Adonais

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

*Επειδή πρὸς τὸν θάνατον οἱ φίλοι μου *Επειδὴ
*δὲ θάνατος λάμπει ἐν φωτείναι—Πλαταῖος

 PREFACE

Φύσισιν ἐπισταύρωσε ΒΙΟΝ, ποιήσει στὸ σερίδνο, φύσισιν εἴη,
πᾶ τὸν τότε χειλεσσά πυκνάρμος, καθώς θαλανθήνῃ,
τὴν δὲ μεταφάσεων αἰμάρμος, ὡς κεράσε του,
δέρνοντα καλλίστα τὸ φύσισιν, ἐνεργεῖτο φύσιν—Μοσχεύς, ΕΡΙΤΙΑΠΗΣ ΒΙΟΝ.2

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, proved, 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.3

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 ancient 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.4

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 such cankerworms abound, what wonder
1. An epigram attributed to Plato, which
Shelley translated:
Thou weft the morning star among the
living,
Ere thy fair light had fled—
Now, having died, thou art as Hesperus,
Now, fading
New splendour to the dead.
2. From the “Elegy for Bion” (attributed
to Moschiusus): “Poison came, Bion,
To thy mouth—poison elder 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
tongue.” The poem’s next clause, not
given by Shelley, states: “Yet justice
overakes all.”
3. Shelley, thinking that Keats died in
his twenty-fourth year (before his twenty-
fourth birthday), and reading in the
Advertisement to the Lamium volume
(dated June 26, 1820) that Hyperion
had been left unfinished because of the
unfavorable reception of Endymion
(1818), must have thought that the frag-
mentary 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.
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 founda-
tion of a rapid consumption” (Letters,
II, 249). The review in question appeared
in the April 1818 number of the Quar-
terly, which was published in September
1817, See Reiman, The Romanticis
6. Shelley may allude to Francis Jeffrey’s
favorable review of Endymion and the
Lamium volume that appeared in the
Edinburgh Review for August 1820 (see
The Romanticism Reviewed, Part C, I,
385–390).
7. Paris in 1815 (1817) by the Rev.
George Croly was published anony-
mosously and favorably reviewed in the
Quarterly for April 1817. (Croly wrote a
vicious review of Adonais for the
Literary Gazette.) A later edition of
Women (1810) by Eston Stanard Bar-
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John Howard Payne, an American dramatist
who later courted the widowed Mary
Shelley, was reviewed harshly, not favor-
able, 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 1816, and May 1820. (Milman him-
self was a reviewer for the Quarterly,
and Shelley later came to suspect him
of having written the sourmouth attack
on Laon and Cythna in the number for
April 1819.)
9. 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 2:34, Matthew 21:24, and John
18:31–33).
10. Shakespeare, Hamlet, I.111.1414.
Shelley alludes to a letter to John
Gibbons 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 by 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." 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!

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, selected from all years
To mourn our loss, raise thy obscure companions,
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 until eternity!

Where went thou mighty Mother, when he lay,
When thy Son lay, pierced by the shaft which flies
In darkness where was born? Urania
When Adonais died? With veiled eyes,
Mid listening Echoes, in her Paradise
She sat, while one, with soft enamoured breath,
Rekindled all the fading melodies,
With which, like flowers that mock the corpse beneath
He had adorned and hid the coming bulk of death.

Lost (Books I, VII), and Urania Venus, the goddess sent as patroness of ideal love.
2. Shakespeare, The Tempest, IV.i, 26-137.
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, is "Heavenly Muse" invoked by Milton in Paradise Lost (Books I, VII), and Urania Venus, the goddess sent 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" (Psalm 91:5). Shelley alludes to the anonymous attack on Keats' Endymion in the Quarterly Review, XIX (April 1818), 204-208.
7. Forsaken.
8. One of the personified Echoes.
9. Corpse.
10. Most musical of mourners, weep anew!
11. 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, others more sublime,
Struck by the envious wrath of man or God,
Have sunk, extinct in their refugial prime;
And some yet live, treading the thorny road,
Which leads, through toil and hate, to Fame's serene abode.
12. But now, thy youngest, dearest one, has perished
The nursling of thy widowhood, who grew,
Like a pale flower by some sad maiden cherished,
And fed with true love tears, instead of dew;
Most musical of mourners, weep anew!
13. Thy extreme hope, the loveliest and the last,
The bloom, whose petals nipt before they blew
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 35-41 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.
9. Bloomed or achieved perfection.
To that high Capital, 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.

He will awake no more, oh, never more!—
Within the twilight 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
Soothé 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.²

O, weep for Adonais!—The quick Dreams,³
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,⁴
They ne'er will gather strength, or find a home again.

And one5 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.

