

Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Poetry and Prose*,  
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## Adonais

An Elegy on the Death of John Keats, Author of  
*Endymion*, *Hyperion*, Etc.

Ἄσπῆρ πρὶν μὲν ἔλαμπες ἐνὶ ζωοῖσιν Ἐφῶς  
ἔνν δὲ θανάων λάμπεις Ἐσπερος ἐν φθιμένοις.—PLATO<sup>1</sup>

## PREFACE

Φάρμακον ἦλθε, Βίων, ποτὶ σὸν στόμα, φάρμακον εἶδες.  
πῶς τεν τοῖς χεῖλεσσι ποτέδραμε, κοῦκ ἐγλυκάνθη;  
τίς δὲ βροτὸς τοσσούτον ἀνάμερος, ἢ κεράσαι τοι,  
ἢ δοῦναι λαλέοντι το φάρμακον; ἐκφυγεν ῥῶδάν.

—MOSCHUS, EPITAPH. BION.<sup>2</sup>

It is my intention to subjoin to the London edition of this poem, a criticism upon the claims of its lamented object to be classed among the writers of the highest genius who have adorned our age. My known repugnance to the narrow principles of taste on which several of his earlier compositions were modelled, prove, at least that I am an impartial judge. I consider the fragment of *Hyperion*, as second to nothing that was ever produced by a writer of the same years.<sup>3</sup>

John Keats, died at Rome of a consumption, in his twenty-fourth year, on the — of — 1821; and was buried in the romantic and lonely cemetery of the protestants in that city, under the pyramid which is the tomb of Cestius, and the massy walls and towers, now mouldering and desolate, which formed the circuit of antient Rome. The cemetery is an open space among the ruins covered in winter with violets and daisies. It might make one in love with death, to think that one should be buried in so sweet a place.<sup>4</sup>

The genius of the lamented person to whose memory I have dedicated these unworthy verses, was not less delicate and fragile than it was beautiful; and where cankerworms abound, what wonder

1. An epigram attributed to Plato, which Shelley translated:

Thou wert the morning star among the living,  
Ere thy fair light had fled—  
Now, having died, thou art as Hesperus,  
giving  
New splendour to the dead.

2. From the "Elegy for Bion" (attributed to Moschus): "Poison came, Bion, to thy mouth—poison didst thou eat. How could it come to such lips as thine and not be sweetened? What mortal was so cruel as to mix the drug for thee, or to give it to thee, who heard thy voice? He escapes [shall be nameless in] my song." The poem's next clause, not

given by Shelley, states: "Yet justice overtakes all."

3. Shelley, thinking that Keats died in his twenty-fourth year (before his twenty-fourth birthday), and reading in the Advertisement to the *Lamia* volume (dated June 26, 1820) that *Hyperion* had been left unfinished because of the unfavorable reception of *Endymion* (1818), must have thought that the fragmentary *Hyperion* had been written by Keats by late 1818 or early 1819, when (according to Shelley's information) he would have been only twenty-one years old.

4. Shelley's son William had been buried there in 1819, as he himself was to be in 1822.

if its young flower was blighted in the bud? The savage criticism on his *Endymion*, which appeared in the *Quarterly Review*, produced the most violent effect on his susceptible mind; the agitation thus originated ended in the rupture of a blood-vessel in the lungs;<sup>5</sup> a rapid consumption ensued, and the succeeding acknowledgements from more candid critics,<sup>6</sup> of the true greatness of his powers, were ineffectual to heal the wound thus wantonly inflicted.

It may be well said, that these wretched men know not what they do. They scatter their insults and their slanders without heed as to whether the poisoned shaft lights on a heart made callous by many blows, or one, like Keats's composed of more penetrable stuff. One of their associates, is, to my knowledge, a most base and unprincipled calumniator. As to *Endymion*, was it a poem, whatever might be its defects, to be treated contemptuously by those who had celebrated, with various degrees of complacency and panegyric, *Paris*, and *Woman*, and a *Syrian Tale*, and Mrs. Lefanu, and Mr. Barrett, and Mr. Howard Payne, and a long list of the illustrious obscure?<sup>7</sup> Are these the men, who in their venal good nature, presumed to draw a parallel between the Rev. Mr. Milman and Lord Byron? What gnat did they strain at here, after having swallowed all those camels? Against what woman taken in adultery, dares the foremost of these literary prostitutes to cast his opprobrious stone?<sup>8</sup> Miserable man! you, one of the meanest, have wantonly defaced one of the noblest specimens of the workmanship of God. Nor shall it be your excuse, that, murderer as you are, you have spoken daggers, but used none.<sup>9</sup>

The circumstances of the closing scene of poor Keats's life were not made known to me until the Elegy was ready for the press.<sup>1</sup>

5. Shelley wrote to Byron on May 4, 1821: "Hunt tells me that in the first paroxysms of his disappointment he burst a blood-vessel; and thus laid the foundation of a rapid consumption" (*Letters*, II, 289). The review in question appeared in the April 1818 number of the *Quarterly*, which was published in September 1818. See Reiman, *The Romantics Reviewed*, Part C, II, 767-770.

6. Shelley may allude to Francis Jeffrey's favorable review of *Endymion* and the *Lamia* volume that appeared in the *Edinburgh Review* for August 1820 (see *The Romantics Reviewed*, Part C, I, 385-390).

7. *Paris in 1815* (1817) by the Rev. George Croly was published anonymously and favorably reviewed in the *Quarterly* for April 1817. (Croly wrote a vicious review of *Adonais* for the *Literary Gazette*.) A later edition of *Woman* (1810) by Eaton Stannard Barrett, a Tory wit, was reviewed by the *Quarterly* in the April 1818 number.

