



1795-1821

- John Keats lived only **twenty-five years**
- poetic achievement -
extraordinary

□ Odes

- Ode to a Nightingale
- Ode on a Grecian Urn
- Ode to Psyche
- To Autumn
- Ode on Melancholy
- Ode on Indolence
- Ode to Fanny
- Ode – (Bards of Passion and of Mirth)
- Lines on the Mermaid Tavern
- Robin Hood – To a Friend
- Ode to Apollo

□ Other poems

- I stood tiptoe upon a little hill
- Specimen of an induction to a poem
- Calidore – a fragment
- To Some Ladies
- On Receiving a Curious Shell, and a Copy of Verses from the Same Ladies
- To – Georgiana Augusta Wylie, afterwards Mrs. George Keats
- To Hope
- Imitation of Spenser

- Three Sonnets on Woman
- Sleep and Poetry
- On Death
- Women, Wine, and Snuff
- Fill For Me a Brimming Bowl
- Isabella or The Pot of Basil
- To a Young Lady who Sent Me a Laurel Crown
- On Receiving a Laurel Crown from Leigh Hunt
- To the Ladies who Saw me Crown'd
- Hymn to Apollo
- The Eve of St. Agnes

□ **Epistles**

- To George Felton Mathew
- To My Brother George
- To Charles Cowden Clarke
- To John Hamilton Reynolds

□ **Sonnets**

- To My Brother George
- To – [Had I a man's fair form, then might my sighs]
- Written on the Day that Mr. Leigh Hunt left Prison
- How many bards gild the lapses of time!

- To a Friend Who Sent Me Some Roses
- To G. A. W. [Georgiana Augusta Wylie]
- O Solitude! if I must with thee dwell
- To My Brothers
- Keen, fitful gusts are whisp'ring here and there
- To one who has been long in city pent
- On First Looking into Chapman's Homer
- On Leaving Some Friends at an Early Hour
- Addressed to Haydon
- On the Grasshopper and Cricket

- To Koscuisko
- Happy is England! I could be content
- Sonnet on Peace
- Sonnet to Byron
- Sonnet to Chatterton
- Sonnet to Spenser
- On the Sonnet
- When I have Fears That I May Cease to Be



- Endymion (A Poetic Romance)

- Book I

- Book II

- Book III

- Book IV

- Lamia
- Lamia – part 1
- Lamia – part 2

- Hyperion – A Fragment

- Hyperion – Book I
- Hyperion – Book II
- Hyperion – Book III



1795-1821

- rank him as one of the great English poets.
- T.S. Eliot calls - "the most notable and the most important ever written by any English poet."

- Complications from tuberculosis.





- the epitaph he wrote for his tombstone indicates:


"Here lies one whose name was writ in water."






The fusion of three
elements, **his social predicament, his health problems
and his brooding nature and love for nature**

**....all contributed to the perfection of the deep
melancholic nature of his poetry**



Majority of cases **we cannot separate the writer from the social forces** which varyingly have direct or indirect impact on the art of a writer but **in case of Keats we can confidently say that his talent is the product of the ideological and social circumstances of his age that is why he is a true representative of the romantic era**

(Ali, 2015)

- 
- nineteenth century critics and readers - did come to appreciate him – though only a partial understanding of his work


□ They saw Keats as -



- a sensual poet
- they focused on his vivid, concrete imagery
- his portrayal of the physical and the passionate
- his immersion in the here and now

- One nineteenth century critic – some extreme
- Keats had "a mind constitutionally inept for abstract thinking," but that he "had no mind."

