

Psyche; or, the Legend of Love (1805)

*Castos docet et pius amores.*¹

Martial

PREFACE

The author who dismisses to the public the darling object of his solitary cares, must be prepared to consider, with some degree of indifference, the various reception it may then meet. But from those who write only for the more interested eye of friendship, no such indifference can be expected. I may therefore be forgiven the egotism which makes me anxious to recommend to my readers the tale with which I present them, while I endeavour to excuse in it all other defects but that which I fear cannot be excused — the deficiency of genius.

In making choice of the beautiful ancient allegory of Love and the Soul, I had some fears lest my subject might be condemned by the frown of severer moralists. However, I hope that if such have the condescension to read through a poem which they may perhaps think too long, they will yet do me the justice to allow that I have only pictured innocent love, such love as the purest bosom might confess. 'Les jeunes femmes, qui ne veulent point paroître coquettes, ne doivent jamais parler de l'amour comme d'une chose ou elles puissent avoir part', says La Rochefoucauld.² But I believe it is only the false refinement of the most profligate court which could give birth to such a sentiment, and that love will always be found to have had the strongest influence where the morals have been purest.

I much regret that I can have no hope of affording any pleasure to some, whose opinion I highly respect, whom I have heard profess themselves ever disgusted by the veiled form of allegory, and yet

Are not the choicest fables of the poets,
Who were the fountains and first springs of wisdom,
Wrapped in perplexed allegories?

But if I have not been able to resist the seductions of the mysterious fair, who perhaps never appears captivating except in the eyes of her own poet, I have however remembered that my verse cannot be worth much consideration, and have therefore endeavoured to let my meaning be perfectly obvious. The same reason has deterred me from using the obsolete words which are to be found in Spenser and his imitators.

Although I cannot give up the excellence of my subject, I am yet ready to own that the stanza which I have chosen has many disadvantages, and that it may perhaps be as tiresome to the reader as it was difficult to the author. The frequent recurrence of the same rhymes is by no means well adapted to the English language, and I know not whether I have a right to offer as an apology the restraint which I had imposed

PREFACE

¹ . . . teaches chaste and reverent loves'.

² Young women who do not wish to appear flirtatious should never speak of love as something in which

they might be involved' (*Maximes* 418). François, duc de La Rochefoucauld (1613-80), is the best known of the French *moralistes*.

upon myself of strictly adhering to the stanza which my partiality for Spenser first inclined me to adopt.

The loves of Cupid and Psyche have long been a favourite subject for poetical allusion, and are well known as related by Apuleius:³ to him I am indebted for the outline of my tale in the two first cantos; but, even there, the model is not closely copied, and I have taken nothing from Molière,⁴ La Fontaine,⁵ Du Moustier, or Marino.⁶ I have seen no imitations of Apuleius except by those authors, nor do I know that the story of Psyche has any other original.⁷

I should willingly acknowledge with gratitude those authors who have perhaps supplied me with many expressions and ideas, but if I have subjected myself to the charge of plagiarism, it has been by adopting the words or images which floated upon my mind, without accurately examining, or being indeed able to distinguish, whether I owed them to my memory or my imagination,

Si id est peccatum, peccatum imprudentia est
Poetae, non qui furum facere studuerit.⁸

(Terentius)

And when I confess that all I have is but the fruit of a much-indulged taste for that particular style of reading, let me be excused if I do not investigate and acknowledge more strictly each separate obligation.

Rossana, January 1802

SONNET ADDRESSED TO MY MOTHER

Oh thou, whose tender smile most partially
Hath ever blessed thy child — to thee belong
The graces which adorn my first wild song,
If aught of grace it knows, nor thou deny
Thine ever-prompt attention to supply.
But let me lead thy willing ear along
Where virtuous love still bids the strain prolong
His innocent applause since, from thine eye,
The beams of love first charmed my infant breast,
And from thy lip Affection's soothing voice
That eloquence of tenderness expressed,
Which still my grateful heart confessed divine —
Oh ever may its accents sweet rejoice
The soul which loves to own what'er it has is thine!

³ Apuleius was writing *The Golden Ass* c. AD 155, one of the most famous episodes of which dealt with Cupid and Psyche.

⁴ Molière (1622-73), the great French comic playwright, combined tragedy with ballet in his *Psyché* (1671).

⁵ Jean de la Fontaine (1621-95) retold Apuleius in *Les Amours de Psyché et de Cupidon* (1669).

⁶ Giambattista Marino (1569-1625), whose most ambitious work, *Adone* (1623), is a long mythological work about the love of Venus and Adonis.

⁷ original source.