John Howard Payne, an American dramatist who later courted the widowed Mary Shelley, was reviewed harshly, not favorably, in the *Quarterly* for January 1820. Works by the Rev. Henry Hart Milman (Shelley's contemporary at both Eton and Oxford) were favorably reviewed in the *Quarterly* issues dated April 1816, July 1818, and May 1820. (Milman himself was a reviewer for the *Quarterly*, and Shelley later came to suspect him of having written the scurrilous attack on *Laon and Cythna* in the number for April 1819.)

8. The language of this sentence, like that of the one that precedes it and the first sentence in the paragraph, comes straight from the New Testament; see Luke 23:34, Matthew 23:24, and John 8:3-11.

9. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, III.ii.414.

1. Shelley alludes to a letter to John Gisborne from the Rev. Robert Finch, who gave a sentimentalized account of Keats's last days.

I am given to understand that the wound which his sensitive spirit had received from the criticism of *Endymion*, was exasperated by the bitter sense of unrequited benefits; the poor fellow seems to have been hooted from the stage of life, no less by those on whom he had wasted the promise of his genius, than those on whom he had lavished his fortune and his care. He was accompanied to Rome, and attended in his last illness by Mr. Severn, a young artist of the highest promise, who, I have been informed "almost risked his own life, and sacrificed every prospect to unwearied attendance upon his dying friend." Had I known these circumstances before the completion of my poem, I should have been tempted to add my feeble tribute of applause to the more solid recompense which the virtuous man finds in the recollection of his own motives. Mr. Severn can dispense with a reward from "such stuff as dreams are made of."<sup>2</sup> His conduct is a golden augury of the success of his future career—may the unextinguished Spirit of his illustrious friend animate the creations of his pencil, and plead against Oblivion for his name!

1

I weep for Adonais—he is dead!  
O, weep for Adonais! though our tears  
Thaw not the frost which binds so dear a head!  
And thou, sad Hour,<sup>3</sup> selected from all years  
To mourn our loss, rouse thy obscure compeers,  
And teach them thine own sorrow, say: with me  
Died Adonais; till the Future dares  
Forget the Past, his fate and fame shall be  
An echo and a light<sup>4</sup> unto eternity!

2

Where wert thou mighty Mother,<sup>5</sup> when he lay,  
When thy Son lay, pierced by the shaft which flies  
In darkness?<sup>6</sup> where was lorn<sup>7</sup> Urania  
When Adonais died? With veiled eyes,  
'Mid listening Echoes, in her Paradise  
She sate, while one,<sup>8</sup> with soft enamoured breath,  
Rekindled all the fading melodies,  
With which, like flowers that mock the corse<sup>9</sup> beneath,  
He had adorned and hid the coming bulk of death.

2. Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, IV.i.156–157.

3. As in *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley follows the classical poetic convention of personifying the Hours (Hours), goddesses of the seasons.

4. The distinction between the senses of sound and sight plays a significant part in the poem's symbolism.

5. Urania (line 12), a name used for the Muse of astronomy, the "Heavenly Muse" invoked by Milton in *Paradise*

*Lost* (Books I, VII), and Uranian Venus, the goddess seen as patroness of ideal love.

6. Cf. "Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day" (Psalms 91:5). Shelley alludes to the anonymous attack on Keats's *Endymion* in the *Quarterly Review*, XIX (April 1818), 204–208.

7. Forsaken.

8. One of the personified Echoes.

9. Corpse.

3

O, weep for Adonais—he is dead!  
Wake, melancholy Mother, wake and weep!  
Yet wherefore? Quench within their burning bed  
Thy fiery tears, and let thy loud heart keep  
Like his, a mute and uncomplaining sleep;  
For he is gone, where all things wise and fair  
Descend;—oh, dream not that the amorous Deep<sup>1</sup>  
Will yet restore him to the vital air;  
Death feeds on his mute voice, and laughs at our despair.

4

Most musical of mourners, weep again!  
Lament anew, Urania!—He died,<sup>2</sup>  
Who was the Sire of an immortal strain,  
Blind, old, and lonely, when his country's pride,  
The priest, the slave, and the liberticide,  
Trampled and mocked with many a loathed rite  
Of lust and blood;<sup>3</sup> he went, unterrified,  
Into the gulph of death; but his clear Sprite  
Yet reigns o'er earth; the third among the sons of light.<sup>4</sup>

5

Most musical of mourners, weep anew!  
Not all to that bright station dared to climb;  
And happier they their happiness who knew,  
Whose tapers yet burn through that night of time  
In which suns perished;<sup>5</sup> others more sublime,  
Struck by the envious wrath of man or God,  
Have sunk, extinct in their refulgent prime;  
And some yet live, treading the thorny road,  
Which leads, through toil and hate, to Fame's serene abode.<sup>6</sup> 45

6

But now, thy youngest, dearest one, has perished  
The nursling of thy widowhood,<sup>7</sup> who grew,  
Like a pale flower by some sad maiden cherished,  
And fed with true love tears, instead of dew;<sup>8</sup>  
Most musical of mourners, weep anew!  
Thy extreme hope, the loveliest and the last,  
The bloom, whose petals nipt before they blew<sup>9</sup>  
Died on the promise of the fruit, is waste;  
The broken lily lies—the storm is overpast.

1. An unfathomable abyss.

2. I.e., Milton.

3. Lines 31–34 refer to the Restoration of the Stuart monarchy, when the "regicides"—those responsible for executing King Charles I—were killed.

