



WWJMRD 2018; 4(3): 181-183

www.wwjmr.com

International Journal

Peer Reviewed Journal

Refereed Journal

Indexed Journal

UGC Approved Journal

Impact Factor MJIF: 4.25

E-ISSN: 2454-6615

**Dr Vidya Patil**

Assistant Professor of English,

Government First Grade

Women's College, Bidar,

Karnataka India

## Lingering and Longing In John Keats' "Ode to a Grecian Urn"

**Dr Vidya Patil**

### Abstract

John Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn", is one of the most remarkable and enduring of all the poems from the Romantic Period. "Ode on a Grecian Urn" is notable for its insightful musings about the nature of beauty. Keat's art had no extraneous purpose, moral, political or philosophical; but only the aim of revealing beauty. "The Ode to a Grecian Urn" reveals Keats interest in Hellenic life with its religious rituals and high sense of artistic beauty. A few figures carved on a Grecian urn impel his imagination to reconstruct the city life of ancient Greece through the glimpses of a surging, full-bodied vitality arrested at a dramatic moment and enshrined forever in the sculptural carvings.

**Keywords:** Beauty, Art, Hellenic life, Imagination, Verbal magic

### Introduction

*John Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn", is one of the most remarkable and enduring of all the poems from the Romantic Period. "Ode on a Grecian Urn" is notable for its insightful musings about the nature of beauty. The meaning of the poem "Ode to a Grecian Urn" by John Keats conveys the "speechlessness of the true language of art". In doing so, it demonstrates "the most universal power [of all nineteenth-century poets] to move readers in our own time" (Bloom & Trilling 494). This effect is achieved through the cohesive development of the meaning of the entire poem, but is especially concentrated in the concluding lines that have become so well-loved and often recited: "**Beauty is truth, truth beauty,**'—that is all/Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know". In these two apparently simple lines, Keats conveys his entire philosophy about art, beauty, and life to the reader.*

*Keat's art had no extraneous purpose, moral, political or philosophical; but only the aim of revealing beauty. And he found beauty everywhere, in nature, in art, and in human life. He is the most richly sensuous of our poets. Keats' poetry is a concrete world of the five senses. Yet an undertone of brooding thought – on **'the agony, the strife of human hearts'** is witnessed in his odes.*

*Greek mythology and medieval life specially appealed to him as themes for poetry; but whatever his theme, he invested it with the glamour of high romance. He was a very great artist, with two ultimate gifts – the gift of verbal magic, and a pictorial quality of imagination which fills his poems with spectacular verbal pictures and effects like those of sculpture.*

### Ode on a Grecian Urn

*This ode reveals Keats interest in Hellenic life with its religious rituals and high sense of artistic beauty. A few figures carved on a Grecian urn impel his imagination to reconstruct the city life of ancient Greece through the glimpses of a surging, full-bodied vitality arrested at a dramatic moment and enshrined forever in the sculptural carvings. The poem further reveals the growing maturity of the reflective powers of the poet, his power to condense a subtle and profound discussion on the relation between art and life within the compass of a few suggestive lines. It also illustrated his power to lead the discussion onto an epigrammatic climax, the exact interpretation of which still leaves the critics guessing. 'The Grecian Ode' is a*

**Correspondence:**

**Dr Vidya Patil**

Assistant Professor of English,

Government First Grade

Women's College, Bidar,

Karnataka, India

Is a predominantly reflective poem in which the poet explores the interspace of silence that surrounds an incomplete drama of human life and relies mostly on the art of suggestiveness?

*Many critics have tried to interpret the meaning of this ode according to their taste, yet the meaning of the poem is not clear. Bridges and many others agree that Keats' main theme in 'Grecian Urn' was the supremacy of art over nature, because of its unchanging expression of perfection. The poem shows the relationship between art and life. The subject of this ode is the truth of the Urn's beauty or the meaning of art in life. The Urn's is a romantic world free from the drawbacks of the real. The Urn celebrates those human attitudes that defeat time and mutability (changing nature) Keats selects two scenes carved on the Urn and describes and comments upon these two scenes. The theme of the first scene is love and the scene occupies the first three stanzas. The second is a sacrificial (ceremonial) procession and is described in the fourth stanza. In the last stanza, the poet tries to understand and convey the importance of the Urn. The beauty that the Urn depicts in this ode is the beauty of human feelings captured in the intense moments of our life.*

