

JOHN
KEATS

Complete
Poems

edited by

Jack Stillinger

*The Belknap Press of
Harvard University Press
Cambridge, Massachusetts
and London, England*

1982

So the unnumber'd sounds that evening store;
 10 The songs of birds—the whisp'ring of the leaves—
 The voice of waters—the great bell that heaves
 With solemn sound,—and thousand others more,
 That distance of recognizance bereaves,
 Make pleasing music, and not wild uproar.

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.
 5 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
 10 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.

Keen, fitful gusts are whisp'ring here and there

Keen, fitful gusts are whisp'ring here and there
 Among the bushes half leafless, and dry;
 The stars look very cold about the sky,
 And I have many miles on foot to fare.
 5 Yet feel I little of the cool bleak air,
 Or of the dead leaves rustling drearily,
 Or of those silver lamps that burn on high,
 Or of the distance from home's pleasant lair:
 For I am brimfull of the friendliness
 10 That in a little cottage I have found;
 Of fair-hair'd Milton's eloquent distress,
 And all his love for gentle Lycid drown'd;
 Of lovely Laura in her light green dress,
 And faithful Petrarch gloriously crown'd.

On Leaving Some Friends at an Early Hour

Give me a golden pen, and let me lean
 On heap'd up flowers, in regions clear, and far;
 Bring me a tablet whiter than a star,
 Or hand of hymning angel, when 'tis seen
 5 The silver strings of heavenly harp atween:
 And let there glide by many a pearly car,
 Pink robes, and wavy hair, and diamond jar,
 And half discovered wings, and glances keen.
 The while let music wander round my ears,
 10 And as it reaches each delicious ending,
 Let me write down a line of glorious tone,
 And full of many wonders of the spheres:
 For what a height my spirit is contending!
 'Tis not content so soon to be alone.

To My Brothers

Small, busy flames play through the fresh laid coals,
 And their faint cracklings o'er our silence creep
 Like whispers of the household gods that keep
 A gentle empire o'er fraternal souls.
 5 And while, for rhymes, I search around the poles,
 Your eyes are fix'd, as in poetic sleep,
 Upon the lore so voluble and deep,
 That aye at fall of night our care condole.
 This is your birth-day, Tom, and I rejoice
 10 That thus it passes smoothly, quietly.
 Many such eves of gently whisp'ring noise
 May we together pass, and calmly try
 What are this world's true joys,—ere the great voice,
 From its fair face, shall bid our spirits fly.

November 18, 1816

Addressed to Haydon

Highmindedness, a jealousy for good,
 A loving-kindness for the great man's fame,
 Dwells here and there with people of no name,

To a Friend Who Sent Me Some Roses

Written on 29 June 1816; first published in 1817. The “Friend” was the poet Charles Jeremiah Wells, who knew the Keats brothers when he was in school at Edmonton (see Molly Tatchell, *K-SMB*, 22 [1971], 7–17, and Priscilla Johnston, *K-SJ*, 26 [1977], 72–87). The poet Thomas Wade briefly explains the occasion of the poem in a letter to R. M. Milnes of 27 January 1845: “Keats and [Wells] quarrelled about some trifle or other; the quarrel being ended by Wells’ present of roses” (*KC*, II, 115).

Happy is England! I could be content

Written perhaps in 1816; first published in 1817.

To My Brother George (sonnet)

Written at Margate in August 1816; first published in 1817.

To My Brother George (epistle)

Written at Margate in August 1816; first published in 1817. This is one of the three most substantial pieces in Keats’s first volume (*I stood tip-toe* and *Sleep and Poetry*, at the beginning and the end of the volume, are the other two; this one comes almost exactly in the middle). The subject, as in the other two (and throughout 1817 more generally), is whether Keats can and should be a poet; the poem deals with inspiration and the poetic process (1–66), fame—“posterity’s award”—and the good influence of poetry (67–109), and then the question of Keats’s personal aims (109 ff.). Note in particular the description of the poetic trance (19–54, a process that literally or metaphorically is central in many later poems), the emphasis on seeing (21, 26, 35, 36, 43, 44, 53, 57, 63, 65), and the fact that what is seen—“enchanted portals,” “golden halls,” “wonders strange”—is clearly outside and above the natural world (at the farthest, it is a realm that “no mortal eye can reach,” 44).

