

As she is fam'd to do, deceiving elf.
 75 Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem^o fades hymn
 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?

May 1819

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Ode on a Grecian Urn¹

I

Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,
 Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,
 Sylvan² historian, who canst thus express
 A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:
 5 What leaf-fring'd legend haunts about thy shape
 Of deities or mortals, or of both,
 In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?³
 What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?
 What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
 10 What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?

2

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
 Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;
 Not to the sensual ear,⁴ but, more endear'd,
 Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone:
 15 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!

3

Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed
 Your leaves, nor ever bid the spring adieu;
 And, happy melodist, unwearied,

1. Another poem that Keats published in Haydon's *Annals of the Fine Arts*. This urn, with its sculptured reliefs of revelry and panting young lovers in chase and in flight, of a pastoral piper under spring foliage, and of the quiet procession of priest and townspeople, resembles parts of various vases, sculptures, and paintings, but it existed in all its particulars only in Keats's imagination. In the urn—which captures moments of intense experience in attitudes of grace and immobilizes them in marble—Keats found the perfect correlative for his concern with the longing for permanence in a world of change. The interpretation of the details with which he develops this concept, however, is hotly disputed. The disputes begin with the open-

ing phrase: is "still" an adverb ("as yet"), or is it an adjective ("motionless"), as the punctuation of the *Annals* version, which adds a comma after "still," suggests? And the two concluding lines have accumulated as much critical discussion as the "two-handed engine" in Milton's "Lycidas" or the most difficult cruxes in Shakespeare's plays.

2. Rustic, representing a woodland scene.

3. The valleys of Arcadia, a state in ancient Greece often used as a symbol of the pastoral ideal. "Tempe": a beautiful valley in Greece that has come to represent rural beauty.

4. The ear of sense (as opposed to that of the "spirit," or imagination).

For ever piping songs for ever new;
 25 More happy love! more happy, happy love!
 For ever warm and still to be enjoy'd,
 For ever panting, and for ever young;
 All breathing human passion far above,
 That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd,
 30 A burning forehead, and a parching tongue.

4

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?
 35 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
 Will silent be; and not a soul to tell
 40 Why thou art desolate, can e'er return.

5

O Attic⁵ shape! Fair attitude!⁶ with brede
 Of marble men and maidens overwrought,⁷
 With forest branches and the trodden weed;
 Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought
 45 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,"⁸—that is all
 50 Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

1819

1820

Ode on Melancholy This is Keats's best-known statement of his recurrent theme of the mingled contrarities of life. The remarkable last stanza, in which Melancholy becomes a veiled goddess worshiped in secret religious rites, implies that it is the tragic human destiny that beauty, joy, and life itself owe not only their quality but their value to the fact that they are transitory and turn into their opposites. Melancholy—a synonym for depression, involving a paralyzing self-consciousness engendered by an excess of thought—is a highly literary and even bookish ailment, as Keats knew. Shakespeare's Hamlet and Milton's speaker in "Il Penseroso" are the

5. Greek. Attica was the region of Greece in which Athens was located.

6. Probably used in its early, technical sense: the pose struck by a figure in statuary or painting.

7. Ornamented all over ("overwrought") with an interwoven pattern ("brede"). The adjective "overwrought" might also modify "maidens" and even "men" and so hint at the emotional anguish of the figures portrayed on the urn.

8. The quotation marks around this phrase are found in the volume of poems Keats published in 1820, but there are no quotation marks in the version printed in *Annals of the Fine Arts* that same year or in the transcripts of the poem made by

Keats's friends. This discrepancy has multiplied the diversity of critical interpretations of the last two lines. Critics disagree whether the whole of these lines is said by the urn, or "Beauty is truth, truth beauty" by the urn and the rest by the lyric speaker; whether the "ye" in the last line is addressed to the lyric speaker, to the readers, to the urn, or to the figures on the urn; whether "all ye know" is that beauty is truth, or this plus the statement in lines 46–48; and whether "beauty is truth" is a profound metaphysical proposition, an overstatement representing the limited point of view of the urn, or simply nonsensical.

disorder's most famous sufferers. Keats was also an admirer of Robert Burton's encyclopedic *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621).