4. In *A Defence of Poetry*, Shelley says that Milton was the third great epic poet, along with Homer and Dante; *Sprite*: spirit.

5. Lines 38–41 characterize minor poets who were content to have minor fame

during their lifetime.

6. *some . . . serene abode*: Byron and Shelley, among others.

7. Keats as a poet is depicted as the posthumous child of Milton (Sire of line 30). Shelley admired Keats's *Hyperion*, his most Miltonic poem.

8. Lines 48–49 allude to the story of Keats's poem "Isabella; or, The Pot of Basil."

9. Bloomed or achieved perfection.

7

To that high Capital,<sup>1</sup> where kingly Death  
Keeps his pale court in beauty and decay,  
He came; and bought, with price of purest breath,  
A grave among the eternal.—Come away!  
Haste, while the vault of blue Italian day  
Is yet his fitting charnel-roof! while still  
He lies, as if in dewy sleep he lay;  
Awake him not! surely he takes his fill  
Of deep and liquid rest, forgetful of all ill.

8

He will awake no more, oh, never more!—  
Within the twilight chamber spreads apace,  
The shadow of white Death, and at the door  
Invisible Corruption waits to trace  
His extreme way to her dim dwelling-place;  
The eternal Hunger sits, but pity and awe  
Soothe her pale rage, nor dares she to deface  
So fair a prey, till darkness, and the law  
Of change, shall o'er his sleep the mortal curtain draw.<sup>2</sup>

9

O, weep for Adonais!—The quick Dreams,<sup>3</sup>  
The passion-winged Ministers of thought,  
Who were his flocks, whom near the living streams  
Of his young spirit he fed, and whom he taught  
The love which was its music, wander not,—  
Wander no more, from kindling brain to brain,  
But droop there, whence they sprung; and mourn their lot  
Round the cold heart, where, after their sweet pain,<sup>4</sup>  
They ne'er will gather strength, or find a home again.

10

And one<sup>5</sup> with trembling hands clasps his cold head,  
And fans him with her moonlight wings, and cries;  
“Our love, our hope, our sorrow, is not dead;  
See, on the silken fringe of his faint eyes,  
Like dew upon a sleeping flower, there lies  
A tear some Dream has loosened from his brain.”  
Lost Angel of a ruined Paradise!  
She knew not 'twas her own; as with no stain  
She faded, like a cloud which had outwept its rain.

11

One from a lucid<sup>6</sup> urn of starry dew  
Washed his light limbs as if embalming them;  
Another clipt her profuse locks, and threw

1. Rome, the Eternal City, where Keats died.

2. In the first edition this line read: “Of mortal change, shall fill the grave which is her maw.”

3. I.e., “living Dreams”; Shelley personifies various aspects of Keats’s mental

life as his *flocks*, according to the tradition of the pastoral elegy.

4. Such use of oxymoron is common in Keats’s poetry, but relatively unusual in Shelley’s.

5. One of the Dreams, etc., of stanza 9.

6. Luminous.

The wreath upon him, like an anadem,<sup>7</sup>  
Which frozen tears instead of pearls begem;  
Another in her wilful grief would break  
Her bow and winged reeds,<sup>8</sup> as if to stem  
A greater loss with one which was more weak;  
And dull the barbed fire against his frozen cheek.

12

Another Splendour<sup>9</sup> on his mouth alit,  
That mouth, whence it was wont to draw the breath  
Which gave it strength to pierce the guarded wit,  
And pass into the panting heart beneath  
With lightning and with music: the damp death  
Quenched its caress upon his icy lips;  
And, as a dying meteor stains a wreath  
Of moonlight vapour, which the cold night clips,<sup>1</sup>  
It flushed through his pale limbs, and past to its eclipse.

13

And others came . . . Desires and Adorations,  
Winged Persuasions and veiled Destinies,  
Splendours, and Glooms, and glimmering Incarnations  
Of hopes and fears, and twilight Phantasies;  
And Sorrow, with her family of Sighs,  
And Pleasure, blind with tears, led by the gleam  
Of her own dying smile instead of eyes,  
Came in slow pomp;—the moving pomp might seem  
Like pageantry of mist on an autumnal stream.<sup>2</sup>

14

All he had loved, and moulded into thought,  
From shape, and hue, and odour, and sweet sound,  
Lamented Adonais. Morning sought  
Her eastern watchtower, and her hair unbound,  
Wet with the tears which should adorn the ground,  
Dimmed the aerial eyes that kindle day;  
Afar the melancholy thunder moaned,  
Pale Ocean in unquiet slumber lay,  
And the wild winds flew round, sobbing in their dismay.

15

Lost Echo sits amid the voiceless mountains,  
And feeds her grief with his remembered lay,  
And will no more reply to winds or fountains,  
Or amorous birds perched on the young green spray,  
Or herdsman’s horn, or bell at closing day;  
Since she can mimic not his lips, more dear  
Than those for whose disdain she pined away

7. Garland for the head, usually of flowers.

8. I.e., arrows; Shelley is here paraphrasing Bion’s “Lament for Adonis,” where the mourning creatures are Loves (Cupids) rather than *Dreams*, *Ministers*

*of thought*, etc.

