

James Beattie, "The Triumph of Melancholy"

Memory, be still! why throng upon the thought
These scenes deep-stain'd with Sorrow's sable^o dye? ^o *black*
Hast thou in store no joy-illumin'd draught,
To cheer bewilder'd Fancy's tearful eye?

Yes — from afar a landscape seems to rise 5
Deckt gorgeous by the lavish hand of Spring;
Thin gilded clouds float light along the skies,
And laughing Loves disport on fluttering wing.

How blest the Youth in yonder valley laid!
Soft smiles in every conscious feature play, 10
While to the gale low-murmuring through the glade
He tempers sweet his sprightly-warbling lay.^o ^o *simple pastoral song*

Hail Innocence! whose bosom all serene
Feels not fierce Passion's raving tempest roll!
Oh ne'er may Care distract that placid mien!^o 15 ^o *countenance*
Oh ne'er may Doubt's dark shades o'erwhelm thy soul!

Vain wish! for lo, in gay attire conceal'd
Yonder she comes! the heart-enflaming fiend!
(Will no kind Power the helpless stripling shield!)
Swift to her destin'd prey see Passion bend! 20

Oh smile accurst to hide the worst designs!
Now with blithe eye she woos him to be blest,
While round her arm unseen a serpent twines —
And lo, she hurls it hissing at his breast!

And, instant, lo, his dizzy eyeball swims 25
Ghastly, and reddening darts a threatful glare;
Pain with strong grasp distorts his writhing limbs,
And Fear's cold hand erects his bristling hair!

Is this, O Life, is this thy boasted prime!
And does thy spring no happier prospect yield! 30
Why gilds the vernal sun thy gaudy clime,
When nipping mildews waste the flowery field!

How Memory pains! Let some gay theme beguile
The musing mind, and sooth to soft delight. 35
Ye images of woe, no more recoil;
Be life's past scenes wrapt in oblivious night.

Now when fierce Winter arm'd with wasteful power
Heaves the wild deep that thunders from afar,
How sweet to sit in this sequester'd bower,
To hear, and but to hear, the mingling war! 40

Ambition here displays no gilded toy
That tempts on desperate wing the soul to rise,
Nor Pleasure's flower-embroider'd paths decoy,
Nor Anguish lurks in Grandeur's gay disguise.

Oft has Contentment chear'd this lone abode 45
With the mild languish of her smiling eye;
Here Health has oft in blushing beauty glow'd,
While loose-robed Quiet stood enamour'd by.

Even the storm lulls to more profound repose:
The storm these humble walls assails in vain; 50
Screen'd is the lily when the whirlwind blows,
While the oak's stately ruin strows the plain.

Blow on, ye winds! Thine, Winter, be the skies,
Roll the old ocean, and the vales lay waste:
Nature thy momentary rage defies; 55
To her relief the gentler Seasons haste.

Throned in her emerald-car^o see Spring appear! *o chariot*
(As Fancy wills the landscape starts to view)
Her emerald-car the youthful Zephyrs¹ bear,
Fanning her bosom with their pinions blue. 60

Around the jocund Hours² are fluttering seen;
And lo, her rod the rose-lip'd Power extends!
And lo, the lawns are deckt in living green,
And Beauty's bright-eyed train from heaven descends!

Haste, happy Days, and make All Nature glad— 65
But will All Nature joy at your return?
Say, can ye chear pale Sickness' gloomy bed,
Or dry the tears that bathe th' untimely urn?

Will ye one transient ray of gladness dart
Cross the dark cell where hopeless Slavery lies? 70
To ease tir'd Disappointment's bleeding heart
Will all your stores of softening balm suffice?

¹ In Greek mythology, Zephyr is the god of the (gentle) west wind.

² The Hours (or Horai) were the Greek goddesses of time and the seasons.

When fell Oppression in his harpy-fangs³
From Want's weak grasp the last sad morsel bears,
Can ye allay the heart-wrung parent's pangs, 75
Whose famish'd child craves help with fruitless tears?

