

Ode on a Grecian Urn and Other Poems

John Keats

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Ode on a Grecian Urn and Other Poems

John Keats

BRIGHT STAR, WOULD I WERE STEADFAST AS THOU ART

Bright star, would I were stedfast as thou art--

Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night
And watching, with eternal lids apart,

Like nature's patient, sleepless Eremite,
The moving waters at their priestlike task

Of pure ablution round earth's human shores,
Or gazing on the new soft-fallen mask

Of snow upon the mountains and the moors--
No--yet still stedfast, still unchangeable,

Pillow'd upon my fair love's ripening breast,
To feel for ever its soft fall and swell,

Awake for ever in a sweet unrest,
Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,
And so live ever--or else swoon to death.

THE EVE OF ST. AGNES

St. Agnes' Eve--Ah, bitter chill it was!

The owl, for all his feathers, was a-cold;
The hare limp'd trembling through the frozen grass,
And silent was the flock in woolly fold:
Numb were the Beadsman's fingers, while he told
His rosary, and while his frosted breath,
Like pious incense from a censer old,
Seem'd taking flight for heaven, without a death,
Past the sweet Virgin's picture, while his prayer he saith.

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His prayer he saith, this patient, holy man;
Then takes his lamp, and riseth from his knees,
And back returneth, meagre, barefoot, wan,
Along the chapel aisle by slow degrees:
The sculptur'd dead, on each side, seem to freeze,
Emprison'd in black, purgatorial rails:
Knights, ladies, praying in dumb orat'ries,
He passeth by; and his weak spirit fails
To think how they may ache in icy hoods and mails.

Northward he turneth through a little door,
And scarce three steps, ere Music's golden tongue
Flatter'd to tears this aged man and poor;
But no—already had his deathbell rung;
The joys of all his life were said and sung:
His was harsh penance on St. Agnes' Eve:
Another way he went, and soon among
Rough ashes sat he for his soul's reprieve,
And all night kept awake, for sinners' sake to grieve.

That ancient Beadsman heard the prelude soft;
And so it chanc'd, for many a door was wide,
From hurry to and fro. Soon, up aloft,
The silver, snarling trumpets 'gan to chide:
The level chambers, ready with their pride,
Were glowing to receive a thousand guests:
The carved angels, ever eager-eyed,

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Star'd, where upon their heads the cornice rests,
With hair blown back, and wings put cross-wise on their breasts.

At length burst in the argent revelry,
With plume, tiara, and all rich array,
Numerous as shadows haunting faerily
The brain, new stuff'd, in youth, with triumphs gay
Of old romance. These let us wish away,
And turn, sole-thoughted, to one Lady there,
Whose heart had brooded, all that wintry day,

On love, and wing'd St. Agnes' saintly care,
As she had heard old dames full many times declare.

They told her how, upon St. Agnes' Eve,
Young virgins might have visions of delight,
And soft adorings from their loves receive
Upon the honey'd middle of the night,
If ceremonies due they did aright;
As, supperless to bed they must retire,
And couch supine their beauties, lily white;
Nor look behind, nor sideways, but require
Of Heaven with upward eyes for all that they desire.

Full of this whim was thoughtful Madeline:
The music, yearning like a God in pain,
She scarcely heard: her maiden eyes divine,
Fix'd on the floor, saw many a sweeping train
Pass by—she heeded not at all: in vain
Came many a tiptoe, amorous cavalier,

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And back retir'd; not cool'd by high disdain,

But she saw not: her heart was elsewhere:
She sigh'd for Agnes' dreams, the sweetest of the year.

She danc'd along with vague, regardless eyes,

Anxious her lips, her breathing quick and short:

The hallow'd hour was near at hand: she sighs

Amid the timbrels, and the throng'd resort

Of whisperers in anger, or in sport;

'Mid looks of love, defiance, hate, and scorn,

Hoodwink'd with faery fancy; all amot,

Save to St. Agnes and her lambs unshorn,
And all the bliss to be before to-morrow morn.

So, purposing each moment to retire,

She linger'd still. Meantime, across the moors,

Had come young Porphyro, with heart on fire

For Madeline. Beside the portal doors,

Buttress'd from moonlight, stands he, and implores

All saints to give him sight of Madeline,

But for one moment in the tedious hours,

That he might gaze and worship all unseen;
Perchance speak, kneel, touch, kiss—in sooth such things have been.

He ventures in: let no buzz'd whisper tell:

All eyes be muffled, or a hundred swords

Will storm his heart, Love's fev'rous citadel:

For him, those chambers held barbarian hordes,

Hyena foemen, and hot-blooded lords,

Ode on a Grecian Urn and Other Poems

Whose very dogs would execrations howl
Against his lineage: not one breast affords
Him any mercy, in that mansion foul,
Save one old beldame, weak in body and in soul.

