

**“I to Solitude am still confind”
Confinement and Resistance in Lady Hester
Pulter’s Poetry**

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Cover illustration: *Charles I of England and Queen Henrietta Maria* (seventeenth century) by Gonzales Coques (1614-1684). Victoria and Albert Museum, London. The painting is a reduced copy of a painting (1632) by Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641) which is now in the collection of the Archiepiscopal Castle and Gardens in Kroměříž.

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Introduction

In 1996, Mark Robson, now a lecturer at Nottingham University, discovered on one of the shelves of the University of Leeds' Brotherton Library a manuscript of 160 folios (MS Lt q 32). The manuscript contained poetry and an unfinished prose romance, *The Unfortunate Florinda*, by Lady Hester Pulter (1605-1678), a seventeenth-century female writer (Clarke, "Introducing H.P." 2). After the library had bought the manuscript at auction in 1975, it was miscatalogued and subsequently forgotten (Eardley, "Leeds"). The manuscript's poetry section, totalling about 120 poems, is divided into two parts: "Emblemes" and "Poems Wrihten By the Right Honorable H.P." (Robson, "Pulter"). Pulter was an aristocrat with royalist sympathies, who lived for most of her life in Hertfordshire. She probably wrote the majority of her work between 1644 and 1660 at Bradfield or Broadfield, the manor house where the Pulter family lived (Eardley, "Leeds"). In her poetry, Pulter displays knowledge about various topics, such as contemporary science and classical myths, she expresses her religious affinities, and she explicitly refers to her personal life and the contemporary political situation. The size and richness of the manuscript makes this an important seventeenth-century work, in particular for the study of literature written by early modern women. In the early modern period, not many women writers had their work printed; they rather collected their writings in manuscript form (Seal Millman, "Perdita Project Catalogue" 2). It was with this in mind that the Perdita Project was started seventeen years ago; initially, Nottingham Trent University funded the project, and later the funding was taken over by Warwick University. Perdita's aim was to find and catalogue women's manuscript writing from 1500-1700, and to make these writings more accessible. Under the auspices of the project, a selection of manuscripts were published in 2005 (*Early Modern Women's Manuscript Poetry*, edited by Jill Seal Millman and Gillian Wright). Since 2007, over 230 entries from the Perdita Project have been digitised, linking the catalogue descriptions to full digital facsimiles (Seal Millman, "Perdita Project Catalogue" 6). Pulter's manuscript is one of the digitised manuscripts, and is considered one of the project's highlights.

Since the discovery of Pulter's manuscript, eight scholarly articles about her work have been published. The articles focus on diverse aspects of Pulter's work, such as alchemy, natural history and politics. Two anthologies contain poems by Pulter: *Early Modern Women Poets* (Stevenson 187-94), and the previously mentioned edited collection *Early Modern Women's Manuscript Poetry* (Seal-Millman 111-27). Interest in Pulter's work is growing: the launch of *Lady Hester Pulter. Poems, Emblems, and The Unfortunate Florinda*, published by the Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies and edited by Alice Eardley, took place on 23 June 2014, and Mark Robson is currently working on a scholarly edition of the poetry. Since *Lady Hester Pulter. Poems, Emblems, and The Unfortunate Florinda* has only recently been published (when I had finished most of the writing for my thesis), I have not used the book for my research. Alongside the publication of Pulter's poetry, Eardley has started a digital companion to Hester Pulter (*Hester Pulter. A Digital Companion*). The companion contains, among other things, a blog where information about Pulter can be posted. Eardley has already used Pulter's poetry extensively for educational purposes; she directed a University of Warwick project to produce an online edition of Lady Hester Pulter's manuscript poetry, in which second-year undergraduate students of the Department of English and Comparative Literary Studies taking the module "Seventeenth-century Literature and Culture" contributed annotations for the text. A considerable part of Pulter's poetry (twenty-nine occasional and devotional poems and twenty-five emblem poems) has been put on the University of Warwick's projects intranet website (*Editing Hester Pulter*). Eardley, very kindly, gave me access to the website when I started writing my thesis in 2012. As a result, the number of poems I was able to use for my thesis increased considerably. In my thesis, I have used the Warwick website's transcriptions for my analyses, unless otherwise specified.

In my master's thesis I will describe Pulter's poetry, and, in particular, focus on religious and royalist components in her work. Pulter wrote most of her work during the 1640s and 1650s, a period of political and religious unrest. She did not welcome the changes that occurred in the mid-century; she was deeply concerned about the direction that the church had taken and about the consequences of the new regime's ideas and regulations. The position of the king in his double role as monarch and head of the Church, and his removal from this position of power played an important part in her

concerns. Apart from the political conflict, Pulter was also burdened with religious worries regarding human sinfulness, and with the day-to-day problems of a seventeenth-century woman. The political situation seemed to heighten the feelings of loneliness and sadness she experienced in her personal life. Furthermore, the various concerns did not exist separately, but were intertwined and influenced one another. Consequently, the political is present not only in her overtly political poems, but also in works about private issues. Moreover, Pulter's poetry is saturated with references to political figures and events, which is an important and defining factor in her work.

The following chapter firstly makes an inventory of the known facts about Pulter's life; secondly, it discusses topics related to the manuscript's poetry collection: for instance, Pulter's pen name, her scribes, and her potential readers; lastly, it investigates which authors or works Pulter might have read and used for her own writing. The second chapter examines Pulter's religious views. Important issues for Pulter were: man's sinfulness, receiving grace, and the king's role as head of the Church. The last chapter focuses on Pulter's resistance to the new rulers, and on the feelings of confinement and loneliness in her poetry. For women in general, and certainly for Pulter who had fifteen children, confinement was a normal consequence of pregnancy, but the word "confinement" also reflected a religious-inspired feeling, and it fitted the royalist imagery. Chapter three looks into Pulter's use of the word "confinement", and we will see how Pulter ultimately accepts the consequences of her pregnancies (in fact, she accepts being a human being), but that she becomes rebellious when the confinement is political. Retirement in the country fuels Pulter's resentment against the new rulers. Throughout her poetry, she gives voice to her discontent and impatience by means of complaints about her own situation, but also by emphasising what the country and its people have lost. Her poetry thus concentrates on the negative aspects of the contemporary situation, and looks forward to a better future in which the monarchy is restored and the king's enemies punished.

1. The Life and Work of Hester Pulter

Lady Hester Pulter

Information about Pulter's life is scarce and in some instances ambiguous, in particular with regard to her date of birth and the date of her marriage. The *ODNB* gives 1595/6 as the likely year of birth and 1623 as the year that Hester married Arthur Pulter (Robson, "Pulter, Lady Hester"); Alice Eardley, however, gives 1618 as the date of marriage ("Biography" 1) and convincingly demonstrates that Pulter was probably born on 18 June 1605 (Eardley, "Date of Birth" 500). To determine Pulter's date of birth and other facts about Pulter's life, Eardley relies on sources such as "The Declaration of Ley, or Ley: His Pedigree" from the Wiltshire and Swindon Record Office and the diary of Pulter's brother-in-law, John Harington of Kelston (1588/9-1654), edited by Margaret Stieg in 1977. The information from the Wiltshire and Swindon Record Office makes 1605 a likely year of birth, but this contradicts the date, or dates, suggested by Pulter in her poetry. Eardley makes clear that a mistake by an annotator and Pulter's own poetical freedom are probable causes for the discrepancy between the dates ("Date of Birth" 500).

If 1605 is the correct year of birth, then Pulter was born in Ireland. Pulter's parents were Sir James Ley (1556-1629), first Earl of Marlborough (from 1624), and Mary née Petty of Stoke Talmage (d. 1613) (Prest). From 1604 till 1608, her father was Chief Justice of the King's Bench in Ireland and he and his family were living just outside Dublin. In 1608 he returned to England, presumably with his family. In 1624, he was made Lord Treasurer. Pulter was one of her parents' eleven surviving children (Eardley, "Biography" 1).

When Hester was thirteen, she married Arthur Pulter, a Hertfordshire gentleman. Not much is known about Arthur; it is known that he was sheriff of Hertfordshire from 1641 until the onset of the Wars of the Three Kingdoms when he retired from public service. Sir Henry Chauncy (1632-1719), who wrote an account of the Pulter genealogy in 1700, states that Arthur "shortly after the breaking forth of the late civil War, declin'd all publick Employment, liv'd a retired life" (Ezell 343). Chauncy does not explain why Arthur retired from public service, but apparently he resigned the sheriffdom

“because of the Wars” (Clarke, “Hester Pulter’s Poems” 113). Elizabeth Clarke wonders whether a wish to stay neutral during the wars might have been the reason for his resignation (“Hester Pulter’s Poems” 113). Margaret Ezell states that it was “a not unprecedented masculine royalist response”, which would place him politically in the royalist camp (343). In the latter case, Pulter and her husband would have agreed politically; Pulter’s poetry definitely reveals her royalist stand, as will be demonstrated. After his retirement, Arthur occupied himself with building their manor house Bradfield or Broadfield in Cottered, Hertfordshire.

Pulter wrote most of her poetry between 1644 and 1660, while living in Broadfield. She added some poems in circa 1665, but most poems were transcribed into the manuscript before 1661 by an unidentified hand (Eardley, “Biography” 1). The house, the surrounding garden, and the Hertfordshire landscape are frequently mentioned in her poems. Pulter is not particularly positive with regard to the house. For instance, she complains about being “shut up in a Countrey Grange” (l.18) and about “forever be[ing] confined” (l.1) by its walls (*Perdita* 81). Pulter does not explicitly explain in her poetry why she is confined to her house, but Eardley suspects that her many pregnancies could have been a reason: between 1624 and 1648, Pulter gave birth to fifteen children, of whom only two out-lived her (“Biography” 1).

Ezell argues that most of Pulter’s children were born previous to the period in which she wrote her work; if so, her pregnancies and giving birth to her children would not have been the reason for her immobility (342). Nonetheless, the responsibility for her large family and the work it generated, plus her children’s illnesses, might have prevented Pulter from leaving her home. In either case, Pulter’s children inspired some of her poems; the grief about the loss of her thirteen children in particular, whom she outlived, is a recurrent theme in her poetry. Pulter herself died in April 1678; she was buried in Cottered church.

The previously mentioned diary of John Harington shows that Pulter kept in contact with her sisters Margaret (dates unknown) and Dionysia (b.? - d.1674) (Stieg 75 and 76). Both sisters married men who supported the parliamentary cause: Margaret married James Hobson (dates unknown), a Lieutenant Colonel in the parliamentary army, and Dionysia married John Harington of Kelston (1588/9-1654), an MP who was loyal to the king until the beginning of the Wars of the Three

Kingdoms. In 1642 Harington switched to the parliamentary side, and in 1646 “he was elected to represent Somerset in parliament as one of those chosen to replace excluded royalists” (Bettey). From Harington’s diary, one gets the impression that he took a moderate position in the House of Commons (Stieg 8). Harington’s withdrawal from parliament in December 1648, “in protest against the ejection of moderates by musketeers under the command of Thomas Pride in the so-called Pride’s Purge” (Bettey), seems indicative of his moderate stand. Stieg distinguishes three groups in the House of Commons: Presbyterians, a Middle Group, and Independents, and she reckons Harington belonged to the Middle Group (Stieg 8).

Pulter’s family also included prominent royalists. For instance, Pulter’s nephew James Ley (1618/19-1665), later third Earl of Marlborough, fought for the king in 1643, and Pulter’s husband’s first cousin Sir Arthur Capel (1604-1649), first Baron Capel of Hadham, was executed by parliament shortly after the king was put to death (Eardley, “Biography” 1-2). Although Pulter was a royalist herself and expressed contempt for parliament and for the military commander and Lord Protector (from 1653 until 1658) Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658) and his supporters in her poetry, her leanings did not prevent her from having contact with her relatives who opposed the king. Although Harington focuses in his diary on religious matters, for instance on church government, he does mention some visits back and forth between Pulter and his family. He wrote, for instance, about Lady Hester visiting London in 1652; during that visit she met John Harington and informed him about the death of her sister Lady Margaret (Stieg 75-76).

Harington also mentions the fact that, while in London, Pulter went to see Sir Samuel Browne (b. in or before 1598-1668), an associate of Harington, and that she met James Ussher (1581-1656), archbishop of Armagh, at Browne’s house (Eardley, “Biography” 2). These three men, Harington, Browne, and Ussher, were known as strikingly learned men and as politically moderate. Harington and Browne were supporters of parliament (Hart Jr), while Ussher was loyal to the monarchy (Ford). However, holding opposing political opinions did not prevent these people respecting and meeting one another. We know from Harington’s diary that Pulter knew these men, but not much else is known about the social circles that Pulter frequented. In her poetry, Pulter mentions and addresses God, her children, and occasionally her husband, and she writes frequently about public figures, such

as the king, Sir George Lisle (b.? - 1648), Sir Charles Lucas (1612/1613-1648) and Sir William Davenant (1606-1668). Not much information about her relationship with other family members or about other friendships can be extracted from her poems.

Pulter's Poetry Collection

Pulter's writings are all included in MS Lt q 32, a manuscript that contains poetry and *The Unfortunate Florinda*, an incomplete prose romance. The poetry section is divided into two parts: approximately sixty-six "Poems Wrihten By the Right Honorable H.P." and a collection of fifty-four "Emblemes". The poem's topics suggest that the poems were composed between 1644 and 1660; in particular, the poems concerning the Wars of the Three Kingdoms give an indication of the year or period in which they were created. Material research on the kind of paper used in the manuscript has shown that the first series of poems were transcribed into the volume in 1655, the "Emblemes" and *The Unfortunate Florinda* were added later (Eardley, "Leeds"). According to Eardley, the hand that transcribed the larger part of the poetry and prose is "most probably not Pulter's own" ("Leeds").

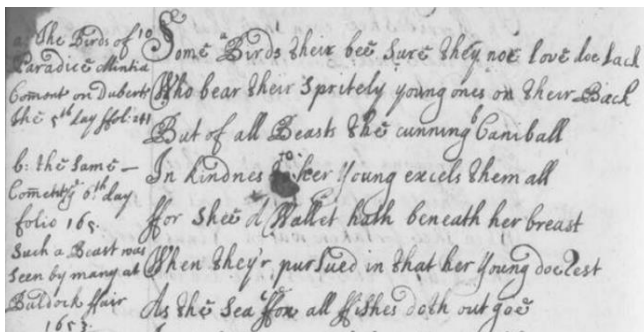


Figure 1 Manuscript, first hand (author unknown) (*Perdita* 102).

Pulter did make some corrections and inserted additions, including several complete poems; hers is the second hand recognisable in the manuscript.

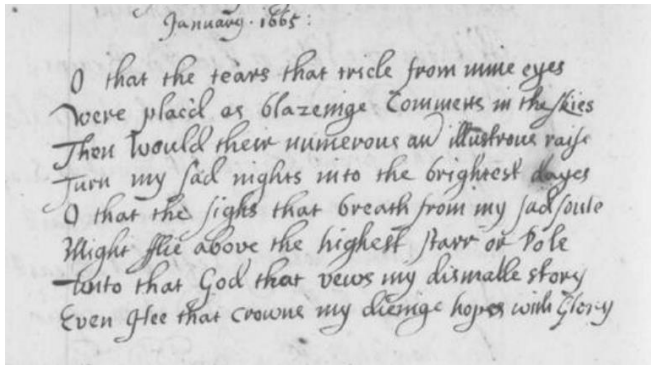


Figure 2 Manuscript, second hand (Hester Pulter) (*Perdita* 87).

A third hand, which has been identified as Angel Chauncy's (eighteenth century), added marginalia in the text and several poems by other authors (Eardley, "Leeds").

