Elizabeth Carter, â??Ode to Melancholyâ?•

Description

ELIZABETH CARTER

â??Ode to Melancholyâ?•

Alas Darkness my sole light, gloom
O fairer to me than any sunshine
Take me take me to dwell with you
Take me **â??** Sophocles.

Come Melancholy! silent Powâ??r,
Companion of my lonely Hour,
To sober Thought confinâ??d:
Thou sweetly-sad ideal Guest,
In all thy soothing Charms confest,
Indulge my pensive Mind.

No longer wildly hurried throâ??
The Tides of Mirth, that ebb and flow,
In Follyâ??s noisy Stream:
I from the busy Croud retire,
To court the Objects that inspire
Thy philosophic Dream.

Throâ?? yon dark Grove of mournful Yews
With solitary Steps I muse,
By thy Direction led:
Here, cold to Pleasureâ??s tempting Forms,
Consociate with my Sister-worms,
And mingle with the Dead.

Ye Midnight Horrors! Awful Gloom!
Ye silent Regions of the Tomb,
My future peaceful Bed:
Here shall my weary Eyes be closâ??d,
And evâ??ry Sorrow lie reposâ??d
In Deathâ??s refreshing Shade.

Ye pale Inhabitants of Night,
Before my intellectual Sight
In solemn Pomp ascend:

O tell how trifling now appears
The Train of idle Hopes and Fears
That varying Life attend.

Ye faithless Idols of our Sense,
Here own how vain your fond Pretence,
Ye empty Names of Joy!
Your transient Forms like Shadows pass,
Frail Offspring of the magic Glass,
Before the mental Eye.

The dazzling Colours, falsely bright,
Attract the gazing vulgar Sight
With superficial State:
Throâ?? Reasonâ??s clearer Optics viewâ??d,
How stript of all its Pomp, how rude
Appears the painted Cheat.

Can wild Ambitionâ??s Tyrant Powâ??r,
Or ill-got Wealthâ??s superfluous Store,
The Dread of Death controul?
Can Pleasureâ??s more bewitching Charms
Avert, or sooth the dire Alarms
That shake the parting Soul?

Religion! Ere the Hand of Fate
Shall make Reflexion plead too late,
My erring Senses teach,
Admist the flattâ??ring Hopes of Youth,
To meditate the solemn Truth,
These awful Relics preach.

Thy penetrating Beams disperse
The Mist of Error, whence our Fears
Derive their fatal Spring:
â??Tis thine the trembling Heart to warm,
And soften to an Angel Form
The pale terrific King.

When sunk by Guilt in sad Despair,
Repentance breathes her humble Prayâ??r,
And owns thy Threatâ??nings just:
Thy Voice the shuddâ??ring Suppliant chears,
With *Mercy* calms her tortâ??ring Fears,
And lifts her from the Dust.

Sublimâ??d by thee, the Soul aspires
Beyond the Range of low Desires,
In nobler Views elate:

Unmovâ??d her destinâ??d Change surveys,
And, armâ??d by Faith, intrepid pays
The universal Debt.

In Deathâ??s soft Slumber lullâ??d to Rest,
She sleeps, by smiling Visions blest,
That gently whisper Peace:
â??Till the last Mornâ??s fair opâ??ning Ray
Unfolds the bright eternal Day
Of active Life and Bliss.

NOTES:

Epigraph These lines are from Sophoclesâ??s play *Ajax*, ll. 394-97; translation mine.

3 *sober â??*Serious; solemn; graveâ?• (Johnson).

5 *Charms* â??Enchantmentsâ?• (*OED*).

8 *Mirth* â??A diversion or entertainmentâ?• (*OED*).

9 *Follyâ??s* â??Act of negligence or passionâ?• (Johnson).

14 *Yews* â??The tree of the dead. (â?¦) The yew tree was sacred to Hecate, the Greek goddess associated with witchcraft, death, and necromancy; it was said to purify the dead as they entered Hadesâ?• (*The Paris Review*).

21 *Bed* â??The graveâ?• (*OED*).

27 *Pomp* â??procession or sequence of thingsâ?• (*OED*).

35 *Glass* Looking-glass.

41 *Pomp* â??Splendorâ?• (Johnson).

67 *Sublimâ??d* â??To raise to an elevated sphere or exalted stateâ?• (*OED*).

72 *universal Debt* Original sin.

SOURCE: *Poems on Several Occasions* (London, 1776), pp. 79-83. [*Google Books*]

Edited by Katarina Wagner