Ah, happy chance! the aged creature came,
Shuffling along with ivory-headed wand,
To where he stood, hid from the torch's flame,
Behind a broad half-pillar, far beyond
The sound of merriment and chorus bland:
He startled her; but soon she knew his face,
And grasp'd his fingers in her palsied hand,
Saying, "Mercy, Porphyro! hie thee from this place;
They are all here to-night, the whole blood-thirsty race!

"Get hence! get hence! there's dwarfish Hildebrand;
He had a fever late, and in the fit
He cursed thee and thine, both house and land:
Then there's that old Lord Maurice, not a whit
More tame for his gray hairs—Alas me! flit!
Flit like a ghost away."—"Ah, Gossip dear,
We're safe enough; here in this arm-chair sit,
And tell me how"—"Good Saints! not here, not here;
Follow me, child, or else these stones will be thy bier."

He follow'd through a lowly arched way,
Brushing the cobwebs with his lofty plume,
And as she mutter'd "Well—a--well—a-day!"

Ode on a Grecian Urn and Other Poems

He found him in a little moonlight room,

Pale, lattic'd, chill, and silent as a tomb.

"Now tell me where is Madeline," said he,

"O tell me, Angela, by the holy loom

Which none but secret sisterhood may see,
When they St. Agnes' wool are weaving piously."

"St. Agnes! Ah! it is St. Agnes' Eve--

Yet men will murder upon holy days:

Thou must hold water in a witch's sieve,

And be liege-lord of all the Elves and Fays,

To venture so: it fills me with amaze

To see thee, Porphyro!--St. Agnes' Eve!

God's help! my lady fair the conjuror plays

This very night: good angels her deceive!
But let me laugh awhile, I've mickle time to grieve."

Feebly she laugheth in the languid moon,

While Porphyro upon her face doth look,

Like puzzled urchin on an aged crone

Who keepeth clos'd a wond'rous riddle-book,

As spectacled she sits in chimney nook.

But soon his eyes grew brilliant, when she told

His lady's purpose; and he scarce could brook

Tears, at the thought of those enchantments cold,
And Madeline asleep in lap of legends old.

Sudden a thought came like a full-blown rose,

Flushing his brow, and in his pained heart

Ode on a Grecian Urn and Other Poems

Made purple riot: then doth he propose
A stratagem, that makes the beldame start:
"A cruel man and impious thou art:
Sweet lady, let her pray, and sleep, and dream
Alone with her good angels, far apart
From wicked men like thee. Go, go!—I deem
Thou canst not surely be the same that thou didst seem."

"I will not harm her, by all saints I swear,"
Quoth Porphyro: "O may I ne'er find grace
When my weak voice shall whisper its last prayer,
If one of her soft ringlets I displace,
Or look with ruffian passion in her face:
Good Angela, believe me by these tears;
Or I will, even in a moment's space,
Awake, with horrid shout, my foemen's ears,
And beard them, though they be more fang'd than wolves and bears."

"Ah! why wilt thou affright a feeble soul?
A poor, weak, palsy-stricken, churchyard thing,
Whose passing-bell may ere the midnight toll;
Whose prayers for thee, each morn and evening,
Were never miss'd."—Thus plaining, doth she bring
A gentler speech from burning Porphyro;
So woful, and of such deep sorrowing,
That Angela gives promise she will do
Whatever he shall wish, betide her weal or woe.

Ode on a Grecian Urn and Other Poems

Which was, to lead him, in close secrecy,
Even to Madeline's chamber, and there hide
Him in a closet, of such privacy
That he might see her beauty unesp'y'd,
And win perhaps that night a peerless bride,
While legion'd faeries pac'd the coverlet,
And pale enchantment held her sleepy-ey'd.
Never on such a night have lovers met,
Since Merlin paid his Demon all the monstrous debt.

"It shall be as thou wishest," said the Dame:
"All cates and dainties shall be stored there
Quickly on this feast-night: by the tambour frame
Her own lute thou wilt see: no time to spare,
For I am slow and feeble, and scarce dare
On such a catering trust my dizzy head.
Wait here, my child, with patience; kneel in prayer
The while: Ah! thou must needs the lady wed,
Or may I never leave my grave among the dead."

So saying, she hobbled off with busy fear.
The lover's endless minutes slowly pass'd;
The dame return'd, and whisper'd in his ear
To follow her; with aged eyes aghast
From fright of dim espial. Safe at last,
Through many a dusky gallery, they gain
The maiden's chamber, silken, hush'd, and chaste;
Where Porphyro took covert, pleas'd amain.

