Ann Yearsley, â??Thoughts on the Authorâ??s Own Death. Written when very Youngâ?•

Description

ANN YEARSLEY

â??Thoughts on the Authorâ??s Own Death. Written when very Youngâ?•

Thus, when the fatal stroke of Deathâ??s designâ??d,
On oozy banks thâ?? expiring swan reclinâ??d,
Her own sad requiem sings in languid note,
While oâ??er the stream the dying echoes float.

But, ah! can youth dwell on the tragic part?
Can I describe the trembling, panting heart?
In Fancyâ??s frolic age can I relate
The pangs, the terrors of a dying state?
Yesâ??thoâ?? unskillâ??d, Iâ??ll the grim shade pursue,
And bring the distant terror to my view;
Dwell on the horrors of that gloomy hour;
Death, made familiar, loses half his power.
Peace then, ye passions of ungovernâ??d youth,
Foes to reflection, enemies to the truth!
Let me, unruffled by your clamorous voice,
Make the drear regions of the tomb my choice;
And while sad Fancy paints the dismal scene,
Where reflects ghosts by midnight moons are seen
Stalk oâ??er the gloomy grave, Muse! be it thine
To rouse the vain, the giddy, and supine,
Who Pleasureâ??s rounds pursue; while young Desire
Wakes the gay dream, and feeds the dangerous fire:
From these I flyâ??and now, my pensive soul
Mark the harsh scream of yon death-bonding owl;
Perhaps she calls some lingering, tardy ghost
To smell the world, ere the dread hour be loft
That parts the night from morn. Come, restless souls,
Relax from torture; you whom Fate controuls
To purge your earthly crimes in liquid fire,
In anguish plungâ??d, till ages shall expire;
(This, ROMEâ??S grand tenet) sin thus washâ??d away,
Pure, bright, and cleansâ??d, youâ??ll wing to endless day.
Presumption, hold! Lo, oâ??er yon misty tomb
Leans a sad spectre, and bemoans the doom
Of never-erring Justice; heavenly power!

Support and guard me in this gloomy hour
Of dread inquiry!â??â?•Say, thou wretched soul,
O teach a young, rash, inexperienced fool,
What â??tis to die, and where thou wingâ??dst thy way,
When turnâ??d a wanderer from thy house of clay?
Didâ??st tread soft lawns, or seek Elysian groves,
Where Poets feign loverâ??s spirit roves?
Or, on light pinions cut the closing air,
And to each planetary world repair?
Or, guideless, stray where dismal groans rebound,
And forked lightnings quiver on the ground?
Or did sad fiends thy unhousâ??d spirit meet,
And with shrill yellings the poor trembler greet
To the dark world? Describe that scene of woe
Which thou hast felt, and may I ever know!â?•
â??Thouâ??lt know, indeed,â?• it answers with a groan,
â??The pangs of death too sure shall by thy own;
Pains yet unfelt must seize thy every part,
And Deathâ??s cold horrors hover round thy heart;
Thy dying eyes fixâ??d on some darling friend,
While strong convulsions their wild orbs extend;
One gasp, and deep eternity in view,
The soul shoots forth, and groans a last adieu.
I dare no moreâ??but Oh! too curious maid,
Seek not to pierce thâ??impenetrable shade
Which wraps futurity; thouâ??rt sure to die;
Rest there, nor farther search, nor question why;
Scan not Omnipotenceâ??of that beware;
Oft the too curious eye is dimmâ??d by blank despair.â?•

Farewel, poor Ghost! ye horrors of the night,
Begone, nor more my shuddâ??ring soul affright;
The question unresolvâ??d I soon shall know,
Then let me haste from this sad scene of woe.

Henceforth, vain Pleasure, I renounce thy joy,
Enchanting Fair, who temptâ??st but to destroy;
Ye thoughtless maids who transient dreams pursue,
No more my moments must be lost with you;
No more my soul in empty mirth shall share,
Or fondly relish pleasures tingâ??d with care.

And thou, all-merciful! omniscient Power!
O teach me to redeem each mis-spent hour;
In youth the mindâ??s best gifts most strongly shine,
Ah! let them not too suddenly decline!
In mercy add a few remaining years,
The grave shall lose its sting, my soul shall lose its fears.

NOTES:

2 *expiring swan reclinâ??d* Greek mythological â??swan-song;â?• â??a song like that fabled to be sung by a dying swan; the last work of a poet or musician, composed shortly before death; any final performance, action, or effortâ?• (*OED*).

20 *supine* Lying on oneâ??s back (*OED*).

24 *Harsh scream of yon death-bonding owl* Roman mythology denotes the owl as an omen of ill-fortune or death; contrarily, the Greeks thought owls to bring imminent good fortune.

31 *tenet* A doctrine, dogma, principle, or opinion, in religion, philosophy, politics, or the like, held by a school, sect, party, or person (*OED*).

40 *house of clay* Colloquially this means, â??of the Earthâ?•; see also King James Bible, Job 4:19, â??How much more them that dwell in houses of clayâ?¦.â?•

41 *Elysian* Of the nature of, or resembling, what is in Elysium (The supposed state or abode of the blessed after death in Greek mythology.); beatific, glorious (*OED*).

43 *pinions* A birdâ??s wing; *esp.* the wing of a bird in flight (*OED*).

61 *futurity* The quality, state, or fact of being future (*OED*).

63 *Omnipotence* As an abstract concept: all-powerfulness, almightiness; force, person, or being representing or embodying this quality; God (*OED*).

71 *transient* Passing by or away with time; not durable or permanent; temporary (*OED*).

73 *mirth* Pleasurable feeling; enjoyment, gratification; joy, happiness (*OED*).

Source: *Poems, on Several Occasions*, 4th edn. (London, 1786), pp. 15-20. [Google Books]

Edited by Abby Bergman