9. Cf. Dante’s word *splendori* (*Paradiso*, XXIII.82).

1. Embraces.

2. Lines 116–117 allude to Keats’s “To Autumn.”

Into a shadow of all sounds:<sup>3</sup>—a drear  
Murmur, between their songs, is all the woodmen hear. 135

16

Grief made the young Spring wild, and she threw down  
Her kindling buds, as if she Autumn were,  
Or they dead leaves; since her delight is flown  
For whom should she have waked the sullen year?  
To Phoebus was not Hyacinth so dear<sup>4</sup> 140  
Nor to himself Narcissus, as to both  
Thou Adonais: wan they stand and sere<sup>5</sup>  
Amid the faint companions of their youth,  
With dew all turned to tears; odour, to sighing ruth.<sup>6</sup>

17

Thy spirit's sister, the lorn nightingale<sup>7</sup> 145  
Mourns not her mate with such melodious pain;  
Not so the eagle, who like thee could scale  
Heaven, and could nourish in the sun's domain  
Her mighty youth with morning,<sup>8</sup> doth complain, 150  
Soaring and screaming round her empty nest,  
As Albion<sup>9</sup> wails for thee: the curse of Cain<sup>1</sup>  
Light on his head who pierced thy innocent breast,  
And scared the angel soul that was its earthly guest!

18

Ah woe is me! Winter is come and gone,  
But grief returns with the revolving year; 155  
The airs and streams renew their joyous tone;  
The ants, the bees, the swallows reappear;  
Fresh leaves and flowers deck the dead Seasons' bier;  
The amorous birds now pair in every brake,  
And build their mossy homes in field and brake;<sup>2</sup> 160  
And the green lizard, and the golden snake,  
Like unimprisoned flames, out of their trance awake.

19

Through wood and stream and field and hill and Ocean  
A quickening life from the Earth's heart has burst 165  
As it has ever done,<sup>3</sup> with change and motion,

3. When the nymph Echo was rebuffed by Narcissus, whom she loved, she faded into an echo of sounds; Narcissus scorned Echo, fell in love with his own reflection, and was transformed into a flower.

4. Hyacinthus was a youth beloved by Phoebus Apollo, who mourned him when jealous Zephyrus caused his death. Apollo turned Hyacinthus into a flower.

5. Dry or withered.

6. Pity.

7. Besides echoing the elegy on Bion, this image alludes to Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale."

8. *eagle* . . . *morning*: According to tradition, the eagle could renew its youthful vision by first flying toward the sun

(which burned the scales from its eyes) and then diving into a fountain.

9. England.

1. The first murderer was cursed to be "a fugitive and a vagabond . . . in the earth."

2. The original form of "brier"; thorny bushes in general, or wild rosebushes; *brake*: thicket or clump of bushes.

3. The renewal of the animal and vegetable species in the spring, contrasted with the linear termination of the individual human life, leads to a lament (in the manner of the late Latin poem *Pervigilium Veneris*) that destroys the comfort earlier provided by the myth in which Adonais was reborn annually.

From the great morning of the world when first  
God dawned on Chaos; in its steam immersed  
The lamps of Heaven flash with a softer light;  
All baser things pant with life's sacred thirst;  
Diffuse themselves; and spend in love's delight, 170  
The beauty and the joy of their renewed might.

20

The leprous corpse touched by this spirit tender  
Exhales itself in flowers of gentle breath;<sup>4</sup>  
Like incarnations of the stars, when splendour  
Is changed to fragrance, they illumine death 175  
And mock the merry worm that wakes beneath;  
Nought we know, dies. Shall that alone which knows<sup>5</sup>  
Be as a sword consumed before the sheath  
By sightless<sup>6</sup> lightning?—th'intense atom glows  
A moment, then is quenched in a most cold repose. 180

21

Alas! that all we loved of him should be,  
But for our grief, as if it had not been,  
And grief itself be mortal! Woe is me!  
Whence are we, and why are we? of what scene  
The actors or spectators? Great and mean 185  
Meet massed in death, who lends what life must borrow.  
As long as skies are blue, and fields are green,  
Evening must usher night, night urge the morrow,  
Month follow month with woe, and year wake year to sorrow.

22

He will awake no more, oh, never more! 190  
"Wake thou," cried Misery, "childless Mother, rise  
Out of thy sleep, and slake,<sup>7</sup> in thy heart's core,  
A wound more fierce than his with tears and sighs."  
And all the Dreams that watched Urania's eyes,  
And all the Echoes whom their sister's song<sup>8</sup> 195  
Had held in holy silence, cried: "Arise!"  
Swift as a Thought by the snake Memory stung,  
From her ambrosial rest the fading Splendour sprung.

23

She rose like an autumnal Night, that springs  
Out of the East, and follows wild and drear 200  
The golden Day, which, on eternal wings,  
Even as a ghost abandoning a bier,  
Had left the Earth a corpse. Sorrow and fear  
So struck, so roused, so rapt Urania;  
So saddened round her like an atmosphere 205  
Of stormy mist; so swept her on her way  
Even to the mournful place where Adonais lay.

4. Anemones, or windflowers.

5. The human mind.

6. Both invisible and blind, amoral.

7. Render less acute or painful.

8. The sister is Echo (127), who repeated Adonais' poem.

24

Out of her secret Paradise she sped,  
 Through camps and cities rough with stone, and steel,  
 And human hearts, which to her aery tread  
 Yielding not, wounded the invisible  
 Palms<sup>9</sup> of her tender feet where'er they fell:  
 And barbed tongues, and thoughts more sharp than they  
 Rent the soft Form they never could repel,  
 Whose sacred blood, like the young tears of May,  
 Paved with eternal flowers that undeserving way.