19 bay: Laurel, symbol of poetic fame. **24 Libertas:** Leigh Hunt. **83–90:** Syntactically incomplete in both Keats’s fair copy MS and 1817 (“Gay villagers” has no main verb). **121 for you:** Woodhouse noted in his interleaved 1817 that *Hadst thou liv’d in days of old, To G. A. W.*, and “perhaps” *O Solitude* “were written for his brother” and that the present poem, the preceding sonnet, and *To My Brothers* “were written to his Brother.” Even so, “for you” in the context at hand surely means “to be read by you.”

To Charles Cowden Clarke

Written at Margate in September 1816; first published in 1817. Clarke, son of the master of the Enfield school that Keats and his brothers attended, was the friend who most influenced the poet’s early reading.

6 the . . . courts: It is not clear whether the object of “courts” is intended to

be “Zephyr” (who then, in the inverted syntax, would be courted by a masculine swan represented as female Naiad) or a feminine-masculine composite, “Naiad-Zephyr.” **27 Helicon:** A mountain sacred to the Muses; here either an error on Keats’s part or a metonym for Hippocrene, Helicon’s famous fountain whose waters were supposed to inspire poets. “Helicon” as wine also occurs in the original draft text of *Lamia*, in a passage subsequently discarded following II.162. **29 Baiae:** An ancient resort on the Bay of Naples. Tasso was educated in a Jesuit school in Naples. Armida’s garden (31) is described in *Gerusalemme liberata* XVI.i–xvi. **33 Mulla’s stream:** A river near Spenser’s home in Ireland. “Maidens . . . cream” (34) is an allusion to Spenser’s *Epithalamion* 175, and Belphoebe, Una, and Archimago are characters in *The Faerie Queene* I–IV. **44 Libertas:** Leigh Hunt, “wrong’d” by political persecution.

How many bards gild the lapses of time

Written probably in 1816; first published in 1817. The sonnet shows that, even relatively early in his career, Keats’s “anxiety of influence” was well under control. On the sources of the poem, Spenser and Milton in particular, see Robert F. Gleckner, *K-SJ*, 27 (1978), 14–22.

On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer

Written in October 1816, on a morning after Keats had stayed up all night reading George Chapman’s translation of Homer with C. C. Clarke; first published in the *Examiner*, 1 December 1816. Clarke explains the circumstances (*Recollections of Writers*, pp. 128–130):

A beautiful copy of the folio edition of Chapman’s translation of Homer had been lent me . . . and to work we went, turning to some of the “famous” passages, as we had scrappily known them in Pope’s version. . . . Chapman supplied us with many an after-treat; but it was in the teeming wonderment of this his [Keats’s] first introduction, that, when I came down to breakfast the next morning, I found upon my table a letter with no other enclosure than his famous sonnet, “On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer.” We had parted . . . at day-spring, yet he contrived that I should receive the poem from a distance of, may be, two miles by ten o’clock.

This is universally regarded as the finest of the short poems in Keats’s first volume, and one of his best sonnets. On its imagery, structure, theme, and language see especially J. M. Murry, *Keats* (1955), pp. 145–165 (an influential essay first published in 1928); Carl Woodring, *K-SJ*, 14 (1965), 15–22; Paul McNally, *JEGP*, 79 (1980), 530–540; and Lawrence Lipking, *The Life of the Poet: Beginning and Ending Poetic Careers* (Chicago, 1981), pp. 3–11.

11 Cortez: It was of course Balboa, not Cortez, who discovered the Pacific (from the Isthmus of Darien, in Panama). But none of Keats’s contemporaries noticed the error.