

# Mark Akenside

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Mark Akenside (1721-1770) was a competent poet and physician born in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, England to parents Mark and Mary Akenside. He was a youthful academic prodigy with a physical disability in having one leg longer than the other. Originally set to attend the University of Edinburgh to become a dissenting (not Church of England) minister, Akenside instead pursued medicine to become a physician. His medical career was only moderately successful, possibly because people found Akenside to be cold and conceited.

Akenside's poetic success stemmed from when he was sixteen years old and sent a poem in Spenserian stanzas to the *Gentleman's Magazine* titled "The Virtuoso." During his time at university, he began his best-known work: *The Pleasures of Imagination*, a didactic and philosophical poem in three books. This poem had seven editions and was translated into a variety of languages including French, German, and Italian. Akenside wrote some medical treatises and other literary works, but none were as famous or successful as *The Pleasures of Imagination*.

Inscription III is one of a group of six inscriptions for monuments and fictional graves published in the sixth volume of Dodsley's *A Collection of Poems by Several Hands* in 1758. With a theme of melancholy and tragic love, this poem is a blank verse epitaph. Iambic pentameter is a meter Akenside excelled in writing.

Akenside died in 1770 at the age of forty-eight due to a severe fever. Although his posthumously published odes had an influence on Coleridge and Southey, there was a decline in interest in Akenside during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which Robin Dix's account of Akenside's lifework may reverse.

## Further Reading

Dix, Robin. *The Literary Career of Mark Akenside*. Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2007.  
 Dix, Robin, editor. *Mark Akenside: A Reassessment*. Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2000.

Inscription III<sup>426</sup>

WHOE'ER<sup>427</sup> thou art whose path in summer lies  
 Through yonder<sup>428</sup> village, turn thee where the grove  
 Of branching oaks a rural palace old  
 Embosoms.<sup>429</sup> there dwells Albert, generous lord  
 Of all the harvest round. And onward thence 5  
 A low plain chapel fronts the morning light  
 Fast by a silent riv'let.<sup>430</sup> Humbly walk,  
 O stranger, o'er the consecrated<sup>431</sup> ground;  
 And on that verdant<sup>432</sup> hilloc,<sup>433</sup> which thou see'st  
 Beset with osiers,<sup>434</sup> let thy pious hand 10  
 Sprinkle fresh water from the brook and strew<sup>435</sup>  
 Sweet-smelling flow'rs. For there doth Edmund rest,  
 The learned shepherd; for each rural art  
 Fam'd, and for songs harmonious, and the woes  
 Of ill-requited<sup>436</sup> love. The faithless pride 15  
 Of fair Matilda sank him to the grave  
 In manhood's prime. But soon did righteous heaven  
 With tears, with sharp remorse, and pining care,

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<sup>426</sup> *A Collection of Poems in Six Volumes, By Several Hands. Vol. VI.* London, edited R. and J. Dodsley, 1763 [1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1758], pp. 31–32.

<sup>427</sup> *Whoe'er* abbreviation of “whoever”

<sup>428</sup> *Yonder* over there

<sup>429</sup> *Embosoms* embraces, surrounds

<sup>430</sup> *Riv'let* a rivulet or small river

<sup>431</sup> *Consecrated* made sacred

<sup>432</sup> *Verdant* green, associated with flora

<sup>433</sup> *Hilloc* a small hill

<sup>434</sup> *Osiers* a specific type of willow tree

<sup>435</sup> *Strew* scatter on the ground

<sup>436</sup> *Ill-requited* unreturned love

Avenge her falsehood. Nor<sup>437</sup> could all the gold  
And nuptial pomp,<sup>438</sup> which lur'd her plighted faith<sup>439</sup> 20  
From Edmund to a loftier husband's home,  
Relieve her breaking heart, or turn aside  
The strokes of death. Go, traveller; relate  
The mournful story. Haply some fair maid  
May hold it in remembrance, and be taught 25  
That riches cannot pay for truth or love.

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<sup>437</sup> *Nor* “nor” in copytext

<sup>438</sup> *Nuptial pomp* a marriage celebration

<sup>439</sup> *Plighted faith* a promise to marry, engagement



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