

Elizabeth Carter, "Ode to Melancholy"

Description

ELIZABETH CARTER

“Ode to Melancholy”

Alas Darkness my sole light, gloom
O fairer to me than any sunshine
Take me take me to dwell with you
Take me

Sophocles.

Come Melancholy! silent Power,
Companion of my lonely Hour,
To sober Thought confin'd:
Thou sweetly-sad ideal Guest,
In all thy soothing Charms confest,
Indulge my pensive Mind.

No longer wildly hurried thro'
The Tides of Mirth, that ebb and flow,
In Folly's noisy Stream:
I from the busy Croud retire,
To court the Objects that inspire
Thy philosophic Dream.

Thro' yon dark Grove of mournful Yews
With solitary Steps I muse,
By thy Direction led:
Here, cold to Pleasure's tempting Forms,
Consociate with my Sister-worms,
And mingle with the Dead.

Ye Midnight Horrors! Awful Gloom!
Ye silent Regions of the Tomb,
My future peaceful Bed:
Here shall my weary Eyes be clos'd,

And evâ€™ry Sorrow lie reposâ€™d
In Deathâ€™s refreshing Shade.

Ye pale Inhabitants of Night, Â
Â 25

Before my intellectual Sight

In solemn Pomp ascend:

O tell how trifling now appears

The Train of idle Hopes and Fears

That varying Life attend. Â
Â 30

Ye faithless Idols of our Sense,

Here own how vain your fond Pretence,

Ye empty Names of Joy!

Your transient Forms like Shadows pass,

Frail Offspring of the magic Glass, Â
Â 35

Before the mental Eye.

The dazzling Colours, falsely bright,

Attract the gazing vulgar Sight

With superficial State:

Throâ€™ Reasonâ€™s clearer Optics viewâ€™d, Â
Â 40

How stript of all its Pomp, how rude

Appears the painted Cheat.

Can wild Ambitionâ€™s Tyrant Powâ€™r,

Or ill-got Wealthâ€™s superfluous Store,

The Dread of Death controul? Â
Â 45

Can Pleasureâ€™s more bewitching Charms

Avert, or sooth the dire Alarms

That shake the parting Soul?

Religion! Ere the Hand of Fate

Shall make Reflexion plead too late, Â
Â 50

My erring Senses teach,

Admist the flattâ€™ring Hopes of Youth,

To meditate the solemn Truth,

These awful Relics preach.

Thy penetrating Beams disperse Â
Â 55

The Mist of Error, whence our Fears

Derive their fatal Spring:

It's thine the trembling Heart to warm,
And soften to an Angel Form
The pale terrific King. 60

When sunk by Guilt in sad Despair,
Repentance breathes her humble Prayer,
And owns thy Threatnings just:
Thy Voice the shuddering Suppliant cheers,
With Mercy calms her torturing Fears, 65
And lifts her from the Dust.

Sublimed by thee, the Soul aspires
Beyond the Range of low Desires,
In nobler Views elate:
Unmoved her destined Change surveys, 70
And, armed by Faith, intrepid pays
The universal Debt.

In Death's soft Slumber lull'd to Rest,
She sleeps, by smiling Visions blest,
That gently whisper Peace: 75
Till the last Morning fair opening Ray
Unfolds the bright eternal Day
Of active Life and Bliss.

NOTES:

Epigraph These lines are from Sophocles's play *Ajax*, ll. 394-97; translation mine.

- 3** sober $\hat{=}$ Serious; solemn; grave (Johnson).
- 5** Charms $\hat{=}$ Enchantments (QED).
- 8** Mirth $\hat{=}$ A diversion or entertainment (QED).
- 9** Folly's $\hat{=}$ Act of negligence or passion (Johnson).
- 14** Yews $\hat{=}$ The tree of the dead. (...) The yew tree was sacred to Hecate, the Greek goddess associated with witchcraft, death, and necromancy; it was said to purify the dead as they entered Hades (*The Paris Review*).
- 21** Bed $\hat{=}$ The grave (QED).
- 27** Pomp $\hat{=}$ procession or sequence of things (QED).
- 35** Glass Looking-glass.

41 *Pomp* "Splendor" (Johnson).

67 *Sublimed* "To raise to an elevated sphere or exalted state" (QED).

72 *universal Debt* Original sin.

SOURCE: *Poems on Several Occasions* (London, 1776), pp. 79-83. [[Google Books](#)]

^ Edited by Katarina Wagner