25

In the death chamber for a moment Death  
 Shamed by the presence of that living Might  
 Blushed to annihilation, and the breath  
 Revisited those lips, and life's pale light  
 Flashed through those limbs, so late her dear delight.  
 "Leave me not wild and drear and comfortless,  
 As silent lightning leaves the starless night!  
 Leave me not!" cried Urania: her distress  
 Roused Death: Death rose and smiled, and met her vain caress.<sup>25</sup>

26

"Stay yet awhile! speak to me once again;  
 Kiss me, so long but as a kiss may live;  
 And in my heartless breast and burning brain  
 That word, that kiss shall all thoughts else survive  
 With food of saddest memory kept alive,  
 Now thou art dead, as if it were a part  
 Of thee, my Adonais! I would give  
 All that I am to be as thou now art!  
 But I am chained to Time, and cannot thence depart!

27

"Oh gentle child, beautiful as thou wert,  
 Why didst thou leave the trodden paths of men  
 Too soon, and with weak hands though mighty heart  
 Dare the unpastured dragon<sup>1</sup> in his den?  
 Defenceless as thou wert, oh where was then  
 Wisdom the mirrored shield,<sup>2</sup> or scorn the spear?  
 Or hadst thou waited the full cycle, when  
 Thy spirit should have filled its crescent<sup>3</sup> sphere,  
 The monsters of life's waste had fled from thee like deer.

28

"The herded wolves, bold only to pursue;  
 The obscene ravens, clamorous o'er the dead;  
 The vultures to the conqueror's banner true  
 Who feed where Desolation first has fed,

9. Shelley's use of *palm* for "sole" of the foot here and in *Prometheus Unbound* (IV.123) and "The Triumph of Life" (361) is, so far as we can discover, entirely without precedent.

1. The hostile critic(s) who, Shelley be-

lieved, had crushed Keats's spirit.

2. A mirrored shield appears in the legend of Perseus, who succeeds in slaying Medusa by viewing her only indirectly in the shield.

3. Growing.

And whose wings rain contagion;—how they fled,  
 When like Apollo, from his golden bow,  
 The Pythian of the age<sup>4</sup> one arrow sped  
 And smiled!—The spoilers tempt no second blow,  
 They fawn on the proud feet that spurn them lying low.<sup>5</sup>

29

"The sun comes forth, and many reptiles spawn;  
 He sets, and each ephemeral insect<sup>6</sup> then  
 Is gathered into death without a dawn,  
 And the immortal stars awake again;  
 So is it in the world of living men:  
 A godlike mind soars forth, in its delight  
 Making earth bare and veiling heaven, and when  
 It sinks, the swarms that dimmed or shared its light  
 Leave to its kindred lamps<sup>7</sup> the spirit's awful night."

30

Thus ceased she: and the mountain shepherds<sup>8</sup> came  
 Their garlands sere, their magic mantles rent;  
 The Pilgrim of Eternity,<sup>9</sup> whose fame  
 Over his living head like Heaven is bent,  
 An early but enduring monument,  
 Came, veiling all the lightnings of his song  
 In sorrow; from her wilds Ierne sent  
 The sweetest lyrist of her saddest wrong,<sup>1</sup>  
 And love taught grief to fall like music from his tongue.

31

Midst others of less note, came one frail Form,<sup>2</sup>  
 A phantom among men; companionless  
 As the last cloud of an expiring storm  
 Whose thunder is its knell; he, as I guess,  
 Had gazed on Nature's naked loveliness,  
 Actæon-like, and now he fled astray  
 With feeble steps o'er the world's wilderness,  
 And his own thoughts, along that rugged way,  
 Pursued, like raging hounds, their father and their prey.<sup>3</sup>

4. Byron, his *one arrow* being *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, which silenced the critics as Apollo killed the Python.

5. The first edition read "as they go" instead of *lying low*; Mary Shelley's emendation of this line and line 72 certainly reflects Shelley's wishes.

6. For Shelley's other uses of the ephemeral, see "The Sensitive-Plant" (II.49) and "The Witch of Atlas" (9).

7. The stars (other creative minds) that the glare of sunlight, diffused through the atmosphere, had "veiled" (258).

8. In pastoral elegies the fellow poets of the poet being mourned are also characterized as shepherds; here they are mountain shepherds because of the traditional associations of mountains with

independence and liberty (see especially Milton's *L'Allegro*, 36, and Wordsworth's poetry *passim*).

9. Byron, alluding particularly to *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*.

1. Thomas Moore from Ireland (*Ierne*), famous for his *Irish Melodies*, his translations of the love songs of Anacreon, and his anti-government satirical poetry (see notes to the Dedication of *Peter Bell the Third*).

2. I.e., Shelley.

3. For the association of the Actæon myth (in which the hunter Actæon was destroyed by his own dogs because he saw Diana naked) with the Shakespearean image of thoughts pursuing their father-mind, see note to *Prometheus Unbound*, I.454–457.

32  
 A pardlike<sup>4</sup> Spirit beautiful and swift— 280  
 A Love in desolation masked;—a Power  
 Girt round with weakness;—it can scarce uplift  
 The weight of the superincumbent hour;<sup>5</sup>  
 It is a dying lamp, a falling shower,  
 A breaking billow;—even whilst we speak 285  
 Is it not broken? On the withering flower  
 The killing sun smiles brightly: on a cheek  
 The life can burn in blood, even while the heart may break.

33  
 His head was bound with pansies overblown, 290  
 And faded violets, white, and pied, and blue;  
 And a light spear topped with a cypress cone,  
 Round whose rude shaft dark ivy tresses grew<sup>6</sup>  
 Yet dripping with the forest's noonday dew,  
 Vibrated, as the ever-beating heart  
 Shook the weak hand that grasped it; of that crew 295  
 He came the last, neglected and apart;  
 A herd-abandoned deer struck by the hunter's dart.

