Anna Seward, â??Invocation of the Comic Museâ?•

Description

ANNA SEWARD

â??Invocation of the Comic Museâ?•

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
Through the palpitating heart;
Fear, that flies its shadowy cause,
With hurried step and startled pause;
Straw-crownâ??d Phrenzyâ??s glaring gaze,
Chaunting shrill her changing lays:
Nor let dim-eyâ??d Grief appear,
Weaving mournful garlands here,
Cypress-buds, and fading flowers,
Wet with cold Novemberâ??s showers;
Nor with the damp, wan brow, and streaming wound,
Let stern, self-piercâ??d Despair her hollow groans resound.

THALIA come, fantastic Fair,
Enthronâ??d in pantomimic car!
Thine open brow with roses bind,
By morningâ??s lucid rays entwinâ??d;
Thine azure vest flow lightly down,
And vivid glow thy rainbow zone!
Haste thee, Nymph, with sunny hair,
With varied voice, and jocund air,
Adornâ??d with all the laughing grace,
That decks the sweet bewitching face
Of her, who oâ??er the knee of snow
Archly snaps young Cupidâ??s bow;
For O! in that more beauteous maid
Than Grecian pencil eâ??er displayâ??d,
Bright from ANGELICAâ??s unrivalâ??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
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,
Her verdant prize extending there; â??
Ah still for them, the generous Pair,
Collect thou each idea bright
From Fancyâ??s shrine of missive light;
From Health, from Love, from Virtueâ??s ray,
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 submission to one of Lady Anna Millerâ??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* â??A vague poetic word for an idealized abodeâ?• (*OED*).

3 *sable vestments* Black clothing (*OED*).

4 *MELPOMENE* â??One of the nine Muses, patron of tragedy and lyre playingâ?• (*Britannica*).

9 *Phrenzy* An archaic spelling of â??frenzy,â?• meaning â??agitation or disorder of the mind likened to madnessâ?• (*OED*).

10 *lays* Poetry, verses.

18 *car* â??A chariot, esp. of war, triumph, splendour, or pageantryâ?• (*OED*).

24 *jocund* â??Mirthful, merryâ?¦light-heartedâ?• (*OED*).

31-32 *ANGELICA* â??Alluding to a celebrated picture of Mrs. Kauffmanâ??s, THE NYMPHS DISARMING CUPIDâ?• [Authorâ??s note]. 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 salonâ??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 Millerâ??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]**

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