□ the twentieth century - the **perception** of Keats's

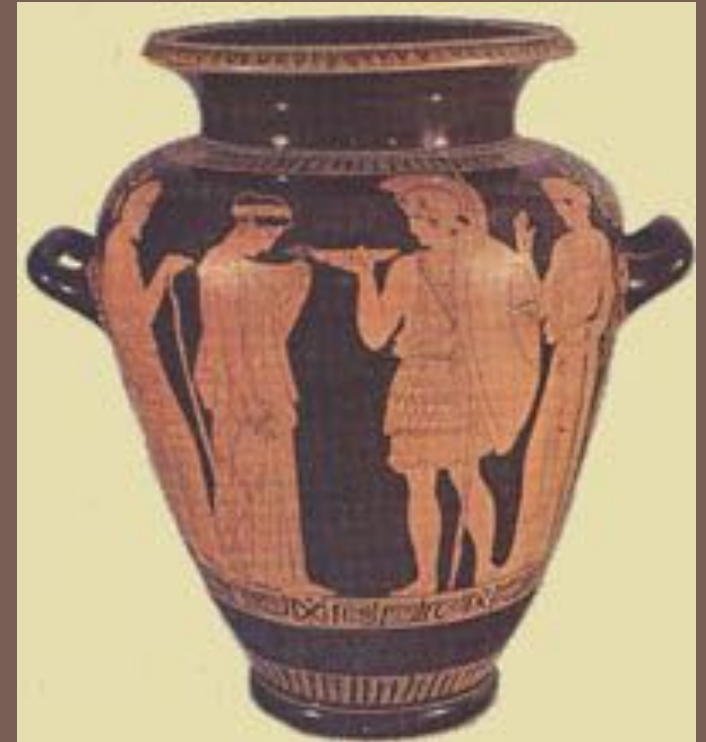


□ praised for his **seriousness and thoughtfulness**

□ for his dealing with **difficult human conflicts and artistic issues**

□ and for his **impassioned mental pursuit of truth**

- Keats advocated living "the ripest, fullest experience that one is capable of"
- he believed that what determines truth is experience



ODE ON A GRECIAN URN

John Keats






- In a letter to his publisher in the summer of 1819 Keats **worries over the question of his literary popularity :**
- "I feel every confidence that if I choose I may be a popular writer," Keats writes; "that I will never be; but for all that I will get a livelihood-I **equally dislike the favour of the public with the love of a woman-** they are both a cloying treacle to the wings of independence."

- **Margaret Homans** recognizes that in such statements about popular readers Keats protests too much-that **he desires as well as fears the mass audiences women represent.**
- Margaret Homans, "Keats Reading Women, Women Reading Keats," *Studies in Romanticism*, 29(Fall 1990), 341-70 (348).

- **Philip Fisher:**

- “Despite the speaker's tone of lofty aestheticism at the conclusion of the ode, **the poem itself comprises a dialogue inhabited by Keats's conflicting desires for, on the one hand, a literary popularity** that would betoken his ability to be heard by mass audiences, ...

- ...and, on the other, **a literary immortality** that would transcend the particular material conditions of contemporary popularity and **grant his poetry** the same privileged **status of the "museum"** artefact that the ode gives the urn: the status of "anthologised art."
- Philip Fisher, "A Museum with One Work Inside: Keats and the Finality of Art," *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 33 (1984), 85-102 (87).

- 
- "The excellence of every art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate from their being in close relationship with Beauty and Truth." **John Keats**

- The poem is about **an object of art** and the poem itself is art.


- based on a **series of paradoxes:**

- ▣ the **discrepancy** between the urn with its frozen images and the dynamic life portrayed on the urn.

- ▣ the **human and changeable** versus the **immortal** and **permanent**.



▣ **life versus art**

- 
- **The “Ode on a Grecian Urn” portrays ---**
 - **an attempt to engage with the **static immobility of****
sculpture

□



□

- **The Grecian urn, passed down through countless centuries to the time of the speaker's viewing, **exists outside of time in the human sense****



the intention of the author-

The Grecian Urn depicts a world of beauty and human passions that are set in art.

- **The Lover on the urn pictures something that cannot fade.**

- **a development of the idea of the supremacy of ideal art over nature**
- **since it is captured for all time on the urn it is an unchanging expression of perfection**



- The **urn is the star** and

- described in several different ways



- it's a married bride

- metaphor to compare the urn to an "unravish'd" bride and "foster-child."

- 
- Perpetuation and immortality

□ Time



- **figures on it are frozen in time** in the middle of what they were doing and they will remain there, unchanged, for eternity.