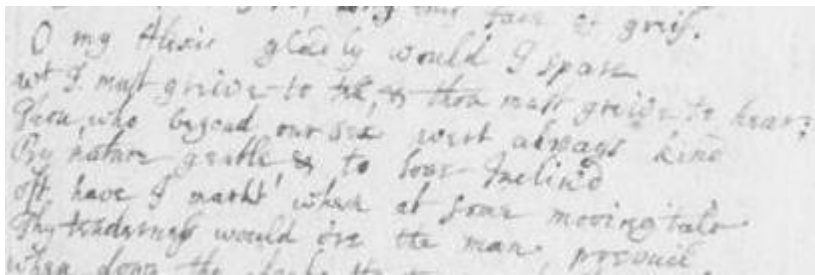


Figure 3 Manuscript, third hand (Angel Chauncy) (*Perdita* 91).

Pulter had arranged to have the large collection of poetry neatly written down in a manuscript (Eardley, "Leeds" 1). This suggests that she valued her work and wanted it preserved, and maybe she wanted to show it to other people so they could read it. Pulter did not have her work printed, but collected her poems and prose romance in a manuscript. This does not necessarily mean that she considered her works unworthy of a wider audience, or that she thought them "private". According to Jonathan Gibson, and demonstrated earlier by for instance Arthur Marotti, Peter Beal, and Steven May, in the seventeenth century printed books were not viewed as more prestigious than manuscripts, and manuscripts were rather "semi-public" than strictly "private" (1).¹ However, Clarke notes that

¹ See for instance: Arthur Marotti *Manuscript, Print, and the English Renaissance Lyric*, and Steven May "The Future of Manuscript Studies in Early Modern Poetry".

“there is no evidence that her poems circulated” (“Hester Pulter’s Poems” 112), and the manuscript that is now in the University of Leeds’ Brotherton library is in a very good condition, which suggests that it has not been opened or read very much.

The poetry collection is included in the manuscript under the title *Poems Breathed Forth by the Noble Hadassas*. Mark Robson reminds us that Pulter’s pen name Hadassah is the biblical name for Esther (“Pulter, Lady Hester”). The Book of Esther tells the story of the Jewish woman Esther, or Hadassah, who rescues her people from the evil intentions of Haman. She displays courage and determination in order to achieve her goal, and she is duly rewarded for this bravery. Clarke also supposes that the biblical story of Esther is the source of Pulter’s pen name. She suggests more specifically that Pulter derived her manuscript’s title and pen name from Francis Quarles’s 1621 work *Hadassa: or the History of Queen Ester with meditations thereupon divine and moral* (“Hester Pulter’s Poems” 111). In the seventeenth century, women often chose one of the biblical women or heroines as model. Diane Purkiss points out that a large group of Protestants identified the Protestant English Church with the Jews, “the Chosen People” (151). Additionally, certain biblical figures were often used as symbol or for identification during the Wars of the Three Kingdoms. Purkiss mentions, for instance, that “Judith, Esther and Susanna were all favourite Civil War subjects; women could see themselves as saviours of their nation” (151). Pulter could well have done the same and have identified with the biblical Esther, especially since they had similar names.

The period of the Wars of the Three Kingdoms was not the only seventeenth-century period in which the biblical name “Esther” was used as a pseudonym. One of the contributors in the “Swetnam Controversy”, called her – or himself – Ester Sovernam. The “Swetnam Controversy” was a pamphlet war about the place and role of women, which was started when Joseph Swetnam published an attack on women, *Araingment of Lewd, Idle, Froward, and Unconstant Women* in 1615 (NAEL 1556). The real name of Ester Sovernam is unknown, and there is no agreement amongst scholars on whether Sovernam’s pamphlet was written by a woman or a man. Jo Carruthers argues that Ester was probably a pseudonym for a woman; Charles Butler, Diane Purkiss, and Mihoko Suzuki believe Ester was a man (Carruthers 322). However, the pamphlet *Ester hath hang’d Haman* is a defence of women, and clearly written from a female perspective. The biblical Esther was a

querelle exempla that figured in writings that defended women in the *querelle des femmes* of that time.² She was one of the biblical women that could serve as an example of women's virtuous behaviour. However, Erin Hendriksen shows that Sowernam probably not only chose the name "Ester" as a pen name because Esther appeared on lists of good women, nor because Esther defended her people (Sowernam's defence of women echoes Esther's defence of the Jews). Hendriksen argues that the name "Ester" is so appropriate because Sowernam's response to the attack on women parallels Esther's uninvited speech to the king and the written decrees she issues in order to achieve her goal (162). Sowernam's response is also uninvited because it is made by a woman, and she writes and makes use of a public pamphlet to shape her defence of women. According to Hendriksen, the fact that Esther intervenes through speech and writing is crucial for Sowernam's adaptation of Esther's name.

This aspect of writing in Esther's story might also for Pulter have been a reason to adopt the pen name Hadassah. Hadassah/Esther asserts her authority by writing, which is a feature Pulter could have found inspiring. Esther's authority is noticeable, for instance, when she orders that Purim should be celebrated every year: Esther 9:29 "Then Esther the queen ... wrote with all authority, to confirm this second letter of Purim", and Esther 9:32 "And the decree of Esther confirmed these matters of Purim; and it was written in the book". In her poetry, Pulter gives her readers advice, and makes accusations against parliamentarians in general and against some prominent figures such as Oliver Cromwell and Robert Devereux, third Earl of Essex (1591-1646) in particular. She assumes authority over political issues, while such authority was usually not granted to women. The biblical Hadassah/Esther who dares to speak out from a position of subordination and to write decrees could have been a fine example with whom Pulter could identify.

Pulter presents many of her poems as meditations or advice in which she is identical to the speaker. The poems are clearly biographical; they refer to personal and public events in Pulter's life. When discussing the various poems, I will assume that the speaker is identical to Pulter, unless otherwise specified. Since Pulter posits herself as the speaker in her poetry, we can assume that the

² *Querelle des femmes*: "a massive body of writings ... that extends over several centuries and argues the issue of women's worthiness or faultiness in several genres and languages" (*NAEL* 1282).

ideas that are expressed correspond with Pulter's opinions. However, whether the description of her circumstances, for instance the references to confinement, accurately reflects the facts is doubtful. As mentioned earlier, Alice Eardley has shown that it is quite possible that Pulter allowed herself poetic freedom with regard to her date of birth ("Date of Birth" 500). Of course she could have used poetic freedom in other instances as well.

Both Robson and Ezell assume that Pulter wrote the poems for her family, in particular for her daughters. Some of the poems are addressed or dedicated to Pulter's daughters by name, which, according to Robson, makes it most likely that there was "an emphasis on female readership" ("Swansongs" 244), and Ezell even suggests that "one could speculate that the volume itself was initially passed down through a female line, going first to her daughter Margaret" ("Laughing Tortoise" 342). According to Helen Wilcox, devotional poetry written by women was often intended as "advice poetry" for daughters or other female family members ("My Hart is Full" 457). Not all of Pulter's poetry can be classified as "devotional", but a large part certainly belongs to this category. Thus, following Wilcox's argument, one could say that the likelihood that Pulter wrote for her daughters is considerable.

As said before, several poems are addressed to Pulter's daughters. However, some of the poems are addressed to men in general, for example "Emblem 19" (*Perdita* 107), or to a particular man: for instance "Pardon mee my Dearest Love" (*Perdita* 64-65) which is addressed to Pulter's husband. Furthermore, the collection contains poetry that does not have a particularly feminine character: some poems are, for instance, political or satirical, genres that were not associated with women in the seventeenth century. However, Pulter apparently did not think women writers should limit themselves to the accepted genres for their sex, but instead should explore new territory. It is quite possible that Pulter wanted her daughters to read the political and satirical poems as part of her advice to them.

Pulter sends mixed messages about the importance of her work. In "Emblem 20" (*Perdita* 108), she does not present her own writing as something to be taken seriously. Although in the poem she urgently presses her audience to follow her advice about how to conduct themselves, at the same

time, she undermines the effect the advice could have had by stating that her poems are just “harmless Rimes” (l.45):

But Chastly live and rather spend your dayes
 In setting Forth your great Creator’s praise
 And for diversion pass your Idle times
 As I doe now in writeing harmless Rimes (ll.42-45)

As Clarke noted, “[d]espite the literary and intellectual range of her work, Pulter represents her authorial activity as a harmless way of occupying her time” (“Hester Pulter’s Poems” 112). However, many women were careful not to appear immodest; as such, this could be a conscious tactic to disarm her potential critical audience. Elizabeth Hageman calls this “a female variant of the humility topos – generally ‘acknowledging’ in a comic or defiant way that [the author] is ‘only a woman’” (201). Indeed, Pulter presents her poetry as inconsequential in the above-cited lines, but the tone she adopts in her other poems is often less modest and suggests that she took her writing seriously.

The collection of poetry as a whole does not particularly emanate an air of humility or modesty. Towards God, Pulter is humble and acknowledges her faults, but realizing her own faults does not make her forgiving or mild towards her fellow human beings. She is very critical of herself and others, and sometimes she is plainly hostile concerning her political enemies. In “The Invitation into the Country to my D:D: MP: PP 1647” (*Perdita* 6-8), for instance, she calls parliament “Fierce Hydras” (l.4), and in “On the Fall of that Grand Rebel the Earl of Essex his Effigies in Henry 7th’s Chappel in Westminster Abby” (*Perdita* 87-88), Pulter compares Cromwell to a “Fierce Monster” (l.1), and the parliamentarian Lord-General Robert Devereux, third Earl of Essex to a “half Beast” (l.13). The latter is also described, amongst other distinctively negative images, as “hee that ne’re gain’d Honour here on Earth” (l.21). The Lord-General fought for the parliamentarian side between 1642 and 1644, but was not very successful in his military campaigns against the royalists. He did not earn the respect and goodwill of the other generals, and was often ignored during negotiations. However, after his retirement from the army, and, in particular, after his death, his military actions were “looked at by many through rose-tinted spectacles” (Morrill). His funeral was a grand affair attended by more than 3000 people, hence Pulter’s remark about gaining honour only after his death.

In short, Pulter does not spare the people she finds fault with and she has self-confidence enough to incorporate her views in her poetry.

Finally, Pulter tried to write poetry that was of particularly literary standard. She met the requirements that were imposed on a writer of serious poetry. Susan Wiseman states that “[p]oetic skill was measured by emulation of Classical and other texts, by use of form, by elaboration of image” (127). Pulter was certainly not afraid to show her knowledge of natural philosophy and the classics; she abundantly interwove contemporary ideas concerning natural philosophy and references to classical figures with religious reflections. This, combined with the outspoken outlook on the political situation, shows an author who wants to engage actively with the world around her and to participate seriously as a writer.

Pulter’s Incorporation of Literary Themes, Natural History, and Political Events in her Poetry

Pulter repeatedly writes about her loneliness and the isolation in which she lives. As mentioned earlier, her personal circumstances might have been the cause of her inability to leave the house or to receive other people at her home. It is also possible that the isolation she mentions was part of a politically inspired attitude or idea Pulter elaborated upon in her poetry. The chapter on Pulter’s political poetry will address more fully this idea of retirement or withdrawal from the world with which royalist identified. Here I will look into Pulter’s writings and examine to what extent her style, her use of specific terminology and her interest in certain topics show similarities with other writers.

A few facts are known about Pulter’s literary background, but to what extent these facts were important for her writing is difficult to determine. Eardley, for instance, mentions that Pulter’s mother was a niece of romance writer George Pettie (c.1548-1589) (“Biography”). Eardley, Clarke, and Robson all mention that Pulter’s sister Margaret is the addressee of John Milton’s Sonnet X, “To the Lady Margaret Ley” (1645). Margaret and her husband were close neighbours of Milton in Aldersgate Street in London during the early 1640s (Eardley, “Biography”), and Milton is thought to have spent time in their company (Clarke, “Hester Pulter’s Poems” 112). Robson states in his *ODNB* entry that

Pulter possibly kept in touch with the London literary world and contemporary poetry via her sister Margaret (“Pulter”). He finds confirmation of Pulter’s connection to this milieu in the subject matter of some of her poems. The theory that Pulter was part of a social circle that was interested in literature is supported by Clarke’s belief that Pulter read Andrew Marvell’s (1621-1678) poetry in manuscript (Ross 12). However, contrary to his suggestion in the *ODNB*, in “Reading Hester Pulter Reading” Robson warns readers not to make overhasty assumptions about her literary milieu. He suggests that the references to the Bible, classical stories, and several more contemporary writers in Pulter’s poetry do not point to her participating in a literary milieu, but point to the use of commonplaces (Robson, “Reading Hester Pulter” 3).

In any event, Pulter’s poetry shows that Pulter was an educated woman with knowledge gained from classical and contemporary sources. Ezell identifies sources for Pulter’s poetry, such as Pliny (23-79 CE), Plutarch (46?-120 CE), classical mythology, and Scripture. She states that “Pulter’s engagement with classical sources on the classification of animals and plants is evident in almost every poem in the volume” (344). But Pulter was also aware of contemporary views on natural philosophy. Jane Archer, who examined Pulter’s alchemical poetic imagery, states that the poetry “is remarkable for a sophisticated use of terms, images and conceits drawn from alchemy” (2), and that it “demonstrates [Pulter’s] thorough knowledge of alchemical literature and experimental work” (8). Sarah Hutton comments on something similar as regards astronomy and natural philosophy: she finds Pulter’s use of imagery drawn from early modern astronomy and natural philosophy most striking (78-79).

Hutton states that Pulter was clearly a Galilean and an atomist (80). She argues that it is especially intriguing “that a woman should be conversant with the most modern and most coherent cosmological theory of the time” (78). Atomism was a theory of natural philosophy based on ancient atomism. The theory came into focus again in the seventeenth century after being revived by French philosopher, natural philosopher, and mathematician Pierre Gassendi (1592-1655) (Goodrum 209). The most complete account of the ancient philosophy available in the seventeenth century was Lucretius’ (c. 99 BCE – c. 55 BCE) *De Rerum Natura* (first century BCE). Gassendi, though, added modifications to the theory to make it less atheistic and less materialistic, and thus more acceptable

for a contemporary public (209). The basic idea of atomism was that atoms are moving in a void. During this motion, the atoms were thought to collide with each other, and in this process some of them would “combine to form the objects we observe in the world” (Goodrum 209). Furthermore, atomism regarded the universe as boundless, without a centre, and containing a plurality of worlds (Rivers 72). This does not contradict heliocentric cosmology that regards the sun as the centre of our universe. The reason for this is that the sun can function as a centre in our world (galaxy), while other galaxies could also exist in the boundless cosmos.

Although the basic assumption in Pulter’s poetry seems to be that we live in a heliocentric universe, Pulter does use terminology that reminds us of geo-centric Aristotelian-Ptolemaic cosmology (something Hutton also acknowledges (80)). For example in “Emblem 26” (Perdita 112-113), Pulter ends the poem with the remark: “T’is best for every one to keep his Sphere” (l.43). She refers here to the Ptolemaic universe in which the sun, the planets, and the stars are placed in fixed spheres. Pulter uses this imagery to emphasise that everyone should know their place in society and keep to it. Other poets are also known to allude to both Ptolemaic and the Galilean cosmology; Milton, for instance, made use of the two systems in *Paradise Lost* (NAEL 2960).

Schema huius præmissæ diuisionis Sphærarum .



Figure 4 Geocentric celestial spheres from Peter Apian (1495-1552) *Cosmographia* (Antwerp, 1584).

