

*Poets of Devon & Cornwall*

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**Poets of  
Devon & Cornwall**

*from Barclay to Coleridge*

**Selected & edited by  
Tony Frazer**

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## Introduction

What room is there in the early 21st century for an anthology of the poets of Devon and Cornwall, where the youngest representative is Coleridge, who died almost 175 years ago? Well, this seemingly arbitrary selection – determined by place, and in which all but four of the authors were born in a sixty-year span – throws up a number of interesting figures who might not otherwise be quite so visible. It also reminds us of the major literary figures who have worked or been born in the two westernmost counties.

The selection begins and ends as it does for two simple reasons: I can find no significant poet prior to Alexander Barclay — although there have been interesting claims for the medieval *Gawain* poet having lived in Devon — and I wished to avoid the turgid work of the minor Victorian versifiers who seem to have been all too active in the latter part of the 19th century. When I began the selection, I was aware of the west-country origins, or connections, of the major names, but subsequently discovered the work of William Strode, Sir Arthur Gorges and Lady Chudleigh — all fine poets — not to mention John Ford and George Peele, whose Devon origins, and indeed whose non-dramatic verse had previously escaped me. Of the other poets offered here, some are of the very first rank, but all those included have something to offer the lover of poetry — these are not provincial makeweights, even if in some cases their works do not now fall quite as easily on the ear as they might have done in former times.

In the cases of Barclay and Richard Carew, the selections are actually translations, which may seem strange to the modern reader. In Barclay's case, the translations are decidedly free however, and *The Ship of Fools* features a number of verses interpolated by the translator, mentioning figures in the Ottery area. Carew's translation of Tasso, though incomplete, deserves to be better known than as a footnote to Fairfax's later version, and represents Carew's talents better than the occasional verses contained in his fascinating *Survey of Cornwall*.

The most famous figure included in the book is of course Sir Walter Raleigh, a figure almost of fable, given the extent of his exploits. His poetry was much esteemed in his day, at a time when all gentlemen courtiers seem to have been able to turn their hand to the composition of verse, but little of it was published and almost none of it with an incontrovertible attribution. Courtiers of the period usually shunned publication, alas — although we are indebted to Sir Arthur Gorges, Raleigh's cousin, for compiling a collection of his own poems and translations in manuscript. This leaves the modern editor with a puzzle over which of Raleigh's poems one might safely include: a recent compilation<sup>1</sup> of his poetry was organised on the basis of declining likelihood of authorship. The results are chastening, with only some 35 poems surviving the cull and not all of those being certainties. The quality of these poems is however very high indeed and gives the modern reader some idea of why Raleigh was held in such esteem by major writers such as Spenser and Sidney.

At the other end of the time-scale we have Coleridge, another giant: the selection here concentrates on early works composed in Devon or across the border in Somerset, or on poems with local themes. One great poem thus qualifies: 'Kubla Khan', composed while the poet lived on Exmoor.

Robert Herrick should need no introduction. He wrote the majority of his work in Devon, while Vicar of Dean Prior, and he is without doubt one of the great poets of the Caroline era. His contemporary, Sidney Godolphin, who was killed in a Civil War skirmish at Chagford on Dartmoor, is a poet who should be better known, although it is true that not all of his work is of the first rank. There is enough there, however, to make him worthy of our time and attention today.

I would have liked to have been able to include more women poets, but social conventions for most of the period covered here tended to prevent women from publishing their work — which leaves us with only two women, the sternly Protestant Anne Dowriche, and the robust proto-feminist Lady Chudleigh, whose work should be considered amongst

the most significant of her era. Both women deserve inclusion on their own merits.

Of the remaining poets, William Strode is woefully under-rated. Whilst researching this selection I acquired the only collected edition of his poetry, published in 1907, and was surprised to find that the volume still had uncut pages — a sad fate for a poet whose best work is still worth reading today, and whose consignment to oblivion owes more perhaps to the stature of his contemporaries than to any deficiencies in his own work. Then there is William Browne, a significant figure in his day but one whose work is now unfashionable, given its Arcadian pastoral themes. Humfrey Gifford, about whom little is known, and Joseph Hall, Bishop of Exeter while Herrick was at Dean Prior, both offer additional evidence that Devon was hardly lacking in talent in the 16th and 17th centuries.

John Gay was probably the most successful of the poets here in his own time, in terms of sales and broader reputation. A populist, as befits the author of *The Beggar's Opera*, much of his other work does not survive the passage of time well, but a small selection such as that offered here gives a fascinating glimpse into the world of 18th century London.