□ Time

- The "bold lover" will never kiss the girl he is pursuing, but then, she will never age either
-
- The boughs will never lose their leaves.



□ Time


- The piper will be "For ever piping songs for ever new,"
- the ceremonial procession will always be on its
- way to the sacrifice.

□ Time

- these claims are **only true in the imaginary sense**, since there are no real lovers, trees, musicians, or procession but only a picture of them

□ Time

- In asking us to **take the leap of imagination** that would let us **pretend that these pictures** have real lives, **Keats is skipping over** one of the basic facts about time: **time is motion**

- 
- poem's last two lines:
 - “Beauty is truth, truth beauty,- that is all
 - Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.”

□ We can certainly see the beauty:



□ the lovers are in love

□ the music of the pipe is sweet

□ the trees are always full

□ and the people attending the sacrifice have the joy of
anticipation



- **But** where is the truth in all of this?

-

- The Romantic notion of beauty is an **intense feeling** and this is, for the Romantics the basis of all interpretation.
- Intense feeling is an **undeniable fact**
- The fact that the **urn is cold is symbolic of the need for feeling.**

- 
- ▣ **The beauty of the urn speaks directly to our imaginations and shows the **power of the human mind to appreciate beauty****

Consider - the scene on the urn is true and

beautiful because it is **self-contained**:

- it has no need for answers, and so it will always have found its truth
- Where as in **real life** - new details always rise up and make **truth and beauty elusive**.




The common factor to both truth and beauty in this poem is that **they both occur when you know all that you need to know**, regardless of what is happening around you



But....


How?

Is it possible?


- 
- Keats does not answer-
 - whether such fulfillment is possible for a human being or if it can only happen to an inanimate object


- "Ode on a Grecian Urn" concludes **with the urn saying "Beauty is truth, truth beauty,"** and **the poet commenting**
- **"—that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."**


- Keats is using paradoxical language to make a claim for **an alternative kind of truth.**
- This **claim makes sense within the logic of the poem**
- it is also meant to have a **wider application to how do we view reality.**

- 
- The poem makes claims about the **value and uses of art** (and poetry) as represented by the urn, **in contrast to other kinds of truth**

- 
- These other kinds of truth might be **scientific, religious, or philosophical**

- 
- but the poem says clearly that "on earth" **we can not know anything more true than what we will learn from art and that such knowledge is sufficient**

- 
- There might be **other forms of knowledge after death** or in some "other" realm-

- 
- but **they do not concern us** and **we are unlikely to know much about them** while "on earth."
 - Realize the **value and uses of art** (and **poetry**)





- Many critics see - ironies


- suggesting the opposite of what is said

-

- Filled with ironies...

- 
- How can Keats or the urn so praise beauty when desire on the urn is unsatisfied by sexual pleasure
 - and when the world it depicts reminds us of death and destruction?


- 
- Moreover the **language of the poem** seems **excessive:**
 - "Ah, happy, happy boughs!.... More happy love! more happy, happy love!"


- 
- **Keats indicates a distance between the serene, silent beauty of art -**
 - **the pains, anguish, passions, and pleasures of the world in which we live**




- Which one is superior?


- thinking about the art or....

- 
- When **we read with more sensitivity and with more familiarity** - we wonder whether **Keats might possibly be suggesting**
 - **his poetry is superior to the urn** which, remember, is also a product of his own **imagination**


- 
- critics speak differently -
 - T. S. Eliot, Allen Tate, and others have argued that "Beauty is truth, truth beauty" does not make sense.

