

Selected Odes
by John Keats

Ode on a Grecian Urn
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- 1 Thou still unravished bride of quietness,
Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,
Sylvan historian, who canst thus express
A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:
What leaf-fringed legend haunts about thy shape
Of deities or mortals, or of both,
In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?
What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?
What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
- 10 What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?
Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;
Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd,
Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone:
Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave
Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;
Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
Though winning near the goal—yet, do not grieve;
She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
- 20 For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!
Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed
Your leaves, nor ever bid the Spring adieu;
And, happy melodist, unwearied,
For ever piping songs for ever new;
More happy love! more happy, happy love!
For ever warm and still to be enjoyed,
For ever panting, and for ever young;
All breathing human passion far above,
That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloyed,
- 30 A burning forehead, and a parching tongue.
Who are these coming to the sacrifice?
To what green altar, O mysterious priest,
Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,

And all her silken flanks with garlands drest?
What little town by river or sea shore,
Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,
Is emptied of this folk, this pious morn?
And, little town, thy streets for evermore
40 Will silent be; and not a soul to tell
O Attic shape! Fair attitude! with brede
Of marble men and maidens overwrought,
With forest branches and the trodden weed;
Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought
As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral!
When old age shall this generation waste,
Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st,
"Beauty is truth, truth beauty,"—that is all
50 Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

Ode to a Nightingale

1 My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:
'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,
But being too happy in thine happiness,—
That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees,
In some melodious plot
Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,
10 Singest of summer in full-throated ease.
O, for a draught of vintage! that hath been
Cooled a long age in the deep-delved earth,
Tasting of Flora and the country green,
Dance, and Provençal song, and sunburnt mirth!
O for a beaker full of the warm South,
Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene¹,
With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,
And purple-stained mouth;
That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,

¹ *Hippocrene* a spring that provided inspiration

20 And with thee fade away into the forest dim:

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
What thou among the leaves hast never known,
The weariness, the fever, and the fret
Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,
Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
And leaden-eyed despairs,
Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,

30 Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.

Away! away! for I will fly to thee,
Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards²,
But on the viewless wings of Poesy³,
Though the dull brain perplexes and retards:
Already with thee! tender is the night,
And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,
Clustered around by all her starry Fays⁴;

But here there is no light,
Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown

40 Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways.

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,
But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet
Wherewith the seasonable month endows
The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;
White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;
Fast fading violets cover'd up in leaves;

And mid-May's eldest child,
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,

50 The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.

Darkling I listen; and, for many a time
I have been half in love with easeful Death,
Called him soft names in many a mused rhyme,
To take into the air my quiet breath;

² *pards* Bacchus was associated with leopards.

³ *Poesy* poetry

⁴ *Fays* fairies

Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
In such an ecstasy!

Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—
60 To thy high requiem become a sod.

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
No hungry generations tread thee down;
The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown:
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth⁵, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn;

The same that oft-times hath
Charmed magic casements, opening on the foam
70 Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

Forlorn! the very word is like a bell
To toll me back from thee to my sole self!
Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well
As she is famed to do, deceiving elf.
Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades
Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep

In the next valley-glades:
Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
80 Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep?

Ode to Psyche

1 O Goddess! hear these tuneless numbers, wrung
By sweet enforcement and remembrance dear,
And pardon that thy secrets should be sung
Even into thine own soft-conched ear:
Surely I dreamt to-day, or did I see
The winged Psyche with awakened eyes?
I wandered in a forest thoughtlessly,

⁵ *Ruth* The story of Ruth is told in the Book of Ruth found in the Old Testament. She was a Moabite widow who followed her mother-in-law Naomi to Bethlehem where Ruth gleaned from the field in order to “find grace” in the sight of Naomi’s kinsman Boaz, whom she eventually marries. She is the mother of Obed, who is the grandfather of King David.