The poems selected for this anthology have been lightly updated, modern spelling being applied except in cases where the scansion would be adversely affected, but period punctuation has been retained where I have been able to verify its accuracy.

The Shearsman Classics series — which is not devoted solely to regional writers — will include individual volumes dedicated to some of these poets, beginning with Herrick in 2007; books devoted to Chudleigh and Strode will follow in 2008.

Tony Frazer,  
Exeter, 2007

<sup>1</sup> *The Poems of Sir Walter Raleigh. A Historical Edition.* Edited by Michael Rudick, Renaissance English Text Society, Tempe, Arizona, 1999.

## Alexander Barclay

Alexander Barclay was born around 1476. His place of birth is disputed, but one source who seems to have known him said that was born “beyond the cold river of Twede”, i.e. in Scotland. His early years were spent in Croydon, and at some point he took a degree. He was ordained in 1508.

Barclay was appointed chaplain of the college of Ottery St Mary in the first decade of the 1500s. There, in 1509, he wrote his satirical poem, *The Ship of Fools*, a free translation from Sebastian Brant’s German poem *Das Narrenschiff* (1494), which was popular throughout Europe at that time, although Barclay seems to have based his version more on the Latin translation than on the German original. *The Ship of Fools* was as popular in Barclay’s version as it had been in Germany, and it marked the beginning of a new satirical literature in English.

In 1513, Barclay seems to have become a monk in the Benedictine monastery of Ely. It was probably here that he wrote his *Eclogues* (translations from Italian), but in 1520 “Maistre Barkleye, the Blacke Monke and Poete” was requested to devise “histoires and convenient raisons to florisshe the buildings and banquet house withal” at the meeting between Henry VIII and François I at the Field of the Cloth of Gold.

It is presumed that he went along with the religious changes as, under Edward VI, he retained the livings of Great Baddow and of Wookey, and acquired the rectory of All Hallows, in London’s Lombard Street, in 1552. Shortly after this last preferment, he died at Croydon, where he was buried.

The text offered here retains some old spellings where the scansion demands it, or where no modern version exists. Sometimes, every syllable in a word should be pronounced, as if the word were French: thus *occasion* is not o-KAY-zhun, but o-KA(Y)-zee-on, and *devotion* is dee-VO-see-on.

### Further Reading:

*Eclogues of Alexander Barclay, Priest* (ed. Beatrice White, Early English Text Society, 1928; reprinted with corrections, 1961).

*The Ship of Fools* (Richard Pynson, London, 1513; John Cawood, London, 1570; William Paterson, Edinburgh, 1874).

from *The Ship of Fools*

*Here begynneth the foles and first inprofytable bokes*

I am like other clerks which so frowardly them guide.  
That after they are honest come unto promotion  
They give them to pleasure their study set aside.  
Their avarice covering with feigned devotion.  
Yet daily they preach: and have great derision  
Against the rude laymen: and all for covetyse.  
Though their own conscience be blinded with that vice.

But if I durst trouth plainly utter and express.  
This is the special cause of this inconvenience.  
That greatest foles, and fullest of lewdness  
Havinge least wit: and simplest science  
Are first promoted: and have greatest reverence  
For if one can flatter, and bear a hawk on his fist  
He shall be made Parson of Honiton or of Clyst.

But he that is in study ay firm and diligent.  
And without all favour preacheth Christus lore  
Of all the comontye nowadays is sore shent.  
And by estates threatened to prison oft therefore.  
Thus what avail is it, to us to study more:  
To know other scripture, truth, wisdom, or virtue  
Since few, or none without favour dare them shew.

But O noble Doctors, that worthy are of name:  
Consider our old fathers: note well their diligence:  
Ensue ye their steps: obtain ye such fame,  
As they did living: and that by true prudence.  
Within their hearts they planted their science  
And not in pleasant books. But now too few such be.  
Therefore in this ship let them come row with me.