No information that would confirm Pulter had read any works on the above-mentioned subjects is available to us. Hutton suggests another possibility of where Pulter could have picked up the knowledge of contemporary natural philosophy and astronomy, namely contemporary poetry (84). She notes that poets often incorporated motifs based on contemporary natural philosophy in their writings, and these writings could well have been the source of Pulter's knowledge on these subjects. Hutton mentions Henry More's (1614-1687) *Philosophical Poems* (1647) in this respect. Apparently, his poems "functioned as a 'popular' source of philosophical and scientific knowledge in the mid-seventeenth century" (Hutton 86). Alternatively, the similarities between Pulter's and More's poems could also be the result of both poets using a common source. In any event, Hutton emphasises that, whatever Pulter's sources were, "[Pulter] shows a clear understanding of the theories involved", and

that the way she incorporates astronomical phenomena in her poetry is not conventional but displays originality (82-84).

A writer that has to be mentioned in this context is Margaret Cavendish (1623?-1673) who was greatly interested in natural philosophy, and who made it one of her poetical topics. Cavendish published her first collection of poetry *Poems and Fancies* in 1653, and in this collection she shows her interest in natural philosophy. Here Cavendish describes in verse, among other things, her view on atomic theory. Hutton points out that Cavendish is considered to have been an atomist during her early poetic career, but that she later repudiated atomism (79). Pulter shared Cavendish's interest in natural philosophy and, in particular, in atomistic matter theory (Hutton 83). In some of their poems, the authors refer to the fact that everything is composed of atoms, as, for instance, in Pulter's "The Revolution" (*Perdita* 37-39): "Who can thy infinite power rehearse / Which didst create this Univers / And canst to atom's it dispers" (ll.20-23), or in Cavendish's poem "A World made by Atoms" (5). A noticeable difference between the two authors, though, is that Pulter mainly focuses on God: the lines referring to natural philosophy serve to express her feelings about her relationship with God; in contrast, in Cavendish's work, natural philosophy can be the poetry's main subject. Taking in consideration the date of publication of *Poems and Fancies*, it is possible that Pulter had read the poetry collection when she composed some of her poems. However, Pulter started writing around 1644, and the first part of her poetry collection, "Poetry Wroughten By the Honorable H. P." was probably transcribed into her manuscript in 1655 (Eardley, "Leeds"). This means that Pulter presumably wrote a considerable part of her poems before the date of publication of *Poems and Fancies*. It seems more likely that both authors picked up on atomism because this topic was then modern and much discussed in the world of natural philosophy.

Two other poets who could have been interesting authors for Pulter as regards vocabulary and topics are Andrew Marvell and George Herbert (1593-1633). Pulter's interest in their work was not limited to topics concerning natural philosophy. Wilcox claims that Pulter wrote in the Marvellian tradition, although she does not specify what it means to write in the tradition of Marvell's lyrics ("My Hart is Full" 455); Clarke focuses in particular on similarities between Marvell's "Upon Appleton House" (1651) and Pulter's "The Larke" (between 1644 and 1655). Pulter's poem "The

Larke” (*Perdita* 71-73) uses the imagery of a lark whose nest, which is built low on the ground, is destroyed, and whose young are killed by a reaper. This resembles Marvell’s “Upon Appleton House” (ll.385-400) (1651) in which mowers destroy the nests of landrails and kill them in the process of reaping. She suspects that Pulter had read Marvell’s poetry in manuscript because Pulter’s lyric “echoes” Marvell’s poem (Ross 12), while most of Marvell’s poetry was published posthumously in 1681 (*Norton Anthology* 1684).

Wilcox mentions that Pulter also drew on Herbert’s work; apparently, his “lyrical manner” is frequently found in the poetry of many female authors (“My Hart Is Full” 455). Jane Archer more specifically states that Pulter’s use of the term “Chimick” in her poem “The Circle” (between 1640 and 1655) imitates Herbert’s application of “Chymick” in “Vantie (I)” (1633) (4). The term in both poems refers to a person who investigates life and understands the workings of nature, but fails to see the infinitely more important meaning behind all that he studies.

Herbert and Pulter share other similarities in their choice of words and metaphors: when comparing Herbert’s “The Star” and “Easter” (Herbert 67 and 37) to Pulter’s “The Revolution” (*Perdita* 37-39), we can see that the use of the phrase “calcine to dust” (l.26) in Pulter resembles the phrases “burn to dust” (l.9) in “The Star” and “calcined thee to dust” (l.4) in “Easter”. “To calcine” means “to burn to ashes” (“Calcine” *OED* Def. 2a), and this word was used in a more specific sense by alchemists to indicate that a mineral or metal was to be reduced “to its purest or most refined residuum by driving off or consuming all the more volatile and perishable constituents” (“Calcine” Def. 1a). Several seventeenth-century poets used alchemical images in their poetry. Archer mentions John Donne, Margaret Cavendish, Katherine Philips, Andrew Marvell, Henry Peacham, George Herbert, and Hester Pulter in this respect (1). In Herbert’s and Pulter’s poetry, the verb “to calcine” is used to indicate the eradication of the physical body and all the earthly sins that are related to it. Archer makes clear this act was thought necessary for the soul: in order to complete the process of sublimation in which matter transforms into spirit, the body had to be eliminated. Additionally, both Herbert and Pulter write about the “refining” of the heart (line 28 in Pulter’s “The Revolution” and line 11 in Herbert’s “The Star”). The “heart’s refining” is the result of calcination and makes the heart pure and ready for God’s grace:

Nay rather all to dust Calcine

I gladly will my forme resign

It will my carnall heart refine (Pulter, "The Revolution" ll.26-28)

That, as his death calcined thee to dust

His life may make thee gold, and much more just (Herbert, "Easter" ll.4-5)

Yet, if thou wilt from thence depart,

Take a bad lodging in my heart;

For thou canst make a debtor,

And make it better.

First with thy fire-work burn to dust

Folly, and worse than folly, lust:

Then with thy light refine,

And make it shine: (Herbert, "The Star" ll.5-12)

The resemblances between these poems show that Pulter's use of alchemical imagery has literary precursors, and this supports the idea that Pulter's alchemical knowledge is, at least partly, derived from literary sources.

Another noticeable similarity in word choice between Herbert and Pulter is the use of the phrases "sighing" or "breathing forth" when describing the utterance of emotional spiritual thoughts or prayers. Ross points out that Pulter follows the tradition of writing devotional lyrics in which "breathing forth" constitutes a form of spiritual emission, noting that Herbert's volume *The Temple. Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations* (1633) popularized this tradition (13). The title of Pulter's manuscript volume reads *Poems Breathed forth by the Noble Hadassas (Perdita 1)*, whereas the emblems have a title page with the words: "The sighes of a sad soule Emblematically breath'd forth by the noble Hadassah: Emblemes" (*Perdita 92*). Each poem is a sigh or a prayer, to God, spoken or written down by Pulter.

Pulter's poetry shows that she was thoroughly familiar with contemporary royalist literature. Firstly, some of the literary forms she chose for her writings, in particular emblem poetry and prose romance, were seen as typically royalist (Salzman 216 and Potter 48). Parliamentarians also wrote emblems, yet the royalists considered this their own form: it was a form that they thought "distinguished them from the vulgar" (Potter 48). Pulter seems not to have despised commoners in general, but she detested people from humble origins who wanted to move upward socially. In her view, many parliamentarians fell into this category. This can be seen, for instance, in "Emblem 48" (*Perdita* 127); here Pulter distinguishes between the obviously highly valued "Noble Spirit[s]" (l.32) and Cromwell, the despised "vulgar one" (l.31). John Morrill points out that from his "lowly position [Cromwell] was to emerge as the most powerful figure in revolutionary times, and this made him loved and reviled in equal measure" ("Oliver Cromwell"). Secondly, the poetry's imagery with regard to the king and Pulter's choice of topics fit into the royalist idiom of the 1640s and 1650s. Andrea Brady states that the royalists frequently compared Charles to Christ in his sufferings (10), and Pulter writes in this same tradition. She presents the king as a martyr: she refers to him as a Christ-like figure, for example, in "Emblem 50" (*Perdita* 130) in which she writes about his beheading: "When Lamblike on that Alter he did lie" (l.19).



Figure 5 King Charles I by William Marshall, frontispiece from Charles I, *Eikon Basilike* (1649).³

³ "William Marshall's emblematic frontispiece to Charles I's final written testament *Eikon Basilike*. *The Pourtraicture of his sacred Maiestie in his solitudes and sufferings*. The print ... concisely summarises the book's principal theme of Charles I's indomitable Christian faith and acceptance of his martyrdom. The king is

Furthermore, Pulter incorporates into her poetry topical issues that were of special interest to royalists, such as the death of the royalist army officers George Lisle and Charles Lucas,⁴ and the vandalizing of parliamentary army officer Robert Devereux's tomb and effigy.⁵ In accordance with royalist sentiment, Pulter was appalled by the death of the royalist officers, and she approved of the vandalizing of the parliamentary officer's tomb. So, with respect to natural philosophy and political developments, Pulter was well acquainted with the contemporary state of affairs. Although Pulter claims that she was shut up at home, she must have had access to books, manuscripts, or news pamphlets, or at least have had contact with people who could inform her about new ideas and developments.

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, Pulter wrote a whole collection of emblem poetry. This is remarkable because, as far as we know, not many women chose this form for their poetry. Clarke points out that Pulter's "Emblemes" is the only known emblem collection by a woman in English ("Introducing H.P. and the Perdita Project" 2). The standard form for an emblem in the late sixteenth and seventeenth century was a motto in Latin, a picture that had to be interpreted, and a verse epigram (often in two parts: one stanza describing the picture, the other stanza showing its moral significance) (Bath, *Speaking Pictures* 72-73). However, although the tripartite form became the emblem's dominant structure, emblem books in a wide range of forms existed alongside each other: some in the balanced tripartite form, some with the emphasis on the picture and some without pictures. Bart Westerweel notes that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries authors were not particularly concerned about the precise form of the emblem (116-117). Michael Bath sees the

shown in an attitude of prayer, which invites comparisons to images of Christ's Agony in the Garden. He discards his worldly crown while seizing a crown of thorns and looking up to an 'incorruptible' celestial crown awaiting him in heaven" ("Charles I: King and Martyr").

⁴ See Andrea Brady: The Lucas and Lisle story "had already been assimilated into the cavalier mythology of love and sacrifice" (20). Sir Charles and Sir George were two royalist army officers who were executed by the parliamentary army after surrendering Colchester in 1648. The royalist army's junior officers were granted quarter, but the senior officers were at the mercy of the victorious parliamentary army. Some of the senior officers were reserved for the judgment of parliament, but Lucas and Lisle were immediately condemned to death, which the royalists considered unsoldierly and barbaric (Morgan).

⁵ Robert Devereux, third Earl of Essex, was a parliamentary army officer. Mark Robson: Essex was the subject of numerous satires and polemics ("Swansongs" 246). Essex was buried with much pomp, and was laid to rest in Westminster Abbey in 1648. A month after the funeral, Essex's tomb was vandalized and his effigy was beheaded by a former royalist soldier (Morrill).

collections of (and the using of) rhetorical commonplaces as one of the most important textual sources for the development of the Renaissance emblem (31). Furthermore, he points out that in order to understand the relationship between text and image, it was often necessary to recognise the emblem's textual source. This implies that the emblems were written with an educated reader in mind, a reader who could recognise the origin of the emblem's topos or who could "at least supply the missing context of its classical use" (Bath 32). This was the reason why the royalists considered the emblem a royalist genre: according to them, only an educated person, that is, not a vulgar or common person, would be able to create an emblem or to find out its meaning (Potter 48).

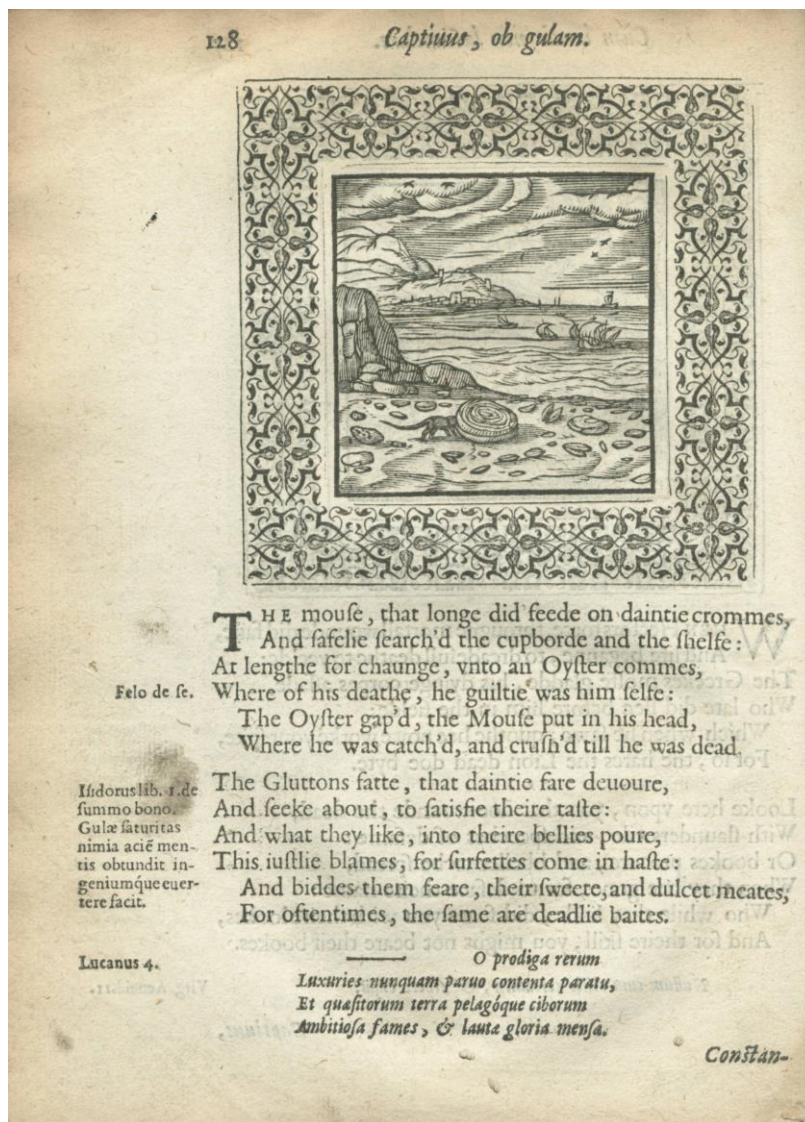


Figure 6 Example of an emblem with a picture: Geoffrey Whitney, *A Choice of Emblemes, and other devises, For the moste part gathered out of sundrie writers, Englished and Moralized. And diuers newly devised.* (Leiden, 1586) 145.

Pulter's poems are not emblematic in a strict sense: they are not accompanied by an illustration or a motto. The poems start with a "verbal image", which often originated from Pliny or Plutarch, followed by a lesson the reader could learn from considering the image (Clarke, "Introducing Hester Pulter and the *Perdita* Project" 2). Alistair Fowler calls these sorts of verbal images "nude emblems" (21). He associates poets such as Henry Vaughan (1621-1695), Edward Taylor (1642-1729), and, in particular, "emblem-inspired" George Herbert with this kind of emblematic poetry (Fowler 22). Herbert was probably a great example for Pulter: her diction and metaphors betray his influence on her poetry, an influence that could easily have extended to other parts of her poetry as well. It should be stressed that the influence of emblem books containing pictures and text is also unmistakably present in Pulter's emblems.

