

# Anna Seward, “Invocation of the Comic Muse”

## Description

ANNA SEWARD

### “Invocation of the Comic Muse”

*Prize Poem at Bath-Easton*

On this mirth-devoted day,  
 From these festal bowers away,  
 In your sable vestments flee,  
 Train of sad MELPOMENE!  
 Ye, who midnight horrors dart   Â 5  
 Through the palpitating heart;  
 Fear, that flies its shadowy cause,  
 With hurried step and startled pause;  
 Straw-crown’d Phrenzy’s glaring gaze,  
 Chaunting shrill her changing lays:   Â 10  
 Nor let dim-ey’d Grief appear,  
 Weaving mournful garlands here,  
 Cypress-buds, and fading flowers,  
 Wet with cold November’s showers;  
 Nor with the damp, wan brow, and streaming wound,   Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â 15  
 Let stern, self-pierc’d Despair her hollow groans resound.

THALIA come, fantastic Fair,  
 Enthron’d in pantomimic car!  
 Thine open brow with roses bind,  
 By morning’s lucid rays entwin’d;   Â 20  
 Thine azure vest flow lightly down,  
 And vivid glow thy rainbow zone!  
 Haste thee, Nymph, with sunny hair,  
 With varied voice, and jocund air,  
 Adorn’d with all the laughing grace,   Â 25  
 That decks the sweet bewitching face  
 Of her, who o’er the knee of snow  
 Archly snaps young Cupid’s bow;  
 For O! in that more beautiful maid  
 Than Grecian pencil e’er display’d,   Â 30

Bright from ANGELICA's unrival'd hand,  
Goddess, thy portrait glows, and charms the gazing Land.

Nor let this Delphic Vase alone  
Thy all-enlivening influence own;  
Exert then still thy magic power  
Â  
Â 35  
To whiten every passing hour  
For him, whose taste decided shines  
In the fair Priestess of these shrines;  
For her, who guides the devious feet  
Of Genius to this fair retreat, Â  
Â Â Â 40  
Her verdant prize extending there; "â€  
Ah still for them, the generous Pair,  
Collect thou each idea bright  
From Fancy's shrine of missive light;  
From Health, from Love, from Virtue's ray, Â 45  
To gild through life their varied day,  
Illume the night, and bless the rising morn,  
And with the beams of bliss the golden sun adorn.

**NOTES:**

- Title** *Comic Muse* Thalia, the muse of comedy.
- Subtitle** *Prize Poem at Bath-Easton* Seward wrote and performed this poem in 1778, her first Â submission to one of Lady Anna Miller's fortnightly poetry contests associated with her literary salon at Batheaston, a village just northeast of Bath (Claudia T. Kairoff, *Anna Seward and the End of the Eighteenth Century*, pp. 32-41).
- 1** *mirth-devoted* Joyful, happy (*OED*).
- 2** *bowers* "a vague poetic word for an idealized abode" (*OED*).
- 3** *sable vestments* Black clothing (*OED*).
- 4** *MELPOMENE* "One of the nine Muses, patron of tragedy and lyre playing" (*Britannica*).
- 9** *Phrenzy* An archaic spelling of "frenzy," meaning "agitation or disorder of the mind likened to madness" (*OED*).
- 10** *lays* Poetry, verses.
- 18** *car* "A chariot, esp. of war, triumph, splendour, or pageantry" (*OED*).
- 24** *jocund* "Mirthful, merry" "light-hearted" (*OED*).
- 31-32** *ANGELICA* "Alluding to a celebrated picture of Mrs. Kauffman's, THE NYMPHS DISARMING CUPID" [Author's note]. Â Angelica Kauffman (1741-1802) was a Swiss painter who live and worked in

England from 1766-1781. She was a founding member of the Royal Academy, and was well-known for her paintings of mythological subjects (*Britannica*).

**33** *Delphic Vase* A reference to the ancient urn that the Millers brought back from Italy in 1772; contestants for the salon's poetry prize would submit their poems by rolling them up and placing them in the urn (Kairoff, p. 35).

**37** *him* Sir John Miller, Lady Anna Miller's husband.

**38** *the fair Priestess of these shrines* That is, Lady Anna Miller.

**40** *Genius* Specifically, poetic genius in the context of the poetry competition.

**44** *Fancy* Poetic imagination.

**SOURCE:** *The Poetical Works of Anna Seward With Extracts from Her Literary Correspondence, Volume 2*, ed. Walter Scott (Edinburgh: J. Ballantyne and Company, 1810), pp. 22-24. [Google Books]

*Edited by Hannah Mayer*