⁸ 'If that is a sin, the sin is the inadvertence of the poet; he did not intend to steal something.'

Chi pensa quanto un bel desio d' amore

Un spirito pellegrin tenga sublime;

Non vorria non averne acceso il core;

Chi gusta quanto dolce il creder sia

Solo esser caro a chi sola n'è cara,

Regna in un stato a cui null' altro è pria.¹

Ariosto, *Elegia XII*

CANTO I

Argument

Proem – Psyche introduced – her royal origin – envy of Venus – her instructions to Cupid – the island of Pleasure – the fountains of Joy and of Sorrow – the appearance of Love – Psyche asleep – mutually wounded – Psyche reveals her dream to her mother – the oracle consulted – Psyche abandoned on the rock by its decree – carried by zephyrs to the island of Pleasure – the Palace of Love – banquet of Love – marriage of Cupid and Psyche – Psyche's daily solitude – her request to her lover – his reluctant consent

PROEM

Let not the rugged brow the rhymes accuse,
Which speak of gentle knights and ladies fair,
Nor scorn the lighter labours of the muse –
Who yet for cruel battles would not dare
The low-strung chords of her weak lyre prepare,
But loves to court repose in slumbery lay,
To tell of goodly bowers and gardens rare,
Of gentle blandishments and amorous play,
And all the lore of love in courtly verse essay.¹

And ye whose gentle hearts in thralldom held
The power of mighty love already own,
When you the pains and dangers have beheld
Which erst your lord hath for his Psyche known,
For all your sorrows this may well atone –
That he you serve the same hath suffered;
And sure, your fond applause the tale will crown
In which your own distress is pictured,
And all that weary way which you yourselves must tread.

Most sweet would to my soul the hope appear,
That sorrow in my verse a charm might find,
To smooth the brow long bent with bitter cheer,

¹ The sentiment is intricate and involved, but it may be rendered: 'He who thinks that a beautiful lover can lift a sad spirit, will want to set her heart on fire; he who knows how sweet it is to know that

¹ *essay* attempt.

Some short distraction to the joyless mind
Which grief, with heavy chain, hath fast confined
To sad remembrance of its happier state;
For to myself I ask no boon more kind
Than power another's woes to mitigate,
And that soft soothing art which anguish can abate.

And thou, sweet sprite, whose sway doth far extend,
Smile on the mean historian of thy fame!
My heart in each distress and fear befriend,
Nor ever let it feel a fiercer flame
Than innocence may cherish free from blame,
And hope may nurse, and sympathy may own;
For as thy rights I never would disclaim,
But true allegiance offered to thy throne,
So may I love but one, by one beloved alone.

That anxious torture may I never feel
Which, doubtful, watches o'er a wandering heart –
Oh who that bitter torment can reveal
Or tell the pining anguish of that smart?
In those affections may I ne'er have part,
Which easily transferred can learn to rove;
No, dearest Cupid, when I feel thy dart,
For thy sweet Psyche's sake may no false love
The tenderness I prize lightly from me remove!

Canto I

Much wearied with her long and dreary way,
And now with toil and sorrow well-nigh spent,
Of sad regret and wasting grief the prey,
Fair Psyche through untrodden forests went
To lone shades uttering oft a vain lament.
And oft in hopeless silence sighing deep,
As she her fatal error did repent,
While dear remembrance bade her ever weep,
And her pale cheek in ceaseless showers of sorrow steep.

Mid the thick covert of that woodland shade,
A flowery bank there lay undressed by art,
But of the mossy turf spontaneous made;
Here the young branches shot their arms athwart,
And wove the bower so thick in every part
That the fierce beams of Phoebus² glancing strong
Could never through the leaves their fury dart;

² *Phoebus* the sun.

But the sweet creeping shrubs that round it throng,
Their loving fragrance mix, and trail their flowers along.

And close beside a little fountain played
Which through the trembling leaves all joyous shone,
And with the cheerful birds sweet music made,
Kissing the surface of each polished stone
As it flowed past - sure as her favourite throne
Tranquillity might well esteem the bower,
The fresh and cool retreat have called her own,
A pleasant shelter in the sultry hour,
A refuge from the blast and angry tempest's power.

Wooed by the soothing silence of the scene
Here Psyche stood, and looking round, lest aught
Which threatened danger near her might have been,
Awhile to rest her in that quiet spot
She laid her down, and piteously bethought
Herself on the sad changes of her fate,
Which in so short a space so much had wrought,
And now had raised her to such high estate,
And now had plunged her low in sorrow desolate.