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His poor guide hurried back with agues in her brain.

Her falt'ring hand upon the balustrade,
Old Angela was feeling for the stair,
When Madeline, St. Agnes' charmed maid,
Rose, like a mission'd spirit, unaware:
With silver taper's light, and pious care,
She turn'd, and down the aged gossip led
To a safe level matting. Now prepare,

Young Porphyro, for gazing on that bed;
She comes, she comes again, like ring-dove fray'd and fled.

Out went the taper as she hurried in;
Its little smoke, in pallid moonshine, died:
She clos'd the door, she panted, all akin
To spirits of the air, and visions wide:
No uttered syllable, or, woe betide!
But to her heart, her heart was voluble,
Paining with eloquence her balmy side;

As though a tongueless nightingale should swell
Her throat in vain, and die, heart-stifled, in her dell.

A casement high and triple-arch'd there was,
All garlanded with carven imag'ries
Of fruits, and flowers, and bunches of knot-grass,
And diamonded with panes of quaint device,
Innumerable of stains and splendid dyes,
As are the tiger-moth's deep-damask'd wings;

Ode on a Grecian Urn and Other Poems

And in the midst, 'mong thousand heraldries,

And twilight saints, and dim emblazonings,
A shielded scutcheon blush'd with blood of queens and kings.

Full on this casement shone the wintry moon,

And threw warm gules on Madeline's fair breast,

As down she knelt for heaven's grace and boon;

Rose-bloom fell on her hands, together prest,

And on her silver cross soft amethyst,

And on her hair a glory, like a saint:

She seem'd a splendid angel, newly drest,

Save wings, for heaven:—Porphyro grew faint:
She knelt, so pure a thing, so free from mortal taint.

Anon his heart revives: her vespers done,

Of all its wreathed pearls her hair she frees;

Uncasps her warmed jewels one by one;

Loosens her fragrant boddice; by degrees

Her rich attire creeps rustling to her knees:

Half-hidden, like a mermaid in sea-weed,

Pensive awhile she dreams awake, and sees,

In fancy, fair St. Agnes in her bed,
But dares not look behind, or all the charm is fled.

Soon, trembling in her soft and chilly nest,

In sort of wakeful swoon, perplex'd she lay,

Until the poppied warmth of sleep oppress'd

Her soothed limbs, and soul fatigued away;

Flown, like a thought, until the morrow-day;

Ode on a Grecian Urn and Other Poems

Blissfully haven'd both from joy and pain;
Clasp'd like a missal where swart Paynims pray;
Blinded alike from sunshine and from rain,
As though a rose should shut, and be a bud again.

Stol'n to this paradise, and so entranced,
Porphyro gaz'd upon her empty dress,
And listen'd to her breathing, if it chanced
To wake into a slumberous tenderness;
Which when he heard, that minute did he bless,
And breath'd himself: then from the closet crept,
Noiseless as fear in a wide wilderness,
And over the hush'd carpet, silent, stept,
And 'tween the curtains peep'd, where, lo!--how fast she slept.

Then by the bed-side, where the faded moon
Made a dim, silver twilight, soft he set
A table, and, half anguish'd, threw thereon
A cloth of woven crimson, gold, and jet:--
O for some drowsy Morphean amulet!
The boisterous, midnight, festive clarion,
The kettle-drum, and far-heard clarinet,
Affray his ears, though but in dying tone:--
The hall door shuts again, and all the noise is gone.

And still she slept an azure-lidded sleep,
In blanched linen, smooth, and lavender'd,
While he forth from the closet brought a heap

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Of candied apple, quince, and plum, and gourd;
With jellies soother than the creamy curd,
And lucent syrups, tinct with cinnamon;
Manna and dates, in argosy transferr'd
From Fez; and spiced dainties, every one,
From silken Samarcand to cedar'd Lebanon.

These delicacies he heap'd with glowing hand
On golden dishes and in baskets bright
Of wreathed silver: sumptuous they stand
In the retired quiet of the night,
Filling the chilly room with perfume light.—
"And now, my love, my seraph fair, awake!
Thou art my heaven, and I thine eremite:
Open thine eyes, for meek St. Agnes' sake,
Or I shall drowse beside thee, so my soul doth ache."

Thus whispering, his warm, unnerved arm
Sank in her pillow. Shaded was her dream
By the dusk curtains:—'twas a midnight charm
Impossible to melt as iced stream:
The lustrous salvers in the moonlight gleam;
Broad golden fringe upon the carpet lies:
It seem'd he never, never could redeem
From such a steadfast spell his lady's eyes;
So mus'd awhile, entoil'd in woofed phantasies.