Pulter seems to have been inspired by the illustrated emblem books of George Wither (1588-1667) and Geoffrey Whitney (1548?-1601?). Many of Pulter's verbal images describe the same animal or situation that is represented as an illustration in their emblem books. Pulter often starts her emblems with frequently used models, such as, for instance, "Medea" (*Perdita* 101), "the elephant" (*Perdita* 107), "the hart" (*Perdita* 109-110), "apes" (*Perdita* 112-113), "the dolphin" (*Perdita* 121-122), and "the mouse and the oyster" (one of Aesop's fables that will be discussed below) (*Perdita* 129). These examples can also be found in Wither and Whitney, although the lessons drawn from them may differ considerably.

In general, the emblem's images do not have an intrinsically fixed meaning; they can serve to teach different moral lessons. Consequently, in Wither's as well as Whitney's emblem books certain images appear more than once, representing different virtues or vices. For instance, "the ape" represents "ambition" in Whitney's emblem 58 (75) and "foolish love" in his emblem 188 (205). However, emblems generally deal with moral issues in a customary, conservative manner. Bath notes that "[e]mblem books in general draw heavily on the same stock of moral commonplaces which had been brought together in the *Adagia* collected by Erasmus [1469?-1536]" (32), and that this can be observed in Wither as well as Whitney. Pulter, on the other hand, employs a more personal approach, which results in poems differing significantly from the older emblems. According to Clarke, Pulter's

emblems are less conservative and sometimes strongly political (“Introducing Hester Pulter and the Perdita Project” 2). This can be seen in Pulter’s “Emblem 48”, “The Mouse and the Oyster”, for instance. “The Mouse and the Oyster” is one of the Aesop fables about a mouse who tries to eat an oyster but who gets caught between the two halves of the shell and dies. Aesop (c620-564 BCE) was an ancient fabulist or storyteller from Greece. In his tales, animals often act as human beings. This mouse and oyster story had been used by other writers than Pulter as well. It often functioned as a warning against gluttony, or as a caution against unwary behaviour. See, for instance, Andrea Alciato’s “Emblem 95” in *Emblematum liber* (1531), or Whitney’s “Emblem 128” (145) in *A Choice of Emblemes* (1586) in which the mouse’s death is caused by its gluttonous behaviour (see *figure 6*). Pulter uses the image of the mouse and the oyster in a totally different way; she turns it into a political poem in which the mouse represents a “Noble Spirit” (l.32) who is imprisoned by a “vulgar” (l.31) oyster. In contrast with the Alciato and Whitney emblems, here the mouse is not the greedy or guilty party, but an innocent victim of the oyster’s behaviour. Pulter starts the poem with a reference to King James and to her father: “When Royall Fergus Line did rule this Realm / My Father had the Third place at the Helme” (ll.1-2). These lines make the poem personal and at the same time establish Pulter’s family’s allegiance to the Stuart monarchy (James Ley was Chief Justice of King’s Bench in Ireland between 1603 and 1608, and King’s Bench’s Lord Chief Justice in London between 1621 and 1625). Line eight introduces the mouse, who is just humbly looking for some crumbs when the oyster captures his tail. Further on in the poem it becomes clear that the “vulgar” oyster that has risen from a humble background to “Raign” (l.31), stands for Cromwell, while the mouse stands for the royalists whom Cromwell imprisoned during the 1640s and 1650s. Pulter closes the emblem with the advice to the restrained noble spirits to be patient until they are freed again by “Tide, or Time, or Death” (l.34) and to “trust in God” (l.35). This poem illustrates beautifully that Pulter indeed used her own experiences and political views, and created unexpected connections between the examples she used and the themes she dealt with.

The above-mentioned sources that Pulter possibly read and made use of comprise mostly literature works and studies on natural philosophy written by men. However, Pulter’s poetry has much in common with poetry written by women as well. In the devotional poetry and the laments, she

expressed concerns which she shared with other female poets. These concerns were for instance related to the death of (some of) their children and to their relationship with their lovers/husbands compared to their love for God. An example of the second concern is Pulter's "Pardon mee my Dearest Love" (*Perdita* 64-65). In this poem she explains to her husband that although here on earth, "subsolarly" (l.3), everything she is and possesses is his, her thoughts are directed towards heaven. Subsequently, she declares her soul's love for God: "Nothing here is worth her Love / Her sumum bonum is above" (ll.11-12).⁶ As Wilcox shows, the anonymous writer of Eliza's Babes (1652) expresses a similar thought in "The Life" ("She on the Hills" 27). Here, the speaker, too, declares her love and life to be dedicated to God. She makes clear that, although she is going to be married, her thoughts are not centred on earthly life:

If as man say, we live not, where we are,
 But where we love,
 I live above.
 For what on earth, or yet in heaven is there,
 Desir'd can be,
 'Tis none but thee.
 Great God, thou onely worth desiring art,
 And none but thee, then must possess my heart. (ll.1-8)⁷

The speaker indicates that her bodily presence on earth is of no importance. God is the highest good and all her love is directed towards him. Both she and Pulter live in anticipation of their union with God.

To refer to her life here on earth Pulter uses the word "subsolarly" (l.3) which is synonymous with "sublunary" ("Sublunary") and refers to earthly business which is defined by `generation and corruption, flux, mutability` and inconstancy in the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic cosmology (Rivers 69). This presents a contrast to the heavenly, which is constant, orderly and eternal (Rivers 69). Although

⁶ My transcription.

⁷ Wilcox's transcription.

this is based on the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic cosmology, Pulter shows in many of her poems that she followed Galileo's cosmic view. Apparently, the contrast between the "subsolar" and the heavenly could still function in this new cosmology. In "Pardon mee my Dearest Love" the "subsolar" love for her husband is thus secondary to the enduring and more important love for God. John Donne (1572-1631) uses the word "sublunary" in a similar context. In "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning" (38) He contrasts the "normal" love on earth with a more refined kind of love. To describe ordinary earthly love he uses the derogatory phrase "dull sublunary lovers love" (l.13). In his case, though, he does not compare his love for a woman with his love for God. The more refined love he feels is directed towards a woman. It is not so much a bodily love as a love of the mind in which the souls are connected. So, although Donne and Pulter both contrast different kinds of love and use similar words with regard to the physical love for the other, the object of their "higher" love is not the same. Donne does not turn away from life and love on earth, while Pulter's and the author of Eliza's Babes's attention is focused on heaven; they seem to merely endure earthly life.

Conclusion

The preceding paragraphs show that Pulter knew the customary old sources such as the Bible and Pliny, that she was informed about the latest thinking on astronomy, and that she kept in touch with contemporary issues and dilemmas. What is more, she was able to use this knowledge to express her private and public concerns in her poetry. Pulter's choices concerning style and language place her firmly in the mid-seventeenth century. She shared topical interests and stylistic characteristics with a variety of writers. When Pulter uses language or ideas expressed in other, older works, she makes them her own. She understands and uses the existing ideas, terminology, and expressions to support and express her own thoughts on the issue at hand.

2. Hester Pulter's Religious Concerns: Sinfulness, Salvation, and the Loss of Faith's Defender

With the inauguration of King James (1566-1625) as King of England and Scotland in 1603, England and Scotland became one kingdom. Scotland, though, retained its own parliament, legal and educational systems, and its own Established Church. Scotland and England were both Protestant states, but their manner of worship differed: in the Scottish Church a more simple liturgy was practised than in the English Established Church.

Already during James's reign as James VI, King of Scotland, the Scots were not happy with some aspects of church government (the installation of bishops in 1584 for example) that James imposed on the Church of Scotland. However, it was not until James's son, Charles I, and the archbishop of Canterbury, William Laud (1573-1645) authoritatively introduced the use of the *Book of Common Prayer* in Scotland in 1638, that the opposition against the king's demands and impositions came to a head. The *Book of Common Prayer* regulated the church's liturgy. The use of the book would bring the liturgy of the Scottish Established Church in line with the English, resulting in a liturgy that was centrally laid down and less simple than the people in Scotland were used to. This did not go down well with the Scots: in 1638, after riots and protests, the Church of Scotland's General Assembly declared the Book of Common Prayer unlawful and abolished the office of bishops. Charles I could not accept this and decided that force had to be used to subordinate the, in his view, rebellious Scots. This culminated in the two Bishops' Wars between Scotland and England in 1638 and 1640. These Bishops' Wars ended disastrously for the king: he lost the wars, and had to accept all the General Assembly's decisions. This meant, among other things, that the Church of Scotland was to be free from royal control. Furthermore, Charles had to summon parliament and ask for money that he needed to pay off the Scots for the expenses they had incurred during the war. For

years, the king had managed to sideline parliament, but now parliament was again a force to reckon with (Kishlansky).

Parliament now seized the opportunity to change the king's government; one of the things parliament did to achieve this was charge the king's supporter and adviser archbishop William Laud with several offences (secular and religious matters), offences for which he was eventually executed. Laud had been very influential during the 1620s and 1630s, but the summoning of parliament in 1640 was the end of his career. A profound distrust of Laud had existed for some time; due to his insistence on conformity, ceremony, ritual, and more decorous forms of church decoration, and his hostility towards Puritanism, he was suspected of popish sympathies. This was an offence of which many people believed the king to be guilty as well. Laud, however, argued that with his intended changes in church rules and liturgy, "he was merely restoring the Church of England 'to the rules of its first reformation'" (Milton). Additionally, Laud shared Charles I's idea that the king receives his power from God, and that, consequently, the person and office of the king are sacred. Laud's emphasis on the power of the monarch and his disregard for parliament did not, of course, help him when parliament became a powerful body.

By 1644, when Hester Pulter wrote her first poems that are preserved in her manuscript, Laud was already imprisoned, and a year later he was executed. Although in her poetry, Pulter does not comment specifically on Laud's views, nor does she declare herself to be a member of the Church of England, or any other church or religious movement for that matter, Clarke recognises close resemblances between Laudians and Pulter ("Women in Church" 113-115). She finds indications in Pulter's poetry that suggest Pulter was a high church member of the Church of England, that is a member subscribing to the tenets Laud and Charles I thought were essential to the church: ritual, ornament, uniformity, and hierarchy. Other scholars are less outspoken regarding the exact religious denomination to which Pulter belonged. Alice Eardley, for instance, agrees with Clarke that Pulter distances herself from strict Puritanism, but she finds it difficult to determine Pulter's exact religious views. She does not recognise in Pulter's writing "a coherent theological basis for her beliefs" ("Biography" 2). In fact, Eardley suspects that Pulter's religious views were strongly influenced by

her political views and her class-consciousness. The following paragraphs will address these issues of religious denomination, and the intertwining of politics and religion in Pulter's devotional poetry.

The Prominent Place of Sinfulness in Pulter's Poetry

In her poetry, Pulter's views on humanity and religion seem to correspond with Protestant ideas on these issues. David Loewenstein states that in the early seventeenth century "Calvinist theology was by and large the orthodox creed of English Protestantism" (10). He mentions the "persistent emphasis on human depravity and sinfulness" and "the emphasis on the individual's personal relation to God" as important parts of the Calvinist theology (10). These aspects are certainly recognisable in Pulter's poetry. In her poems there is little scope for the joys of life, such as embracing a happy family life or enjoying the company of friends; she refers, for instance, to "this Dunghill Globe of Earth" in line twenty of "The Perfection of Patience and Knowledge" (*Perdita* 59-60),⁸ and she sees earthly life as tainted by sin; mortality casts a shadow over her life, and her only comfort is her bond with God.

Pulter repeatedly mentions the sinfulness of humankind: she refers to people who have lost their moral guide and, consequently, their way, but also acknowledges her own sinfulness. In Pulter's case, her sins consist mainly of a too strong attachment to earthly life and forgetfulness of the soul's origin: for instance, in "The Eclips" (*Perdita* 4-5) she regrets enjoying "Earths fadeing pleasures" (l.56) such as beauty and "sportive wit and Mirth" (l.22) (on which she elaborates in "Made when I was not well, April 20, 1655" (*Perdita* 76)), and in "Made when I was sick 1647" (*Perdita* 49) she complains "How loath my soule is from my flesh to part" (l.2). These confessed sins nuance the negative outlook on Pulter's existence: although she emphasises the sadness experienced throughout her life, she enjoys life as well and still wants to continue her earthly existence .

This reality, this life on earth, which Pulter could not ignore or overlook, was in constant conflict with her wish to only worship God and to return to him. She expressed her anxiety about this predicament. On the one hand, she did not want to die. On the other hand, she asked herself why she

⁸ See also for example "Of a Young lady at Oxford 1646" (*Perdita* 65-66): "And thou my soul witherd and Worn with Grief/ Thinks't in this Dunghill Earth to find relief" (ll.77-78).

should be unwilling to die since death would bring her closer to God, as in “Why art thou sad at the Approach of Night” (*Perdita* 73-74):

Why art thou sad at the approach of Night
 My Melancholly soul
 Should not obscurity and cheerfull Light
 After each other Rowl

For as sad Gloomey shades doth follow Light
 Soe after Life wee die
 But Death at last is Conquered quite
 O happy Victory (ll.1-8)

Pulter associates death with darkness, but it is only a temporary state in which her soul will exist. Because of Christ’s sacrifice, there will be light after the darkness. Knowing this, Pulter has no reason to fear death. However, it is not fear that makes her unwilling to die, but her enjoyment of earthly life and her attachment to material objects and persons.

In “Pardon mee my Dearest Love” (*Perdita* 64-65), Pulter ignores her love for the material world for a moment. Here, she claims that she is only interested in her life with God:

Pardon mee my Dearest Love
 That I place my thoughts about
 What subsolary is yours
 And soe shall Bee while Life indures
 Onely my aspiring mind
 Noe felicity can find
 In this Dirty Dunghill earth
 My Soul Remembers still her Birth
 Shee being a sparkle of that Light
 Which ne’r shall set in Death or night
 Nothing here is worth her Love

Her sumum bonum is above (ll.1-12)⁹

However, her other poems clearly show that it is not only God whom she loves and that she cares for more than life after death. In her poetry, Pulter expresses her love for her children and friends, for the king, and for nature: in fact, the whole collection of poetry bears witness to her interest in life on earth. As mentioned before, she writes and is knowledgeable about nature, alchemy, politics, mythology, the Bible, and literature. Although Pulter might think she should not be concerned with earthly matters, she cannot help it; as long as she lives these will matter to her.

Pulter reluctantly realises that it is her bodily form that fetters her to earth. Her body is made of dust and this holds her back: as long as she, that is her soul, is within her body she cannot rise to God. She experiences this as imprisonment or confinement of her soul. In “The Perfection of Patience and Knowledg” (*Perdita* 59-60), Pulter compares her “infranchised soul” (l.16), among other things, with a chicken in an eggshell, or an embryo in the womb, waiting to be born. She reminds her soul that everyone has to obey nature’s laws, and everyone has to wait till their time to be born arrives. Her soul, though, is impatient:

But tho’art still striving to bee free
 As if none were in Bonds but thee
 Though for a time thourt cloath’d with earth
 Er’e long thoul’t have a happy Birth (ll.7-11)

Pulter’s soul wants to throw off its shell and “rise and fly away” (l.26). When this happens, Pulter expects to understand and know everything, in particular what she calls “[t]he eternall essence” (l.59). Knowing God and being known to him is for Pulter essential. However, she must first live life on earth, die, and then wait “in [her] silent Urn” (l.23) for the Day of Judgment before she expects to be born again.