*In the first stanza, the poet describes the everlasting freshness and virginity of the urn. The Urn remains unbroken and safe from the destruction of time and hence it is eternally fresh and virgin like. The figures inscribed on the urn are dedicated to inviolable silence; no sound can ever break through the indissoluble marriage bond that ties them to dumbness. The figures have acquired a deep suggestiveness of import under the fostering influence of the silent art in which they are enshrined, deepened by the silence of the passing centuries. They have not spoken for so long, the bustling centuries in which they live have been buried so deep under the marching procession of the following years that a whole eternity seems to be behind their dumbness. It's real parents (the artist) is unknown. So the poet calls the silent centuries its guardians. The Urn depicting the rural scenes is a record of the rural life of the past. Even though wedded to silence, the urn by its art can express more ably than verse. Thus Keats regards sculpture as superior to poetry. He says the urn is having the beautiful shape of a leaf which is liked by both man and God (and Goddesses). He comments on the pictures of men and women carved on the Urn. He asks whether they are men or Gods. This way he introduces the Urn in the first stanza.*

*In the second stanza, Keats, comments on the pipes carved on the Urn and the sweet music of the pipe at first and in the later part he comes to the lover and the beloved. The silent songs of the pipe on the Urn are sweeter than the melodious songs we hear. He writes; -**"Heard melancholies are sweet, but those unheard are sweeter."** The heard music is sweet only to the sensual ear but the unheard songs of the pipe is sweet and attracting to the human spirit. The music played is of no particular tone and thus of infinite variety.*

*Keats says that the young man who is standing under the tree will be singing all the time. The tree will ever be green. This bold lover will always be near the goal but will not be able to reach it. He cannot kiss his beloved. Keats consoles the young lover by saying that she will not fade away. They never get united but their love is immortal. In reality, there is a chance of change in love that may not last long, but the*

love of this young lover is ever living. Life is a flowing stream: art is a cup dipped into that flowing stream. Life will dry up but the fullness of the cup will endure. Art isolates a single transcendent moment out of the complex web of life. Eternity is promised to art, while transitorizes is the portion of life.

*In the third stanza, the poet continues the description of the same scene. He calls the boughs, happy boughs because they will not shed their leaves and are forever green. The spring is eternal on the trees on the urn. The spring is eternal on the trees on the urn. The melodist never feels tried to play the pipe. He is happily playing the pipe and is ever singing new songs. Then Keats comes to the love of those young lovers, whose love is a happy love. It is ever warm and ever enjoying, it is forever young. The pleasure is in the ardent pursuit, not in the attainment. The warmth remains unabated owing to the joy of expectancy. The love made eternal by art transcends all earthly love. It will not grow old, whereas breathing (real) human beings have a sorrowful and heavy heart. In the real world, the lovers living on earth experience the lover's sadness. Here the perfect and ideal lovers and love on Grecian Urn is compared to reality. Restlessness and unhappiness is always there in real life.*

*In the fourth stanza, Keats comes to the second scene on the Grecian urn, i.e. the sacrificial procession. Keats has described the sacrificial procession on the urn beautifully and asks to which town these people belong. Where the town is? Lastly he remarks that the town will be desolate without men because all of them have gathered on the Grecian urn, never to return. Looking at the scene on the urn, the poet questions who the men are, who are participating in the sacrificial procession. Then he asks the priests, who were leading the procession to what offering place he is taking the young cow. The young cow is dressed with garlands and silken clothes. Here we see the clear picture of the non-Christian (Heathen) ritual of sacrifice to village deity. Then he proceeds questioning where the town is situated, the town to which those men of procession on the urn belong. Whether that town is on the bank of a river, or on the sea shore, or on the mountain-foot. Wherever the town is, however the town might be, the town is emptied of its folk (people) that holy morning to attend to attend the sacrificial procession. The streets of that little town will always be silent because there is no one wandering in the street. And no one will tell why the the town is lonely and ruinous. The town is permanently desolate.*

*In the last stanza, the poet makes the urn eternal for its everlasting qualities. He says the fair bodied Greek urn is thickly embossed with a crowded array of figures of men and women, forest branches, plants, etc. The figures on the urn and the art which is the parent of these figures are as baffling to the human understanding as eternity. The rustic scene carved on the marble of the urn lacks the pleasure of life. Keats says the Grecian urn will remain safe and unbroken. It will soothe and console the future generations beset with new troubles. The figures on the run through their beauty convey an all important lesson of the identity of beauty and truth. Man is so made that for him the passage to the hall of truth lies through the vestibule (entrance hall) of beauty. It is clear in the following lines of Keats:-*

**"Beauty is truth, truth beauty – that is all  
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."**

**References**

1. Bloom, Harold, and Lionel Trilling. *Romantic Poetry and Prose*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1973.
2. Vendler, Helen. *The Odes of John Keats*. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1983.
3. John Schilb. John Clifford "Making Arguments about Literature: A Compact Guide and Anthology" P 695-696 "Ode on a Grecian urn" by John Keats
4. Ferrari, G.R.F. *Plato - The Republic*. Eleventh. United Kingdom: University Press, Cambridge, 2008. Print