Oh how refreshing seemed the breathing wind
To her faint limbs, and while her snowy hands
From her fair brow her golden hair unbind,
And of her zone³ unloose the silken bands,
More passing bright unveiled her beauty stands;
For faultless was her form as beauty's queen,
And every winning grace that Love demands,
With mild attemper'd dignity was seen
Play o'er each lovely limb, and deck her angel mien.

Though solitary now, dismayed, forlorn,
Without attendant through the forest rude,
The peerless maid of royal lineage born
By many a royal youth had oft been wooed;
Low at her feet full many a prince had sued,
And homage paid unto her beauty rare;
But all their blandishments her heart withstood,
And well might mortal suitor sure despair,
Since mortal charms were none which might with hers compare.

Yet nought of insolence or haughty pride
Found ever in her gentle breast a place;
Though men her wondrous beauty deified,

³ zone silk hair-band.

And rashly deeming such celestial grace
Could never spring from any earthly race,
Lo, all forsaking Cytherea's⁴ shrine,
Her sacred altars now no more embrace,
But to fair Psyche pay those rites divine
Which, goddess, are thy due, and should be only thine.

But envy of her beauty's growing fame
Poisoned her sisters' hearts with secret gall,
And oft with seeming piety they blame
The worship which they justly impious call;
And oft, lest evil should their sire befall,
Besought him to forbid the erring crowd
Which hourly thronged around the regal hall
With incense, gifts, and invocations loud
To her whose guiltless breast ne'er felt elation proud.

For she was timid as the wintry flower
That, whiter than the snow it blooms among,
Droops its fair head submissive to the power
Of every angry blast which sweeps along,
Sparing the lovely trembler, while the strong
Majestic tenants of the leafless wood
It levels low. But ah, the pitying song
Must tell how, than the tempest's self more rude,
Fierce wrath and cruel hate their suppliant prey pursued.

Indignant quitting her deserted fanes,
Now Cytherea sought her favourite isle,
And there from every eye her secret pains
Mid her thick myrtle bowers concealed awhile;
Practised no more the glance or witching smile,
But nursed the pang she never felt before
Of mortified disdain; then to beguile
The hours which mortal flattery soothed no more,
She various plans revolved her influence to restore.

She called her son with unaccustomed voice,
Not with those thrilling accents of delight
Which bade so oft enchanted Love rejoice,
Soft as the breezes of a summer's night;
Now choked with rage its change could Love affright;
As all to sudden discontent a prey,
Shunning the cheerful day's enlivening light,
She felt the angry power's malignant sway
And bade her favourite boy her vengeful will obey.

⁴ Cytherea Venus.

Bathed in those tears which vanquish human hearts,
 'Oh son beloved!' the suppliant goddess cried,
 'If e'er thy too indulgent mother's arts
 Subdued for thee the potent deities
 Who rule my native deep, or haunt the skies;
 Or if to me the grateful praise be due
 That to thy sceptre bow the great and wise,
 Now let thy fierce revenge my foe pursue,
 And let my rival scorned her vain presumption rue.

'For what to me avails my former boast
 That, fairer than the wife of Jove confessed,
 I gained the prize thus basely to be lost?
 With me the world's devotion to contest
 Behold a mortal dares; though on my breast
 Still vainly brilliant shines the magic zone.⁵
 Yet, yet I reign; by you my wrongs redressed,
 The world with humbled Psyche soon shall own
 That Venus, beauty's queen, shall be adored alone.

'Deep let her drink of that dark, bitter spring
 Which flows so near thy bright and crystal tide;
 Deep let her heart thy sharpest arrow sting,
 Its tempered barb in that black poison dyed.
 Let her for whom contending princes sighed
 Feel all the fury of thy fiercest flame
 For some base wretch to foul disgrace allied,
 Forgetful of her birth and her fair fame,
 Her honours all defiled, and sacrificed to shame.'

Then with sweet pressure of her rosy lip,
 A kiss she gave bathed in ambrosial dew;
 The thrilling joy he would for ever sip,
 And his moist eyes in ecstasy imbrue.⁶
 But she whose soul still angry cares pursue
 Snatched from the soft caress her glowing charms;
 Her vengeful will she then enforced anew,
 As she in haste dismissed him from her arms,
 The cruel draught to seek of anguish and alarms.

Mid the blue waves by circling seas embraced
 A chosen spot of fairest land was seen;
 For there with favouring hand had Nature placed
 All that could lovely make the varied scene;
 Eternal spring there spread her mantle green,

⁵ the *magic zone* Venus' power was assisted by a magic belt which inspired love even when worn by the most deformed person.

