

John Hawkesworth, "Life. An Ode"

Description

[JOHN] HAWKESWORTH

"LIFE. An Ode"

LIFE! The dear, precarious boon! Soon we lose; alas, how soon! Fleeting vision, falsely gay! Grasp'd in vain, it fades away; Mixing with surrounding shades,	5
Lovely vision! how it fades! Let the Muse, in Fancy's glass, Catch the phantoms as they pass. See, they rise! a nymph behold, Careless, wanton, young, and bold;	10
Mark her devious, hasty pace, Antick dress, and thoughtless face; Smiling cheeks, and roving eyes, Causeless mirth, and vain surprise? Tripping at her side, a boy	15
Shares her wonder, and her joy: This is Folly, Childhood's guide; This is Childhood, at her side. What is he succeeding now, Myrtles blooming on his brow,	20
Bright and blushing, as the morn; Not on earth a mortal born? Shafts, to pierce the strong, I view; Wings, the flying to pursue: Victim of his power, behind	25
Stalks a slave of human kind, Whose disdain of all the free, Speaks his mind's captivity. Love's the tyrant, Youth the slave; Youth, in vain, is wise or brave:	30
Love, with conscious pride, defies All the brave, and all the wise. Who art thou, with anxious mien, Stealing o'er the shifting scene? Eyes, with tedious vigils red,	35
Sighs, by doubts and wishes bred: Cautious step, and glancing leer,	

Speak thy woes, and speak thy fear.
 Arm and arm, what wretch is he
 Like thyself, who walks with thee? 40
 Like thy own his fears and woes,
 All thy pangs his bosom knows.
 Well, to well! my boding breast
 Knows the names your looks suggest;
 Anxious, busy, restless pair! 45
 Manhood, link'd by Fate to Care.
 Wretched state! and yet 'tis dear.
 Fancy, close the prospect here!
 Close it, or recal the past,
 Spare my eyes, my heart the last. 50
 Vain the wish! the last appears,
 While I gaze, it swims in tears.
 Age my future self I trace,
 Moving slow with feeble pace;
 Bending with disease and cares, 55
 All the load of life he bears:
 White his locks, his visage wan,
 Strength, and ease, and hope, are gone.
 Death, the shadowy for I know!
 Death o'ertakes him, dreadful foe! 60
 Swift they vanish mournful sight;
 Night succeeds, impervious night!
 What these dreadful glooms conceal,
 Fancy's glass can ne'er reveal.
 When shall time the veil remove? 65
 When shall light the scene improve?
 When shall truth my doubts dispel?
 Awful period! Who can tell?

NOTES:

1 *boon* – A gift considered with reference to its value to the receiver; a benefit enjoyed, blessing, advantage, a thing to be thankful for: sometimes without even the notion of giving, but always with that of something that one has no claim to, or that might have been absent. (OED).

7 *Fancy* – Imagination, a mental image. (OED).

12 *Antick* – Grotesque, in composition or shape, bizarre. (OED).

20 *Myrtles* – Any of various evergreen shrubs or small trees of the genus *Myrtus*. (OED).

23 *Shaft* – The long slender rod forming the body of a lance or spear, or of an arrow. (OED).

33 *mien* – The look, bearing, manner, or conduct of a person, as showing character, mood, etc. (OED).

37 leer ??A side glance, a look or roll of the eye expressive of slyness, malignity, immodest desire, etc. (OED).

SOURCE: *Lady's Poetical Magazine*, vol. III (London, 1782), pp. 142-44. [Hathi Trust]

Edited by Kyla Asbell