34  
 All stood aloof, and at his partial<sup>7</sup> moan  
 Smiled through their tears; well knew that gentle band 300  
 Who in another's fate now wept his own;  
 As in the accents of an unknown land,  
 He sung new sorrow; sad Urania scanned  
 The Stranger's mien, and murmured: "who art thou?"  
 He answered not, but with a sudden hand 305  
 Made bare his branded and ensanguined brow,  
 Which was like Cain's or Christ's<sup>8</sup>—Oh! that it should be so!

35  
 What softer voice is hushed over the dead?  
 Athwart what brow is that dark mantle thrown?  
 What form leans sadly o'er the white death-bed, 310  
 In mockery of monumental stone,<sup>9</sup>  
 The heavy heart heaving without a moan?  
 If it be He,<sup>1</sup> who, gentlest of the wise,  
 Taught, soothed, loved, honoured the departed one;  
 Let me not vex, with inharmonious sighs  
 The silence of that heart's accepted sacrifice. 315

4. A *pard* is a panther or leopard, sacred to Dionysus (Bacchus).

5. Lines 281–283: The "overlying" or "overhanging" hour is that which marks the death of Adonais (see 4–9); this hour masks Cupid (*Love*) with *desolation*, godlike *Power* with *weakness*.

6. The thyrsus, a staff tipped with an evergreen cone and wrapped with ivy or grape leaves. In the Dionysia, the festival honoring Dionysus, the Greeks carried the thyrsus (which had clear phallic symbolism) and garlanded their heads with ivy, violets, and other flowers.

7. Having a bias.

8. The forehead of Cain was *branded* by God with a mark to distinguish him; the crown of thorns bloodied (*ensanguined*) Christ's brow.

9. The figure leans silent and still, posing like a memorial statue, yet *mocking* such a statue because his *heart* continues to beat.

1. Leigh Hunt, Keats's first literary patron and champion; he took Keats into his house and cared for him at the beginning of his final illness.

36  
 Our Adonais has drunk poison—oh!  
 What deaf and viperous murderer could crown  
 Life's early cup with such a draught of woe?<sup>2</sup>  
 The nameless worm<sup>3</sup> would now itself disown: 320  
 It felt, yet could escape the magic tone  
 Whose prelude held all envy, hate, and wrong,  
 But what was howling in one breast alone,  
 Silent with expectation of the song,  
 Whose master's hand is cold, whose silver lyre unstrung.

37  
 Live thou, whose infamy is not thy fame! 325  
 Live! fear no heavier chastisement from me,  
 Thou noteless blot on a remembered name!  
 But be thyself, and know thyself to be!  
 And ever at thy season be thou free  
 To spill the venom when thy fangs o'erflow: 330  
 Remorse and Self-contempt shall cling to thee;  
 Hot Shame shall burn upon thy secret brow,  
 And like a beaten hound tremble thou shalt—as now.

38  
 Nor let us weep that our delight is fled 335  
 Far from these carrion kites<sup>4</sup> that scream below;  
 He wakes or sleeps with the enduring dead;  
 Thou canst not soar where he is sitting now.<sup>5</sup>—  
 Dust to the dust! but the pure spirit shall flow  
 Back to the burning fountain whence it came,<sup>6</sup>  
 A portion of the Eternal, which must glow 340  
 Through time and change, unquenchably the same,  
 Whilst thy cold embers choke the sordid hearth of shame.

39  
 Peace, peace! he is not dead, he doth not sleep—  
 He hath awakened from the dream of life— 345  
 'Tis we, who lost in stormy visions, keep  
 With phantoms an unprofitable strife,  
 And in mad trance, strike with our spirit's knife  
 Invulnerable nothings.—*We* decay  
 Like corpses in a charnel; fear and grief 350  
 Convulse us and consume us day by day,  
 And cold hopes swarm like worms within our living clay.

2. Throughout this and the following stanza Shelley attacks the anonymous author of the *Quarterly Review's* attack on Keats. Shelley believed him to be Robert Southey, who (Shelley thought) was also the hostile reviewer of works by Hunt and himself. The actual reviewer of Keats was John Wilson Croker, while the attacks on Hunt and Shelley had been written by John Taylor Coleridge, nephew of S. T. Coleridge.

3. Snake.

4. Birds of the hawk family.

5. Again addressing the *Quarterly* reviewer, Shelley adapts (and inverts the implications of) an image from *Paradise Lost*, IV.828–829, in which fallen Satan rebukes Ithuriel and Zephon for failing to recognize him, who had once been "sitting where ye durst not soare."  
 6. The concept of spirit as a fiery emanation flowing from the divine fire appears in the writings of the neoplatonic philosopher Plotinus (*Enneads*, IV.iii.9–10) and had been widely disseminated in the Platonic tradition.

40

He has outsoared the shadow of our night;<sup>7</sup>  
 Envy and calumny and hate and pain,  
 And that unrest which men miscall delight,  
 Can touch him not and torture not again;  
 From the contagion of the world's slow stain  
 He is secure, and now can never mourn  
 A heart grown cold, a head grown grey in vain;<sup>8</sup>  
 Nor, when the spirit's self has ceased to burn,  
 With sparkless ashes load an unlamented urn.