- 
- Critics now usually agree that the 1820 version of the poem is correct; here the urn only says "**Beauty is truth, truth beauty,**" and the rest of the two lines is **Keats's commentary**



- 
- In Keats' poetry there is a **tension between spirit and matter**


 - between **vision and existence**


- 
- Keats **longed to shape existence into the permanent form of beauty**
 - but **he could never forget the sense of anguish and limitation in his individual self**



- **The tension arising from this dualism**

caused him to **search for symbols** which might **unite in permanent and meaningful** form the play between the **transient anguish of life** and the **world of his imagination**

- 
- For Keats it was a **quest of a special kind to create a symbolic world in which the qualities of the spirit modify harsh facts of nature**


- 
- When successful this romantic vision achieves
 - permanence in the world of art equal to that of a grecian urn.
 - In moments of failure the **existential anxiety of the unsatisfied individual breaks** through to destroy the symbol





- His perception of the **natural world creates the bird symbol** in " Ode to a Nightingale,"


- intensely refined passion the **religious symbolism** surrounding the lovers in " The Eve of St. Agnes,"

-


- 
- a semi-divine force operating in the world the myth
symbolism of " Lamia."

- 
- In these symbolic experiences **the poet projects on the highest imaginative level man's dream of permanence** for his more hopeful psychological states of being.


- 
- Keats' **greatest achievement in the art of symbolic projection of experience** is the " Ode on a Grecian Urn."
 - The medium of projection is a **work of art** itself
 - an urn on which are brought to life Keats' other symbols of man's experience


- 
- Nature, love, mythology, and religious experience live on in the world of the urn, subsumed by the poet into the powerful art symbol


□


- 
- - Keats' Symbolism Author(s): James D. Boulger Source: ELH, Vol. 28, No. 3 (Sep., 1961), pp. 244-259
 - Cleanth Brooks, *The Well Wrought Urn* (New York, 1948), pp. 139-152, and Earl R. Wasserman, *The Finer Tone*, pp. 11-63.


- 
- What is the principle tension in the poem?


- 
- The principal tension in the poem comes from the awareness that **what he most enjoys in life - warm, youthful sensuousness, love and beauty - must be spontaneous and fluid, ever-changing,** if they are to retain their special vitality and charm.

- 
- They belong to life, not to art.
 - **Art may resist flux and perpetuate lover and maiden, but, dead and cold in itself, it can only represent life**

- 
- No matter **how great an effort of the imagination is made to endow** these figures with breathing, sensuous life, **they remain but a semblance of life**, a "brede of marble men and maidens."

- 
- he **feels compassion not only for the lover** who will grow old and the beautiful woman that will lose her lustrous eyes in real life (Ode to a Nightingale)
 - **but also, in art,** for the **lover who will never attain his goal** and for the **town that will be forever desolate.**


- 
- **He wanted, then, two irreconcilable things:** life in its ever-changing fullness -the lover's ardor, the flush on the maiden's cheek, her sparkling eyes, her alternating moods and caprices- and **he wanted to arrest these ripe moments and hold them permanently**

- 
- The second desire clearly stems from the first.
 - It is the result of his sheer zest for living, the natural gusto with which he seized life, and the accompanying profoundly **melancholy awareness that all passes, all is flux**


- 
- **Art was to embody his ideal** but, ironically, **he found it deficient in life.**

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- Nervous unrest in life was replaced **by placidity and calm in art**
- passion and fever, **by tranquillity**
- disorder and chaos, **by order and harmony**
- flux, **by permanence**

- 
- Since **life is a flow and subsists in change**, *the flow of blood within and the flow of time and circumstance without, in addition to the constant physical action of the body*, then **the essential nature and vitality of life itself is negated when transfixed in art.**

□


- 
- There is a stoppage of the circulation, or stasis, and a suspension of both time and circumstance


□ **In life the passage of time brings completion.**




□ Unless a change in relationship occurs or untoward circumstance intervenes, the lover in real life consummates his love and thereby wins his bliss;


□


- 
- while the sculptured lover, **subject neither to chance nor change**, is always about to enjoy, but never enjoys

- 
- What he really desires is the ripeness of youth, its joy and bliss, lasting forever

 - His ideal, in short, is the best of both worlds, what he can have neither in life nor in art alone.*

- 
- Wasserman sees the poet's conception in a similar light:
 - "No one," he writes, "will deny that the ode, like most of Keats's poems, deals with the **human and mutable on the one hand, and the immortal and essential on the other;** and that what it states has some thing to do with both an opposition and a fusion of these two states."