On a few occasions Pulter experiences some freedom, not immediately of her soul but of her mind. In “This was written 1648” (*Perdita* 69-71), Pulter remembers the time when she was sick and had to stay in bed. Her body was fettered to the bed, but her thoughts “being free I bid them take their

⁹ My transcription.

flight / Above the Gloomey shades of Death and Night” (ll.3-4). She describes her thoughts flying to the stars and getting close to the sun, but being too dazzled by the bright light, they were not able to see the sun well. What is noticeable here is the description of her thoughts flying through the universe without encountering any barriers. Pulter distances herself from the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic view that the movements of everything and everyone are limited by the spheres they live in. Pulter's sun, that is God, amazes and frightens her, but the glimpse she discerns also gives her comfort. This is the nearest Pulter will come to God while alive and with her soul still confined to her body.

Pulter's Unshakeable Belief in receiving Grace

In many of her poems, Pulter addresses God, or contemplates her relationship with him. She confides in him, and he is a constant source of comfort to her. Although Pulter experiences life as extremely troublesome, as can be seen in, for instance, “Altheas Pearl” (l.40) (*Perdita* 50-53) or “Emblem 31” (l.35) (*Perdita* 116) in which she refers to her life as “sad and weary”, she takes comfort from the knowledge that after this (earthly) life she will return to God. In “The Eclips” (*Perdita* 4-5), Pulter seems not so confident at first about her return to the source of life:

But oh sins (my sins) and none but those
 Makes my poore soule o're flow with sad any
 Tis they and none but they doe interpose
 Twixt heaven and me and doth Eclips my Joy
 Tis neither clowdes, nor Moone nor shades of Earth
 Could keepe my soule from whence she had her birth

For were my soule from all transgression free
 Earth fadeing pleasures I would then despise
 Corruption. I would trample over thee
 And with swift Eagles wings I'd mount the skies
 Bit o my Sins they will not let mee flie

They fetter me more then Mortalitie (ll.49-60)

Pulter, initially, finds fault with clouds, the earth, and the moon, for obscuring her sight of “the azure skie” (l.4). In the fourth stanza it becomes clear that she is not only talking about astronomical phenomena as solar or lunar eclipses, but about the obstruction of her “soule[‘s] Celestiall Joyes” (l.42). Pulter’s soul longs to see God, but she is hindered by various elements. First, she blames external objects; then, in stanza four, she changes her view and claims that it is mortality that “dos’t obscure bright Glory from my soule” (l.38). However, in line 49 she concludes that her sins, and nothing other than these, are responsible for her not being able to see God’s light and not being able to return to that source of life. Finally, in the last stanza Pulter realises that she was wrong in presuming that God would abandon her: here, she expresses her understanding of Christ’s sacrifice and her consequent salvation:

But yet my saviour doth hope me feed
 Who did in love my cursed nature take
 And, that poore I might live in Death did Bleed
 He to Eternall Glory will me take
 Then sin triumph noe longer over mee
 For I in Christ have conquer’d Death and thee. (ll.61-66)

Pulter believes that Christ has suffered for her and taken upon himself all her sins so she can enter God’s kingdom. She repeats this belief in salvation many times; she seems absolutely sure about it. She ends “Emblem 3” (*Perdita* 94-95), for instance, with the lines: “Then though I sadly here sigh out my story / yet am I sure to rise again to Glory” (ll.41-42). She acknowledges her sins and unworthiness, but she is not afraid because she trusts unquestioningly in God’s love.

In her poetry, Pulter makes clear that it is impossible to earn God’s grace: humans are too sinful. They are incapable of doing good, and can never earn salvation. For example, in “Emblem 48” (*Perdita* 129), Pulter describes men and women as “sinful souls immured by flesh” (ll.27-28). Sometimes she presents herself as an example of how women should live; however, at the same time, she recognises that she, too, is just a human being and thus sinful and not entitled to resurrection from death. In “My God I thee (and only thee) Adore” (*Perdita* 75), for instance, she confesses that,

although she loves God, she has “wickedly deserted” (l.6) him, and she calls herself “ungratefull” (l.7). Here again a similarity between Pulter and Herbert can be detected. Herbert used the same term, “ungrateful” (l.9), in his poem “Love 3” (1633) (178) in which he also writes about the soul's sinfulness and subsequent hesitation to face God.

Pulter does not seem to be able to steer her destiny in any direction; she is totally dependent on God for grace. If he wants to, God can decide to save her: Pulter states that he can “[t]irradiate my soul ... with one raie / It will create in mee eternall Day” (ll.10-11). So, on the one hand, Pulter emphasises the absolute wickedness of man; on the other hand, she reassures her reader by showing that due to God's love the position of man is not hopeless.

“Emblem 11” (*Perdita* 102) is a beautiful example of a poem in which Pulter shows that God's love can change an essentially unloving and remorseless person/animal into a better person who is granted entry into God's kingdom. She chose the form of the emblem for this poem. The poem's first part sketches a picture of an animal and its characteristic behaviour, which tells us something about human behaviour that is described in the second part of the poem. Here the picture of the raven functions as a lesson about the relationship between living creatures and God. Pulter starts by describing how “the dubious raven doth her young forsake” (l.1), and how God takes care of the young birds. Moreover, God not only feeds the birds, but he also makes the “hard Hearted” (l.7) birds do good and he lets them bring bread to the prophet Eliah. Pulter refers here to 1 Kings 17: 6 “And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening and he drank of the brook” (all quotations of the Bible are taken from the *Authorized King James Version*). After establishing this picture of the raven, Pulter switches to the present time and advises her readers, when in need of comfort and help, to turn to God. The speaker urges her readers not to be afraid, even if we have nothing more than sorrows and tears to offer, because God's love works miracles. The speaker asks: “Why should his Children then soe Faint and Fear / T'was hee that these hard Hearted Birds did make / Of his Eliah constant care to take” (ll.6-8). God has the power to make the birds do good, and his power and mercy will also take care of our souls. We are all helpless and sinful creatures, yet God will not reject us.

With the example of the raven, Pulter wants to remind her reader of two important notions: firstly, that man is totally dependent on God; and secondly, that God is merciful. Pulter deliberately compares man with a “hard-hearted” bird in this poem; she implies that the adjective “hard-hearted” could be used for humans as well. In doing so, she draws attention to man’s incapability to do good or to open his heart to God. She emphasises the Calvinist idea that all humans are sinners, whatever they do to avoid this. However, Pulter believes that God can make it possible for man to open his heart and repent his sins, in order to receive God’s mercy. Without God’s help man is lost; just as it is due to God that the birds overcame their “hard-hearted” nature and took care of Eliah, it is only through God’s intervention that man can become worthy of redemption.

Donne expressed this idea of man’s inability to receive God’s love without intervention earlier in his “Holy Sonnet XIV” (1633) (264). In the poem, the speaker confesses that although he tries and labours hard to admit God into his heart, he cannot free himself from his bond with God’s “enemie” (l.10). He presents himself as a sinful human being who always tends to act contrary to God’s will. Donne’s speaker, though, hopes God is able to change this and begs Him to use force in order to break the hated bond with His opponent. This evil opponent includes all the things that seduce humans and bind them to earth. By using imagery connected with brute violence he emphasises the seriousness of his sinfulness and imperfection; he suggests that his weaknesses are so deep-seated that only extreme measures can stamp them out.

The first line of “Holy Sonnet XIV” starts with the words “Batter my heart”, which sets the tone of the poem. In the poem, the speaker expresses his wish to be cleansed and to be made ready to receive God. In order to rise as a new man, he believes that it is necessary to be almost annihilated: “That I may rise, and stand, o’erthrow mee, ‘and bend / Your force, to breake, blowe, burn and make me new” (ll.3-4). He longs to be free from his wickedness but he cannot achieve this without God’s help.

Donne’s choice of words in “Holy Sonnet XIV” underlines the deplorable state of man; man can only be saved at a very high cost. Pulter takes a different view in “Emblem 11”. She emphasises God’s mercy and believes that man’s deplorable state can change as a result of God’s affection; his love, and not his wrath, is our way out of misery:

Thus Gods affections altereth every hower
 To Shew to us his infinite Love and Power
 Then as thy Friends and near relations Die
 To him alone (to him) for comfort Flie. (ll.1-14)

Pulter often elaborates on her painful and lonely existence, which she alludes to here as well, but she assures her reader that God provides comfort to all and that he can relieve us from pain and sorrow. Here, the key words in the relationship between God and those who seek God seem to be “love” and “mercy”. Having said this, “The Revolution” (*Perdita* 37-39) shows that Pulter sometimes does refer to the state of despair that Donne describes and to the force that is needed to make one receptive to God. I have discussed this briefly on page 18 with regard to similarities between Herbert’s and Pulter’s work. She does not describe this as vividly and elaborately as Donne, but she mentions the need to be “calcine[d]” (l.26), which means “burned to ashes” (“Calcine” Def. 2a) or “brought in a state of utter despair” (Archer 5). So, to Pulter, too, in order to purify the heart and soul of a person, calcination seems a necessary step in the journey towards God.

Pulter believes that man is intrinsically bad, and that nothing can be done about this. However, when people realise this fact, they can repent their sins, which will make God’s forgiveness possible. In “The Revolution”, Pulter indicates, using alchemical terminology, that her tears of repentance will save her when God judges her. When all is annihilated, her physical being will be “calcined” to dust, but she confides to God: “my tears my Dust will rarifie / To Ayer which Circularly / Thy blessed name shall magnifie” (ll.29-31), and she trusts that she eventually will enjoy God’s “Blessed sight” (l.49). Jane Archer explains in her article about alchemical terminology in Pulter’s poetry that calcination is a chemical process in which matter is reduced to powder or dust by heating (5). It is necessary for the material to undergo this treatment in order to dissolve the material in a liquid. She points out that the term is also used to indicate a spiritual process in which the human soul is reduced to “a state of utter despair” (5). In this state, temptation to fear and doubt is a serious threat, but the soul could also “be most receptive to the influx of divine spirit” (5). In the process, the element that enables the soul’s reception by God is water, and Archer interprets the tears in Pulter’s poetry as a sign of the divine spirit’s influx (7). With regard to “The Revolution”, Pulter’s tears would

indicate her repentance and at the same time her receiving grace. Pulter warns people who criticize her for her tears: “Now you that scorn repentant tears / As if proceeding from base fears / When yours lies low my dust it rears” (ll.59-61). They misinterpret the reasons of her tears: her critics might think that her repentance is the result of “base fears”, but Pulter implies this is not the case by using the phrase “as if” (l.60). Instead of emphasizing fear, Pulter focuses on the reward of repentance; in this perspective, the tears are a blessing. Indeed, it seems that the tears indicate that Pulter truly understands her position as a sinful human being and her position in relation to God, and that this insight and genuine feeling will overcome the obstacles that stand between her and God.

Pulter’s complete trust in God’s forgiveness shows that she rejected a strict Calvinist view of predestination. The Calvinists believed that only a select group of people were predestined to be saved: whether someone would be saved or not was God’s decision, made even before birth, that could neither be changed nor rejected. On the one hand, Pulter, as well, emphasises God’s importance in the process. She makes clear that God makes it possible to receive grace: in “Emblem 5” (*Perdita* 96), Pulter mentions the “Eternall Spark” (l.28) that God has kindled in her breast, and she also reminds her reader: “But know that the least spark or beam of Love / Is first diffus’d and kindled from above” (ll.19-20). On the other hand, though, she insists on man’s role in the whole process: man should repent his sins, and believe and trust in God. Thus, receiving grace does not seem to be laid down before birth, but seems to depend, partly, on man’s acceptance of God. The theological view that corresponds with this idea is Arminianism. Arminianism followed the doctrine of the Dutch reformed theologian Jacob Arminius (1559-1609), and “became associated with the high church party of William Laud” (*The Cambridge Companion to Writing of the English Revolution* 286). Pulter’s writings about the possibility of receiving grace as a result of repentance could indicate that she was a high church member of the Church of England, although this alone is somewhat meagre evidence. Clarke, though, identifies also resemblances between Pulter and Laudians in language use and in the importance they attach to sacred places (“Women in Church” 114-115).

Laudian Characteristics in Pulter's Poetry

Clarke mentions the importance of rituals and the reverence for sacred spaces as typically Laudian characteristics ("Women in Church" 113). She recognises in Pulter's poem "Must I thus ever interdicted bee" (*Perdita* 78) the significance the actual church building and the religious rituals had to Pulter. Pulter complains in the poem about her "indictment" (l.1), the "ordinances" (l.6) she cannot receive, and her wish to be received into the Church again (l.9), and Clarke interprets these complaints as indications that she was being excluded from the church building:

Must I thus ever interdicted bee

My Gracious God to thee and onely thee

I will complain pardon and pittie

Have I thy sacred Pledges took in vain

Or heard thy Blessed word applaus to gain

That thou dost thus thine Ordinances restrain

If it bee soe thy mercy I implore

To lay my sins upon my saviours score

And mee unto thy Church again restore

The wanton sparrow and the Chaster Dove

Within thy sacred temple Freely move

But I ay mee am kept from what I love (ll.1-12)¹⁰

In her analysis of the poem, Clarke looks closely at the text and combines this with information about the local church service in Cottered, Hertfordshire, during the time Pulter lived there.¹¹ She speculates

¹⁰ My transcription.

¹¹ Pulter and her family lived in Cottered. Pulter's husband was the patron of Cottered's parish church's rector (Eardly "Biography" 2).

that the “sense of exclusion may be because the vicar of Cottered celebrated Communion in an unfamiliar and more Puritan manner, as his survival in post throughout the Interregnum indicates” (115). Eardly, too, refers to the rector Thomas Gardiner as a radical clergyman (“Biography” 2). This would mean that Pulter belonged to the high church party, and that she refused to change her ways of worship to the Puritan manner. Wilcox agrees with Clarke’s analysis: she interprets the above-mentioned poem as a lament on the indictment that is placed upon Pulter and on the consequence that she could not go to church anymore, although she does not refer to the situation of the local church service (“My Hart is Full” 465).

In her analysis of “Must I thus ever interdicted bee”, Clarke focuses on “Laudian” topics such as ritual and sacred place in Pulter’s poetry. This particular poem lends itself to this approach, but not many references to the church building or the service are to be found elsewhere in Pulter’s poetry. Clarke states that because Pulter could not or did not want to attend church any more, she “describes instead a mental space which seems to substitute for a place of Christian worship: Pulter finds God in the natural world ...” (“Women in Church” 115). Indeed, she does not seem to need the church to communicate with God or to recognise his presence all around her. Maybe due to the circumstances, Pulter’s religious focus shifted from formalised to private worship, but there is little evidence in the poetry that confirms this.

According to Clarke, another resemblance between Pulter and Laudians is her use of language, in particular her use of the phrase “sacred temple” (l.11); Laudians apparently used these words when they referred to their church (“Women in Church” 115). However, this does not necessarily link Pulter to the Laudians. As mentioned before, Pulter’s idiom resembles George Herbert’s and her choice of words might have to do with Herbert’s phrasing: Herbert uses the word “temple” in the title of his volume of poems and he uses words derived from the Latin word *fanum* meaning “temple” in his poetry (Herbert xvii). John Tobin explains in the introduction to Herbert’s poems that Herbert refers to the church, but also to the human heart when he uses the word “temple” (Herbert xvii). The fact that Pulter made use of Herbert’s idiom does not tell us much about her religious conviction. As Wilcox states, “[Herbert’s *The Temple*] was read by members of a whole spectrum of religious and political groups in that most sectarian of periods in English history”, and

she points out that “[t]he poems were widely imitated by seventeenth-century writers” (“George Herbert” 183). So, Herbert’s influence in itself is not telling; he was an example for many men and women who aspired to write poetry, whatever their religious denomination.

