Ode on a Grecian Urn

**Author:** John Keats, an English Romantic poet, 1795-1821.

* Although his poems were not generally well received by critics during his life, his reputation grew after his death, so that by the end of the 19th century he had become one of the most beloved of all English poets.
* He was seen as a master of Odes

**Occasion:** This poem was first published in Annals of the Fine Arts, a journal focused mainly in painting and sculpture.

**Speaker:** A *romantic* with a fascination for a marble art piece, an urn.

**Setting:** Not entirely clear (and this might’ve been on purpose). The speaker seems to drift in between the reality of the urn sitting before him, and a fantastical world that accompanies the urn in all of its beauty and complexity.

* The Meter is Iambic Pentameter
* Rhyme Scheme is *ABAB CDECDE*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| THOU still 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? |  |
| What men or gods are these? What maidens loth? |  |
| What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape? |  |
| What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy? | *10* |
|  |  |
| 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* |
|  |  |
| Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed |  |
| Your leaves, nor ever bid the Spring adieu; |  |
| And, happy melodist, unwearièd, |  |
| 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* |
|  |  |
| 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 its 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* |
|  |  |
| O Attic shape! fair attitude! with brede |  |
| 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: Cold 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* |