[Elizabeth Carter], â??A Riddleâ?•

Description

[ELIZABETH CARTER]

â??A Riddleâ?•

Nor form nor substance in my being share,
Iâ??m neither fire nor water, earth nor air;
From motionâ??s force alone my birth derive,
I neâ??er can die, for never was alive:
And yet with such extensive empire reign,
That very few escape my magick chain.
Nor time nor place my wild excursions bound,
I break all order, natureâ??s laws confound;
Raise schemes without contrivance or design,
And make apparent contradictions join:
Transfer the *Thames* where *Gangesâ??* waters roll,
Unite thâ?? equator to the frozen pole;
Midst *Zemblaâ??s* ice bid blushing rubies glow,
And *British* harvests bloom in *Scythian* snow;
Cause trembling flocks to skim the raging main,
And scaly fishes graze the verdant plain;
Make light descend, and heavy bodies rise,
Stars sink to earth, and earth ascend the skies.
If nature lie deformâ??d in wintry frost,
And all the beauties of the spring be lost,
Raisâ??d by my powâ??r new verdure decks the ground,
And smiling flowâ??rs diffuse their sweets around.
The sleeping dead I summon from the tomb,
And oft anticipate the livingâ??s doom;
Convey offenders to the fatal tree,
When law or stratagem have set them free.
Awâ??d by no checks, my roving flight can soar
Beyond imaginationâ??s active powâ??r;
I view each country of the spacious earth,
Nay visit realms that never yet had birth,
Can trace the pathless regions of the air,
And fly with ease beyond the starry sphere;
So swift my operations, in an hour
I can destroy a town, or build a towâ??r.
Play tricks would puzzle all the search of wit,

And show whole volumes that were never writ.
In sure records my mystick powrâ??s confest,
Who rackâ??d with cares a haughty tyrantâ??s breast,
Chargâ??d in prophetick emblems to relate
Approaching wrath, and his peculiar fate.
Oft to the good by heavâ??n in mercy sent,
Iâ??ve armâ??d their thoughts against some dire event;
As oft in chains presumptuous villains bind,
And haunt with restless fears the guilty mind.

NOTES:

Author Signed â??Eliza,â?• known to be Elizabeth Carterâ??s nom de plume in *The Gentlemanâ??s Magazine* in this period.

6 *magick* â??Acting or doing by powers superior to the known power of nature; incantating; necromantickâ?• (Johnson).

11 *Thames* Largest river in southern England, flows through London (*Britannica*); *Ganges,* A river in India sacred to Hindus and personified as the goddess Ganga in ancient texts and art. It flows from the Himalaya mountains to northern India and Bangladesh in the Bay of Bengal (*Britannica*).

13 *Zembla* Novaya Zemlya, an archipelago of two islands located in northwestern Russia in the Arctic ocean (*Britannica*).

14 *Scythian* â??Of or relating to Scythia, an ancient region extending over a large part of European and Asiatic Russiaâ?• (*OED*).

15 *raging main* â??The oceanâ?• (Johnson).

25 *the fatal tree* A reference to Tyburn, â??a place of public execution for Middlesex (London) until 1783, situated at the junction of the present Oxford Street, Bayswater Road, and Edgware Roadâ?• (*OED*).

SOURCE: *The Gentlemanâ??s Magazine,* vol. 8 (February, 1738), p. 99. [Google Books]

Edited by Tovanni Renteria