41

He lives, he wakes—'tis Death is dead, not he;  
 Mourn not for Adonais.—Thou young Dawn  
 Turn all thy dew to splendour, for from thee  
 The spirit thou lamentest is not gone;  
 Ye caverns and ye forests, cease to moan!  
 Cease ye faint flowers and fountains, and thou Air  
 Which like a mourning veil thy scarf hadst thrown  
 O'er the abandoned Earth, now leave it bare  
 Even to the joyous stars which smile on its despair!<sup>9</sup>

42

He is made one with Nature: there is heard  
 His voice in all her music, from the moan  
 Of thunder, to the song of night's sweet bird;<sup>1</sup>  
 He is a presence to be felt and known  
 In darkness and in light, from herb and stone,  
 Spreading itself where'er that Power<sup>2</sup> may move  
 Which has withdrawn his being to its own;  
 Which wields the world with never wearied love,  
 Sustains it from beneath, and kindles it above.

43

He is a portion of the loveliness  
 Which once he made more lovely: he doth bear  
 His part, while the one Spirit's plastic<sup>3</sup> stress  
 Sweeps through the dull dense world, compelling there,  
 All new successions to the forms they wear;  
 Torturing th'unwilling dross that checks its flight  
 To its own likeness, as each mass may bear;  
 And bursting in its beauty and its might  
 From trees and beasts and men into the Heaven's light.

7. The shadow cast by the earth away from the sun. That shadow can eclipse the moon but none of the planets.  
 8. Shelley undoubtedly thought of Southey, whose youthful liberalism had hardened into conservatism by the time Shelley met him at Keswick late in 1811.  
 9. If there were no moisture-laden air to diffuse sunlight into a general glow,

the stars would be visible in daytime, as well as at night.

1. The nightingale.

2. Power was the eighteenth-century philosophical term for an impersonal God (note the pronoun *its* in line 376).

3. Capable of shaping or molding formless matter.

44

The splendours of the firmament of time<sup>4</sup>  
 May be eclipsed, but are extinguished not;  
 Like stars to their appointed height they climb  
 And death is a low mist which cannot blot  
 The brightness it may veil. When lofty thought  
 Lifts a young heart above its mortal lair,  
 And love and life contend in it, for what  
 Shall be its earthly doom, the dead live there<sup>5</sup>  
 And move like winds of light on dark and stormy air.

45

The inheritors of unfulfilled renown<sup>6</sup>  
 Rose from their thrones, built beyond mortal thought,  
 Far in the Unapparent. Chatterton  
 Rose pale, his solemn agony had not  
 Yet faded from him; Sidney, as he fought  
 And as he fell and as he lived and loved  
 Sublimely mild, a Spirit without spot,  
 Arose; and Lucan, by his death approved:  
 Oblivion as they rose shrank like a thing reproved.

46

And many more, whose names on Earth are dark  
 But whose transmitted effluence<sup>7</sup> cannot die  
 So long as fire outlives the parent spark,  
 Rose, robed in dazzling immortality.  
 "Thou art become as one of us," they cry,  
 "It was for thee yon kingless sphere has long  
 Swung blind in unascended majesty,  
 Silent alone amid an Heaven of song.<sup>8</sup>  
 Assume thy winged throne, thou Vesper of our throng!"

4. Adonais and other creative spirits are now called *splendours*, which at line 100 was the term used to designate one of Adonais' mental creations.

5. The examples of the illustrious dead influence the lives of young imaginative persons torn between the ideals pursued by their desires (*love*) and the sordid realities of everyday life; *doom*: destiny.

6. Those who died young before receiving their just recognition. Thomas Chatterton, to whose memory Keats had dedicated *Endymion*, committed suicide in 1770 at the age of seventeen while facing starvation, after writing brilliant poetry (purporting to be the work of a medieval monk named Thomas Rowley). Sir Philip Sidney (1554–1586), courtier and poet, while dying from wounds, directed that a cup of water intended for himself be given to a wounded common soldier, saying, "Thy necessity

is yet greater than mine." He is the subject of Spenser's pastoral elegy *Astrophel. Lucan*: Marcus Annaeus Lucanus (39–65 A.D.) was the author of the *Pharsalia (Bellum Civile)*, which praised the republican ideals of Pompey and Cato in their war against Caesar; forced to commit suicide when his role in a plot against Nero was discovered, Lucan recited a passage from his own poetry to his friends while bleeding to death.

7. Emanation.

8. Traditionally each *sphere* that encircled the earth was thought to be piloted by a particular god or genius—a spirit that gave vitality to it. Adonais is to be the genius of the third sphere of Venus, also known as Lucifer (morning star) and Hesperus or *Vesper* (evening star).

47  
 Who mourns for Adonais? oh come forth  
 Fond<sup>9</sup> wretch! and know thyself and him aright.  
 Clasp with thy panting soul the pendulous Earth;<sup>1</sup>  
 As from a centre, dart thy spirit's light  
 Beyond all worlds, until its spacious might  
 Satiates the void circumference:<sup>2</sup> then shrink  
 Even to a point within our day and night;  
 And keep thy heart light lest it make thee sink  
 When hope has kindled hope, and lured thee to the brink.<sup>3</sup>

48  
 Or go to Rome,<sup>4</sup> which is the sepulchre  
 O, not of him, but of our joy: 'tis nought  
 That ages, empires, and religions there  
 Lie buried in the ravage they have wrought;  
 For such as he can lend,—they<sup>5</sup> borrow not  
 Glory from those who made the world their prey;  
 And he is gathered to the kings of thought  
 Who waged contention with their time's decay,  
 And of the past are all that cannot pass away.

