

Elizabeth Tollet, "On a Death's Head"

Description

ELIZABETH TOLLET

• On a Death's Head •

Est illic Lethaeus Amor, qui pectora sanat,
Inque suas gelidam lampadas addit aquam.
Ovid.

On this Resemblance, where we find
 A Portrait drawn for all Mankind,
 Fond Lover! gaze a while, to see
 What Beauty's Idol Charms shall be.
 Where are the Balls that once cou'd dart 5
 Quick Lightning thro' the wounded Heart?
 The Skin, whose Teint cou'd once unite
 The glowing Red and polish'd White?
 The Lip in brighter Ruby drest?
 The Cheek with dimpled Smiles imprest? 10
 The rising Front, where Beauty sate
 Thron'd in her Residence of State;
 Which, half-disclos'd and half-conceal'd,
 The Hair in flowing Ringlets veil'd;
 'Tis vanish'd all! remains alone 15
 This eyeless Scalp of naked Bone:
 The vacant Orbits sunk within:
 The Jaw that offers at a Grin.
 Is this the Object then that claims
 The Tribute of our youthful Flames? 20
 Must am'rous Hopes and fancy'd Bliss,
 Too dear Delusions! end in this?
 How high does Melancholy swell!
 Which Sighs can more than Language tell:
 Till Love can only grieve or fear; 25
 Reflect a while, then drop Tear
 For all that's beautiful or dear.

NOTES:

Title *Death's Head* A picture or depiction of a human skull as a symbol of mortality (*OED*).

Epigraph "Lethaeon Love is there, who makes hearts whole, and pours cool water upon his torch" (Ovid, *The Remedies of Love* from *The Art of Love and Other Poems*, p. 214).

Epigraph *Lethaeon* "Causing oblivion or forgetfulness of the past. From the river Lethe in Hades, whose water when drunk made the souls of the dead forget their life on earth" (*OED*).

7 Teint "Colour; shade" (Johnson).

11 Front "The face or forehead" (Johnson).

16 Scalp Originally denoting the "skull" or "cranium" (*OED*).

18 *Orbits* — The eyeball; the eye (QED).

20 *Flames* — The passion of love (Johnson).

Source: Poems on Several Occasions. With Anne Boleyn to King Henry VIII. An Epistle (London, 1755), pp. 58-59. [Google Books]

Edited by Carrie Siskind