

Benjamin Hoadly

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Benjamin Hoadly was born on 10 February 1706, London, to parents Benjamin and Sarah Hoadly. Hoadly was immersed in a creative world from childhood, as both his parents were artists and he attended Dr Newcome's academy – a school well-known for its plays (Moore). However, as a young adult, Hoadly explored an additional path, moving to Cambridge, where he eventually became a Doctor of Medicine. As a member of the Royal Society and a Goulstonian Lecturer, Hoadly is most known for his contributions to the medical field, but he also became a name in the world of drama and poetry. Hoadly published a handful of poems, but he is mainly recognized for his work as a comedic playwright. His most famous play, *The Suspicious Husband* (1747), was a long-lived comedy performed throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Hoadly also wrote a lesser-known comedy, *The Tatlers* (staged posthumously in 1797). As Albrecht von Haller said, Hoadly was “*elegantis ingenii vir, poeta etiam comicus*” (Royal College of Physicians), meaning a man of elegant character, a poet, and a comedian (my translation). Hoadly passed away in London in 1757.

“To Chloe. Written on my Birth-Day, 1734” is an occasional poem, in a variation of ballad stanza but with anapestic rather than iambic meter, meaning readers would have perceived it as light and humorous. We can suppose that the speaker is being self-consciously humorous, or possibly the author is making fun of the speaker. The poem captures how age and love transform our perceptions of how fast or slow time passes, concluding that only death can subdue love. Hoadly personifies Time, which, in the eighteenth century, was a valued technique. As Wasserman describes, “of descriptions addressed to the fancy, those that are most vivid and picturesque will generally be found to have the most powerful influence over our affections.... No abstract notion of Time...can be so striking to the fancy, as the image of an old man accoutered with a scythe” (Wasserman, 457). The poem was published in *A Collection of Poems in Six Volumes. By Several Hands. Vol. III* by Robert Dodsley in 1758, a year after Hoadly's death. Who Chloe is, along with the reception of the poem, remains uncertain. However, we can speculate that “Chloe” was a type name for Hoadly's wife at the time, Elizabeth Betts.

Further Reading

Filippo, David San. “Historical Perspectives on Attitudes Concerning Death and Dying.”
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References

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"Benjamin Hoadley." Royal College of Physicians, *RCP Museum*, 2019.

Wasserman, Earl R. "The Inherent Values of Eighteenth-Century Personification." *PMLA*, vol. 65, no. 4, June 1950, pp. 435–463

To Chloe. Written on my Birth-Day, 1734¹⁰¹

THE minutes, the hours, the days, and the years,
 That fill up the current of Time,
 Neither flowing with hopes, neither ebbing with fears,
 Unheeded roll'd on to my prime.

In infancy prattling, in youth full of play, 5
 Still pleas'd with whatever was new,
 I bad² the old cripple³ fly swifter away,
 To o'ertake some gay trifle⁴ in view.

But when CHLOE, with sweetness and sense in her look, 10
 First taught me the lesson of love;
 Then I counted each step the wing'd fugitive took,
 And bad him more leisurely move.

Stop, run-away, stop, nor thy journey pursue,
 For CHLOE has gi'en me her heart:
 To enjoy it thy years will prove many too few, 15
 If you make so much haste to depart.

Still, still he flies on — still, still let him fly
 'Till he's tired, and panting for breath;
 My love both his teeth and his scythe shall defy—
 That can only be conquer'd by Death. 20

¹⁰¹ *A Collection of Poems in Six Volumes. By Several Hands*, edited by Robert Dodsley, Vol. 3, printed by J. Hughs, 1763, pp. 270–271; *Eighteenth-Century Poetry Archive*.

² *Bad*: ordered; sometimes spelt as “bade.”

³ *Cripple*: someone whose mobility is hindered by age, disability, or injury (in this case Time).

⁴ *Gay trifle*: something that is pleasant to look at, but lacks substance.



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