

Mary Masters (1694?-1771)

Description

Mary Masters was a native of Otley, a market town near Leeds, where she appears to have emerged from humble origins. Her father was a petty school-master at Norwich but did not seem to support his daughter's education or her predilection for poetry, as the preface to her first volume, *Poems on Several Occasions* (1733), makes clear: "The Author of the following Poems never read a Treatise of Rhetorick, or an Art of Poetry, nor was ever taught her English Grammar [and] her Genius to Poetry was always brow-beat and discountenanced by her Parents." No evidence of a life of labour has survived, though Masters is presented to her potential reading public in 1733 as a self-taught poet who exhibits a natural genius for poetry, implicitly linking her to the fashion for such figures in the wake of Stephen Duck's success in the 1730s.

Poems on Several Occasions gathers at least a decade's worth of work, including religious, philosophical, and topographical pieces, as well as many poems celebrating friends. One friend, Thomas Scott, a dissenting minister and hymn writer, also contributed six poems to round out a substantial first volume whose subscribers largely hailed from Norfolk, Suffolk, and the Otley neighborhood.