⁶ *Flours* the three daughters of Jupiter representing spring, summer and winter, often shown accompanying Venus and the Graces.

There high surrounding hills deep-wooded rose
 O'er placid lakes, while marble rocks between
 The fragrant shrubs their pointed heads disclose
 And balmy breathes each gale which o'er the island blows.

Pleasure had called the fertile lawns her own
 And thickly strewed them with her choicest flowers,
 Amid the quiet glade her golden throne
 Bright shone with lustre through o'erarching bowers.
 There her fair train, the ever-downy Hours,
 Sport on light wing with the young Joys entwined;
 While Hope, delighted, from her full lap showers
 Blossoms whose fragrance can the ravished mind
 Inebriate with dreams of rapture unconfined.

And in the grassy centre of the isle,
 Where the thick verdure spreads a damper shade,
 Amid their native rocks concealed awhile,
 Then o'er the plains in devious streams displayed,
 Two gushing fountains rise – and thence conveyed,
 Their waters through the woods and vallies play,
 Visit each green recess and secret glade,
 With still unmingled, still meandering way,
 Nor widely wandering far, can each from other stray.

But of strange contrast are their virtues found,
 And oft the lady of that isle has tried
 In rocky dens and caverns underground
 The black deformed stream in vain to hide;
 Bursting all bounds her labours it defied,
 Yet many a flowery sod its course conceals
 Through plains where deep its silent waters glide,
 Till secret ruin all-corroding steals,
 And every treacherous arch the hideous gulf reveals.

Forbidding every kindly prosperous growth
 Where'er it ran, a channel bleak it wore;
 The gaping banks receded, as though loath
 To touch the poison which disgraced their shore;
 There deadly anguish pours unmixed his store
 Of all the ills which sting the human breast,
 The hopeless tears which past delights deplore,
 Heart-gnawing jealousy which knows no rest,
 And self-upbraiding shame, by stern remorse oppressed.

Oh how unlike the pure transparent stream
Which near it bubbles o'er its golden sands!
Th' impeding stones with pleasant music seem
Its progress to detain from other lands;
And all its banks, enwreathed with flowery bands,
Ambrosial fragrance shed in grateful dew.
There young Desire enchanted ever stands,
Breathing delight and fragrance ever new,
And bathed in constant joys of fond affection true.⁸

But not to mortals is it e'er allowed
To drink unmingled of that current bright;
Scarce can they taste the pleasurable flood,
Defiled by angry Fortune's envious spite;
Who from the cup of amorous delight
Dashes the sparkling draught of brilliant joy,
Till, with dull sorrow's stream despoiled quite,
No more it cheers the soul nor charms the eye,
But mid the poisoned bowl distrust and anguish lie.

Here Cupid tempers his unerring darts
And in the fount of bliss delights to play;
Here mingle balmy sighs and pleasing smarts,
And here the honeyed draught will oft allay.⁹
With that black poison's all-polluting sway,
For wretched man. Hither, as Venus willed,
For Psyche's punishment he bent his way;
From either stream his amber vase he filled,
For her were meant the drops which grief alone distilled.

His quiver, sparkling bright with gems and gold,
From his fair-plumed shoulder graceful hung,
And from its top in brilliant cords enrolled
Each little vase resplendently was slung.
Still as he flew, around him sportive clung
His frolic train of winged zephyrs light,
Waiting the fragrance which his tresses flung,
While odours dropped from every ringlet bright,
And from his blue eyes beamed ineffable delight.

Wrapped in a cloud unseen by mortal eye¹⁰
He sought the chamber of the royal maid;
There, lulled by careless soft security,
Of the impending mischief nought afraid,

Upon her purple couch was Psyche laid,
Her radiant eyes a downy slumber sealed;
In light transparent veil alone arrayed,
Her bosom's opening charms were half-revealed,
And scarce the lucid folds her polished limbs concealed.

A placid smile plays o'er each roscate lip:
Sweet severed lips, why thus your pearls disclose
That, slumbering thus, unconscious she may sip
The cruel presage of her future woes?
Lightly, as fall the dews upon the rose,
Upon the coral gates of that sweet cell!¹¹
The fatal drops he pours – nor yet he knows,
Nor, though a god, can he presaging tell
How he himself shall mourn the ills of that sad spell!

Nor yet content, he from his quiver drew,
Sharpened with skill divine, a shining dart;
No need had he for bow, since thus too true
His hand might wound her all-exposed heart;
Yet her fair side he touched with gentlest art,
And half relenting on her beauties gazed:
Just then awaking with a sudden start
Her opening eye in humid lustre blazed –
Unseen he still remained, enchanted and amazed.

