[Anne Wharton], â??The Retirementâ?•

Description

[ANNE WHARTON]

â??The Retirementâ?•

All flie thâ?? unhappy, and I all wouâ??d flie,
Knew I but where to go, or how to die.
A Tomb of Sorrow is a dreadful Sight,
No wonder that a moving Grave shouâ??d fright.
Abandonâ??d, helpless, and alone I came
From nothing to this World; from Ease to Pain
My infant Sighs did the small Fabric shake,
As Winds Pent in when from the Earth they Break,
Which Mortal Men for dismal Omens take.
â??Twas then alas! by certain Instinct taught,
As if inspirâ??d by some prophetic Thought,
My Parents fled that World, to which this Wretch they brought.
They fearâ??d to see what I was Born to prove,
They fled from Youth, from Beauty, and from Love,
But â??twas to meet again in Groves above.
An Assignation justly timâ??d, and kept,
The last undaunted went, and boldly leapt
That Gulph of Death her dearer half had past,
Desire of Liberty her Hopes encreasâ??d;
Love lent her Wings and added to her Hast
But all too Slow, too late she was releasâ??d.
Too late for me, for had she sooner fled,
She with her own, had burst my twisted Thred;
That Thred, which since the Sisters Wove so Strong
As if they meant to prove their Force was young.
As in the Worlds bright dawn, when sprightly Life
Was Proof against Diseases, Age, and Grief.
Then Men couâ??d live in Spight of every dart
That Death couâ??d fling, nor fearâ??d a broken Heart.
But I, who had observâ??d their Force Decay,
And that each Chance couâ??d clear to Death the Way;
From Grief expected long that mournful Ease,
And learnâ??t to smile at every Pains Encrease.
But now alas! those Fatal Hopes decay,
Inspite of Sorrow I must longer Stay;

My Pilgrimage is hard and long the Way.
Too long the Way throâ?? which I still must grieve,
Ah! for what Crime am I condemnâ??d to live?
â??Else throâ?? thâ?? Abyss Iâ??d Steer my airy Race,
And view the Secrets of the boundless Space.
Survey those glittering Particles of Light,
That with dissembled Day supply the Night.
Thence to the Source of Day direct my wondrous Flight.
The Hidden Cause of things unknown discrie,
The Strange Vicissitudes of Earth, of Air, and Skye.
Why some so prone to change, to some again
Such firm, and Stedfast, constant Rules Remain
I wouâ??d go on but that the towring flight,
Makes me grow giddy, with the dreadful hight,
Yes I wouâ??d forward, and my Voice Iâ??d raise,
Join with the Spheres in my Creatorâ??s Praise,
In Songs Eternal, and no mortal Lays.
As â??tis his Will; but who that will can see
Involvâ??d in such dark Clouds of Mistery.â?•
We know not what his will commands us here,
Less can we tell our future duty there.
Yes, here Iâ??m lost, for none of all the dead,
Return to tell what a Soul is when fled.
Of what we there will do, we here may boast,
But there for ought we know All thought is lost.
To live, or Die why should I not submit?
Or why delay My death, or hasten it?
Since all is guided by his boundless Will,
For sure the Soul his Wisdom made, his Powâ??r continues Still.

NOTES:

Author â??The Retirementâ?• first appeared in print (unattributed) in Charles Gildonâ??s *A New Miscellany of Original Poems, On Several Occasions* (1701). However, in her *The Surviving Works on Anne Wharton* (1997), Germaine Greer attributes â??The Retirementâ?• to Anne Wharton through an earlier, undated manuscript version of the poem, titled â??Thoughts occasioned by her retirement into the Countrey,â?• which Greer uses as her copy-text. The two versions differ substantially in word/spelling variation, but most notably in length, as the MS poem contains 89 lines (25 more than the 1701 text). Greer attributes these textual variations to the â??editorial principlesâ?• of Gildon, who was known for both pirating and editing other poetsâ?? work.

1 *flie* Fly â??To leave;â?¦to pass awayâ?• (Johnson).

4 *fright.* Punctuation added to the end of this line (printerâ??s error).

7 *Fabric* The *OED* definition references a â??frameâ?• or â??structure,â?• which here is the infantâ??s small body.

8 *Pent* Emended from â??Penâ??tâ?• in the copy text (printerâ??s error).

9 *dismal* â??Boding or bringing misfortune; sinisterâ?• (*OED*).

12 *fled* â??Pass away quickly and suddenlyâ?• (*OED*).

16 *Assignation* â??An appointment to meet; used generally of love appointmentsâ?• (Johnson).

20 *Hast* Archaic spelling of â??haste.â?•

24 *Sisters Wove* A reference to the Three Fates in Greek mythology, who are often personified as women â??who spin the thread of human destinyâ?• (*Encyclopedia Britannica*).

25 *Force* â??Power to influence, affect, or controlâ?• (*OED*).

28 *Spight* Alternative spelling of â??spite.â?•

38 *Crime* Emended from â??Crime;â?• (printerâ??s error).

39 *airy* â??Celestial; immaterialâ?• (*OED*).

44 *discrie* Alternative spelling of â??descry,â?• â??To catch sight of, observe, discoverâ?• (*OED*).

45 *Skye* Emended from â??Siyeâ?• (printerâ??s error).

51 *Spheres* Emended from â??Sphereâ??sâ?• (printerâ??s error); *Creatorâ??s* Emended from â??Creatorsâ?• (printerâ??s error)

54 *Mistery* Alternative spelling of â??mystery.â?•

59 *here* Emended from â??hearâ?• (printerâ??s error).

SOURCE: *A New Miscellany of Original Poems, on Several Occasions* (London, 1701), pp. 288-292.

Edited by Katarina Wagner