ANNA LETITIA BARBAULD

Life

Animula, vagula, blandula.¹

Life! I know not what thou art,
But know that thou and I must part;
And when, or how, or where we met,
I own to me's a secret yet.

But this I know, when thou art fled,
Where'er they lay these limbs, this head,
No clod so valueless shall be,
As all that then remains of me.

O whither, whither dost thou fly,
Where bend unseen thy trackless course,
And in this strange divorce,
Ah tell where I must seek this compound I?

To the vast ocean of empyreal flame,
From whence thy essence came,
Dost thou thy flight pursue, when freed
From matter's base encumbering weed?
Or dost thou, hid from sight,
Wait, like some spell-bound knight,
Through blank oblivious years th' appointed hour,
To break thy trance and reassume thy power?

Yet canst thou without thought or feeling be?
O say what art thou, when no more thou 'rt thee?

Life! we've been long together,
Through pleasant and through cloudy weather;
'Tis hard to part when friends are dear;
Perhaps 't will cost a sigh, a tear;
Then steal away, give little warning,
Choose thine own time;
Say not Good night, but in some brighter clime
Bid me Good morning.

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¹ From Aelius Spartianus's Life of Hadrian 25—the first line of a poem supposedly composed by the emperor Hadrian on his deathbed: “Charming little soul, hastening away.”