One from a lucid⁶ 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 own."³
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.
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 Thoughts, etc.
9. Cf. Dante's word splendour (Paradiso, XXIII.82).
10. Embrace.
11. Lines 116-117 allude to Keats's "To Autumn."
Into a shadow of all sounds—a dearer
Murmur, between their songs, is all the woodmen hear.

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 sillent year?
To Phoebus was not Hyacinth so dear
Nor to himself Narcissus, as to both
Thou Adonais: wan they stand and sere
Amid the faint companions of their youth,
With dew all turned to tears; odour, to sighing ruth.

Thy spirit’s sister, the lone nightingale?
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, doth complain,
Soaring and screaming round her empty nest,
As Albion5 waits for thee: the curse of Cain¹
Light on his head who pierced thy innocent breast,
And scared the angel soul that was its earthly guest!

Ah woe is me! Winter is come and gone,
But grief returns with the revolving year;
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 brreek,
And build their mossy homes in field and brere;²
And the green lizard, and the golden snake,
Like unimprisoned flames, out of their trance awake.

Through wood and stream and field and hill and Ocean
A quickening life from the Earth’s heart has burst
As it has ever done, with change and motion,

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,
The beauty and the joy of their renewed night.

The leprous corpse touched by this spirit tender
Exhales itself in flowers of gentle breath;³
Like incarnations of the stars, when splendour
Is changed to fragrance, they illumine death
And mock the merry worm that wakes beneath;
Nought we know, dies. Shall that alone which knows
Be as a sword consumed before the sheath,
By sightless⁶ lightning?—th’ intense atom glows
A moment, then is quenched in a most cold repose.

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
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 morn,
Month follow month with woe, and year waketh year to sorrow.

He will awake no more, oh, never more!
“Wake thou,” cried Misery, “childless Mother, rise
Out of thy sleep, and slake,⁷ 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 song⁸
Had held in holy silence, cried: “Ariseth!”
Swift as a Thought by the snake Memory stung,
From her ambrosial rest the fading Splendour sprang.

She rose like an autumnal Night, that springs
Out of the East, and follows wild and dear
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
Of stormy mist; so swept her on her way
Even to the mournful place where Adonais lay.

3. What 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 mounted him when
jealous Zephyrus caused his death. Apollo
turned Hyacinthus into a flower.
5. Dry or withered.
6. Prickly.
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 youth-
ful vision by first flying toward the sun
(which burned the scales from its eyes)
and then diving into a fountain.
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: thatch or clump of brushes.
3. The renewal of the animal and vege-
table species in the spring, contrasted
with the linear terminations of the indi-
vidual human life, leads to a lament (in
the manner of the late Latin poem
Persephone Venus) that destroys the
comfort earlier provided by the myth
in which Adonais was reborn annually.
4. Anemones, or windflowers.
5. The human soul.
6. Both invisible and blind, amoral.
7. Render less acute or painful.
8. The sister is Echo (127), who re-
pealed Adonais’s poem.
Adonais

Out of her secret Paradise she sped,
Through camps and cities rough with stone, and steel,
And human hearts, which to her aery tend
Yielding not, wounded the invisible
Palms 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.

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 drest 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.

"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!

"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 in his den?
Defenceless as thou wert, oh where was then
Wisdom the mirrored shield, or scorn the spear?
Or hast thou waited the full cycle, when
Thy spirit should have filled its crescent sphere,
The monsters of life's waste had fled from thee like deer.

"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,

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

"The sun comes forth, and many reptiles spawn;
He sets, and each ephemeral insect 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 the spirit's awful night.

Thus ceased she: and the mountain shepherds came
Their garlands sere, their magic mantles rent;
The Pilgrim of Eternity, 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 wild Ierne sent
The sweetest lyrist of her saddest wrong,
And love taught grief to fall like music from his tongue.

Midst others of less note, came one frail Form,
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,
Actaeon-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.

4. Byron, his one arrow being English Barbs and Scotch Reviewers, which silenced the critics as Apollo killed the Python.
5. The first edition read "as they go" instead of being low; Mary Shelley's emendation of this line and lines 72-74 certainly reflects Shelley's wishes.
6. For Shelley's other uses of the epithet, see "The Sensitive-Plant" (1149) and "The Witch of Atlas" (9).
7. The stars (other creative minds) that glare of sunlight, diffused through the atmosphere, had "veiled" (238).
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 passages).
9. Byron, alluding particularly to Childe Harold's Pilgrimage.
10. 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 note to the Dedication of Peter Bell the Third).
11. I.e., Shelley.
12. For the association of the Actaeon myth (in which the hunter Actaeon 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, 1454-1457.
A pardlike Spirit beautiful and swift—
A Love in desolation masked,—a Power
Girt round with weakness—it can scarce uplift
The weight of the superincumbent hour;
It is a dying lamp, a falling shower.
A breaking billow—even whilst we speak
Is it not broken? On the withering flower
The killing sun smiles brightly: on a check
The life can burn in blood, even while the heart may break.

