

“On a Grecian Urn” (Annals of the Fine Arts
MDCCCXIX) appeared January 1920 Signed with a
cross. (*Annals*)

ORIGINAL POETRY.

ART. XVI. ON A GRECIAN URN.

I.

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,
Of Deities, or Mortals, or of both,
In 'Tempe or the Dales of Arcady ?
What Gods or Men are these ? What Maidens loth ?
What love ? what dance ? what struggle to escape ?
What Pipes and timbrels ? what wild extacy ?

II.

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
Are sweeter ; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on ;
Not to the sensual ear but more endeared,
Pipe to the spirit, ditties of no tone :
Fair Youth, beneath the trees thou canst not leave
Thy song, nor ever bid the spring adieu ;
Bold lover never, never canst thou kiss
Though winning near the goal :—O do not grieve !
She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss :
For ever wilt thou love and she be fair.

III.

Ah happy, happy boughs, that cannot shed
Your leaves, nor never, bid the Spring adieu ;
And happy Melodist unwearied,
For ever piping songs for ever new ;

More happy love, more happy happy love,
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 cloyed
A burning forehead and a parching tongue.

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
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.

V.

O Attick shape ! Fair attitude ! with brede
Of marble men and maidens overwrought,
With forest branches and the trodden weed,—
Thou silent form dost teaze us out of thought
As doth eternity ! Cold Pastoral,
When old age shall this generation waste,
Thou wilt 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.

2nd publication, 1820 – in *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St. Agnes, and Other Poems* (1820)

Ode on a Grecian Urn

I.

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-fring'd legend haunt about thy shape
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 ?

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
Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare ;
Bold lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
Tho' 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 !

III.

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All breathing human passion far above,
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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,
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.

V.

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 !
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.

55

Ode on a Grecian Urn 1819.

Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,
Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,
Sylvan Historian, who can'st thus express
A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme,
What leaf-fring'd legend haunts about thy shape,
Of Witches, or of Sorcerers, or of both,
In Tempe, or the Dale of Arcady?
What men or Gods are these? what maidens ^{lotto}
What love? what dance? what struggle to escape?
What pipes and timbrels? what wild ecstasy?

2

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 can'st not leave
Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare, -
Bold Lover, never, never can'st thou kiss.
Tho' winning near the goal, - O, do not grieve!
She cannot fade, tho' thou hast not thy bliss
For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!

1b) George Keats' transcript (G) of "Ode On a Grecian Urn"

Ode on a Grecian Urn 1819

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A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:
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What love ? what dance ? What struggle to escape ?
What pipes and timbrels ? What wild ecstasy ?

2.

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
Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare,-
Bold lover, never, never canst thou kiss.
Tho' winning near the goal - O, do not grieve!
She cannot fade, tho' thou hast not thy bliss
For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!

3.

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!
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.

4.

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 sides with garlands drest?
What little town by river or sea shore,
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.

5.

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!
When old age shall this generation waste,
Thou wilt 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.

Transcript 2) Sir Charles' Dilkes' transcript (D) in his copy of *Endymion*

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Bold lover, never, never canst thou kiss
Though winning near the goal—O, do not grieve!
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3) Charles Brown's (B) transcript of Keats' holograph

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Richard Woodhouse's transcript (W) made from
Brown's:

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Letter to Richard Woodhouse, dated October 27, 1818

My dear Woodhouse,

Your Letter gave me a great satisfaction; more on account of its friendliness, than any relish of that matter in it which is accounted so acceptable in the 'genus irritabile' The best answer I can give you is in a clerklike manner to make some observations on two principle points, which seem to point like indices into the midst of the whole pro and con, about genius, and views and achievements and ambitions and coetera. 1st As to the poetical Character itself, (I mean that sort of which, if I am any thing, I am a Member; that sort distinguished from the wordsworthian or egotistical sublime; which is a thing per se and stands alone) it is not itself—it has no self—it is every thing and nothing—it has no character—it enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, right or poor, mean or elevated—it has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen. What shocks the virtuous philosp[h]er, delights the camelion Poet. It does no harm from its relish of the dark side of things any more than from its taste for the bright one; because they both end in speculation. A Poet is the most unpoetical of any thing in existence; because he has no Identity—he is continually in for—and filling some other Body—The Sun, the Moon, the Sea, and Men and Women who are creatures of impulse are poetical and have about them an unchangeable attribute—the poet has none; no identity—he is certainly the most unpoetical of all of God's Creatures. If then he has no self, and if I am a Poet, where is the Wonder that I should say I would write no more? Might I not at that very instant [have] been cogitating on the Characters of Saturn and Ops? It is a wretched thing to confess: but is a very fact that not one word I ever utter can be taken for granted as an opinion growing out of my identical nature—how can it, when I have no nature? When I am in a room with People if I ever am free from speculating on creations of my own brain, then not myself goes home to myself: but the identity of every one in the room begins to press upon me that, I am in a very little time an[ni]hilated—not only among Men; it would be the same in a Nursery of children: I know not whether I make myself wholly

understood: I hope enough so to let you see that no dependence is to be placed on what I said that day.

In the second place I will speak of my views, and of the life I purpose to myself—I am ambitious of doing the world some good: if I should be spared that may be the work of maturer years—in the interval I will assay to reach to as high a summit in Poetry as the nerve bestowed upon me will suffer. The faint conceptions I have of Poems to come brings the blood frequently into my forehead—All I hope is that I may not lose all interest in human affairs—that the solitary indifference I feel for applause even from the finest Spirits, will not blunt any acuteness of vision I may have. I do not think it will—I feel assured I should write from the mere yearning and fondness I have for the Beautiful even if my night's labours should be burnt every morning and no eye ever shine upon them. But even now I am perhaps not speaking from myself; but from some character in whose soul I now live. I am sure however that this next sentence is myself. I feel your anxiety, good opinions and friendliness in the highest degree, and am

Your's most sincerely

John Keats

Source: <http://42opus.com/v5n1/torichardwoodhouse>