[*frowardly*: perversely; *covetyse*: covet; *comontye*: community;  
*shent*: put to shame/disgraced; *ensue*: follow]

*Of leapings and dances and fools that pass  
their time in such vanity.*

Those folys a place may challenge in my ship  
Which void of wisdom as men out of their mind  
Them self delight to dance to leap and skip  
In compass running like to the world wide  
In unkind labour, such folys pleasure find  
Running about in this their furious vice  
Like as it were in Bacchus' sacrifice

Or as the druydans runneth in vain about  
In their mad feasts upon the hill of yde  
Making their sacrifice with furore noise and shout  
Whan their madness setteth their wit aside  
Or when the priests of mars all night abide  
Within their temple by use abominable  
To their idolys doing their service detestable

Like as these paynims hath to their idols done  
Their sacrifice wand'ring in their madness  
Their bodies wearying, in vain wasting their shone  
So do these folys them self to dancing dress  
Seeking occasion of great unhappiness  
They take such labour without all hope of gain  
Without reward sure, of wearyness and pain

Say folys that use this fury and outrage  
What causeth you to have delight therein  
For your great labour say what is your wage  
Forsooth ye can thereby no profit win  
But seek occasion (as I have said) of sin  
And for thy wearing thy feet thus in the dust  
Thou gettest no gain but cause of carnal lust

But when I consider of this foolish game  
The first beginning and cause original  
I say the cause thereof is worthy blame  
For when the devil to deceive man mortal  
And do contempt to the high god eternal  
Upon a stage had set a calf of gold.  
That every man the same might clear behold

So than the fend ground of misgovernance  
Caused the people this figure to honour  
As for their god and before the same to dance.  
When they were drunken, thus fell they in error  
Of idolatry, and forgot their creator.  
Before this idol dancing both wife and man  
Despising God: Thus dancing first began

Such blind folyes and inconvenience  
Engendreth great hurt and incommodity  
And seweth seed whereof groweth great offence  
The ground of vice and of all enormity  
In it is pride, foul lust and lechery  
And while lewd leaps are usèd in the dance  
Oft froward bargains are made by countenance

What else is dancing but even a nursery  
Or else a bait to purchase and maintain  
In young hearts the vile sin of ribaldry  
Them fest'ring therein, as in a deadly chain  
And to say truth in words clear and plain  
Venereous people have all their whole pleasance  
Their vice to nourish by this unthrifty dance

And wanton people disposèd unto sin  
To satisfy their mad concupiscence  
With hasty course unto this dancing ryn  
To seek occasion of vile sin and offence

And to express my mind in short sentence  
This vicious game oft times doth attyse  
By his lewd signs, chaste heartis unto vice

Than it in earth no game is more damnable  
It seemeth no peace, but battle openly  
They that it use of minds seem unstable  
As mad folk runnng with clamour shout and cry  
What place is void of this furious folly  
None: so that I doubt within a while  
These folys the holy church shall defile

Of people what sort or order may we find  
Rich or poor high or low of name  
But by their foolishness, and wanton mind  
Of each sort some are given unto the same  
The priestis and clerks to dance have no shame  
The frere or monk in his frock and cowl  
Must dance in his dortor leaping to play the fool

To it cometh children, maids and wives.  
And flattering young men to see to have their prey  
The hand in hand great falsehood oft contrives  
The old queen also this madness will assay  
And the old dotard though he skantly may  
For age and lameness steer other foot or hand  
Yet playeth he the fool with other in the band

Than leap they about as folk past their mind  
With madness amazèd running in compace  
He most is commended that can most lewdness find  
Or can most quickly run about the place  
There are all manners usèd that lack grace  
Moving their bodies in signs full of shame  
Which doth their hearts to sin right sore inflame

So oft this vice doth many one abuse  
That when they are departed from the dance  
On lust and sin continually they muse  
Having therein their will and their pleasance  
Than fall they oft to great misgovernance  
As folys given to work unprofitable  
So in my ship they well deserve a babel.

\* \* \*

[*druydans*: druids; *yde*: probably 'Ide,' as in Ides, a druidic festival day;  
*idolys*: idols; *paynymys*: pagans, heathens; *fend*: either fiend/fiendish,  
or defended; *froward*: perverse; *ryn*: run; *attyse*: entice; *heartis*: hearts;  
*folys*: fools; *priestis*: priests; *frere*: friar; *dortor*: dormitory; *compace*:  
compass; ]

### *The Envoy of Barclay to The Fools*

Ye obstinate folys that often fall in vice  
How long shall ye keep this froward ignorance  
Submit your minds, and so from sin arise  
Let meekness slake your mad misgovernance  
Remember that worldly pain it grievance  
To be compared to hell which hath no peer  
There is still pain, this is a short penance  
Wherefore correct thy self while thou art here.

