

1819

TO (“WHAT CAN I DO TO DRIVE AWAY”)

John Keats

Keats, John (1795-1821) - Widely regarded as the most talented of the English romantic poets, Keats, whose work was poorly received during his lifetime, could not have foreseen his later recognition. Ironically, he wrote for his own epitaph: "Here lies one whose name was writ in water." To- (What can I do to drive away) (1819) - Written for Fanny Brawne, Keats' fiancée. Opening lines: What can I do to drive away / Remembrance from my eyes? for they have seen, ...

TO WHAT CAN I DO TO DRIVE AWAY

What can I do to drive away
 Remembrance from my eyes? for they have seen,
 Aye, an hour ago, my brilliant Queen!
 Touch has a memory. O say, love, say,
 What can I do to kill it and be free
 In my old liberty?
 When every fair one that I saw was fair
 Enough to catch me in but half a snare,
 Not keep me there:
 When, howe'er poor or particolour'd things,
 My muse had wings,
 And ever ready was to take her course
 Whither I bent her force,
 Unintellectual, yet divine to me;

Divine, I say!- What sea-bird o'er the sea
 Is a philosopher the while he goes
 Winging along where the great water throes?

How shall I do
 To get anew
 Those moulted feathers, and so mount once more
 Above, above
 The reach of fluttering Love,
 And make him cower lowly while I soar?
 Shall I gulp wine? No, that is vulgarism,
 A heresy and schism,
 Foisted into the canon law of love;
 No,- wine is only sweet to happy men;
 More dismal cares Seize on me unawares,

Where shall I learn to get my peace again?
 To banish thoughts of that most hateful land,
 Dungeoner of my friends, that wicked strand
 Where they were wreck'd and live a wrecked life;
 That monstrous region, whose dull rivers pour
 Ever from their sordid urns unto the shore,
 Unown'd of any weedy-haired gods;
 Whose winds, all zephyrless, hold scourging rods,
 Iced in the great lakes, to afflict mankind;

Whose rank-grown forests, frosted, black, and blind,
Would fright a Dryad; whose harsh herbag'd meads
Make lean and lank the starv'd ox while he feeds;
There flowers have no scent, birds no sweet song,
And great unerring Nature once seems wrong.

O, for some sunny spell
To dissipate the shadows of this hell!
Say they are gone,- with the new dawning light
Steps forth my lady bright!
O, let me once more rest
My soul upon that dazzling breast!
Let once again these aching arms be plac'd,
The tender gaolers of thy waist!
And let me feel that warm breath here and there
To spread a rapture in my very hair,
O, the sweetness of the pain!
Give me those lips again!
Enough! Enough! it is enough for me
To dream of thee!

THE END