And, on the sudden, fainting with surprise,
 Saw two fair creatures, couched side by side
 10 In deepest grass, beneath the whisp'ring roof
 Of leaves and trembled blossoms, where there ran
 A brooklet, scarce espied:
 'Mid hushed, cool-rooted flowers, fragrant-eyed,
 Blue, silver-white, and budded Tyrian⁶,
 They lay calm-breathing on the bedded grass;
 Their arms embraced, and their pinions too;
 Their lips touched not, but had not bade adieu,
 As if disjoined by soft-handed slumber,
 And ready still past kisses to outnumber
 20 At tender eye-dawn of aurorean love:
 The winged boy⁷ I knew;
 But who wast thou, O happy, happy dove?
 His Psyche true!

 O latest born and loveliest vision far
 Of all Olympus' faded hierarchy!
 Fairer than Phoebe's⁸ sapphire-regioned star,
 Or Vesper⁹, amorous glow-worm of the sky;
 Fairer than these, though temple thou hast none,
 Nor altar heaped with flowers;
 30 Nor virgin-choir to make delicious moan
 Upon the midnight hours;
 No voice, no lute, no pipe, no incense sweet
 From chain-swung censer teeming;
 No shrine, no grove, no oracle, no heat
 Of pale-mouthed prophet dreaming.

 O brightest! though too late for antique vows,
 Too, too late for the fond believing lyre,
 When holy were the haunted forest boughs,
 Holy the air, the water, and the fire;
 40 Yet even in these days so far retired

⁶ *Tyrian* purple

⁷ *the winged boy* Cupid, or Eros

⁸ *Phoebe's* Diana's, or Artemis's

⁹ *Vesper*. *Vesper* is the Roman name for Hesperus, who was the evening star Venus.

From happy pieties, thy lucent¹⁰ fans,
Fluttering among the faint Olympians,
I see, and sing, by my own eyes inspired.
So let me be thy choir, and make a moan
Upon the midnight hours;
Thy voice, thy lute, thy pipe, thy incense sweet
From swung censer teeming;
Thy shrine, thy grove, thy oracle, thy heat
Of pale-mouthed prophet dreaming.

- 50 Yes, I will be thy priest, and build a fane¹¹
In some untrodden region of my mind,
Where branched thoughts, new grown with pleasant pain,
Instead of pines shall murmur in the wind:
Far, far around shall those dark-clustered trees
Fledge the wild-ridged mountains steep by steep;
And there by zephyrs, streams, and birds, and bees,
The moss-lain Dryads shall be lulled to sleep;
And in the midst of this wide quietness
A rosy sanctuary will I dress
- 60 With the wreathed trellis of a working brain,
With buds, and bells, and stars without a name,
With all the gardener Fancy e'er could feign,
Who breeding flowers, will never breed the same:
And there shall be for thee all soft delight
That shadowy thought can win,
A bright torch, and a casement ope at night,
To let the warm Love in!

Ode to Melancholy

- 1 No, no, go not to Lethe, neither twist
Wolf's-bane, tight-rooted, for its poisonous wine;
Nor suffer thy pale forehead to be kissed
By nightshade, ruby grape of Proserpine;
Make not your rosary of yew-berries,
Nor let the beetle, nor the death-moth be
Your mournful Psyche, nor the downy owl

¹⁰ *lucent* shining

¹¹ *fane* temple

A partner in your sorrow's mysteries;
For shade to shade will come too drowsily,
10 And drown the wakeful anguish of the soul.

But when the melancholy fit shall fall
Sudden from heaven like a weeping cloud,
That fosters the droop-headed flowers all,
And hides the green hill in an April shroud;
Then glut thy sorrow on a morning rose,
Or on the rainbow of the salt sand-wave,
Or on the wealth of globed peonies;
Or if thy mistress some rich anger shows,
Emprison her soft hand, and let her rave,
20 And feed deep, deep upon her peerless eyes.

She dwells with Beauty—Beauty that must die;
And Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips
Bidding adieu; and aching Pleasure nigh,
Turning to poison while the bee-mouth sips:
Ay, in the very temple of Delight
Veiled Melancholy has her sovran shrine,
Though seen of none save him whose strenuous tongue
Can burst Joy's grape against his palate fine;
His soul shall taste the sadness of her might,
30 And be among her cloudy trophies hung.