## Sir Arthur Gorges

Sir Arthur Gorges was born in 1557, most probably at the family manor house in Butshead, outside Plymouth, although claims have been made for his birth in Dorset. He was cousin to Sir Walter Raleigh and, like Raleigh, was one of the gentleman-volunteers to battle against the Spanish Armada. In 1597 he commanded the *War-Spite*, the ship in which Raleigh sailed as Vice Admiral under Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, on the Islands voyage. Gorges was knighted in 1597. His first wife Douglas Howard, whom he married in 1584, was a great beauty, and was the subject of a famous poem by Edmund Spenser upon her early death. Gorges remarried in 1597.

In 1611, with Sir Walter Cope, he was one of the founders of a central office for the transaction and registration of the sale of land, tenements, and goods, and also mercantile and other businesses, called 'The Publicke Register for Generall Commerce'. He was MP for five different constituencies between 1584 and 1601.

His own poems have sometimes been confused with those of Raleigh, and his poem 'The gentle season of the year...' – in fact partly a translation from the French – had at times been ascribed to Sir Philip Sidney, but matters became much clearer in 1940 when his collected poems, *Vannetyes and Toyes of Yowth*, were discovered in manuscript. Two of the poems were in the author's own hand, and many of the others bore his autograph emendations. Gorges was also a translator, producing a version of Lucan's *Pharsalia*, and several versions of French poems, which are scattered throughout his *Vannetyes*. He died in 1625.

### Further reading:

*The Poems of Sir Arthur Gorges* (ed. Helen Estabrook Sandison, Oxford University Press, London, 1953)

Raymond Gorges: *The Story of a Family Through Eleven Centuries* (privately printed, Boston, 1944)

*The gentle season of the year*

The gentle season of the year  
hath made the blooming branch appear  
and beautified the lands with flowers  
The air doth savour with delight  
the heavens do smile to see the sight  
and yet mine eyes augment their showers

The meadows mantled all with green  
the trembling leaves have clothed the treen  
the birds with feathers new do sing  
But I poor soul whom wrong doth wrack  
attire myself in mourning black  
whose leaf doth fall amidst his spring

And as we see the scarlet rose  
in this sweet prime his bud disclose  
whose hue is with the sun revived  
So in this April of mine age  
my lively colour doth assuage  
because my sunshine is deprived

My heart that wanted was of yore  
light as the wind to range and sore  
in every place where beauty springs  
Now only hovers over you  
even as a bird that's taken new  
and flutters but with clipped wings

When all men else are bent to sport  
then pensive I alone resort  
into some solitary walk  
As doth the doleful turtledove  
who having lost her faithful love  
sits mourning on some withered stalk

There to myself do I recount  
how far my woes my joys surmount  
how love requiteth me with hate  
how all my pleasures end in pain  
how happ doth show my hope but vain  
how fortune frowns upon my state

And in this mood charged with despair  
with vapoured sighs I dim the air  
and to the gods make this request  
That by the ending of my life  
I may have truce with this strange strife  
and bring my soul to better rest.

[*treen*: trees]

*She that holds me under the laws of love*

She that holds me under the laws of love  
    on whom my mournful verse so oft complains  
For those strange griefs that I through wrong do prove  
    she is the court wherein my life remains  
She is my prince of whom I would deserve  
    and she alone to me can favour lend  
She hath for courtiers thousands that do serve  
    and only on her eyes for looks attend  
Unto her love we would as fain aspire  
    as others would in Court to honours rise  
And as disgrace makes courtiers to retire  
    so do her frowns cause malcontents likewise  
Like to the court she is unconstant and unkind  
    But from the court differs in this alone  
That in the court men hope reward to find  
    But following her such hope remaineth none

*From your fair eyes the kindling sparks were sent*

From your fair eyes the kindling sparks were sent  
that first did set my fancy on a fire  
before which time I knew not what it meant  
to burn in love and languish in desire  
But daily now as in your face I see  
those graces grow, that makes you more to shine  
so daily doth new flames arise in me  
and more and more, consume this breast of mine  
Now are they grown so far into extremes  
that greater rage, with life I may not taste  
then do you not increase, in beauty's beams  
Except you would my limbs to cinders waste  
Yet better 'twere, that I should perish so  
than you to lose such praise and glory due  
although a mean to help all this I know  
if love with beauty might increase in you  
Which if it fail, then love thou wantst device  
that canst not make her subject to thy bow  
whose gentle heart was never framed of ice  
although her breast resemble driven snow.

*Since course of kind ordains it to be so*

Since course of kind ordains it to be so  
that strongest steel should yield unto the flame  
and every metal that in mine doth grow  
doth want the power for to resist the same  
Then do not blame this human heart of mine  
To yield unto the force of flames divine.