The dart which in his hand now trembling stood
As o'er the couch he bent with ravished eye,
Drew with its daring point celestial blood
From his smooth neck's unblemished ivory.
Headless of this, but with a pitying sigh
The evil done now anxious to repair,
He shed in haste the balmy drops of joy
O'er all the silky ringlets of her hair,
Then stretched his plumes divine, and breathed celestial air.

Unhappy Psyche! Soon the latent wound
The fading roses of her cheek confess;
Her eyes' bright beams, in swimming sorrows drowned,
Sparkle no more with life and happiness,
Her parents' fond exulting hearts to bless;
She shuns adoring crowds, and seeks to hide
The pining sorrows which her soul oppress,
Till to her mother's tears no more denied,
The secret grief she owns, for which she lingering sighed.

⁸ Jonathan Wordsworth points out that this stanza provides a source for Keats, *Ode on a Grecian Urn* 21–30 (*Psyche is lit* introduced by Jonathan Wordsworth of the *Lock* ii 61, 'too fine for mortal sight' (Spelsbury, 1992)).

⁹ *allay* mix.

¹⁰ *unseen by mortal eye* cf. the sylphs in Pope's *Rape of the Lock* ii 61, 'too fine for mortal sight'.

¹¹ *the coral gates . . . cell* i.e. her lips, the 'cell' being her mouth.

A dream of mingled terror and delight
 Still heavy hangs upon her troubled soul;
 An angry form still swims before her sight,
 And still the vengeful thunders seem to roll;
 Still crushed to earth she feels the stern control
 Of Venus unrelenting, unappeased.
 The dream returns, she feels the fancied dole;¹²
 Once more the furies on her heart have seized,
 But still she views the youth who all her sufferings eased.

Of wondrous beauty did the vision seem,
 And in the freshest prime of youthful years;
 Such at the close of her distressful dream
 A graceful champion to her eyes appears;
 Her loved deliverer from her foes and fears
 She seems in grateful transport still to press;
 Still his soft voice sounds in her ravished ears;
 Dissolved in fondest tears of tenderness
 His form she oft invokes her waking eyes to bless.

Nor was it quite a dream,¹³ for as she woke
 Ere heavenly mists concealed him from her eye,
 One sudden transitory view she took
 Of Love's most radiant bright divinity;
 From the fair image never can she fly,
 As still consumed with vain desire she pines,
 While her fond parents heave the anxious sigh,
 And to avert her fate seek holy shrines,
 The threatened ills to learn by auguries and signs.

And now, the royal sacrifice prepared,
 The milk-white bull they to the altar lead,¹⁴
 Whose youth the galling yoke as yet had spared,
 Now destined by the sacred knife to bleed —
 When lo, with sudden spring his horns he freed,
 And headlong rushed amid the frightened throng,
 While from the smoke-veiled shrine such sounds proceed
 As well might strike with awe the soul most strong,
 And thus divinely spoke the Heaven-inspired tongue:

'On nuptial couch, in nuptial vest arrayed,
 On a tall rock's high summit Psyche place;
 Let all depart, and leave the fated maid

¹² *double* grief, distress.

¹³ *Nor was it quite a dream* this episode would have had an obvious interest for Keats, who reworks the 'dreaming' of a lover into reality in *The Eve of St. Ignace*,

Ode on a Grecian Urn 31-3.

and who describes the imagination as being like Adam's dream: 'He awoke and found it truth' (*Romanticism* 1014).

¹⁴ Weller suggests that lines 289-90 inspired Keats,

Who never must a mortal hymen¹⁵ grace.
 A wingéd monster of no earthly race
 Thence soon shall bear his trembling bride away;
 His power extends o'er all the bounds of space,
 And Jove himself has owned his dreaded sway,
 Whose flaming breath sheds fire, whom earth and heaven obey.'

With terror, anguish, and astonishment
 The oracle her wretched father hears,
 Now from his brow the regal honours rent,
 And now in frantic sorrow wild appears;
 Nor threatened plagues, nor punishment he fears,
 Refusing long the sentence to obey,
 Till Psyche, trembling with submissive tears,
 Bids them the sacrifice no more delay,
 Prepare the funeral couch, and leave the destined prey.

Pleased by th' ambiguous doom the Fates promulge,¹⁶
 The angry goddess and enamoured boy¹⁷
 Alike content their various hopes indulge;
 He still exploring with an anxious eye
 The future prospect of uncertain joy,
 Plans how the tender object of his care
 He may protect from threatened misery —
 Ah, sanguine Love, so oft deceived, forbear
 With flattering tints to paint illusive¹⁸ hope so fair!