The poem once had the following initial stanza, which Keats canceled in manuscript:

Though you should build a bark of dead men's bones,
 And rear a phantom gibbet for a mast,
 Stitch creeds together for a sail, with groans
 To fill it out, bloodstained and aghast;
 Although your rudder be a Dragon's tail,
 Long sever'd, yet still hard with agony,
 Your cordage large uprootings from the skull
 Of bald Medusa: certes you would fail
 To find the Melancholy, whether she
 Dreameth in any isle of Lethe dull.

Ode on Melancholy

I

No, no, go not to Lethe,¹ neither twist
 Wolf's-bane, tight-rooted, for its poisonous wine;
 Nor suffer thy pale forehead to be kiss'd
 By nightshade, ruby grape of Proserpine;²
 5 Make not your rosary of yew-berries,³
 Nor let the beetle, nor the death-moth be
 Your mournful Psyche,⁴ nor the downy owl
 A partner in your sorrow's mysteries;⁵
 For shade to shade will come too drowsily,
 10 And drown the wakeful anguish of the soul.⁶

2

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;
 15 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,
 20 Emprison her soft hand, and let her rave,
 And feed deep, deep upon her peerless eyes.

3

She⁷ dwells with Beauty—Beauty that must die;
 And Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips
 Bidding adieu; and aching Pleasure nigh,

1. The waters of forgetfulness in Hades.

2. The wife of Pluto and queen of the underworld. "Nightshade" and "wolf's-bane" (line 2) are poisonous plants.

3. A symbol of death.

4. In ancient times Psyche (the soul) was sometimes represented as a butterfly or moth, fluttering out of the mouth of a dying man. The allusion may also be to the death's-head moth, which has skull-

like markings on its back. The "beetle" of line 6 refers to replicas of the large black beetle, the scarab, which were often placed by Egyptians in their tombs as a symbol of resurrection.

5. Secret rituals.

6. I.e., sorrow needs contrast to sustain its intensity.

7. Usually taken to refer to Melancholy rather than to "thy mistress" in line 18.

Turning to poison while the bee-mouth sips:
 25 Ay, in the very temple of Delight
 Veil'd Melancholy has her sovran shrine,
 Though seen of none save him whose strenuous tongue
 Can burst Joy's grape against his palate fine;⁸
 His soul shall taste the sadness of her might,
 30 And be among her cloudy trophies hung.⁹

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Ode on Indolence¹

"They toil not, neither do they spin."²

I

One morn before me were three figures seen,
 With bowed necks, and joined hands, side-faced;
 And one behind the other stepp'd serene,
 In placid sandals, and in white robes graced:
 5 They pass'd, like figures on a marble urn,
 When shifted round to see the other side;
 They came again: as when the urn once more
 Is shifted round, the first seen shades return;
 And they were strange to me, as may betide
 10 With vases, to one deep in Phidian³ lore.

2

How is it, shadows, that I knew ye not?
 How came ye muffled in so hush a masque?
 Was it a silent deep-disguised plot
 To steal away, and leave without a task
 15 My idle days? Ripe was the drowsy hour;
 The blissful cloud of summer-indolence
 Benumb'd my eyes; my pulse grew less and less;
 Pain had no sting, and pleasure's wreath no flower.
 O, why did ye not melt, and leave my sense
 20 Unhaunted quite of all but—nothingness?

3

A third time pass'd they by, and, passing, turn'd
 Each one the face a moment whiles to me;
 Then faded, and to follow them I burn'd
 And ached for wings, because I knew the three:
 25 The first was a fair maid, and Love her name;

8. Sensitive, refined.

9. A reference to the Greek and Roman practice of hanging trophies in the temples of the gods.

1. On March 19, 1819, Keats wrote to George and Georgiana Keats: "This morning I am in a sort of temper indolent and supremely careless. . . . Neither Poetry, nor Ambition, nor Love have any alertness of countenance as they pass by me: they seem rather like three figures on a greek vase—a Man and two women—whom no one but myself could distinguish in their disguisement. This is the only

happiness; and is a rare instance of advantage in the body overpowering the Mind." The ode was probably written soon after this time, but was not published until 1848, long after the poet's death.

2. Matthew 6.28. Christ's comment on the lilies of the field—a parable justifying those who trust to God rather than worry about how they will feed or clothe themselves.

3. Phidias was the great Athenian sculptor of the 5th century B.C.E. who designed the marble sculptures for the Parthenon.