

An Allegory On Man - Poem by Thomas Parnell

A thoughtful Being, long and spare,
Our Race of Mortals call him Care:
(Were Homer living, well he knew
What Name the Gods have call'd him too)
With fine Mechanick Genius wrought,
And lov'd to work, tho' no one bought.

This Being, by a Model bred
In Jove's eternal sable Head,
Contriv'd a Shape impow'rd to breathe,
And be the Worldling here beneath.

The Man rose staring, like a Stake;
Wond'ring to see himself awake!
Then look'd so wise, before he knew
The Bus'ness he was made to do;
That pleas'd to see with what a Grace
He gravely shew'd his forward Face,
Jove talk'd of breeding him on high,
An Under-something of the Sky.

But e'er he gave the mighty Nod,
Which ever binds a Poet's God:
(For which his Curls Ambrosial shake,
And Mother Earth's oblig'd to quake
He saw old Mother Earth arise,
She stood confess'd before his Eyes;
But not with what we read she wore,
A Castle for a Crown before,
Nor with long Streets and longer Roads
Dangling behind her, like Commodes:
As yet with Wreaths alone she drest,
And trail'd a Landskip-painted Vest.
Then thrice she rais'd, (as Ovid said)
And thrice she bow'd, her weighty Head.

Her Honours made, Great Jove, she cry'd,
This Thing was fashion'd from my Side;
His Hands, his Heart, his Head are mine;
Then what hast thou to call him thine?

Nay rather ask, the Monarch said,
What boots his Hand, his Heart, his Head,
Were what I gave remov'd away?
Thy Part's an idle Shape of Clay.

Halves, more than Halves! cry'd honest Care,
Your Pleas wou'd make your Titles fair,
You claim the Body, you the Soul,
But I who join'd them, claim the whole.

Thus with the Gods Debate began,
On such a trivial Cause, as Man.
And can Celestial Tempers rage?
(Quoth Virgil in a later Age.)

As thus they wrangled, Time came by;
(There's none that paint him such as I,
For what the Fabling Antients sung
Makes Saturn old, when Time was young.)
As yet his Winters had not shed
Their silver Honours on his Head;
He just had got his Pinions free
From his old Sire Eternity.
A Serpent girdled round he wore,
The Tail within the Mouth before;
By which our Almanacks are clear
That learned Ægypt meant the Year.
A Staff he carry'd, where on high
A Glass was fix'd to measure by,
As Amber Boxes made a Show
For Heads of Canes an Age ago.
His Vest, for Day, and Night, was py'd;

A bending Sickle arm'd his Side;
And Spring's new Months his Train adorn;
The other Seasons were unborn.

Known by the Gods, as near he draws,
They make him Umpire of the Cause.
O'er a low Trunk his Arm he laid,
(Where since his Hours a Dial made
Then leaning heard the nice Debate,
And thus pronounc'd the Words of Fate.

Since Body from the Parent Earth,
And Soul from Jove receiv'd a Birth,
Return they where they first began;
But since their Union makes the Man,
'Till Jove and Earth shall part these two,
To Care who join'd them, Man is due.

He said, and sprung with swift Career
To trace a Circle for the Year;
Where ever since the Seasons wheel,
And tread on one another's Heel.

'Tis well, said Jove, and for consent
Thund'ring he shook the Firmament.
Our Umpire Time shall have his Way,
With Care I let the Creature stay:
Let Bus'ness vex him, Av'rice blind,
Let Doubt and Knowledge rack his Mind,
Let Error act, Opinion speak,
And Want afflict, and Sickness break,
And Anger burn, Dejection chill,
And Joy distract, and Sorrow kill.
'Till arm'd by Care and taught to Mow,
Time draws the long destructive Blow;
And wasted Man, whose quick decay
Comes hurrying on before his Day,

Shall only find, by this Decree,
The Soul flies sooner back to Me