49  
 Go thou to Rome,—at once the Paradise,  
 The grave, the city, and the wilderness;  
 And where its wrecks like shattered mountains rise,<sup>6</sup>  
 And flowering weeds, and fragrant copses dress  
 The bones of Desolation's nakedness  
 Pass, till the Spirit of the spot shall lead  
 Thy footsteps to a slope of green access  
 Where, like an infant's smile,<sup>7</sup> over the dead,  
 A light of laughing flowers along the grass is spread.<sup>8</sup>

50  
 And grey walls<sup>9</sup> moulder round, on which dull Time  
 Feeds, like slow fire upon a hoary brand;<sup>1</sup>

9. Unreasonable or foolish.

1. The earth is like a pendulum in that its orbit is irregular and from a cosmic vantage point it would appear to be oscillating at the end of its cone-shaped shadow (umbra).

2. "Poetry is indeed something divine. It is at once the centre and circumference of knowledge . . ." (*Defence of Poetry*, p. 503).

3. The edge of a precipice or a grave.

4. When the imagination *shrinks* to a single *point*, a *centre*, after having reached out to scan the universe in stanza 47, the poet suggests Rome as the proper point within time (*our day and night*) to explore.

5. I.e., those *such as he*, creative spirits as opposed to political and ecclesiastical rulers, who merely *ravage* the world.

6. The remains of Nero's palace and other imperial buildings, the city walls,

and the Baths of Caracalla, where Shelley wrote *Prometheus Unbound*, were overgrown with vegetation and almost seemed to have returned to natural hills.

7. Shelley's and Mary's eldest son, William Shelley, had died in Rome on June 7, 1819; his grave was in the Protestant Cemetery (Cimitero Acatolico) near the spot where Keats was later buried.

8. Before he died, Keats had asked Severn to look at the cemetery, and he had expressed pleasure at the "description of the locality . . . , particularly the innumerable violets" and the daisies among the grass.

9. The twelve-mile walls of Rome begun under Aurelian (emperor, 270–275 A.D.) form one boundary of the cemetery; the Porta San Paolo is the nearby gate in the Aurelian wall.

1. A log that has been covered with white ash while burning on the hearth.

And one keen pyramid with wedge sublime,<sup>2</sup>  
 Pavilions the dust of him who planned  
 This refuge for his memory, doth stand  
 Like flame transformed to marble; and beneath,  
 A field is spread, on which a newer band  
 Have pitched in Heaven's smile their camp of death<sup>3</sup>  
 Welcoming him we lose with scarce extinguished breath.

51  
 Here pause: these graves are all too young as yet  
 To have outgrown the sorrow which consigned  
 Its charge to each; and if the seal is set,  
 Here, on one fountain of a mourning mind,<sup>4</sup>  
 Break it not thou! too surely shalt thou find  
 Thine own well full, if thou returnest home,  
 Of tears and gall. From the world's bitter wind<sup>5</sup>  
 Seek shelter in the shadow of the tomb.  
 What Adonais is, why fear we to become?

52  
 The One remains, the many change and pass;  
 Heaven's light forever shines, Earth's shadows fly;  
 Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,  
 Stains the white radiance of Eternity,  
 Until Death tramples it to fragments.<sup>6</sup>—Die,  
 If thou wouldst be with that which thou dost seek!  
 Follow where all is fled!—Rome's azure sky,  
 Flowers, ruins, statues, music, words, are weak  
 The glory they transfuse with fitting truth to speak.

53  
 Why linger, why turn back, why shrink, my Heart?  
 Thy hopes are gone before;<sup>7</sup> from all things here  
 They have departed; thou shouldst now depart!  
 A light is past from the revolving year,  
 And man, and woman; and what still is dear  
 Attracts to crush, repels to make thee wither.  
 The soft sky smiles,—the low wind whispers near:  
 'Tis Adonais calls! oh, hasten thither,  
 No more let Life divide what Death can join together.

2. The pyramidal tomb of Caius Cestius, praetor and tribune of Rome during the latter half of the first century B.C., had been incorporated into the Aurelian wall.

3. One common name for a cemetery in Italy is *camposanto*, "holy camp." Shelley is punning seriously on the Italian word.

4. Shelley alludes to his sorrow at the death of his son.

5. William Shelley died in an epidemic of *malaria* (Italian for "bad [or evil] air"), possibly another Italian-English serious pun.

6. As the atmosphere refracts the sun's

white light into the colors of the rainbow, Life distorts the universal *One* into *many* imperfect particulars, *until Death* permits the individual to reunite with the One.

7. Shelley at this period regretted the deaths of his children William and Clara (as well as the legal loss of his children by Harriet), alienation from Mary Shelley, animosity from the reviewers, neglect by his publisher and the reading public, and exile from his country and his few closest friends. Most of his early hopes, personal and political, had apparently failed.

54

That Light whose smile kindles the Universe,  
That Beauty in which all things work and move,  
That Benediction which the eclipsing Curse  
Of birth can quench not, that sustaining Love  
Which through the web of being blindly wove  
By man and beast and earth and air and sea,  
Burns bright or dim, as each are mirrors of  
The fire for which all thirst; now beams on me,  
Consuming the last clouds of cold mortality.

480

485

55

The breath whose might I have invoked in song  
Descends on me; my spirit's bark is driven,  
Far from the shore, far from the trembling throng  
Whose sails were never to the tempest given;  
The massy earth and sphered skies are riven!  
I am borne darkly, fearfully, afar:  
Whilst burning through the inmost veil of Heaven,  
The soul of Adonais, like a star,  
Beacons from the abode where the Eternal are.

490

495