

John Gerrard

Chelsea Ivanich, Simon Fraser University

Little is known about the life of John Gerrard. What can be identified is that he was a member of the clergy, a curate, and presided over a parish in Devon, England known as Withycombe in the Moor. The name for this parish is now Widecombe in the Moor. Gerrard is credited with one published work titled *Poems, by John Gerrard, Curate of Withycombe in the Moor, Devon* (1769), and he may have been the same John Gerrard to produce *Siglarium Romanum*, which is a dictionary that deals with Latin abbreviations. However, there is not a definitive connection between the two, besides their shared moniker and an affiliation with the Church of England (Baines et al. 172).

His collection of seventeen poems contains elegies, epistles, a translation, and a pastoral, among other genres. The collection was distributed to his subscribers and, though they were few, some took more than one copy. The *London Magazine* pronounced John Gerard “to have two qualifications, which must always give a writer consequence with the public, good sense and modesty” (“*Poems*” 209).

Gerrard’s poem in this anthology, titled “A Song,” is a musing on youth long past and aging. It is written in anapestic trimeter and follows a rhyme scheme of abab.

Further Reading

Morris, David B. *The Religious Sublime: Christian Poetry and Critical Tradition in Eighteenth-Century England*. UP of Kentucky, 2014.

Spacks, Patricia M. *Reading Eighteenth-Century Poetry*. Wiley Blackwell, 2009, pp. 221–236.

Jacob, W M. *The Clerical Profession in the Long Eighteenth Century 1680-1840*. Oxford UP, 2007.

References

Baines, Paul, et al. “John Gerrard.” *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Eighteenth-Century Writers and Writing 1660–1789*. 2010, p. 172. *Wiley Online Library*.

“*Poems*, by John Gerrard, Curate of W[i]thycombe in the Moor, Devon.” Anonymous review, *London Magazine, Or, Gentleman's Monthly Intelligencer, 1747–1783*, vol. 39, 1770, pp. 209–10.

A Song²³⁸

YE scenes that engag'd my gay²³⁹ youth,

Say, whither so fast do ye fly?

If the lesson you told me was truth,

Ah! why do ye fade from my eye?

That meadow where often I stray'd,

5

That bank, and yon shadowy tree,

Those streams, with such fondness survey'd,

Have hid all their sweetness from me.

Yon hill that uprears his smooth head,

Where the wild-thyme its fragrance bestows,

10

Whose verdures²⁴⁰ have rose from my bed,

And whose breezes have sigh'd my repose.

What tho' from his summit so high.

Flock, cottage, and woodland are seen;

Yet no more I with fondness descry,²⁴¹

15

For indifference rises between.

Ah! whither, ye sweets, do ye fly?

For fancy²⁴² your absence must mourn;

Ah! say, will ye fade from my eye,

And yet will ye never return?

20

²³⁸ *Poems: By John Gerrard, Curate of Withycombe in the Moor, Devon*, sold by G. Kearsley, 1769, pp.75-6, *Internet Archive*.

²³⁹ *Gay*: "light-hearted, carefree" (*OED*).

²⁴⁰ *Verdures*: green vegetation.

²⁴¹ *Descry*: glimpse.

²⁴² *Fancy*: imagination.

That valley, whose mantle so gay,
 Is with primrose and cowslip o'erspread;
 No longer invites me to stray,
 And rifle²⁴³ the sweets of their bed.

Not odious at present they look; 25
 I discern that their colours are bright;
 But their charms have my fancy forsook,
 And their fragrance forgot to delight.

To my cooler attention how dear
 The soothing complaint of the dove! 30
 I have left my companions to hear
 The wood-linnet warble her love.

Nor these can my footsteps retard;²⁴⁴
 Or if round me they carelessly fly,
 From mine eyes they attract no regard, 35
 And my ears their soft warblings deny.

Ah! sure 'tis the bus'ness of life,
 That bids those endearments depart;
 To involve us in cares and in strife,
 That estrange and entangle the heart. 40

With destiny all must comply;
 Yet cannot my fancy but mourn,

²⁴³ *Rifle*: to search with an intent to steal

²⁴⁴ *Retard*: slow.

For the season that fades from my eye,
And the sweets that must never return.



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