King Charles I: the Church’s “Heroick Champion” and “Defender”¹²

An aspect which Clarke does not mention but that reveals something about Pulter’s religious denomination is Pulter’s opinion about the role of the king in religious matters. She is very clear about whom she considers head of the Church (on earth), namely King Charles I. According to Pulter, Charles is essential to the Church, without him the Church is helpless and driven to despair. In “On the Same” (*Perdita* 35-36), a poem about George Lisle and Charles Lucas, two royalist army officers,¹³ Pulter refers to Charles I as the Church’s “defender” (l.40):

Just as our martyrd king his spirit fled
 The spouse of Christ hung down her virgin head
 And sighing said my Faiths defender’s Dead
 Then trickling tears down on her trembling breast
 Shee said (ay mee) when shall I safely rest
 At which a voice from Heaven said weep noe more
 Nor my Heroick Champions Death Deplore
 A second Charles shall all thy Joyes restore (ll.38-45)

Pulter presents the Church as wedded to Christ, and the king as “faith’s defender” (l.40) on earth. The poem makes clear that Charles is acting in God’s name when God calls the king “my heroick champion” (l.44). To be “faith’s defender” is Charles I’s assigned role, given by God, and this seems in line with the Laudian view that considers it to be, ultimately, the king’s responsibility to lead and

¹² “On the Same” l.40 and l.44 (*Perdita* 35-36)

¹³ Lisle and Lucas were captured after the loss of Colchester to parliamentary troops. They were executed by the parliamentary army and subsequently became royalist martyrs (Donagan).

also to defend the Church. The poem's last sentence predicts that Charles's son will take on this kingly duty, and restore the Church to its proper place.

Pulter expresses the same idea of kingly authority (by God infused) in religious matters in "And must the sword this controverce decide" (*Perdita* 89), and to get the message across she uses Calvinist language. In the poem about the battle between various groups that fought each other in the 1640s and 1650s, she uses the words "chosen ones" (l.14). This phrase is often associated with Protestant/Calvinist terminology, meaning "the elect": the people that God has chosen for eternal life. However, as stated before, Pulter's view on the possibility of receiving grace was less strict than the Calvinist perspective: she had no doubt that anyone believing in Christ had a chance to be saved. She held that man has the choice of accepting or refusing grace, thus a potentially larger group of people than only "the elect" could receive grace. This suggests that she did not use the phrase "chosen ones" in "And must the sword this controverce decide" in the conventional Protestant manner. In this particular poem, the phrase refers to the people who support the king in the "controversy", carrying both a secular and religious meaning.

In "And must the sword this controverce decide" the term "chosen ones" has a distinctly political meaning; the phrase refers here to Charles I's supporters:

Butt in that dismale, Black, and Bloody daye
Give all thy chosen ones their life a praye
And lett our Longinge eyes behold restor'd
Our Grac/tious kinge, whos loss hath bin deplor'd (ll.13-16)¹⁴

"The chosen ones" are the ones that grieved for their king and their spiritual guide after he was executed. Pulter contrasts the king's supporters with the king's executioners and their followers, whom she accuses of having "almost destroy'd this church and nation" (l.6). Religion and politics are intertwined here: Charles I was king of the nation and head of the Church, and those functions were inextricably bound up with each other. Additionally, Charles I was convinced that he had a divine right to rule and that he had to give account only to God. A number of his subjects subscribed to this

¹⁴ My transcription.

viewpoint: they considered opposing the king, and, worse, killing him, as an act against God. Pulter seems to be one of these subjects: her loyalty lies with the king and she describes all those who oppose the king as “those that 'for blood ... thirst” (l.7); moreover, she implores God to show them “no mersie” (l.12). Pulter’s “chosen ones” are the people that supported Charles and that in so doing acted according to God’s rule.

Conclusion

Pulter’s view on the king’s role in the English Church is one of the clues that tells us something about her possible allegiance with the Church of England. Her support of the king and her conviction that Charles received his power and responsibility for the Church directly from God are evident in her poetry. Her lenient view on predestination is also recognisable. However, the other clues that could point towards high church allegiance, such as her language use and the possible importance she attached to ritual and space, are less unambiguous. Nonetheless, combining the various signs, the Church of England seems the most likely religious denomination to which Pulter belonged.

3. Pulter's Political Criticism

In *The English Civil War. A People's History* (2006), Diane Purkiss vividly describes how the Wars of the Three Kingdoms interfered with and changed the lives of many people. Of course the people living in the areas where the actual fighting took place were the most affected, but the war's influence did not stop there. Many people lost their family members in battle; some fled the country; other families did not have casualties but were divided because of the existence of opposing opinions within one family. Pulter's house was not under siege or destroyed during the wars and there were no casualties in her immediate family. However, her husband's cousin Sir Arthur Capel was condemned to execution by parliament. Furthermore, the family was divided over the choice of which side to support, but that, seemingly, did not result in animosity amongst them. John Harington, Hester Pulter's brother-in-law, writes in his diary about occasional visits back and forth between Pulter and the family members who supported parliament (Stieg 75-76).

Judging by her poetry, Pulter strongly supported the king. She refers to the agents in the conflict in contrasting terms: the king is called, for instance, "sacred majestie" (*Perdita* 6), "the best of kings" (*Perdita* 10), "most excellent magisty" (*Perdita* 45), and "my faiths defender" (l.40) (*Perdita* 36), whereas the king's opponents are negatively portrayed: "the worst of rebels" (*Perdita* 10), "fierce Hydras" (l.4) (*Perdita* 6), and "traytors" (l.31) (*Perdita* 88). In fact, Pulter's association with the royalist side is noticeable throughout her poetry. As mentioned earlier, in chapter 1 pages 20 and 21, her poetic style with regard to genre, imagery, and topicality corresponds with what was in vogue in royalist circles. In this chapter attention will be given particularly to the feeling of confinement, and the acceptance of, or resistance to, the new balance of power, all expressed in Pulter's poetry, because these issues were at the heart of royalist poetry.

Royalists' Retirement to the Country

After the Wars of the Three Kingdoms, people had to adjust to a new situation; the royalists in particular experienced a difficult period because they had lost the wars. The royalists could no longer

play a political role; their influence had diminished enormously and many noblemen retreated to the country. James Loxley states that during James's and Charles's reign noblemen were already encouraged to live in the country in order to enjoy rural life and to involve themselves in local government (204). He explains that part of the reason behind this was the idea that the king was responsible for the wellbeing of the country while his subjects were able to enjoy their leisure (204). However, during and after the wars the reason for retreating to the country differed from the period before the wars. The royalists had to lie low for a while and, moreover, the retreat was often a forced one; from 1646 onwards royalists who were thought to have actively supported the king were at times banished from London (Loxley 210). Two examples of documents that order the king's supporters' departure from the city are: *A Proclamation of his Excellency: Tho. L. Fairfax, L. Gen. requiring all persons who have engaged for the King in the first of latter warres now in London, to depart the City, and ten miles distant therefrom, within twenty foure houres after the publication hereof.* by Thomas Fairfax (1612-1671), and *By the Protector an order and declaration of His Highness, by the advice of His council, commanding all persons who have been of the late Kings party, or his sons, to depart out of the cities of London and Westminster, and late lines of communication, on or before Monday the fifth of November, 1655.* by Oliver Cromwell.

The retreat to the country is a topic often discussed in the royalist poetry at the time. The authors of this poetry are now often referred to as royalist poets or Cavalier poets. Jerome de Groot defines them as "a loose collection of writers ... who wrote within a specially loyalist political framework during the English civil wars (1642-6, 1648)" ("Cavalier Poets" 1). He states that they had "much in common and wrote within a context of manuscript culture and shared political affiliation; through loose ... networks they shared work, approaches, motif and form" (1). Favourite motifs in royalist works are the celebration of friendship; drinking; singing; and retreat (de Groot 1-2). Perhaps the most well-known Cavalier poets are Robert Herrick (1591-1674), Richard Lovelace (1618-1657), and Henry Vaughan (1621-1695). In addition, De Groot specifically mentions two female authors that were sympathetic to cavalier ideals: Katherine Philips (1632-1664) and Lady Hester Pulter ("Cavalier Poets" 2).

Before discussing specific ways in which Pulter articulates her sympathy to cavalier ideals, we will look at two opposing views on what cavalier ideals consisted of, as described by Earl Miner and James Loxley. Furthermore, Hero Chalmers' view on royalist ideas on retirement will be summarized. With its emphasis on retirement and enjoying pleasures with friends in a private atmosphere, Cavalier poetry was for many years considered "apolitical" and "uncommitted" (de Groot, "Cavalier Poets" 4). Loxley holds Miner's *The Cavalier Mode from Jonson to Cotton* (1971) in particular responsible for the idea that "royalist commitment has been recast as allegiance to the obvious virtues of the good life, political zeal contained by a value system prizing the safety and security of disengagement from public affairs" (2). Contrary to Miner's opinion, Loxley states that royalist poetry, on the contrary, is firmly politically committed and that it is used as a polemical instrument (6). To back up his point, Loxley gives ample examples of poems in which fighting for the good cause is praised, and of elegies for the royalist dead where their active resistance to the enemy is commemorated (192-234). He mentions, for example, Vaughan's "Elegy on the Death of Mr R. Hall, Slain at Pontefract, 1648" (1651) (209), King's "An Elegy on Charles Lucas and George Lisle" (1664) (210), and Lovelace's "To Athea, From Prison" (written in 1642, published in 1649), and "To Lucasta. From Prison" (1642) (215-217). Moreover, he recognises in the poetry the intention to act as a means of transforming political impotence into a "renewed capacity to intervene" (217). Instead of a "movement to within" (Loxley 2), Loxley reads the poetry as a "war of the pen", a "literature of engagement" (214), which could be a textual form of fighting, but could also revive the willingness to take up arms for the king or his son the Prince of Wales.¹⁵

Both Miner and Loxley concentrate in their books on royalist male poets from the mid-seventeenth century and recognise in their poetry either an emphasis on "friendship and the good life of rural retirement" (Loxley 1) or on active political engagement. In her book *Royalist Women Writers 1650-1689* (2004), Hero Chalmers focuses mainly on the work of three female writers from approximately the same period: Margaret Cavendish (1623-1673), Katherine Philips, and Aphra Behn (1640-1689). In particular in the chapter about Katherine Philips' work, she discusses the

¹⁵ Loxley notices that "[t]hroughout 1648 the Prince of Wales was a central totem for the renewed active royalism of the second civil war" (227).

importance of ideas about friendship and retirement in royalist poetry and how male writers and readers perceived this. Although she does not want to refute Loxley's observation that for many royalist men writing and reading royalist poetry became "a surrogate gesture of military engagement" and that it was connected with the reassertion of masculinity (109), Chalmers states that at the same time royalist men identified with feminine retirement or inwardness, as found in Philips' poetry, because they were "forced by the Interregnum into an effectively 'feminized' condition of retirement" (109). According to Chalmers, this private or interior space to which the royalists retreated was experienced as the place where the dismantled state may somehow be reconstructed or sustained and where the true monarchical power was located (112-113).

The private or interior space to which royalists (voluntarily) retreated could either be the country or their mental space. As mentioned earlier, taking up residence in the country was sometimes not a voluntary choice but a migration forced by parliament. In particular royalists who lived in London and Westminster were at some point sent to the country. (See page 44 for the previously mentioned proclamations that all royalists should leave the city.) There were exceptions though: during the period 1646-1649, the House of Lords favoured upper-class royalists by granting passes to them to remain in London despite ordinances banishing all royalists to the country (Hardacre 28). The forced migration was part of a parliamentary policy to punish royalists for supporting the king, and to prevent renewed royalist activism in the city (Hardacre 18). Other "private spaces" to which royalists could be forced to go were exile and prison. With regard to the latter, imprisonment could mean different things: a person could be held under house arrest, or be forced to stay in a "real" prison (de Groot, "Prison Writing" 195). Significant differences existed even between prisons. De Groot mentions Sir Lewis Dyve (1599-1669) who was first imprisoned in The Tower of London (between 1645 and 1647), but later had to go to a "Common Gaole" ("Prison Writing" 200). The circumstances and treatment of the prisoners at that time were much better in The Tower than they were in a common jail. In the account of his imprisonment, Dyve relates for instance that he had freedom of movement while being "confined" in The Tower (De Groot, "Prison Writing" 200).

The Imagery of Confinement

Lois Potter notices a parallel between the royalists' actual movement to the country or to prison, and a movement of the poets into melancholy (134). She points out that their characteristic imagery is that of darkness and confinement. One of the genres that matched this mood well was prison literature. Apparently royalists were not ashamed to present themselves as prisoners since they could appeal to the notion that they were "guiltless sufferers for reasons of conscience" (135). However, as Potter remarks, it is often difficult to tell "whether poems of imprisonment derive from real experience or merely from, say, the idea of the body as the prison of the soul" (136). The same can be said about exile and restraint; these are not the same as imprisonment, but to some writers they felt the same.

Some writers emphasised the fact that, whatever the circumstances, their soul/thought was free. Potter states that the idea that "thought is free even when the thinker is imprisoned" (136) was a commonplace. She gives an example of a reference to this idea citing lines from Henry King's (1592-1669) verse "Essay on Death and Prison": "Whilst I in prison ly, nothing is free, / Nothing enlarg'd, but Thought and Misery" (ll.15-16) (1657) (136). The same idea is elaborated upon in Richard Lovelace's "To Althea, from Prison" (written in 1642, published in 1649) (*NAEL* 1673):

Stone walls do not a prison make,
Nor iron bars a cage;
Minds innocent and quiet take
That for an hermitage.
If I have freedom in my love,
And in my soul am free,
Angels alone, that soar above,
Enjoy such liberty. (ll.25-32)

This is certainly a concept recognizable in Pulter's poetry as well, for instance in "This was written 1648, when I Lay Inn, with my Son John, being my 15 Child, I being soe weak, that in Ten Dayes and Nights I never moved my Head one jot from my Pillow" (*Perdita* 69-71):¹⁶

Sad, sick and Lame, as in my Bed I lay
 Least Pain and Passion should bear all the sway
 My thoughts being free I bid them take their flieght
 Above the Gloomey shades of Death and Night (ll.1-4)

In this case Pulter relates how her body is confined to her sickbed after giving birth to her son John, but that her thoughts can go as far as the farthest planet of the universe; there seems to be no limits. Although this idea of freedom could decrease the sense of confinement, in the end the body is not free and Pulter expresses how reality presents itself again when the maid opens the curtains in the morning as follows:

And then my Mayds my Window Curtains drew
 And as my Pain soe Comforts did renew
 Unto the God of truth, Light Life, and Love
 Ile such Layes Here begin shall end above (ll.65-68)

She does find comfort in the knowledge that one day she will return to God and be genuinely free, but until that happens she feels fettered to her body/the earth. Thus, her prison is not an actual cell with bars in front of the windows, but it is in fact her body. The feeling that the soul is trapped in the body was not an exclusively female perception; however, this sense of confinement was heightened by the female experience of pregnancy.

Although the subject of Pulter's "This was written 1648" may not at first glance seem politically charged, the imagery of confinement bears resemblance to – often politically infused – cavalier poetry. Additionally, we should note that the year Pulter wrote this poem coincides with Charles's imprisonment on the Isle of Wight (and later in Hurst Castle and Windsor), and with his

¹⁶ See also "Why must I thus forever bee confin'd" (*Perdita* 81-83). In the poem's opening lines Pulter emphasises the contrast between "the noble Freedom of [her] Mind" (2) and the fact that she, that is her body, cannot leave her home.

approaching death. Of course, the tragic outcome of the political events was not yet known then, but parliament had already threatened him with a trial and with execution (Kishlansky). In the poem the overt reason for Pulter's confinement is clear: it is a mixture of immobility because of giving birth and the "imprisonment" of her soul. The latter is also the case in "The Perfection of Patience and Knowledge" (*Perdita* 59-60) in which she mentions her "infranchised soul" (l.16), and in "Made when I was not well, April 20, 1655" (*Perdita* 76) in which she describes her body as her soul's "Loathsome ruind Prison" (l.2). However, Pulter does not always explicitly state the reason for her confinement; sometimes the reader can derive the reason from the rest of the poem and sometimes the question why she is or feels confined remains unanswered. Apart from reasons such as pregnancy and longing for the afterlife, the political situation probably also contributed to her feeling of imprisonment.