For ah! thy reign, Oppression, is not past.
Who from the shivering limbs the vestment rends?
Who lays the once-rejoicing village waste,
Bursting the ties of lovers and of friends? 80

O ye, to Pleasure who resign the day,
As loose in Luxury's clasping arms you lye,
O yet let pity in your breast bear sway,
And learn to melt at Misery's moving cry.

But hopest thou, Muse, vainglorious^o as thou art, 85
With the weak impulse of thy humble strain,
Hopedst thou to soften Pride's obdurate^o heart,
When Erroll's bright example shines in vain?⁴ ^o *overly proud*
^o *hardened, obstinate*

Then cease the theme. Turn, Fancy, turn thine eye,
Thy weeping eye, nor further urge thy flight; 90
Thy haunts alas no gleams of joy supply,
Or transient gleams, that flash, and sink in night.

Yet fain^o the mind its anguish would forego — ^o *willingly*
Spread then, Historic Muse,^o thy pictur'd scroll; ^o *Clio, muse of history*
Bid thy great scenes in all their splendor glow, 95
And swell to thought sublime th' exalted soul.

What mingling pomps rush boundless on the gaze!
What gallant navies ride the heaving deep!
What glittering towns their cloud-wrapt turrets raise!
What bulwarks frown horrific o'er the steep! 100

Bristling with spears, and bright with burnish'd shields,
Th' embattled legions stretch their long array;
Discord's red torch, as fierce she scours the fields,
With bloody tincture stains the face of day.

And now the hosts in silence wait the sign. 105
How keen their looks whom Liberty inspires!
Quick as the goddess darts along the line,

³ The Harpies were winged females in Greek mythology, associated with storms and with tormenting and snatching people. Beattie alludes specifically to a story about the Harpies being sent by Zeus to torment the King Phineas of Thrace, who had revealed secrets of the gods. They continually snatched away any food set before him.

⁴ William Hay, the 4th Earl of Erroll, heroically died fighting (in vain) to save the life of his king at the Battle of Flodden Field (1513), an attempted invasion of England by King James IV of Scotland. The battle, a significant event in Scottish history despite the decisive victory of the English forces, is commemorated in Sir Walter Scott's *Marmion*.

Each breast impatient burns with noble fires.

Her form how graceful! In her lofty mien
The smiles of Love stern Wisdom's frown controul; *110*
Her fearless eye, determin'd though serene,
Speaks the great purpose, and th' unconquer'd soul.

Mark, where Ambition leads the adverse band,
Each feature fierce and haggard, as with pain!
With menace loud he cries, while from his hand *115*
He vainly strives to wipe the crimson stain.

Lo, at his call, impetuous as the storms,
Headlong to deeds of death the hosts are driven;
Hatred to madness wrought each face deforms,
Mounts the black whirlwind, and involves the heaven. *120*

Now, Virtue, now thy powerful succour lend,
Shield them for Liberty who dare to die —
Ah Liberty! will none thy cause befriend!
Are these thy sons, thy generous sons that fly!

Not Virtue's self, when Heaven its aid denies, *125*
Can brace the loosen'd nerves, or warm the heart;
Not Virtue's self can still the burst of sighs,
When festers in the soul Misfortune's dart.

See, where by heaven-bred terror all dismay'd
The scattering legions pour along the plain. *130*
Ambition's car with bloody spoils array'd
Hews its broad way, as Vengeance guides the rein.

But who is he, that, by yon lonely brook
With woods o'erhung and precipices rude,⁵
Abandon'd lies, and with undaunted look *135*
Sees streaming from his breast the purple flood?

Ah Brutus! ever thine be Virtue's tear!
Lo, his dim eyes to Liberty he turns,
As scarce-supported on her broken spear
O'er her expiring son the Goddess mourns. *140*

Loose to the wind her azure mantle flies,
From her dishevel'd locks she rends the plume;
No lustre lightens in her weeping eyes,
And on her tear-stain'd cheek no roses bloom.

