

Anna Seward, "Invocation of the Comic Muse"

Description

ANNA SEWARD

•“Invocation of the Comic Muse”•

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 Â 5
Through the palpitating heart;

Fear, that flies its shadowy cause,
With hurried step and startled pause;
Straw-crown'd Phrenzy's glaring gaze,

Chaunting shrill her changing lays: Â 10
Nor let dim-ey'd Grief appear,

Weaving mournful garlands here,
Cypress-buds, and fading flowers,

Wet with cold November's showers;

Nor with the damp, wan brow, and streaming wound, Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â Â 15

Let stern, self-pierc'd Despair her hollow groans resound.

THALIA come, fantastic Fair,
Enthron'd in pantomimic car!

Thine open brow with roses bind,

By morning's lucid rays entwin'd; Â 20
Â Â 20

Thine azure vest flow lightly down,

And vivid glow thy rainbow zone!

Haste thee, Nymph, with sunny hair,

With varied voice, and jocund air,

Adorn'd with all the laughing grace, Â 25

That decks the sweet bewitching face

Of her, who o'er the knee of snow

Archly snaps young Cupid's bow;

For O! in that more beauteous maid

Than Grecian pencil e'er display'd, Â 30
Â Â 30

Bright from ANGELICA's unrival'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 Â
Â 35
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, Â
Â Â Â 40
Her verdant prize extending there; "â€
Ah still for them, the generous Pair,
Collect thou each idea bright
From Fancy's shrine of missive light;
From Health, from Love, from Virtue's ray, Â
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 Â submission to one of Lady Anna Miller'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€œA vague poetic word for an idealized abode" (OED).
- 3** *sable vestments* Black clothing (OED).
- 4** *MELPOMENE* "â€œOne of the nine Muses, patron of tragedy and lyre playing" (Britannica).
- 9** *Phrenzy* An archaic spelling of "â€œfrenzy," meaning "â€œagitation or disorder of the mind likened to madness" (OED).
- 10** *lays* Poetry, verses.
- 18** *car* "â€œA chariot, esp. of war, triumph, splendour, or pageantry" (OED).
- 24** *jocund* "â€œMirthful, merry" (light-hearted) (OED).
- 31-32** *ANGELICA* "â€œAlluding to a celebrated picture of Mrs. Kauffman's, THE NYMPHS DISARMING CUPID" [Author's note]. Â 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 salon'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 Miller'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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