And since likewise by proof and daily view  
we find the fire to have such secret power  
to try the gold were it be false or true  
and basest dross from finest silver scour  
Then be assured true is this heart of mine  
That so is tried in flames that are divine.

But therewithall sweet friend you must presume  
that as the fire can metals melt and try  
So will the force thereof each thing consume  
that therein doth too long a season lie  
Then save with speed the heart more yours than mine  
Which else consumes amidst these flames divine.

*My heart I have oftimes bid thee beware*

My heart I have oftimes bid thee beware  
how thou becamst subject to cruel love  
But of my words thou never tookest care  
alluring hope, thy fancy so did move  
Wherefore my heart, the harm remains to me  
but thine the blame, if I a captive be.

Why say you so what fault was it of mine  
to yield when I did find my self betrayed  
Nay rather blame those spialls false of thine  
that led me on where beauty ambush laid  
Those eyes I mean that bribèd were so oft  
with smiling looks sent from a murdering thought

And call to count the trumpet of thy mind  
who did so friendly sound unto thy foes  
That tongue of thine who trait'rously inclined

in parley did thy secrets all disclose  
And thy right hand (who if the truth were known)  
did oft subscribe, more yours than mine own

Why then my heart this last farewell receive  
and ye false limbs that be betrayèd so  
Alas sweet life as yet do not us leave  
for though perchance may'st find a friendly foe  
Who of her grace to thee may freedom give  
in hope thereof I am content to live.

[*spialls*: spies]

*Retire from me you pensive thoughts awhile*

Retire from me you pensive thoughts awhile  
decayers of my youth my strength and lively blood  
And let sweet sleep my troubled head beguile  
whilst you go bathe yourselves in Lethe's flood  
Or if not so, till I have taken rest  
my thoughts go lodge within my mistress' breast

Make known to her my wounds as yet but green  
disclose the sparks not grown to be a flame  
Which time itself will make too plainly seen  
except I cloak these griefs of mine with game  
A ready way to fly not find relief  
for who will rue on him that hides his grief

Therefore my thoughts perform this last request  
of my true heart a thrall become to love  
that she may know from whence comes my unrest  
as well as I her beauty's force do prove

Then will I hope this happy end to see  
pity in her, and joy to reign in me

Until which time I vow to roam about  
in deserted woods till life with love be spent  
Where none but love shall know to find me out  
nor love himself, but from my mistress sent  
For whose sweet sake to show on me her power  
my weal for woe, my sweet I change for sour

And more then that for though through her disdain  
She chance to clip the wings off my desire  
And of my hope throw out the latter main  
and force with shame my fancies to retire  
Yet shall my love not end with loss of breath  
for thou my soul shalt serve her after death

*The unripe fruits of wanton youth's desire*

The unripe fruits of wanton youth's desire  
so diff'rent are to use from that they seem  
As when we do unto their height aspire  
then most we loathe that we most dear did deem  
To find ourselves so blinded in conceit  
instead of food to fawn on flatt'ring bait

To hunters' sports these joys compared may be  
who with delight, so long in chase do run  
As that their game before their face do fly  
but lose their sport when they their prey have won  
Then reason would that we should toys neglect  
as are but shows and nothing in effect

Whose small abode doth yield no more content  
    then lickerish meats, that do the palate please  
Whose pleasure fades, when as their taste is spent  
    and only serve to nourish one disease  
Whose count well made, low grief is all the gain  
    where fading joys are bought with lasting pain

Yet well I wote that when these lines of mine  
    shall come before my mistress' carping eyes  
She will me taunt and say the fox is fine  
    that loves no grapes because they hang too high  
And seem to make that dainty to be found  
    which all men see grow rife, upon the ground

[*lickerish*: tasty)

## Sonnet

When at your hands of love the sugared fruit  
    I did request in guerdon of my truth  
You did allege to hinder such my suit  
    good fame which did surpass delights of youth  
But as a man I pleasure did prefer  
    with those sweet joys which I in love do find  
Before those dreams that make us think we err  
    and live in awe of words that are but wind  
For frankly speak and then sweet friend tell me  
    in these great terms of fame what proof is found  
That doth delight or with our sense agree  
    on old wives' tales, a fancy vain you ground  
For in conceit alone doth fame consist  
    But pleasure you may taste of if you list.

[*guerdon*: reward, recompense; *list*: wish/desire]