Meanwhile the world, Ambition, owns thy sway, *145*
Fame's loudest trumpet labours in thy praise,

⁵ “ ‘By yon lonely brook With woods o'erhung and precipices rude’ — Such, according to the description given by Plutarch, was the scene of Brutus's death.” [Beattie's note]

For thee the Muse awakes her sweetest lay,
And Flattery bids for thee her altars blaze.

Nor in life's lofty bustling sphere alone,
The sphere where monarchs and where heroes toil, 150
Sink Virtue's sons beneath Misfortune's frown,
While Guilt's thrill'd bosom leaps at Pleasure's smile;

Full oft, where Solitude and Silence dwell
Far far remote amid the lowly plain,
Resounds the voice of Woe from Virtue's cell. 155
Such is man's doom, and Pity weeps in vain.

Still grief recoils — How vainly have I strove
Thy power, O Melancholy, to withstand!
Tir'd I submit; but yet, O yet remove,
Or ease the pressure of thy heavy hand. 160

Yet for a while let the bewilder'd soul
Find in society relief from woe;
O yield a while to Friendship's soft controul;
Some respite, Friendship, wilt thou not bestow!

Come then, Philander!⁶ for thy lofty mind 165
Looks down from far on all that charms the Great;
For thou canst bear, unshaken and resign'd,
The brightest smiles, the blackest frowns of Fate:

Come thou, whose love unlimited, sincere,
Nor faction cools, nor injury destroys; 170
Who lend'st to Misery's moans a pitying ear,
And feel'st with ecstasy another's joys:

Who know'st man's frailty; with a favouring eye,
And melting heart, behold'st a brother's fall;
Who unenslav'd by Custom's narrow tye 175
With manly freedom follow'st Reason's call.

And bring thy Delia,⁷ softly-smiling Fair,
Whose spotless soul no sordid thoughts deform;
Her accents mild would still each throbbing care,
And harmonize the thunder of the storm: 180

Though blest with wisdom and with wit refin'd,
She courts not homage, nor desires to shine;
In Her each sentiment sublime is join'd
To female sweetness, and a form divine.

⁶ In Greek myth, the son of Apollo and the human woman Acacallis, a daughter of King Minos. The name, which means "lover of man," was commonly used in poetry as a generic name for a lover. Compare to James Hervey's *Meditations Among the Tombs*, where the name is used for Hervey's son-in-law.

⁷ A generic name for a woman beloved of a man, in the case Philander.

Come, and dispel the deep-surrounding shade: 185
Let chasten'd mirth the social hours employ;
O catch the swift-wing'd hour before 'tis fled,
On swiftest pinion flies the Hour of joy.

Even while the careless disencumber'd soul 190
Dissolving sinks to Joy's oblivious dream,
Even then to Time's tremendous verge we roll
With haste impetuous down life's surgy stream.

Can Gaiety the vanish'd years restore, 195
Or on the withering limbs fresh beauty shed,
Or soothe the sad inevitable hour,
Or cheer the dark dark mansions of the dead?

Still sounds the solemn knell in Fancy's ear, 200
That call'd Cleora⁸ to the silent tomb;
To her how jocund roll'd the sprightly year!
How shone the nymph in Beauty's brightest bloom!

Ah! Beauty's bloom avails not in the grave,
Youth's lofty mien, nor Age's awful grace;
Moulder unknown the monarch and the slave
Whelm'd in th' enormous wreck of human race.

The thought-fix'd portraiture, the breathing bust, 205
The arch with proud memorials array'd,
The long-liv'd pyramid shall sink in dust
To dumb Oblivion's ever-desart shade.

Fancy from comfort wanders still astray. 210
Ah Melancholy! how I feel thy power!
Long have I labour'd to elude thy sway,
But 'tis enough, for I resist no more.

The traveler thus, that o'er the midnight-waste 215
Through many a lonesome path is doom'd to roam,
Wilder'd and weary sits him down at last;
For long the night, and distant far his home.

⁸ Another poetic name for a beloved and devoted woman.