

Excerpt from Book Two of  
*The Pleasures of Imagination* by **Mark Akenside**

First published 1744.

The following excerpt is from Book Two, lines 187 - 337.

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'Twas in the windings of an ancient wood,  
When spotless youth with solitude resigns  
To sweet philosophy the studious day,  
What time pale autumn shades the silent eve,  
Musing I rov'd. Of good and evil much,  
And much of mortal man my thought revolv'd;  
When starting full on fancy's gushing eye  
The mournful image of Parthenia's fate,  
That hour, o long belov'd and long deplor'd!  
When blooming youth, nor gentlest wisdom's arts,  
Nor Hymen's honours gather'd for thy brow,  
Nor all thy lover's, all thy father's tears  
Avail'd to snatch thee from the cruel grave;  
Thy agonizing looks, thy last farewell  
Struck to the inmost feeling of my soul  
As with the hand of death. At once the shade  
More horrid nodded o'er me, and the winds  
With hoarser murmuring shook the branches. Dark  
As midnight storms, the scene of human things  
Appear'd before me; deserts, burning sands,  
Where the parch'd adder dies; the frozen south,  
And desolation blasting all the west  
With rapine and with murder: tyrant power  
Here sits enthron'd with blood; the baleful charms  
Of superstition there infect the skies,  
And turn the sun to horror. Gracious heaven!  
What is the life of man? Or cannot these,  
Not these portents thy awful will suffice?  
That, propagated thus beyond their scope,

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They rise to act their cruelties anew  
In my afflicted bosom, thus decreed  
The universal sensitive of pain,  
The wretched heir of evils not its own!

Thus I impatient; when, at once effus'd,  
A flashing torrent of coelestial day  
Burst through the shadowy void. With slow descent  
A purple cloud came floating through the sky,  
And pois'd at length within the circling trees,  
Hung obvious to my view; till opening wide  
Its lucid orb, a more than human form  
Emerging lean'd majestic o'er my head,  
And instant thunder shook the conscious grove.  
Then melted into air the liquid cloud,  
And all the shining vision stood reveal'd.  
A wreath of palm his ample forehead bound,  
And o'er his shoulder, mantling to his knee,  
Flow'd the transparent robe, around his waist  
Collected with a radiant zone of gold  
Æthereal: there in mystic signs ingrav'd,  
I read his office high and sacred name,  
Genius of human kind. Appall'd I gaz'd  
The godlike presence; for athwart his brow  
Displeasure, temper'd with a mild concern,  
Look'd down reluctant on me, and his words  
Like distant thunders broke the murmuring air.

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Vain are thy thoughts, o child of mortal birth!  
And impotent thy tongue. Is thy short span  
Capacious of this universal frame?  
Thy wisdom all-sufficient? Thou, alas!  
Dost thou aspire to judge between the Lord  
Of nature and his works? to lift thy voice  
Against the sovran order he decreed,  
All good and lovely? to blaspheme the bands  
Of tenderness innate and social love,

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Holiest of things! by which the general orb  
Of being, as by adamantine links,  
Was drawn to perfect union and sustain'd  
From everlasting? Hast thou felt the pangs  
Of softening sorrow, of indignant zeal  
So grievous to the soul, as thence to wish  
The ties of nature broken from thy frame;  
That so thy selfish, unrelenting heart  
Might cease to mourn its lot, no longer then  
The wretched heir of evils not its own?  
O fair benevolence of generous minds!  
O man by nature form'd for all mankind!

He spoke; abash'd and silent I remain'd,  
As conscious of my tongue's offence, and aw'd  
Before his presence, though my secret soul  
Disdain'd the imputation. On the ground  
I fix'd my eyes; till from his airy couch  
He stoop'd sublime, and touching with his hand  
My dazzling forehead, Raise thy sight, he cry'd  
And let thy sense convince thy erring tongue.

I look'd, and lo! the former scene was chang'd;  
For verdant alleys and surrounding trees,  
A solitary prospect, wide and wild,  
Rush'd on my senses. 'Twas an horrid pile  
Of hills with many a shaggy forest mix'd,  
With many a sable cliff and glittering stream.  
Aloft recumbent o'er the hanging ridge,  
The brown woods wav'd; while ever-trickling springs  
Wash'd from the naked roots of oak and pine  
The crumbling soil; and still at every fall  
Down the steep windings of the channel'd rock,  
Remurmuring rush'd the congregated floods  
With hoarser inundation; till at last  
They reach'd a grassy plain, which from the skirts  
Of that high desert spread her verdant lap,  
And drank the gushing moisture, where confin'd

In one smooth current, o'er the liliated vale  
Clearer than glass it flow'd. Autumnal spoils  
Luxuriant spreading to the rays of morn,  
Blush'd o'er the cliffs, whose half-incircling mound  
As in a sylvan theatre inclos'd  
That flowery level. On the river's brink  
I spy'd a fair pavilion, which diffus'd  
Its floating umbrage 'mid the silver shade  
Of osiers. Now the western sun reveal'd  
Between two parting cliffs his golden orb,  
And pour'd across the shadow of the hills,  
On rocks and floods, a yellow stream of light  
That cheer'd the solemn scene. My listening powers  
Were aw'd, and every thought in silence hung,  
And wondering expectation. Then the voice  
Of that coelestial power, the mystic show  
Declaring, thus my deep attention call'd.

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Inhabitant of earth, to whom is given  
The gracious ways of providence to learn,  
Receive my sayings with a stedfast ear--  
Know then, the sovran spirit of the world,  
Though self-collected from eternal time,  
Within his own deep essence he beheld  
The bounds of true felicity complete;  
Yet by immense benignity inclin'd  
To spread around him that primæval joy  
Which fill'd himself, he rais'd his plastic arm,  
And sounded through the hollow depth of space  
The strong, creative mandate. Strait arose  
These heavenly orbs, the glad abodes of life  
Effusive kindled by his breath divine  
Through endless forms of being. Each inhal'd  
From him its portion of the vital flame,

In measure such, that, from the wide complex  
Of coexistent orders, one might rise,  
One order, all-involving and intire.  
He too beholding in the sacred light  
Of his essential reason, all the shapes  
Of swift contingency, all successive ties  
Of action propagated through the sum  
Of possible existence, he at once,  
Down the long series of eventful time,  
So fix'd the dates of being, so dispos'd,  
To every living soul of every kind  
The field of motion and the hour of rest,  
That all conspir'd to his supreme design,  
To universal good: with full accord  
Answering the mighty model he had chosen,  
The best and fairest of unnumber'd worlds  
That lay from everlasting in the store  
Of his divine conceptions.

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Since this excerpt is from Book Two, your parenthetical citations should include the Roman numeral "II" (e.g., "II: 190-202").