Awakening up, he took her hollow lute,—
Tumultuous,—and, in chords that tenderest be,

Ode on a Grecian Urn and Other Poems

He play'd an ancient ditty, long since mute,
In Provence call'd, "La belle dame sans mercy":
Close to her ear touching the melody;—
Wherewith disturb'd, she utter'd a soft moan:
He ceas'd—she panted quick—and suddenly
Her blue affrayed eyes wide open shone:
Upon his knees he sank, pale as smooth-sculptured stone.

Her eyes were open, but she still beheld,
Now wide awake, the vision of her sleep:
There was a painful change, that night expell'd
The blisses of her dream so pure and deep
At which fair Madeline began to weep,
And moan forth witless words with many a sigh;
While still her gaze on Porphyro would keep;
Who knelt, with joined hands and piteous eye,
Fearing to move or speak, she look'd so dreamingly.

"Ah, Porphyro!" said she, "but even now
Thy voice was at sweet tremble in mine ear,
Made tuneable with every sweetest vow;
And those sad eyes were spiritual and clear:
How chang'd thou art! how pallid, chill, and drear!
Give me that voice again, my Porphyro,
Those looks immortal, those complainings dear!
Oh leave me not in this eternal woe,
For if thy diest, my Love, I know not where to go."

Ode on a Grecian Urn and Other Poems

Beyond a mortal man impassion'd far
At these voluptuous accents, he arose
Ethereal, flush'd, and like a throbbing star
Seen mid the sapphire heaven's deep repose;
Into her dream he melted, as the rose
Blendeth its odour with the violet,—
Solution sweet: meantime the frost-wind blows
Like Love's alarum pattering the sharp sleet
Against the window-panes; St. Agnes' moon hath set.

"Tis dark: quick pattereth the flaw-blown sleet:

"This is no dream, my bride, my Madeline!"

"Tis dark: the iced gusts still rave and beat:

"No dream, alas! alas! and woe is mine!

Porphyro will leave me here to fade and pine.—

Cruel! what traitor could thee hither bring?

I curse not, for my heart is lost in thine,

Though thou forsakest a deceived thing;—
A dove forlorn and lost with sick unpruned wing."

"My Madeline! sweet dreamer! lovely bride!

Say, may I be for aye thy vassal blest?

Thy beauty's shield, heart-shap'd and vermeil dyed?

Ah, silver shrine, here will I take my rest

After so many hours of toil and quest,

A famish'd pilgrim,—sav'd by miracle.

Though I have found, I will not rob thy nest

Saving of thy sweet self; if thou think'st well

Ode on a Grecian Urn and Other Poems

To trust, fair Madeline, to no rude infidel.

"Hark! 'tis an elfin-storm from faery land,

Of haggard seeming, but a boon indeed:

Arise--arise! the morning is at hand;--

The bloated wassaillers will never heed:--

Let us away, my love, with happy speed;

There are no ears to hear, or eyes to see,--

Drown'd all in Rhenish and the sleepy mead:

Awake! arise! my love, and fearless be,
For o'er the southern moors I have a home for thee."

She hurried at his words, beset with fears,

For there were sleeping dragons all around,

At glaring watch, perhaps, with ready spears--

Down the wide stairs a darkling way they found.--

In all the house was heard no human sound.

A chain-droop'd lamp was flickering by each door;

The arras, rich with horseman, hawk, and hound,

Flutter'd in the besieging wind's uproar;
And the long carpets rose along the gusty floor.

They glide, like phantoms, into the wide hall;

Like phantoms, to the iron porch, they glide;

Where lay the Porter, in uneasy sprawl,

With a huge empty flaggon by his side:

The wakeful bloodhound rose, and shook his hide,

But his sagacious eye an inmate owns:

Ode on a Grecian Urn and Other Poems

By one, and one, the bolts full easy slide:—

The chains lie silent on the footworn stones;—
The key turns, and the door upon its hinges groans.

And they are gone: aye, ages long ago

These lovers fled away into the storm.

That night the Baron dreamt of many a woe,

And all his warrior-guests, with shade and form

Of witch, and demon, and large coffin-worm,

Were long be-nightmar'd. Angela the old

Died palsy-twitch'd, with meagre face deform;

The Beadsman, after thousand aves told,
For aye unsought for slept among his ashes cold.

