Elizabeth Carter, â??Thoughts at Midnight. 1739â?•

Description

ELIZABETH CARTER

â??Thoughts at Midnight. 1739â?•

WHILE Night in solemn shade invests the Pole,
And calm reflection soothes the pensive soul;
While Reason undisturbâ??d asserts her sway,
And lifeâ??s deceitful colours fade away:
To thee! all-conscious presence! I devote
This peaceful interval of sober thought.
Here all my better faculties confine,
And be this hour of sacred silence thine.
If by the dayâ??s illusive scenes misled,
My erring soul from Virtueâ??s path has strayâ??d:
If by example snarâ??d, by passion warmâ??d,
Some false delight my giddy sense has charmâ??d,
My calmer thoughts the wretched choice reprove,
And my best hopes are centerâ??d in thy love.
Deprivâ??d of this, can life one joy afford!
Its utmost boast a vain unmeaning word.
But ah! how oftâ?? my lawless passions rove,
And break those awful precepts I approve!
Pursue the fatal impulse I abhor,
And violate the virtue I adore!
Oftâ?? when thy gracious Spiritâ??s guardian care
Warnâ??d my fond soul to shun the tempting snare,
My stubborn will his gentle aid represt,
And checkâ??d the rising goodness in my breast,
Mad with vain hopes, or urgâ??d by false desires,
Stillâ??d his soft voice, and quenchâ??d his sacred fires.
With grief opprest, and prostrate in the dust,
Shouldâ??st thou condemn, I own the sentence just.
But oh thy softer titles let me claim,
And plead my cause by Mercyâ??s gentle name.
Mercy, that wipes the penitential tear,
And dissipates the horrors of despair:
From rigâ??rous Justice steals the vengeful hour:
Softens the dreadful attribute of power;
Disarms the wrath of an offended God,

And seals my pardon in a Saviourâ??s blood.
All powâ??rful Grace, exert thy gentle sway,
And teach my rebel passions to obey:
Lest lurking Folly with insidious art
Regain my volatile inconstant heart.
Shall evâ??ry high resolve devotion frames,
Be only lifeless sounds and specious names?
Or rather while thy hopes and fears controul,
In this still hour each motion of my soul,
Secure its safety by a sudden doom,
And be the soft retreat of sleep my tomb.
Calm let me slumber in that dark repose,
â??Till the last morn its orient beam disclose:
Then, when the great Archangelâ??s potent sound,
Shall echo throâ?? Creationâ??s ample round,
Wakâ??d from the sleep of Death, with joy survey
The opâ??ning splendors of eternal day.

NOTES:

1 *Pole* â??The sky, the heavensâ?• (*OED*).

2 *pensive* â??Implying thought, anxiety, or melancholyâ?• (*OED*).

9 *illusive scenes* â??Deceptive; illusoryâ?• (*OED*).

13 *reprove â??*To censure, condemnâ?• (*OED*).

16 *Its* The copy test reads â??Itâ??s,â?• a printerâ??s error.

17 *rove* â??Waver, vacillateâ?• (*OED*).

31 *penitential tear* â??Indicative of repentanceâ?• (*OED*).

40 *volatile* â??Changeable, fickleâ?• (*OED*).

48 *orient beam disclose* The rising of the sun (*OED*); *its* The copy text reads â??itâ??s,â?• a printerâ??s error.

49 *the great Archangelâ??s potent sound* A reference to a Christian tradition (more literary than Biblical) that has the archangel Gabriel blowing a trumpet or horn to wake the dead and announce the return of Jesus on Judgment Day (S. Vernon McCasland, â??Gabrielâ??s Trumpet,â?• *Journal of Bible and Religion*, vol. 9, no. 3 [August 1941], pp. 159-161).

Source: ***Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Elizabeth Carter: With a New Edition of Her Poems; to Which Are Added, Some Miscellaneous Essays In Prose, Together With Her Notes On the Bible, And Answers to Objections Concerning the Christian Religion, ed. Rev. Montagu Pennington.*** **(London, 1808), vol. II, pp. 37-39. [Google Books]**

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