But now what lamentations rend the skies!
 In amaracine wreaths¹⁹ the virgin choir
 With 'lo Hymen'²⁰ mingle funeral cries;
 Lost in the sorrows of the Lydian²¹ lyre
 The breathing flutes' melodious notes expire;
 In sad procession pass the mournful throng
 Extinguishing with tears the torches' fire,
 While the mute victim weeping crowds among,
 By unknown fears oppressed, moves silently along.

But on such scenes of terror and dismay
 The mournful muse delights not long to dwell;
 She quits well pleased the melancholy lay,
 Nor vainly seeks the parents' woes to tell,
 But what to wondering Psyche then befell

¹⁵ *hymen* marriage.

¹⁶ *promulge* formally announce.

¹⁷ *The angry goddess and enamoured boy* Venus and Cupid.

¹⁸ *illusive* deceptive, illusory.

¹⁹ *amaracine wreaths* wreaths composed, apparently, of amarantus, the imaginary flower reputed never to fade.

²⁰ *lo Hymen* used to invoke the god of marriage at wedding ceremonies.

²¹ *Lydian* Lydia was a country of eastern Turkey famed for its music.

265

270

275

280

285

290

295

300

305

310

315

320

325

330

335

When thus abandoned, let her rather say,
 Who shuddering looks to see some monster fell
 Approach the desert rock to seize his prey,
 With cruel fangs devour, or tear her thence away.

340

When Io, a gentle breeze began to rise,
 Breathed by obedient zephyrs round the maid;
 Fanning her bosom with its softest sighs
 Awhile among her fluttering robes it strayed,
 And boldly sportive latent charms displayed;
 And then, as Cupid willed, with tenderest care
 From the tall rock where weeping she was laid,
 With gliding motion through the yielding air
 To Pleasure's blooming isle their lovely charge they bear.

345

350

On the green bosom of the turf reclined,
 They lightly now th' astonished virgin lay -
 To placid rest they soothe her troubled mind;
 Around her still with watchful care they stay,
 Around her still in quiet whispers play,
 Till lulling slumbers bid her eyelids close,
 Veiling with silky fringe each brilliant ray,
 While soft tranquillity divinely flows
 O'er all her soul serene, in visions of repose.

355

360

Refreshed she rose, and all enchanted gazed
 On the rare beauties of the pleasant scene.
 Conspicuous far a lofty palace blazed
 Upon a sloping bank of softest green -
 A fairer edifice was never seen;
 The high-ranged columns own no mortal hand,
 But seem a temple meet for beauty's queen;
 Like polished snow the marble pillars stand
 In grace-attenuated majesty, sublimely grand.

365

Gently ascending from a silvery flood,
 Above the palace rose the shaded hill,
 The lofty eminence was crowned with wood,
 And the rich lawns, adorned by nature's skill,
 The passing breezes with their odours fill;
 Here ever-blooming groves of orange glow,
 And here all flowers which from their leaves distil
 Ambrosial dew in sweet succession blow,
 And trees of matchless size a fragrant shade bestow.

370

375

The sun looks glorious mid a sky serene
 And bids bright lustre sparkle o'er the tide;
 The clear blue ocean at a distance seen

380

Bounds the gay landscape on the western side,
 While closing round it with majestic pride,
 The lofty rocks mid citron groves arise.
 'Sure some divinity must here reside',
 As, tranced in some bright vision, Psyche cries,
 And scarce believes the bliss, or trusts her charmed eyes.

385

When Io, a voice divinely sweet she hears,
 From unseen lips proceeds the heavenly sound:
 'Psyche approach, dismiss thy timid fears,
 At length his bride thy longing spouse has found,
 And bids for thee immortal joys abound;
 For thee the palace rose at his command,
 For thee his love a bridal banquet crowned;
 He bids attendant nymphs around thee stand,
 Prompt every wish to serve, a fond obedient band.'

390

395

Increasing wonder filled her ravished soul,
 For now the pompous portals opened wide;
 There, pausing oft, with timid foot she stole
 Through halls high-domed, enriched with sculptured pride,
 While gay saloons appeared on either side
 In splendid vista opening to her sight;
 And all with precious gems so beautified,
 And furnished with such exquisite delight
 That scarce the beams of heaven emit such lustre bright.

400

405

The amethyst was there of violet hue,
 And there the topaz shed its golden ray,
 The chrysoberyl, and the sapphire, blue
 As the clear azure of a sunny day,
 Or the mild eyes where amorous glances play;
 The snow-white jasper, and the opal's flame,
 The blushing ruby, and the agate grey,
 And there the gem which bears his luckless name²²
 Whose death, by Phoebus mourned, ensured him deathless fame.