FANCY

Ever let the Fancy roam,
Pleasure never is at home:
At a touch sweet Pleasure melteth,
Like to bubbles when rain pelteth;
Then let winged Fancy wander
Through the thought still spread beyond her:
Open wide the mind's cage-door,
She'll dart forth, and cloudward soar.
O sweet Fancy! let her loose;
Summer's joys are spoilt by use,
And the enjoying of the Spring
Fades as does its blossoming;
Autumn's red-lipp'd fruitage too,
Blushing through the mist and dew,
Cloys with tasting: What do then?
Sit thee by the ingle, when
The sear faggot blazes bright,
Spirit of a winter's night;

Ode on a Grecian Urn and Other Poems

When the soundless earth is muffled,
And the caked snow is shuffled
From the ploughboy's heavy shoon;
When the Night doth meet the Noon
In a dark conspiracy
To banish Even from her sky.
Sit thee there, and send abroad,
With a mind self-overaw'd,
Fancy, high-commission'd:—send her!
She has vassals to attend her:
She will bring, in spite of frost,
Beauties that the earth hath lost;
She will bring thee, all together,
All delights of summer weather;
All the buds and bells of May,
From dewy sward or thorny spray;
All the heaped Autumn's wealth,
With a still, mysterious stealth:
She will mix these pleasures up
Like three fit wines in a cup,
And thou shalt quaff it:—thou shalt hear
Distant harvest-carols clear;
Rustle of the reaped corn;
Sweet birds antheming the morn:
And, in the same moment, hark!
'Tis the early April lark,
Or the rooks, with busy caw,
Foraging for sticks and straw.
Thou shalt, at one glance, behold
The daisy and the marigold;
White-plum'd lillies, and the first
Hedge-grown primrose that hath burst;
Shaded hyacinth, alway
Sapphire queen of the mid-May;
And every leaf, and every flower
Pearled with the self-same shower.
Thou shalt see the field-mouse peep
Meagre from its celled sleep;
And the snake all winter-thin
Cast on sunny bank its skin;
Freckled nest-eggs thou shalt see

Hatching in the hawthorn-tree,
When the hen-bird's wing doth rest
Quiet on her mossy nest;
Then the hurry and alarm
When the bee-hive casts its swarm;
Acorns ripe down-pattering,
While the autumn breezes sing.

Ode on a Grecian Urn and Other Poems

Oh, sweet Fancy! let her loose;
Every thing is spoilt by use:
Where's the cheek that doth not fade,
Too much gaz'd at? Where's the maid
Whose lip mature is ever new?
Where's the eye, however blue,
Doth not weary? Where's the face
One would meet in every place?
Where's the voice, however soft,
One would hear so very oft?
At a touch sweet Pleasure melteth
Like to bubbles when rain pelteth.
Let, then, winged Fancy find
Thee a mistress to thy mind:
Dulcet—ey'd as Ceres' daughter,
Ere the God of Torment taught her
How to frown and how to chide;
With a waist and with a side
White as Hebe's, when her zone
Slipt its golden clasp, and down
Fell her kirtle to her feet,
While she held the goblet sweet
And Jove grew languid.—Break the mesh
Of the Fancy's silken leash;
Quickly break her prison—string
And such joys as these she'll bring.—
Let the winged Fancy roam,
Pleasure never is at home.

THE HUMAN SEASONS

Four Seasons fill the measure of the year;
There are four seasons in the mind of man:
He has his lusty Spring, when fancy clear
Takes in all beauty with an easy span:
He has his Summer, when luxuriously
Spring's honied cud of youthful thought he loves
To ruminate, and by such dreaming high
Is nearest unto heaven: quiet coves
His soul has in its Autumn, when his wings

He furleth close; contented so to look
On mists in idleness—to let fair things

Ode on a Grecian Urn and Other Poems

Pass by unheeded as a threshold brook.
He has his Winter too of pale misfeature,
Or else he would forego his mortal nature.

IF BY DULL RHYMES OUR ENGLISH MUST BE CHAIN'D

If by dull rhymes our English must be chain'd,
And, like Andromeda, the Sonnet sweet
Fetter'd, in spite of pained loveliness;
Let us find out, if we must be constrain'd,
Sandals more interwoven and complete
To fit the naked foot of poesy;
Let us inspect the lyre, and weigh the stress
Of every chord, and see what may be gain'd
By ear industrious, and attention meet:
Misers of sound and syllable, no less

Than Midas of his coinage, let us be

Jealous of dead leaves in the bay wreath crown;
So, if we may not let the Muse be free,

She will be bound with garlands of her own.

LA BELLE DAME SANS MERCI

Ah, what can ail thee, wretched wight,
Alone and palely loitering;
The sedge is wither'd from the lake,
And no birds sing.

Ah, what can ail thee, wretched wight,
So haggard and so woe-begone?
The squirrel's granary is full,
And the harvest's done.

I see a lily on thy brow,

With anguish moist and fever dew;
And on thy cheek a fading rose

Ode on a Grecian Urn and Other Poems

Fast withereth too.