In "A Solitary Complaine" (*Perdita* 77-78), the reason for Pulter being "confind to this sad Grove" (l.1) is initially not clear. She starts her poem by comparing herself, immobile and confined, to the planets that eternally circle around the sun. Pulter's Copernican view on cosmology is evident here: the sun is clearly presented as the centre of this part of the universe. Pulter shows her interest in atomistic ideas halfway through the poem when she mentions "those Suns and Stars" (l.24). In particular the plural form of "sun" is important here; it suggests that the universe contains more than one solar system/world, which corresponds with the atomistic view of a boundless universe with a plurality of worlds (Rivers 72). Pulter longs to be like the planets: constantly moving around the sun and illuminated by it. At this point she could be referring to God or to King Charles, both of whom were often likened to the sun. Her confinement could, for instance, be caused by her sins that block her path to God, or it could mean that she cannot leave her house as a result of the war or of the measures taken to control the royalists. She notices that the planets do not dare to do anything other than what nature prescribes for them: "But every Orb his fellow doth illustrate / For non the ends of Nature dares to frustrate" (ll.22-23). These lines could be read as an example of proper conduct. It provides a contrast to the situation in England where the people violate the natural and holy order of things in which the king, who is appointed by God, must be obeyed and venerated by his subjects. However, Pulter continues:

Thus all those Suns and Stars for ever move

About the Fount of Life, and Light, and Love

Then o my God Irradiate my sad Soul

That I about thy Glorious Thron may rowl (ll.24-27).

Here it becomes clear that Pulter's sun is God. She needs God's love, a spark of his light, in order to receive grace, so she can enter his universe. This is very much in accordance with other poems such as "The Revolution" (*Perdita* 37-39) and "My God I thee (and only thee) Adore" (*Perdita* 75) that are discussed in the chapter on Pulter's religious concerns.

In "Why must I thus forever bee confin'd" (*Perdita* 81-83) Pulter explicitly keeps the reader in the dark about the reason for her lack of freedom. She laments her solitude and inability to leave her estate and she compares herself with all kinds of animals that are freer than she is. There is again a suggestion of an unnatural situation: all the animals behave as God/nature has made them, and they all have the freedom to move, fly or crawl around; Pulter, on the other hand, is "shut up in a Countrey Grange" (l.18), and "buried thus alive" (l.20). She experiences this as unnatural and completely without purpose. She names several reasons for which she would happily give up her freedom, but does not mention why she is "ti'de to one Habitation" (l.14) against her wishes:

Wer't for my God, King, Countrey, or my Freind,
 My Love, my Children, twere a Noble End
 Or wer't for sin my guilty Head I wo'd hide
 And Patiently the stroke of Death abide
 Or wer't my veniall slip's to expiate
 Then my restraint would have a happie Date
 Or wer't for debt I soon could pay that score
 But tis, Oh my sad soul, I'le say noe more
 To God alone my sufferings Il'e deplore. (ll.91-100)

Here, Pulter states that she would not mind giving up her freedom for the sake of her children (l.92), so pregnancy or childcare are unlikely to be the reasons at which she is hinting. In fact, she feels obstructed in her love and care for her children because she is unable to leave the house: "But I above

my Life my Children Love / Yet I to comfort them cannot remove” (ll.57-58). Further on in the poem, Pulter repeats that she cannot assist her children in their sorrow (ll.85-86), which makes her very sad.

It does not seem likely either that she is hinting at the imprisonment of the soul, although Pulter declares she will only find freedom in her grave (l.79). This lament comes across as a bitter conclusion because she has no hope of having liberty before her death, rather than as a longing for death. The emphasis in this poem is very much on life on earth: how “Beasts, Birds, Fishes, Equivocall Worm and Fly” (l.90) live here on earth and how Pulter wants similar freedom. Besides, Pulter suggest that were she not “shut up in a Countrey Grange” (l.18), she could meet her friend and he or she would “revive” at seeing her (l.19). The focus is not on God but on her friends and family: on life on earth.

A clue to what might be the reason for her imprisonment can be found in lines 45-46: “Nor doe they fear the terrablest Tirants lower / Should shut them in a Basteel or a Tower”. Here Pulter mentions a tyrant whom she fears, and she implies that he is responsible for shutting her up in her house. The tyrant is not named but we might guess that she is referring to Cromwell here. Pulter used several unflattering words to refer to Cromwell in her poetry; “tyrant” is one of these. She also used the word in “Emblem 37” (*Perdita* 119-120) in which she regards Cromwell as one of “the most impious Tirants in the World” (l.11).¹⁷ It seems unlikely that Cromwell or any other parliamentarian really incarcerated Pulter in her house. In any case, no documents that would verify this have been found. However, she might very well have held him responsible for her or her fellow royalists’ lack of freedom of movement. This could have been brought about by a forced retirement or by a quasi-voluntary one in which royalists deemed it wise to lie low for a while, or by real imprisonment.¹⁸ In line 46 Pulter mentions “a Basteel or a Tower” which is probably a reference to the Tower of London, a prison where in the 1640s and 1650s royalists were jailed. Royalists could be imprisoned for various reasons, because they were captured after losing a battle, for actively supporting the king, or for being in debt. They could be in debt, for example because many estates were confiscated, leaving the former

¹⁷ I will come back to “Emblem 37” later in more detail.

¹⁸ See page 44 for proclamations that all royalists should leave the city of London and Westminster.

owners ruined (Hardacre 19-20). Another possible reason for being in debt was the compromise some royalists reached with parliament: they could be released from prison after paying a fine to parliament and taking the Covenant and Negative Oath (Hardacre 20 and 22). The Covenant was an oath “by which the taker swore to resist innovations in religion” (Hardacre 22). With the Negative Oath people had to forswear their support to the king and pledge their support to parliament: “I, A. B., do swear from my heart that I will not directly or indirectly adhere unto or willingly assist the King in this war, or in this cause against the Parliament, nor any forces raised without the consent of the two Houses of Parliament in this cause or war. And I do likewise swear that my coming and submitting myself under the power and protection of the Parliament, is without any manner of design whatsoever, to the prejudice of the proceedings of the two Houses of this present Parliament, and without the direction, privity or advice of the King, or any of his Council or officers, other than what I have now made known. So help me God, and the contents of this Book.” (“Negative Oath”). For Pulter it seems that the restraints imposed on her and other royalists were unacceptable. To be confined by her political enemies would in no way have positive consequences, neither for her soul, nor for her children, and she deeply resented it.

The Experience of Loneliness in Pulter's Poetry

For Pulter, confinement came with loneliness; her laments about her imprisonment are accompanied by laments about her solitude. In “Why must I thus forever bee confin’d” she states that she cannot assist and comfort her friend (l.19) and children (l.86), implying that it is impossible for her to reach them, and that she feels “in-slavd to solitude” (l.75). Retirement to their estate apparently did not create a situation in which Pulter could fall back on a circle of friends that shared the same ideas and where she could be content with this restricted life.

In 1647, King Charles was captured and imprisoned, probably at Holdenby House.¹⁹ At this time, in “The invitation into the Countrey to my D:D: MP: PP 1647 when his sacred Majestie was at

¹⁹ Charles I was kept prisoner first at Holdenby House in Northamptonshire (7 February–4 June 1647), later at a series of great houses in East Anglia and Hertfordshire (4 June–24 August 1647); then at Hampton Court (24 August–11 November 1647) (Kishlansky).

unhappy home” (*Perdita* 6-8), Pulter still described her home as “this sweet place” (l.48). In this pastoral poem, Pulter contrasts the country with the city, in particular London. The comparison turns out favourably for the country, since London is presented as a perverted place: with the king defeated by the parliamentarians and replaced by Cromwell, people in London have lost their moral guide. Pulter tries to convince her daughters to join her in the country in order to escape the city’s bad influence and decadent atmosphere:

Deare daughters come make hast away
 from that sad place make no delay
 Hee's gon that was the Citties Grace
 Feirce Hydras now usurps his place (ll.1-4)

What can you learn there elce but pride
 And what your blushes will not hide
 There virgins lose their Honoured name
 Which doth for ever blur their fame
 Their Husbands looke with Jealous eyes
 And wives deceive them and their Spies; (ll.11-16)

The adjective “sad” (l.2) means two things here: unpleasant and unhappy. London is an unpleasant place to be because the king has left, and the parliamentarians now rule the city. They are being compared with a “hydras” which is a multiple-headed serpent of the marshes of Lerna in Greek mythology, whose heads grew again as fast as they were cut off (“hydra”). An important characteristic of the hydra is its destructive character, and Pulter certainly blames the parliamentarians for their destructive influence on London. She is convinced that the people remaining in London lead a disgraceful life where they mistrust each other and nothing is as it should be. The husbands do not trust their wives, and they let others spy on them; the wives in their turn deceive their husbands. Additionally, the personified city is unhappy and mourns for its loss. Pulter uses pathetic fallacy to emphasise the scope of the changes that have occurred and the enormity of the new situation. The

city's sadness is expressed for instance by the description of marble walls (l.8) and city's parks and river that grieve:

Hide Parke a place of chiefe delight
 Her bushes mourne like Jewes in white
 The stately Deer doe weeping stray
 Anticipating theire last day
 Spring Garden that such pleasures bred
 Lookes dull and sad since Cloris fled
 The Christall Thames her loss deplores
 And to the sea her Griefe out Rores (ll.23-30)

The city includes buildings, but also nature, such as bushes; flowers; animals; and rivers. Everything, except for the people that live in the city, seems to realise the horror of what has happened.

Initially, Pulter presents Bradfield as a joyful place where everything still is as it should be. She creates a pastoral idyll in which nature blossoms and people act naturally and truly: "Here Husbands free from Jealous eye / Have wives as full of modesty" (ll.57-58). What is noticeable is the reference to May festivities: "In woods and Dales faire Maidens may / Unfrighted freely gather May" (ll.71-72). Celebrations such as Christmas and May festivities were banned by the parliamentarians because these celebrations were associated with Catholicism, and misrule, and were expected to "give rise to sexual licence" (Royle 627). Pulter places Bradfield outside the parliamentary sphere of influence when she mentions the girls who come together for the May festivities without needing to be afraid. However, she has to admit that this was the situation once, but not anymore. It is just "poor Bradfields dreames"(l.92) and here, too, nature now mourns. The effect on the people is different though from what happened in the city: the inhabitants of Bradfield feel sorrowful, apathetic, and afraid. The whole estate has undergone a metamorphosis since the king "went away"(l.75) and war became a reality:

Where Maypoles shewed theire feathered head
 Theire colour'd Insign's now are spread
 Instead of Musicks pleasant sound

And lively lasses dancing round
 Tumultuous Drums make Deafe our eares
 And Trumpets fill our hearts with feares
 In shades where Nymphs did use to walke
 There sons of Mars in Armour stalke (ll.83-90)

The maypoles represent innocence and peace, and are associated with such words as “pleasant”(l.85) and “lively (l.86). They are contrasted with the deafening drums and the trumpets that announce war. To indicate the intentions of the parliamentary army, Pulter uses the verb “[s]talke” (l.90), which means “to go stealthily to, towards (an animal) for the purpose of killing or capturing it” (“stalk”). She suggests that the parliamentarians have sent their soldiers to kill or capture the innocent people who live in the countryside.

People and nature alike are in shock due to this crude interruption of their pleasant lives and the king's departure from the centre of power. Although the poem's character and imagery remain pastoral-like, the idyll is broken. Pulter gives ample examples of various birds, rivers, trees, and flowers that are in mourning. A few of these examples are chosen because they contain references to the king: “the crown imperial” (l.160) and “Royall rose” (l.165).

Pulter also mentions grieving “Hamadrides” (l.141), who are “wood-nymph[s] fabled to live and die with the tree [they] inhabited (*OED* Def. n.1), and goddesses of the woods (l.142). These figures highlight the poem's pastoral character. In keeping with this, she refers to Charles as “Aminta” (l.75, l.144 and l.150), which is a character (a shepherd) in the pastoral play *Aminta* (1573) by Torquato Tasso (1544-1595). The poem ends with the speaker's wish that the king and queen will be restored to their rightful place. (This is one of the few poems that alludes also to the queen: “Untill I see them *both* restored” (l.185) emphasis added.) Additionally, the speaker makes a plea for her daughters' presence to comfort her in these distressful times. So, she starts the poem by inviting her daughters because it is morally healthier for them to stay at Bradfield, but ends by urging them to come home because she needs them at her side.

The speaker needs comfort, but she also needs company because life in the country cannot provide her with a full and interesting life. Pulter hints at this in “To my Deare, J.P., M.P., P.P. they

being at London, I at Bradfield” (*Perdita* 58-59) in which she again asks her daughters to come home to Bradfield: “Come my Deare Children to this lonely Place” (l.1). Pulter hopes her children’s presence will “Exhillerate [her] drooping spirit” (l.15) and thus make her life more bearable. So, the “sweet place” at the beginning of “The invitation into the Countrey” becomes a “Sad Grove” (“A Solitary Complaite” l.1) or “sad place” (“Why must I thus” l.71) in other poems. There is certainly no indication in Pulter’s work of the cavalier idyll of the good life in the country that Miner recognises in male poets of the period. In fact, Pulter rejects the idea of contentment, singing, and drinking in retirement when she declares she feels dull and sad and that no “Quintissence of Bacchus Liquor” (l.5) can relieve this.

Pulter does try to create a circle of friends that share the same ideas and principles. Judging by her poetry, this is a small circle containing Pulter and her daughters Margaret (dates unknown), Penelope (1633-1655), Anne (1635-1666), and Jane (1625-1646). Pulter addresses Margaret, Penelope, and Jane in “The Invitation into the Country to my D:D: MP: PP 1647 when his Sacred Majestie was at Unhappy Home” (*Perdita* 6-8), and in “To my Dear, J.P., M.P., P.P. they beeing at London, I at Bradfield” (*Perdita* 58-59). She mentions Penelope and Anne in “A Dialogue between Two Sisters Virgins bewailing their Solitary Life P.P. A.P.” (*Perdita* 79-80). As shown above, she repeatedly asks her daughters to come home in order to relieve her from her loneliness and for them to escape the bad influence of the city. However, when her daughters are home at Bradfield, their presence does not alter Pulter’s deplorable situation. Despite their nearness, Pulter still feels lonely which she articulates in “A Dialogue between Two Sisters” (*Perdita* 79-80). In this poem Pulter seems to project her own feelings on her daughters Penelope and Anne who complain about their “recluse life” (l.47). Indeed, the sisters state that they will help to express their mother’s feelings: they will “help poor Philomele to sing” (l.4). Twenty-five lines further there is a second reference to Philomele: “With Philomele wee may lament too Late / Our most disastrous and too differing Fate” (ll.29-30). Nowhere is it explained who is represented by Philomele, but in the light of other poems in which Pulter complains about her imprisonment, and the poem’s setting at Bradfield, probably Pulter herself is meant here.

Philomele is a female figure in Greek mythology who was raped by her brother-in-law King Tereus, who also cut out her tongue. After this, she was left in a cabin where she wove a tapestry depicting her fate. She sent the tapestry to her sister who, subsequently, took revenge on her husband by killing, boiling, and serving up their son as dinner. After this the two sisters had to flee from Tereus. In order to escape him, the gods turned them into birds (a nightingale and a sparrow).