410

415

There the green emerald, there cornelians glow,
 And rich carbuncles pour eternal light
 With all that India and Peru can show,
 Or Labrador can give so flaming bright
 To the charmed mariner's half-dazzled sight.
 The coral-paved baths with diamonds blaze,
 And all that can the female heart delight
 Of fair attire, the last recess displays,
 And all that Luxury can ask, her eye surveys.

420

²² *his luckless name* Hyacinth, the Spartan youth loved were playing with a discus, the wind Zephyrus blew by Apollo (Phoebus), who brought him up. As they it so that it killed Hyacinth.

Now through the hall melodious music stole,
 And self-prepared the splendid banquet stands;
 Self-poured the nectar sparkles in the bowl,
 The lute and viol touched by unseen hands
 Aid the soft voices of the choral bands;
 O'er the full board a brighter lustre beams
 Than Persia's monarch at his feast commands;
 For sweet refreshment all-inviting seems
 To taste celestial food, and pure ambrosial streams.²³

But when meek Eve hung out her dewy star,
 And gently veiled with gradual hand the sky,
 Lo, the bright folding doors retiring far
 Display to Psyche's captivated eye
 All that voluptuous ease could e'er supply
 To soothe the spirits in serene repose.
 Beneath the velvet's purple canopy,
 Divinely-formed, a downy couch arose,
 While alabaster lamps a milky light disclose.

Once more she hears the hymeneal²⁴ strain,
 Far other voices now attune the lay;
 The swelling sounds approach, awhile remain,
 And then, retiring faint, dissolved away.
 The expiring lamps emit a feebler ray,
 And soon in fragrant death extinguished lie;
 Then virgin terrors Psyche's soul dismay,
 When through the obscuring gloom she nought can spy,
 But softly-rustling sounds declare some being nigh.

Oh you for whom I write, whose hearts can melt
 At the soft thrilling voice whose power you prove,²⁵
 You know what charm, unutterably felt,
 Attends the unexpected voice of Love.
 Above the lyre, the lute's soft notes above,
 With sweet enchantment to the soul it steals
 And bears it to Elysium's²⁶ happy grove;
 You best can tell the rapture Psyche feels
 When Love's ambrosial lip the vows of Hymen seals.

²³ The reviewer in the *Gentleman's Magazine* was particularly impressed by this passage: 'The description of the ideal palace reared for Psyche, after the oracle had decreed she should be exposed on a tall rock's high summit, is fanciful and rich as a brilliant imagination can well depict; and the magic operations of her attendants are described with an exuberance of taste peculiar to herself, and equal to the manner in which she relates the impression made upon the heart of Cupid by the charms of Psyche when he executed the

harsh commands of his mother' (*Gentleman's Magazine* 82 (1812) 464-7, p. 466). This stanza in particular may have given Keats the idea for the description of the banquet-room magically supplied with music and food, *Lamia* ii 117-31.

²⁴ *hymeneal* nuptial.

²⁵ *prove* i.e. by being susceptible to its power.

²⁶ *Elysium* idyllic world where the souls of the glorious dead spent an afterlife of revelry.

'Tis he, 'tis my deliverer! Deep impressed
 Upon my heart those sounds I well recall,
 The blushing maid exclaimed; and on his breast
 A tear of trembling ecstasy let fall.
 But ere the breezes of the morning call
 Aurora²⁷ from her purple humid bed,
 Psyche in vain explores the vacant hall;
 Her tender lover from her arms is fled,
 While sleep his downy wings had o'er her eyelids spread.

Again the band invisible attend,
 And female voices soothe the mournful bride;
 Light hands to braid her hair assistance lend,
 By some she sees the glowing bracelet tied;
 Others officious hover at her side,
 And each bright gem for her acceptance bring,
 While some, the balmy air diffusing wide,
 Fan softer perfumes from each odorous wing
 Than the fresh bosom sheds of earliest, sweetest spring.

With songs divine her anxious soul they cheer,
 And woo her footsteps to delicious bowers;
 They bid the fruit more exquisite appear
 Which at her feet its bright profusion showers.
 For her they cull unknown celestial flowers;
 The gilded car²⁸ they bid her fearless guide,
 Which at her wish self-moved with wondrous powers,
 The rapid bird's velocity defied,
 While round the blooming isle it rolled with circuit wide.

