

Thomas Gray, "Ode on the Spring"

Description

THOMAS GRAY

"Ode on the Spring"

Lo! where the rosy-bosomed hours,
Fair VENUS's train, appear,
Disclose the long-expecting flowers,
And wake the purple year!
The Attic warbler pours her throat, 5
Responsive to the cuckoo's note,
The untaught harmony of spring:
While, whispering pleasure as they fly,
Cool Zephyrs thro' the clear blue sky
Their gather'd fragrance fling. 10

Where-e'er the oak's thick branches stretch
A broader browner shade;
Where-e'er the rude and moss-grown beech
O'er-canopies the glade;
Beside some water's rushy brink 15
With me the Muse shall sit, and think,
(At ease reclined in rustic state),
How vain the ardour of the crowd,
How low, how little are the proud,
How indigent the great! 20

Still is the toiling hand of Care;
The panting herds repose:
Yet hark, how thro' the peopled air
The busy murmur glows!
The insect youth are on the wing, 25
Eager to taste the honied spring,
And float amid the liquid noon:
Some lightly o'er the current skim,
Some shew their gayly-gilded trim
Quick-glancing to the sun. 30

To Contemplation's sober eye
Such is the race of man:
And they that creep, and they that fly,

Shall end where they began.
 Alike the busy and the gay 35
 But flutter thro' life's little day,
 In Fortune's varying colours drest:
 Brush'd by the hand of rough Mischance,
 Or chill'd by Age, their airy dance
 They leave in dust to rest. 40

Methinks I hear, in voices low,
 The sportive kind reply;
 Poor Moralist! and what are thou?
 A solitary fly!
 Thy joys no glittering female meets, 45
 No hive hast thou of hoarded sweets,
 No painted plumage to display:
 On hasty wings thy youth is flown;
 Thy sun is set, thy spring is gone
 We frolic while 'tis May. 50

NOTES:

2 *VENUS* Roman goddess of beauty and love (*OED*).

9 *Zephyrs* Personified west wind (*OED*).

14 *O'er-canopies the glade* – A bank/*O'er-canopied* with luscious woodbine. *Shakesp[eare] Mids[ummer] Night's Dream* • [Author's Note]. Act II, scene 1, ll. 257, 259.

16 *Muse* – Patron goddesses of poets • (*Britannica*).

27 *And float amid the liquid noon* – *Nare per aestatem liquidam* / *Virgil. Georg[ics]. lib* [Book] 4 • [Author's Note]. Line 59: – beholdest their army floating on high, / And the marvelous dusky cloud trailed down the wind afar • (Arthur Way, *The Georgics of Virgil in English Verse*, p. 91.)

30 *Quick-glancing to the sun* – sporting with quick glance, / Shew to the sun their wav'd coats dropt with gold. *Milton's Paradise Lost*, book 7 • [Author's note]. Lines 405-06.

31 *To Contemplation's sober eye* – While insects from threshold preach, &c. / *M[atthew] Green, in the Grotto . / Dodsley's Miscellanies, Vol. 5, p. 161* • [Author's Note]. Gray's poem was first published in Robert Dodsley's *A Collection of Poems by Several Hands* (1748).

37 *Fortune* – Chance, hap, or luck, regarded as a cause of events and changes in men's affairs. Often personified as a goddess • (*OED*).

38 *Mischance* – Bad luck; ill fortune • (*OED*).

SOURCE: *Poems by Mr. Gray. A New Edition* (London, 1778), pp. 43-47. [Google Books]

Edited by Katherine Szarata