Pulter mentioned Philomele in “Upon the Death of my deare and lovely Daughter J.P. Pulter, baptized May 1 1625 and died Oct 1646 Aet. 20” (*Perdita* 18-19) as well.²⁰ In this poem, Philomele’s main quality seems to be the sadness she represents. She is mentioned here to emphasise Pulter’s mournful state. This is similar to Aemilia Lanyer’s (1569-1645) use of Philomela in “The Description of Cooke-ham” (1611) (*NAEL* 1287-1292). The main objective of Philomela’s presence appears to be the articulation of sadness at the departure of Margaret and Anne Clifford from their Cooke-ham estate. In “A Dialogue between Two Sisters”, the implications of referring to Philomele are much greater. The Philomele story had specific relevance for Pulter since it refers to oppression and loneliness, two states she experienced herself. In this poem, Pulter not only mentions Philomele, she also identifies with her. For Pulter, Philomele represented the vulnerable and lonely individual who is repressed by an evil oppressor, but who finds ways to speak out against her tormentor. Pulter, apparently, felt silenced, and the poetry she wrote could be interpreted as her “tapestry” in which she communicated her life story.

The notion of imprisonment is emphasised by the use of the phrase “Curtuous grate” (l.48): “Oh that a recluse life had bin my Fate / To tale our visits at a Curtuous Grate” (ll.47-48). The phrase is used as a synonym for the phrase “honourable imprisonment”. The word “grate” indicates that the women at Bradfield cannot leave the premises; they are barred from the outside world. The combination with “curtuous” implies that they are allowed to live according to the nobility’s standard of living, however without the possibility of leaving the house and grounds. The result is that although Pulter has some sympathetic company, she still feels lonely, which is expressed in the poem’s final sentence: “And goe to our sad Mother shee’s alone” (54). The circle of people around Pulter cannot

²⁰ Transcription from Stevenson and Davidson (191).

give her a satisfying life, nor does it offer its group members a private space in which they can contentedly withdraw and uphold the dismantled state's principles.

We have to keep in mind that it is quite possible that Pulter's confinement, in particular when she claims imprisonment, is not based on real events but on a feeling or on a royalist pose. Margaret Cavendish made a similar claim in the biography of her husband, where she states that, "I have lived for the most part a strict and retired Life", while the latter was clearly not the case (Chalmers 27). We know that Pulter did leave Bradfield on certain occasions: she, for instance, visited her brother-in-law John Harington in London in 1652 (Stieg 75-76). Nevertheless, Pulter wrote her poetry within a span of sixteen years, between approximately 1644 and 1660, so at times travelling might have been difficult for her, or even impossible. Whether she was actually confined or not, Pulter uses the confinement strategically to criticize the new regime.

Pulter's Cry for Revenge

Pulter was clearly troubled by the political events going on at the time, and she felt indignation at the new regime's deeds. The poetry that expresses this anger, and that has been discussed in this chapter so far, is written from Pulter's, or in any case a woman's, perspective, and contains references to personal circumstances. The following paragraphs will discuss two poems that express the same criticism, but that have a less personal tone: "Emblem 4" (*Perdita* 95-96) and "Emblem 37" (*Perdita* 119-120). "Emblem 37" is already mentioned on page 51 in relation to Pulter's qualification of Cromwell as a tyrant. In this emblem she refers to Cromwell's appalling actions, and calls for revenge. In "On the Same" (*Perdita* 35-36), discussed on page 40, Pulter still anticipates the monarchy's restoration and the subsequent reversal of all the wrongdoing that has taken place. In the last line of the poem, she predicts that "[a] second Charles shall all thy Joyes restore" (l.45). This we will see in "Emblem 4" as well. However, in "Emblem 37" she trusts in God's ultimate intervention and punishment (withholding grace) of the wrongdoers.

"Emblem 4" is a political poem that comments on the death of King Charles and the events leading up to the regicide. In the poem, Virtue, flanked by Wisdom, duels with Fortune, who is

flanked by Folly. Virtue comes off worst, not least because Virtue and Wisdom are weakened by the support that the “Citty Cockney's” (l.8) give to Fortune and Folly. The phrase “Citty's Cockneys” makes reference to London and its inhabitants that supported the parliamentarians in the fight between the king and parliament. Pulter characterises the people from the city as stupid and irresponsible. The contrast between London and the countryside which was present in “The Invitation into the Countrey” is confirmed again here. Unfortunately, the actions of the parliamentarian side have far-reaching consequences: they lead to innocent victims, because, to win the fight, Fortune “Madly lay'd about her Foes to Find / Nor car'd on who, or where her blowes did lite” (ll.9-10), and they lead to an unnatural and immoral situation:

“Wee have liv'd (ay mee) to see the Laws
Of God and Nature basely Tramp'd on
When bold Impiety the Vict'ry won
And such a king kild at this Isle before
Did never see nor never will see more
Unles our God his Princely Son restore” (ll.22-27).

By killing the king, the parliamentarians have violated God's law and reached the nadir of their misguided behaviour. The situation seems hopeless, but Pulter ends with a spark of hope: maybe God will restore Charles's son to the throne. This can be interpreted as an encouragement not to give up the resistance to the new rulers.

“Emblem 37” is one of many poems from Pulter’s emblem collection that starts with a description of an animal. In the emblems, the animal acts either as a human being, or naturally. “Emblem 37” is an example of the second instance, in which the spider’s behaviour shows similarities with the behaviour of human beings, but the animal always acts according to the rules of nature. The spider in “Emblem 37” is portrayed as a hugely powerful being that is brought down by a small insignificant creature: “a slender Azure Flye” (l.9). The spider is called a “[t]yrant” (l.8) that is “ugly” (l.2), “monstrous” (l.5), and “bloodsucking” (l.10), because it catches smaller creatures, that is insects, in order to eat them. A few lines further on in the poem, Pulter switches to human tyrants who resemble the spider. Pulter gives three examples of what she calls “impious [t]irants” (l.11): Emperor

Julian (331/32-363), Alexander the Great (356-323 BCE), and the contemporary ruler Oliver Cromwell. The Cromwell example is the most relevant since it comments on contemporary events. The other examples of pre-Christian emperors are put into the poem to emphasise certain aspects of Cromwell, namely the fact that, according to Pulter, he is not a Christian and that he is a successful military commander.²¹

The focus on Cromwell's military capacity can also be seen in Marvell's "An Horatian Ode" (1650) (*NAEL* 1700-1704). In this poem, Cromwell is highly praised for his military successes. He is depicted as a brilliant commander, and it is suggested that Cromwell is favoured by God: "Tis madness to resist or blame / The force of angry heaven's flame" (ll.25-26). This is contrary to what Pulter suggests in her work when she predicts that Cromwell will not receive God's mercy.

Calling Cromwell an "impious tyrant" (l.11) makes clear that Pulter blamed the parliamentarians for the Wars of the Three Kingdoms and that she held Cromwell responsible for killing many innocent people. She claims, however, that although tyrants may seem powerful, when death comes to them they are brought down and will receive little comfort or mercy. Pulter presents death as a just "King of Terrours" (l.13) from whom no one can escape, and whose arrival signals that the time has come to account for all one's decisions in life:²²

Soe hee that hath three Kingdoms in his power
 What comfort will they Yield that fatall hower
 When as that Sea of Innocent blood shall Rore
 To Heaven for vengeances, who can but implore (ll.21-24)

In most of her poems, Pulter presents God as loving and forgiving. Yet, when she writes about people who oppose the king, she urges God to withhold his mercy and avenge the harm done by these people. Because Pulter categorizes the king's opponents as unchristian, it makes it easier to justify this call for revenge.

²¹ Cromwell considered himself a Christian, but Pulter firmly disagreed. In "And must the Sword this Controverce deside" (*Perdita* 89), for instance, Pulter accuses the king's enemies, to which group Cromwell belonged, of having "almost destroy'd this church and the nation" (6).

²² Pulter probably refers to Job 18:14 "His confidence shall be rooted out of his tabernacle, and it shall bring him the king of terrors".

Initially, human tyrants seem to resemble the “Monstrous Spider” in line 5 of the poem. However, Pulter concludes that the “Spiders Tiranny” (l.25) can be pardoned because the spider has to catch other animals, in order not to starve. As for humans, Pulter has no excuse for them; she calls man the “greatest Beast of prey of all” (l.27), who kills and eats his own kind. The imagery of slaughter and bloodshed is in line with the metaphor in which she compares the house of man to a “Butchers Stall” (l.28). Pulter uses the image of the spider to introduce the theme of tyrants and then to comment on man’s murderous behaviour, in particular with regard to contemporary events. In the end, instead of being similar, man’s behaviour turns out to be quite different from the spider’s behaviour. This emphasises the unnatural and improper behaviour of the people in question, which makes it again easier to condemn them.

Conclusion

In her poetry Pulter is very outspoken about how people should behave, and about what is right and what is wrong. Furthermore, she expresses her discontentment with her personal circumstances and the political situation. To a certain extent Pulter’s personal circumstances mirror the political situation in her poetry. She writes about her pregnancies and her longing for God, and mentions the same feelings these experiences arouse to express her feelings about the restrictions the royalists suffered from the parliamentarians. Those feelings are predominantly feelings of confinement, loneliness, and impatience.

Pulter found her pregnancies and her life on earth acceptable in the end because they represented the natural course of life. However, all the political changes that took place during her life, with King Charles’s imprisonment and his beheading as an absolute low point, were unacceptable to Pulter. She considered the changes as unnatural and made grave accusations against the new rulers whom she held responsible for the changes.

Pulter did not adapt easily to the new political situation. In her poetry she celebrates the past and this forms a sharp contrast with her description of the contemporary circumstances. She would have liked to keep the changes far away from her, but she does not seem able to create an

environment in which the old values could be upheld. She describes the new order as based in the city, but she notices that it invades the country and also her home Bradfield. In her poetry she expresses her anger about this. The result reads not as uncommitted poetry celebrating retirement and the enjoyment of pleasures with friends, with which Cavalier poetry was associated for many years (de Groot, "Cavalier Poets" 4). Instead, it has more in common with Loxley's idea of Cavalier poetry as "literature of engagement" (Loxley 2). Pulten commemorates the old establishment's representatives, such as the fallen soldiers and the king, and explains the consequences of the new order for the Britons: loss of virtue and loss of lives. Furthermore, she reminds her readers of Charles's son whom she hopes will come and save Church and country. This fits into the activist strand Loxley recognises in the work of many Cavalier poets.

Conclusion

In the previous chapters, I have given a description of Pulter's life and poetry in general, and examined religious and political aspects of her poetry in more detail. The main focus was on the political, but since politics and religion were inseparable in the mid-seventeenth century, I have also looked into Pulter's religious views that she expressed in her work. Her belief that the king was the Church's defender, appointed by God, confirms that in her view there was a strong connection between religion and politics. Politics is not a subject that is immediately associated with poetry written by women in the seventeenth century. Their poetry is most often related to devotional or domestic issues. These issues are indeed present in Pulter's work, but politics is, noticeably, also a subject with which she was much concerned.

Some of Pulter's poems were obviously dedicated to royalist issues; in these Pulter explicitly expressed her anger about the parliamentarians. In other poems she alluded to political developments or incidents without mentioning them directly. To convey her thoughts and feelings about these developments, she used imagery which was also used by her contemporaries, and she made connections between her personal life, her religious views and the political situation. For example, her confinement because of childbirth and illness coincided with Charles's imprisonment in 1648. These seemingly unrelated events had an important factor in common: they both resulted in a curtailment of freedom of movement. So, in "This was written 1648" (*Perdita* 69-71), writing about one event (confinement because of childbirth) functioned as a reminder of another (Charles's imprisonment), and her contemporaries would have noticed.

Lack of freedom was a typical royalist issue which gave rise to the frequent occurrence of imagery of confinement in royalist literature (Potter 134). Pulter's use of the imagery of confinement is particularly interesting, because it gives expression to a deep-felt anxiety about various aspects of her life. In her poetry, the word "confinement" could refer to the laws and regulations the

parliamentarians imposed on the royalists, but it also encompassed her worries about the state of her soul, as well as referring to the condition of women, particularly pregnant women.

Pulter claimed that her freedom of movement was curtailed by governmental actions, and it seems likely that she was no longer able to go to the church services that she used to attend. For her, this would mean a shift from formalised church service to a highly individual form of devotion. However, these factors were only partly to blame for her sense of loneliness and isolation. The political and ecclesiastical developments in the 1640s and 1650s probably intensified the already existing feeling of confinement. Because Pulter went through many pregnancies and had to care for her children, she was confined to her bed or at least to her house for long periods. What is more, she experienced this (feeling of) confinement also in relation to her longing for God. She understood life here on earth as a stage to which she had to resign herself before her soul could return to God. What is important here is the sharp distinction she made between body and soul. In her view, the body operated as a prison in which the soul was immured. So, in more than one way, the word “confinement” encapsulated the way Pulter experienced her life.

The above-mentioned circumstances seem to have isolated Pulter from the outside world and to have forced her to focus on her inner life and her immediate surroundings. This did not mean, though, that she reconciled herself to the situation. It aroused anger and a fighting spirit in her, which were directed at political figures and their followers, or at people that aspired to higher positions than they, in Pulter’s view, deserved.

Pulter attached great importance to, what she understood as the natural order of things. She was convinced that everything had a fixed place in God’s plan, and that one should not deviate from this plan. For people in England, this meant that they should accept their, and others, position in life. Not only did the king have an inviolable position according to this view, but the position of the nobility could not be doubted either. Pulter was not antagonistic to people whom she called the “vulgar” as long as they remained in their place. However, when someone from a lower position aspired to rise in society, she became hostile. This “ambition” is one of the things for which she blamed Cromwell for instance.

It was not ambition, though, that Pulter regarded as the greatest offence the parliamentarians had committed; this was reserved for the king's execution in 1649. In general, Charles's beheading was perceived by royalists as an unspeakable crime. They reasoned that the monarch was the highest authority in the kingdom, so any action taken against him was considered unlawful. More importantly though, Charles was head of the Church of England, a role assigned by God, and Pulter interpreted Charles's execution as an attack on the Church and ultimately as an affront to God. Although in her poems Pulter reacted to this "crime" with shock, tears, and despair, she also fulminated against the people who were responsible for Charles's death, and adopted a rebellious attitude towards them.

Noticing the accusative tone in Pulter's (political) poetry, the emphasis on the good that has been and the reminder of a better future for the country with Charles II as king and head of the Church, I would categorise Pulter as a Cavalier poet, not in the limited meaning of a poet who keeps a low profile while celebrating the good life, but in the way Loxley describes Cavalier poets. Loxley points out that many Cavalier poets regarded writing poetry as a way to continue the fight or as a means to renew the willingness to take up arms against the enemy (214). This would mean that Pulter's poetry contributed to the resistance against the parliamentarians.

It is not the case that Pulter's whole poetic oeuvre was written as a political statement or as a contribution to the fight for the good cause, but, as noted before, references to politics do crop up through the whole collection. In fact, the political component forms an important characteristic of her work. For Pulter, royalism was an integral part of her life (as were her religious beliefs) and an inseparable part of her language. Furthermore, she was thoroughly familiar with the style in which royalists wrote, and used it for her own writing. Royalist views, ideas, and language were fully integrated into Pulter's poetry collection and into her poetic language. While writing in this particular manner, she personalised it by incorporating biographical information, linking the personal with the public, and by giving commonly used examples a personal interpretation. This resulted in an oeuvre that combined a typically female perspective with strong political views.

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