Again they spread the feast, they strike the lyre,
 But to her frequent questions nought reply,
 Her lips in vain her lover's name require,
 Or wherewith thus concealed he shuns her eye.
 But when reluctant twilight veils the sky
 And each pale lamp successively expires,
 Again she trembling hears the voice of joy,
 Her spouse a tender confidence inspires,
 But with a fond embrace ere dawn again retires.

To charm the languid hours of solitude
 He oft invites her to the muse's lore,²⁹
 For none have vainly e'er the muse pursued,
 And those whom she delights, regret no more

²⁷ *Aurora* goddess of dawn and morning, often described rising from the bed of Tithonus, her husband. ²⁸ *He oft invites her to the muse's lore* i.e. encouraged her to write poetry. ²⁹ *to write poetry.*

The social joyous hours, while rapt they soar
 To worlds unknown, and live in fancy's dream.
 Oh muse divine, thee only I implore,
 Shed on my soul thy sweet inspiring beams,
 And pleasure's gayest scene insipid folly seems!

Silence and solitude the Muses love
 And whom they charm they can alone suffice,
 Nor ever tedious hour their votaries prove.
 This solace now the lonely Psyche tries,
 Or, while her hand the curious needle plies,
 She learns from lips unseen celestial strains;
 Responsive now with their soft voice she vies,
 Or bids her plaintive harp express the pains
 Which absence sore inflicts where Love all potent reigns.

But melancholy poisons all her joys,
 And secret sorrows all her hopes depress,
 Consuming languor every bliss destroys,
 And sad she droops repining, comfortless.
 Her tender lover well the cause can guess,
 And sees too plain inevitable fate
 Pursue her to the bowers of happiness.
 'Oh Psyche, most beloved, ere yet too late,
 Dread the impending ills and prize thy tranquil state.'

In vain his weeping love he thus advised;
 She longs to meet a parent's sweet embrace.
 'Oh, were their sorrowing hearts at least apprised
 How Psyche's wondrous lot all fears may chase,
 For whom thy love prepared so fair a place!
 Let but my bliss their fond complaints repress,
 Let me but once behold a mother's face,
 Oh spouse adored, and in full happiness
 This love-contented heart its solitude shall bless.

'Oh, by those beauties I must ne'er behold!
 The spicy-scented ringlets of thine hair;
 By that soft neck my loving arms enfold,
 Crown'd with a kind consent thy Psyche's prayer!
 Their dear embrace, their blessing let me share;
 So shall I stain our couch with tears no more,
 But, blessed in thee, resign each other care,
 Nor seek again thy secret to explore
 Which yet, denied thy sight, I ever must deplore.'

Unable to resist her fond request,
 Reluctant Cupid thus at last complied,

500

505

510

515

520

525

530

535

540

And sighing clasped her closer to his breast.
 'Go then, my Psyche; go, my lovely bride!
 But let me in thy faith at least confide
 That by no subtle, impious arts betrayed,
 Which, ah, too well I know will all be tried,
 Thy simply trusting heart shall e'er be swayed
 The secret veil to rend which fate thy screen hath made.

'For danger hovers o'er thy smiling days,
 One only way to shield thee yet I know;
 Unseen, I may securely guard thy ways
 And save thee from the threatened storm of woe;
 But forced, if known, my Psyche to forego,
 Thou never, never must again be mine!
 What mutual sorrows hence must ceaseless flow,
 Compelled thy dear embraces to resign,
 While thou to anguish doomed for lost delights shalt pine.

'Solace thy mind with hopes of future joy:
 In a dear infant thou shalt see my face,
 Blessed mother soon of an immortal boy.
 In him his father's features thou shalt trace;
 Yet go, for thou art free, the bounds of space
 Are none for thee. Attendant zephyrs stay,
 Speak but thy will, and to the wished-for place
 Their lovely mistress swift they shall convey –
 Yet hither, ah, return, ere fades the festive day.'

'Light of my soul, far dearer than the day!
 Exulting Psyche cries in grateful joy,
 'Me all the bliss of earth could ill repay
 For thy most sweet divine society,
 To thee again with rapture will I fly,
 Nor with less pleasure hail the star of eve
 Than when in tedious solitude I sigh;
 My vows of silent confidence believe,
 Nor think thy Psyche's faith will e'er thy love deceive.'

Her suit obtained, in full contentment blessed,
 Her eyes at length in placid slumbers close.
 Sleep, hapless fair! Sleep on thy lover's breast –
 Ah, not again to taste such pure repose!
 Till thy sad heart by long experience knows
 How much they err who, to their interest blind,
 Slight the calm peace which from retirement flows;
 And while they think their fleeting joys to bind,
 Banish the tranquil bliss which heaven for man designed!

545

550

555

560

565

570

575

580

585