

Anne Finch, The Spleen

THE SPLEEN A Pindaric Poem

What art thou, SPLEEN, which ev'ry thing dost ape ?
Thou Proteus to abus'd Mankind,
Who never yet thy real Cause cou'd find,
Or fix thee to remain in one continued Shape.
Still varying thy perplexing Form,
Now a Dead Sea thou'lt represent,
A Calm of stupid Discontent,
Then, dashing on the Rocks wilt rage into a Storm.
Trembling sometimes thou dost appear,
Dissolved into a Panick Fear; 10
On Sleep intruding dost thy Shadows spread,
Thy gloomy Terrours round the silent Bed,
And croud with boading Dreams the Melancholy Head;
Or, when the Midnight Hour is told,
And drooping Lids thou still dost waking hold,
Thy fond Delusions cheat the Eyes,
Before them antick Spectres dance,
Unusual Fires their pointed Heads advance,
And airy Phantoms rise.
Such was the monstrous Vision seen, 20
When *Brutus* (now beneath his Cares opprest,
And all *Rome*'s Fortunes rolling in his Breast,
Before *Philippi*'s latest Field,
Before his Fate did to *Octavius* lead)
Was vanquish' d by the *Spleen*.

Falsly, the Mortal Part we blame
Of our deprest, and pond'rous Frame,
Which, till the First degrading Sin
Let Thee, its dull Attendant, in,
Still with the Other did comply, 30
Nor clogg'd the Active Soul, dispos'd to fly,

And range the Mansions of it's native Sky.
Nor, whilst in his own Heaven he dwelt,
Whilst Man his Paradice possest,
His fertile Garden in the fragrant East,
And all united Odours smelt,
No armed Sweets, until thy Reign,
Cou'd shock the Sense, or in the Face
A flusht, unhandsom Colour place.
Now the *Jonquille* o'ercomes the feeble Brain; 40
We faint beneath the Aromatick Pain,
Till some offensive Scent thy Pow'rs appease,
And Pleasure we resign for short, and nauseous Ease.

In ev'ry One thou dost possess,
New are thy Motions, and thy Dress:
Now in some Grove a list'ning Friend
Thy false Suggestions must attend,
Thy whisper'd Griefs, thy fancy 'd Sorrows hear,
Breath'd in a Sigh, and witness'd by a Tear;
Whilst in the light, and vulgar Croud, 50
Thy Slaves, more clamorous and loud,
By Laughters unprovok'd, thy Influence too confess.
In the Imperious *Wife* thou Vapours art,
Which from o'erheated Passions rise
In Clouds to the attractive Brain,
Until descending thence again,
Thro' the o'er-cast, and show'ring Eyes,
Upon her Husband's soften'd Heart,
He the disputed Point must yield,
Something resign of the contested Field; 60
Till Lordly *Man*, born to Imperial Sway,
Compounds for Peace, to make that Right away,
And *Woman*, arm'd with *Spleen*, do's servilely Obey.

The *Fool*, to imitate the Wits,
Complains of thy pretended Fits,
And Dulness, born with him, wou'd lay

Upon thy accidental Sway;
Because, sometimes, thou dost presume
Into the ablest Heads to come:
That, often, Men of Thoughts refin'd, 70
Impatient of unequal Sence,
Such slow Returns, where they so much dispense,
Retiring from the Croud, are to thy Shades inclin'd.
O'er me alas! thou dost too much prevail:
I feel thy Force, whilst I against thee rail;
I feel my Verse decay, and my cramp't Numbers fail.
Thro' thy black Jaundice I all subjects see,
As Dark, and Terrible as Thee,
My Lines decry 'd, and my Employment thought
An useless Folly, or presumptuous Fault: 80
Whilst in the *Muses* Paths I stray,
Whilst in their Groves, and by their secret Springs
My Hand delights to trace unusual Things,
And deviates from the known, and common way;
Nor will in fading Silks compose
Faintly th' inimitable *Rose*,
Fill up an ill-drawn *Bird*, or paint on Glass
The *Sovereign's* blurr'd and undistinguish'd Face,
The threatening *Angel*, and the speaking *Ass*.

Patron thou art to ev'ry gross Abuse,
The sullen *Husband's* feign'd Excuse,
When the ill Humour with his Wife he spends,
And bears recruited Wit, and Spirits to his Friends.
The Son of *Bacchus* pleads thy Pow'r,
As to the Glass he still repairs,
Pretends but to remove thy Cares,
Snatch from thy Shades one gay, and smiling Hour,
And drown thy Kingdom in a purple Show'r.
When the *Coquette*, whom ev'ry Fool admires,
Wou'd in Variety be Fair, 100
And, changing hastily the Scene
From Light, Impertinent, and Vain,

Assumes a soft, a melancholy Air,
And of her Eyes rebates the wand'ring Fires,
The careless Posture, and the Head reclin'd,
The thoughtful, and composed Face,
Proclaiming the withdrawn, the absent Mind,
Allows the Fop more liberty to gaze,
Who gently for the tender Cause inquires;
The Cause, indeed, is a Defect in Sense, 110

Yet is the *Spleen* alledg'd, and still the dull Pretence.
But these are thy fantastic Harms,
The Tricks of thy pernicious Stage,
Which do the weaker Sort engage;
Worse are the dire Effects of thy more pow'rful Charms.
By Thee *Religion*, all we know,
That shou'd enlighten here below,
Is veil'd in Darkness, and perplext
With anxious Doubts, with endless Scruples vext,
And some Restraint imply 'd from each perverted Text. 120
Whilst *Touch* not, *Taste* not, what is freely giv'n,
Is but thy niggard Voice, disgracing bounteous Heav'n.
From Speech restrain'd, by thy Deceits abus'd,
To Deserts banish'd, or in Cells reclus'd,
Mistaken Vot'ries to the Pow'rs Divine,
Whilst they a purer Sacrifice design,
Do but the *Spleen* obey, and worship at thy Shrine.
In vain to chase thee ev'ry Art we try,
In vain all Remedies apply,
In vain the *Indian* Leaf infuse, 130
Or the parch'd *Eastern* Berry bruise ;
Some pass, in vain, those Bounds, and nobler Liquors use.
Now *Harmony*, in vain, we bring,
Inspire the Flute, and touch the String.
From Harmony no help is had;
Musick but soothes thee, if too sweetly sad,
And if too light, but turns thee gayly Mad.
Tho' the Physicians greatest Gains,

Altho' his growing Wealth he sees
Daily increas'd by Ladies Fees, 140
Yet doft thou baffle all his studious Pains.
Not skilful *Lower* thy Source cou'd find,
Or thro' the well-dissected Body trace
The secret, the mysterious ways,
By which thou dost surprise, and prey upon the Mind.
Tho' in the Search, too deep for Humane Thought,
With unsuccessful Toil he wrought,
'Till thinking Thee to've catch'd, Himself by thee was caught,
Retain'd thy Pris'ner, thy acknowledg'd Slave,
And sunk beneath thy Chain to a lamented Grave. 150