His head was bound with pansies overblown,
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
Yet dripping with the forest's noonday dew,
Vibrated, as the ever-beating heart.
Shook the weak hand that grasped it; of that crew
He came the last, neglected and apart;
A herd-abandoned deer struck by the hunter's dart.

All stood aloof, and at his partial moan
Smiled through their tears; well knew that gentle band
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
Made bare his branded and ensanguined brow,
Which was like Cain's or Christ's—Oh! that it should be so!

What softer voice is hushed over the dead?
Athose what brow is that dark mantle thrown?
What form leans sadly o'er the white death-bed,
In mockery of monumental stone,
The heavy heart heaving without a moan?
If it be He, who, gentliest of the wise,
Taught, soothed, loved, honored the departed one;
Let me not vest, with inharmonious sighs
The silence of that heart's accepted sacrifice.

Our Adonais has drunk poison—oh!
What deaf and viperous murderer could crown
Life's early cup with such a draught of woe?
The nameless worm would now itself disown:
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.

Live thou, whose infamy is not thy fame!
Livel fear no heavier chastisement from me,
Thou notest 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:
Renorse 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.

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

Peace, peace! he is not dead, he doth not sleep—
He hath awakened from the dream of life—
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
Convulse us and consume us day by day,
And cold hopes swarm like worms within our living clay.
He has outsoared the shadow of our night;
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;
Nor, when the spirit's self has ceased to burn,
With sparkless ashes load an unlettered urn.

He lives, he wakes— 'tis Death is dead, not he;
Mourn not for Adonis.—Thou young Dawn
Turn all thy dew to splendour, from thine
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!

He is made one with Nature: there is heard
His voice in all her music, from the moon
Of thunder, to the song of night's sweet bird;
He is a presence to be felt and known
In darkness and in light, from herb and stone,
Spreading itself wherever that Power 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.

He is a portion of the loneliness
Which once he made more lovely: he doth bear
His part, while the one Spirit's plastic 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.

The splendours of the firmament of time
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
And move like winds of light on dark and stormy air.

The inheritors of unfulfilled renown
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.

And many more, whose names on Earth are dark
But whose transmitted influence 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 unscended majesty,
Silent alone amid an Heaven of song.
Assume thy winged throne, thou Vesper of our throng!"

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 Sout- they, 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 for in line 376).
3. Capable of shaping or molding formless matter.
4. Adonais and other creative spirits are now called spendours, which at line 100 was the term used to designate one of Adonis' mental creations.
5. The examples of the illusory dead influence the lives of young imaginative persons torn between the ideals pursued by their deities (here) and the worldly realities of everyday life; down: destiny.
6. These who died young before receiving their just recognition. Thomas Chatterton, to whose memory Keats had dedicated Endymion, committed suicide in 1790 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), diplomat, 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 Lucan us (39-65 A.D.) was the author of the Pharsalia (Bellum Civile), which praised the republican ideals of Pompey and Catulus 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 encompassed the earth was thought to be piloted by a particular god or genius—a spirit that gave vitality to it. Adonis is to be the genius of the third sphere of Venus, also known as Lucifer (morning star) and Hesperus or Vesper (evening star).
Who mourns for Adonais? oh come forth
Fond wretch! and know thyself and him aight.
Clasp with thy panting soul the pendulous Earth;⁴
As from a centre, dart thy spirit’s light
Beyond all worlds, until its spacious might
Satiate the void circumference;⁵ 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.⁶

Or go to Rome,⁷ 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,—they⁸ 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.

Go thou to Rome,—at once the Paradise,
The grave, the city, and the wilderness;
And where its wrecks like shattered mountains rise,⁹
And flowering weeds, and fragrant copes 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,¹⁰ over the dead,
A light of laughing flowers along the grass is spread.¹¹

And grey walls,¹² moulder round, on which dull Time
Feeds, like slow fire upon a hoary brand;¹³

And one keen pyramid with wedge sublime,²
Pavilioning 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 death³
Welcoming him we lose with scarce extinguished breath.⁴

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,⁵
Break it not thou too surely shalt thou find
Thine own well full, if thou returnst home,
Of tears and gale. From the world’s bitter wind⁶
Seek shelter in the shadow of the tomb.

What Adonais is, why fear we to become?

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.⁸—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.

Why linger, why turn back, why shrink, my Heart?
Thy hopes are gone before;¹⁰ from all things here
They have departed; thou shouldst now depart!
A light is past from the reviving year,
And man, and woman; and what still is dear
Attracts to crush, repels to make thee wite.
The soft sky smiles,—the low wind whispers near:
’Tis Adonais callst 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 discloses the universal One into many imperfect particulars, until Death permits the individual to reunite with the One.
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.

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 sphere of 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.