I met a lady in the meads

Full beautiful, a faery's child;
Her hair was long, her foot was light,

And her eyes were wild.

I set her on my pacing steed,

And nothing else saw all day long;
For sideways would she lean, and sing

A faery's song.

I made a garland for her head,

And bracelets too, and fragrant zone;
She look'd at me as she did love,

And made sweet moan.

She found me roots of relish sweet,

And honey wild, and manna dew;
And sure in language strange she said,

I love thee true.

She took me to her elfin grot,

And there she gaz'd and sighed deep,
And there I shut her wild sad eyes--

So kiss'd to sleep.

And there we slumber'd on the moss,

And there I dream'd, ah woe betide,
The latest dream I ever dream'd

On the cold hill side.

I saw pale kings, and princes too,

Pale warriors, death-pale were they all;
Who cry'd--"La belle Dame sans merci

Hath thee in thrall!"

Ode on a Grecian Urn and Other Poems

I saw their starv'd lips in the gloam

With horrid warning gaped wide,
And I awoke, and found me here

On the cold hill side.

And this is why I sojourn here

Alone and palely loitering,
Though the sedge is wither'd from the lake,

And no birds sing.

LINES ON THE MERMAID TAVERN

Souls of Poets dead and gone,
What Elysium have ye known,
Happy field or mossy cavern,
Choicer than the Mermaid Tavern?
Have ye tipp'd drink more fine
Than mine host's Canary wine?
Or are fruits of Paradise
Sweeter than those dainty pies
Of venison? O generous food!
Drest as though bold Robin Hood
Would, with his maid Marian,
Sup and bowse from horn and can.

I have heard that on a day
Mine host's sign-board flew away,
Nobody knew whither, till
An astrologer's old quill
To a sheepskin gave the story,
Said he saw you in your glory,
Underneath a new old sign
Sipping beverage divine,
And pledging with contented smack
The Mermaid in the Zodiac.

Souls of Poets dead and gone,
What Elysium have ye known,
Happy field or mossy cavern,
Choicer than the Mermaid Tavern?

MEG MERRILIES

Old Meg she was a Gipsy,
And liv'd upon the Moors:
Her bed it was the brown heath turf,
And her house was out of doors.

Her apples were swart blackberries,
Her currants pods o' broom;
Her wine was dew of the wild white rose,
Her book a churchyard tomb.

Her Brothers were the craggy hills,

Her Sisters larchen trees--
Alone with her great family

She liv'd as she did please.

No breakfast had she many a morn,

No dinner many a noon,
And 'stead of supper she would stare

Full hard against the Moon.

But every morn of woodbine fresh

She made her garlanding,
And every night the dark glen Yew

She wove, and she would sing.

And with her fingers old and brown

She plaited Mats o' Rushes,
And gave them to the Cottagers

She met among the Bushes.

Old Meg was brave as Margaret Queen

And tall as Amazon:
An old red blanket cloak she wore;

Ode on a Grecian Urn and Other Poems

A chip hat had she on.
God rest her aged bones somewhere—

She died full long ago!

ODE ON A GRECIAN URN

Thou still unravish'd 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-fring'd 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?
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,
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 enjoy'd,
For ever panting, and for ever young;
All breathing human passion far above,

That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd,
A burning forehead, and a parching tongue.

Ode on a Grecian Urn and Other Poems

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

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

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
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."

ODE ON MELANCHOLY

No, no, go not to Lethe, 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;
Make not your rosary of yew-berries,
Nor let the beetle, nor the death-moth be
Your mournful Psyche, nor the downy owl
A partner in your sorrow's mysteries;
For shade to shade will come too drowsily,
And drown the wakeful anguish of the soul.

But when the melancholy fit shall fall

Ode on a Grecian Urn and Other Poems

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,
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

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;
His soul shalt taste the sadness of her might,
And be among her cloudy trophies hung.

ODE TO A NIGHTINGALE

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,
Singest of summer in full-throated ease.

O, for a draught of vintage! that hath been

Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth,

Ode on a Grecian Urn and Other Poems

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 Hippocrene,
With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,

And purple–stained mouth;

That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,
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,
Or new Love pine at them beyond to–morrow.

Away! away! for I will fly to thee,

Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,
But on the viewless wings of Poesy,

Though the dull brain perplexes and retards:
Already with thee! tender is the night,

And haply the Queen–Moon is on her throne,
Cluster'd around by all her starry Fays;

But here there is no light,

Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown
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

Ode on a Grecian Urn and Other Poems

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,
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,
Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme,

To take into the air my quiet breath;
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--
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 Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn;

The same that oft–times hath

Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
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 fam'd to do, deceiving elf.
Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades

Past the near meadows, over the still stream,

Ode on a Grecian Urn and Other Poems

Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep

In the next valley-glades:

Was it a vision, or a waking dream?

Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep?

ODE TO PSYCHE

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 awaken'd eyes?
I wander'd in a forest thoughtlessly,
And, on the sudden, fainting with surprise,
Saw two fair creatures, couched side by side

In deepest grass, beneath the whisp'ring roof

Of leaves and trembled blossoms, where there ran
A brooklet, scarce espied:

Mid hush'd, cool-rooted flowers, fragrant-eyed,

Blue, silver-white, and budded Tyrian,
They lay calm-breathing, on the bedded grass;

Their arms embraced, and their pinions too;

Their lips touch'd not, but had not bade adieu,
As if disjoined by soft-handed slumber,
And ready still past kisses to outnumber

At tender eye-dawn of aurorean love:
The winged boy I knew;
But who wast thou, O happy, happy dove?
His Psyche true!

O latest born and loveliest vision far

Of all Olympus' faded hierar Their lips touch'd not, but had not bade adieu,
As if disjoined by soft-handed slumber,
And ready still past kisses to outnumber

Ode on a Grecian Urn and Other Poems

At tender eye–dawn of aurorean love:
The winged boy 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's sapphire–region'd star,

Or Vesper, amorous glow–worm of the sky;
Fairer than these, though temple thou hast none,
Nor altar heap'd with flowers;
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–mouth'd 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;
Yet even in these days so far retir'd

From happy pieties, thy lucent fans,

Fluttering among the faint Olympians,
I see, and sing, by my own eyes inspir'd.
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–mouth'd prophet dreaming.

Yes, I will be thy priest, and build a fane

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–cluster'd trees

Ode on a Grecian Urn and Other Poems

Fledge the wild-ridged mountains steep by steep;
And there by zephyrs, streams, and birds, and bees,

The moss-lain Dryads shall be lull'd to sleep;
And in the midst of this wide quietness
A rosy sanctuary will I dress

With the wreath'd 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!

ON FIRST LOOKING INTO CHAPMAN'S HOMER

Much have I travell'd in the realms of gold,
 And many goodly states and kingdoms seen;
 Round many western islands have I been
Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold.
Oft of one wide expanse had I been told
 That deep-brow'd Homer ruled as his demesne;
 Yet did I never breathe its pure serene
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold:
Then felt I like some watcher of the skies

 When a new planet swims into his ken;
Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes

 He star'd at the Pacific—and all his men
Look'd at each other with a wild surmise—

 Silent, upon a peak in Darien.

ON SITTING DOWN TO READ KING LEAR ONCE AGAIN

O golden-tongued Romance with serene lute!
Fair plumed Syren! Queen of far away!
Leave melodizing on this wintry day,
Shut up thine olden pages, and be mute:
Adieu! for once again the fierce dispute,
Betwixt damnation and impassion'd clay
Must I burn through; once more humbly assay
The bitter-sweet of this Shakespearian fruit.
Chief Poet! and ye clouds of Albion,

Begetters of our deep eternal theme,
When through the old oak forest I am gone,

Let me not wander in a barren dream,
But when I am consumed in the fire,
Give me new Phoenix wings to fly at my desire.

ROBIN HOOD

TO A FRIEND

No! those days are gone away
And their hours are old and gray,
And their minutes buried all
Under the down-trodden pall
Of the leaves of many years:
Many times have winter's shears,
Frozen North, and chilling East,
Sounded tempests to the feast
Of the forest's whispering fleeces,
Since men knew nor rent nor leases.

No, the bugle sounds no more,
And the twanging bow no more;
Silent is the ivory shrill
Past the heath and up the hill;
There is no mid-forest laugh,
Where lone Echo gives the half
To some wight, amaz'd to hear
Jesting, deep in forest drear.

On the fairest time of June
You may go, with sun or moon,
Or the seven stars to light you,
Or the polar ray to right you;
But you never may behold
Little John, or Robin bold;
Never one, of all the clan,
Thrumming on an empty can
Some old hunting ditty, while
He doth his green way beguile
To fair hostess Merriment,
Down beside the pasture Trent;
For he left the merry tale
Messenger for spicy ale.

Gone, the merry morris din;
Gone, the song of Gamelyn;
Gone, the tough-belted outlaw

Ode on a Grecian Urn and Other Poems

Idling in the "grenè shawe";
All are gone away and past!
And if Robin should be cast
Sudden from his turfed grave,
And if Marian should have
Once again her forest days,
She would weep, and he would craze:
He would swear, for all his oaks,
Fall'n beneath the dockyard strokes,
Have rotted on the briny seas;
She would weep that her wild bees
Sang not to her—strange! that honey
Can't be got without hard money!

