

Mary Jones

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Mary Jones was born in 1707 to Oliver Jones, a maker of casks and barrels, and his second wife, in Oxford. She learned French and Italian at a young age, which led to speculation about Jones being a governess due to her network of aristocratic friends, but no evidence of this being true has been found. For most of her adult life she lived with her older brother, also named Oliver. With no mention of a husband or children, it is likely that Jones was unmarried until her death. This could have been due to a lack of prospects or of her own volition.

Jones never moved from Oxford, only leaving to visit her friends at Windsor Castle occasionally. Jones dabbled in writing, but her works were not published until 1742. Her piece “The Lass of the Hill” and an elegy written for Lord Aubrey Beauclerk’s monument, commissioned by his widow, were both published around the same time, bringing her writing to the public eye. Jones published “A Letter to Dr Pitt” in 1745, before the first and only collection of her writing, *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse*. This collection was released through subscription in 1750 and includes forty-six pages listing the subscribers’ names. It met with a warm reception. While a few of her poems were featured in the anthology *Poems by Eminent Ladies*, Jones did not publish much work after *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse*. She died on 10 February 1778 in Oxford, presumably of old age.

Much of Jones’s work is lighthearted and playful, and “Matrimony” is no exception. It speaks of marriage from a woman’s point of view and has a satiric tone. However, considering that Jones was likely unmarried, we can also read it as her own take on the restrictions of marriage. Unmarried women in the eighteenth century were not rarities, but the separation between single women and married or widowed women was obvious. The primary focus of this poem comes from the rhyming words, which Jones was given by a male friend and asked to write a poem with them in this order. The iambic tetrameter rhyming couplets combined with Jones’s writing style create a light piece that critiques the confinement of marriage for a woman.

Further Reading

Froide, Amy M. *Never Married: Singlenwomen in Early Modern England*. 1st ed., Oxford UP, 2005.

Kennedy, Deborah. *Poetic Sisters Early Eighteenth-Century Women*. Bucknell UP; Rowman & Littlefield, 2013, pp. 163–203.

Matrimony¹⁸³

CLOE,¹⁸⁴ coquet¹⁸⁵ and debon — — — — —¹⁸⁶ *air*,¹⁸⁷
 Haughty,¹⁸⁸ flatter'd, vain, and — — — — — *fair*,¹⁸⁹
 No longer obstinately¹⁹⁰ — — — — — *coy*,
 Let loose her soul to dreams of — — — — — *joy*.
 She took the husband to her — — — — — *arms*, 5
 Resign'd her freedom and her — — — — — *charms*;
 Grew tame, and passive to his — — — — — *will*,
 And bid her eyes forbear¹⁹¹ to — — — — — *kill*.
 But mighty happy still at — — — — — *heart*,
 Nor room was there for pain, or — — — — — *smart*. 10

At length she found the name of — — — — — *wife*
 Was but another word for — — — — — *strife*.
 That cheek, which late out-blush'd the — — — — — *rose*,
 Now with unwonted¹⁹² fury — — — — — *glows*.
 Those tender words, "my dear, I — — — — — *die*,"¹⁹³ 15
 The moving tear, and melting — — — — — *sigh*,
 Were now exchang'd for something — — — — — *new*,
 And feign'd¹⁹⁴ emotions yeild to — — — — — *true*.

¹⁸³ *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse*: By Mary Jones. Oxford, 1750, pp. 49–50; *Eighteenth-Century Poetry Archive*

¹⁸⁴ *CLOE* a female given name, a form of Chloe

¹⁸⁵ *coquet* "to flirt playfully and insincerely with (a person)" (*OED*)

¹⁸⁶ — Jones was challenged to rhyme these words in this specific order, so she incorporated dashes to allow the rhyming words/syllables to line up on the right margin in the original

¹⁸⁷ *debonair* "pleasant and affable in outward manner or address" (*OED*)

¹⁸⁸ *Haughty* "high in one's own estimation; lofty and disdainful in feeling or demeanour" (*OED*)

¹⁸⁹ *fair* pretty

¹⁹⁰ *obstinately* stubbornly

¹⁹¹ *forbear* refrain from

¹⁹² *unwonted* unaccustomed

¹⁹³ "my dear, I die," eighteenth-century euphemism for orgasm

¹⁹⁴ *feign'd* imitated deceptively

Reproach,¹⁹⁵ debate, and loss of — — — — *fame*,¹⁹⁶

Intrigues,¹⁹⁷ diseases, duns,¹⁹⁸ and — — — — *shame*.

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No single fault He strives to — — — — *hide*;

Madam has virtue,¹⁹⁹ therefore — — — — *pride*.

Thus both resent, while neither — — — — *spar*es,²⁰⁰

And curse, but cannot break their — — — — *snares*.²⁰¹



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¹⁹⁵ *Reproach* “blame, censure, or reproof expressed towards or directed against a person” (*OED*)

¹⁹⁶ *fame* social reputation

¹⁹⁷ *Intrigues* sexual affairs

¹⁹⁸ *duns* debt collectors

¹⁹⁹ *virtue* “chastity, esp. on the part of a woman” (*OED*); he is the one having affairs, and she resents this, acting self-righteous in her pride

²⁰⁰ *neither spares* neither refrains from attacking the other

²⁰¹ *cannot break their snares* divorce in eighteenth-century Britain required an act of Parliament and was nearly impossible to obtain