

Ode to a Nightingale

1

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
 My sense, as though of hemlock⁸ I had drunk,
 Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
 One minute past, and Lethe-wards⁹ had sunk:
 5 'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,
 But being too happy in thine happiness—
 That thou, light-wingèd Dryad^o of the trees, *nymph*
 In some melodious plot
 Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,
 10 Singest of summer in full-throated ease.

2

O, for a draught of vintage! that hath been
 Cooled a long age in the deep-delvèd earth,
 Tasting of Flora¹ and the country green,
 Dance, and Provençal song,² and sunburnt mirth!
 15 O for a beaker full of the warm South,
 Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,³
 With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,
 And purple-stainèd mouth;
 That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,
 20 And with thee fade away into the forest dim:

3

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;
 25 Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,
 Where youth grows pale, and specter-thin, and dies,
 Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
 And leaden-eyed despairs,
 Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
 30 Or new Love pine at them beyond tomorrow.

7. I.e., Cupid.

8. Opiate made from a poisonous herb.

9. Towards the river Lethe, whose waters in Hades bring the dead forgetfulness.

1. Roman goddess of springtime and flowers.

2. Of the late medieval troubadours of Provence, in southern France.

3. The fountain of the Muses (goddesses of poetry and the arts) on Mt. Helicon, in Greece; its waters induce poetic inspiration.

4

Away! away! for I will fly to thee,
 Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,⁴
 But on the viewless[°] wings of Poesy, *invisible*
 Though the dull brain perplexes and retards:
 35 Already with thee! tender is the night,
 And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,
 Clustered around by all her starry Fays;[°] *fairies*
 But here there is no light,
 Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown
 40 Through verdurous[°] glooms and winding mossy ways. *green-leaved*

5

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
 Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,
 But, in embalmèd[°] darkness, guess each sweet *perfumed*
 Wherewith the seasonable month endows
 45 The grass, the thicket, and the fruit tree wild;
 White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;⁵
 Fast fading violets covered up in leaves;
 And mid-May's eldest child,
 The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
 50 The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.

6

Darkling[°] I listen; and for many a time *in darkness*
 I have been half in love with easeful Death,
 Called him soft names in many a musèd rhyme,
 To take into the air my quiet breath;
 55 Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
 To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
 While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
 In such an ecstasy!
 Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—
 60 To thy high requiem become a sod.

7

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:
 65 Perhaps the selfsame song that found a path
 Through the sad heart of Ruth,⁶ when, sick for home,
 She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
 The same that ofttimes hath
 Charmed magic casements, opening on the foam
 70 Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

4. Leopards, drawing the chariot of Bacchus, god of wine.

5. Sweetbrier; wood roses.

6. In the Hebrew Scriptures, a woman of great loy-

alty and modesty who, as a stranger in Judah, won a husband while gleaning in the barley fields ("the alien corn," line 67).

Forlorn! the very word is like a bell

To toll me back from thee to my sole self!

Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well

As she is famed to do, deceiving elf.

75 Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades

Past the near meadows, over the still stream,

Up the hill side; and now 'tis buried deep

In the next valley-glades:

Was it a vision, or a waking dream?

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

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