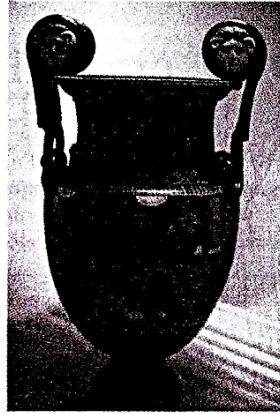


Ode on a Grecian Urn

In probably the most famous ode in English, Keats expresses the view that through art the longing for permanence in a world of change can be satisfied. On the Grecian urn, sculptured relief scenes depict graceful moments of intense experience. The first three stanzas describe one side of the urn. Beginning with the fourth stanza, the other side of the urn is described.



I
Thou still¹ unravish'd bride of quietness,
Thou foster-child of Silence and slow Time,
Sylvan historian, who canst thus express
A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:
What leaf-fringed legend haunts about thy shape 5
Of deities or mortals, or of both,
In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?²
What men or gods are these? what maidens loth?
What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
What pipes and timbrels?³ What wild ecstasy? 10

II
Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;
Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd
Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone:
Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave 15
Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;
Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
Though winning near the goal—yet, do not grieve;
She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair! 20

III
Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed
Your leaves, nor ever bid the Spring adieu;
And, happy melodist, unwearied,
For ever piping songs for ever new;
More happy love! more happy, happy love! 25
For ever warm and still to be enjoy'd,
For ever panting, and for ever young;
All breathing human passion far above,
That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd,
A burning forehead, and a parching tongue. 30

IV
Who are these coming to the sacrifice?
To what green altar, O mysterious priest,
Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,
And all her silken flanks with garlands drest?
What little town by river or sea shore, 35
Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,
Is emptied of this folk, this pious morn?
And, little town, thy streets for evermore
Will silent be; and not a soul to tell
Why thou art desolate, can e'er return. 40

V
O Attic⁴ shape! Fair attitude! with brede⁵
Of marble men and maidens overwrought,
With forest branches and the trodden weed;
Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought
As doth eternity: Cold⁶ Pastoral! 45
When old age shall this generation waste,
Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st,
'Beauty is truth, truth beauty,'—that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know. 50

¹still—means both *yet* and *quiet*.

²Tempe . . . Arcady—Picturesque regions of Greece associated with beauty and contentment.

³timbrels—tambourines.

⁴Attic—of Attica, a state in ancient Greece.

⁵brede—embroidery. ⁶Cold—immortal.

When I Have Fears

Keats's first Shakespearean sonnet, "When I Have Fears," expresses his concern that he would die before he could write the mature poems that he wanted to write.

When I have fears that I may cease to be
Before my pen has glean'd my teeming brain,
Before high piled books, in charactry,¹
Hold like rich garners the full-ripen'd grain;
When I behold, upon the night's starr'd face, 5
Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance,
And think that I may never live to trace
Their shadows, with the magic hand of chance;²
And when I feel, fair creature of an hour!
That I shall never look upon thee more, 10
Never have relish in the faery power
Of unreflecting love;—then on the shore
Of the wide world I stand alone, and think
Till Love and Fame to nothingness do sink.

¹charactry—letters of the alphabet. ²chance—inspiration.