So it is: yet let us sing,
Honour to the old bow—string!
Honour to the bugle—horn!
Honour to the woods unshorn!
Honour to the Lincoln green!
Honour to the archer keen!
Honour to tight little John,
And the horse he rode upon!
Honour to bold Robin Hood,
Sleeping in the underwood!
Honour to maid Marian,

And to all the Sherwood—clan!
Though their days have hurried by
Let us two a burden try.

TO AUTUMN

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
Close bosom—friend of the maturing sun;
Conspiring with him how to load and bless
With fruit the vines that round the thatch—eves run;
To bend with apples the moss'd cottage—trees,
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;
To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells
With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,
And still more, later flowers for the bees,
Until they think warm days will never cease,
For Summer has o'er—brimm'd their clammy cells.

Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?

Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find
Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,

Thy hair soft—lifted by the winnowing wind;
Or on a half—reap'd furrow sound asleep,

Drows'd with the fume of poppies, while thy hook
Spares the next swath and all its twined flowers:
And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep

Steady thy laden head across a brook;

Or by a cyder—press, with patient look,
Thou watchest the last oozings hours by hours.

Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?

Think not of them, thou hast thy music too,—
While barred clouds bloom the soft—dying day,

And touch the stubble—plains with rosy hue;
Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn

Among the river shallows, borne aloft
Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;
And full—grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;

Hedge—crickets sing; and now with treble soft

The red—breast whistles from a garden—croft;
And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.

TO HOMER

Standing aloof in giant ignorance,
 Of thee I hear and of the Cyclades,
As one who sits ashore and longs perchance
 To visit dolphin–coral in deep seas.
So thou wast blind;—but then the veil was rent,
 For Jove uncurtain'd Heaven to let thee live,
And Neptune made for thee a spumy tent,
 And Pan made sing for thee his forest–hive;
Aye on the shores of darkness there is light,

 And precipices show untrodden green,
There is a budding morrow in midnight,

 There is a triple sight in blindness keen;
Such seeing hadst thou, as it once befel
To Dian, Queen of Earth, and Heaven, and Hell.

TO ONE WHO HAS BEEN LONG IN CITY PENT

To one who has been long in city pent,
 'Tis very sweet to look into the fair
 And open face of heaven,—to breathe a prayer
Full in the smile of the blue firmament.
Who is more happy, when, with heart's content,
 Fatigued he sinks into some pleasant lair
 Of wavy grass, and reads a debonair
And gentle tale of love and languishment?
Returning home at evening, with an ear

 Catching the notes of Philomel,—an eye
Watching the sailing cloudlet's bright career,

 He mourns that day so soon has glided by:
E'en like the passage of an angel's tear

 That falls through the clear ether silently.

TO SLEEP

O soft embalmer of the still midnight,
Shutting, with careful fingers and benign,
Our gloom—pleas'd eyes, embower'd from the light,
Enshaded in forgetfulness divine:
O soothest Sleep! if so it please thee, close
In midst of this thine hymn my willing eyes,
Or wait the "Amen," ere thy poppy throws
Around my bed its lulling charities.
Then save me, or the passed day will shine
Upon my pillow, breeding many woes,—

Save me from curious Conscience, that still lords
Its strength for darkness, burrowing like a mole;

Turn the key deftly in the oiled wards,
And seal the hushed Casket of my Soul.

WHEN I HAVE FEARS THAT I MAY CEASE TO BE

When I have fears that I may cease to be
 Before my pen has glean'd my teeming brain,
Before high-piled books, in charactery,
 Hold like rich garners the full ripen'd grain;
When I behold, upon the night's starr'd face,
 Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance,
And think that I may never live to trace
 Their shadows, with the magic hand of chance;
And when I feel, fair creature of an hour,

 That I shall never look upon thee more,
Never have relish in the faery power

 Of unreflecting love;—then on the shore
Of the wide world I stand alone, and think
Till love and fame to nothingness do sink.

"Ode on a Grecian Urn" was written by the influential English poet John Keats in 1819. It is a complex, mysterious poem with a disarmingly simple set-up: an undefined speaker looks at a Grecian urn, which is decorated with evocative images of rustic and rural life in ancient Greece. These scenes fascinate, mystify, and excite the speaker in equal measure—they seem to have captured life in its fullness, yet are frozen in time. Keats wrote this poem in a great burst of creativity that also produced his other famous odes (e.g. "Ode to a Nightingale"). Though this poem was not well-received in Keats' day, it has gone on to become one of the most celebrated in the English language. You can read the full text of "Ode on a Grecian Urn" [here](#). Get. Get. LitCharts.