- 
- This delicate balancing - this "paradoxical essence" is, in Wasserman's view, "the central principle of Keats's visions."


- 
- although the ode is a symbolic action in terms of an urn, **its intrinsic theme** is that region where earth and the ethereal, light and darkness, time and no-time become one; and what the symbolic dance ultimately **discovers is the way in which art (the urn) relates man to that region"**
 - The Finer Tone, Johns Hopkins Press, 1953, pp. 14-16).


- Cold pastoral! - in his objective scrutiny





- He realizes that the urn is indeed a cold pastoral, several removes from life, but that it is nonetheless beautiful.

- 
- To Keats beauty, the object of his pursuit in *Endymion* and his solace in *Hyperion*, was an attribute of the ideal.
 - .

- 
- By sympathizing with humanity and by directly experiencing the real, *Endymion* had won Cynthia, or ideal beauty, for his bride.
 - *Endymion* was allegorical of the artist's quest for the ideal, embodied in Cynthia the moon-goddess.


- 
- In the Ode on a Grecian Urn beauty, though intrinsically desirable, is not a passive ideal to be reached for in a rarer atmosphere than the earth's; rather, like the nightingale's song, it possesses active power to soothe everyman's mortal pain.
 - Hence the poet addresses the urn:


- 
- 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

- 
- Rooted in awareness of pain and flux
 - the poet's desire - to escape the painful actual
 - and seek repose in beauty -in the ideal.

- 
- the implicit subject - of the Ode on a Grecian Urn is the **ideal** itself.

Is it attainable?

- 
- **Too many inner tensions** - as the poem develops, shape the ideal into something much more complex, unattainable in either life or art since it encompasses both life and art.


- 
- In the first stanza Keats or the speaker, standing apart-gazes at the urn contemplatively.
 - It is an object to muse upon, isolated in the dignity of its ancientness - whole, undisturbed, quiet


□ The observer is aware –





□ at his point in time it exists for him

□ but that it has existed for countless generations
before him

- 
- More than that -
 - it is a "sylvan historian" that speaks to him silently out of the past, relating a "leaf-fringed legend" of long ago
 - when gods walked in the vales of Tempe and Arcadia.

- 
- Though **the urn itself is silent**, the poet sees that **its detail depicts** a revelry -
 - **mad pursuit**
 - struggle to escape
 - **pipes and timbrels**
 - wild ecstasy


- 
- He asks the questions that any curious observer might ask:
 - What do these actions signify?
 - Who are these men or gods?
 - Who are these maidens?


- 
- As he asks these questions
 - he comes closer and imaginatively enters into the scene before his eyes





the urn as object fades from sight


but the poet gives us - a close-up of its detail.


- 
- He accepts now the anonymity of these figures, men or gods;
 - indeed takes pleasure in their anonymity and silence, since the keen delight of imagining is left to him:

- 
- 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

- 
- The fair youth piping songs beneath the trees
 - Since they are unknown, the figures assume a general identity-
 -

- 
- he is of unknown place and unknown time, may be regarded as the artist –
 - poet or musician of any place and any time.

- 
- the lover pursuing the maiden may be regarded as any lover and the maiden as any beautiful woman who is loved –
 - more broadly - these figures are **symbolic of love and beauty.**

- 
- In the real world , the poet has mourned –
 - Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes -Ode to a Nightingale
 - the lover's mistress dwells with Beauty that must die
Ode on Melancholy


□ But the tree, piper, lover, and maiden will always be enjoying or about to enjoy:


□ the tree, its green leaves


□ the piper, his song

□ the lover, his pursuit and passion and the hope of winning his bliss

□ the maiden, her spirited youth and radiant beauty.


- 
- The graceful movement and living action of human creatures moments of being and becoming
 - aspiration and growth have been **caught and held,**
suspended permanently in art

- 
- In the third stanza the poet rejoices - Yet his rejoicing is not unmixed with nostalgia and sorrow, reflected in the repetition of "happy," a word that bears much emotional stress in the odes.


- 
- **He longs for the ideal in nature, art, and love** as they are represented on the urn (21-27)
 - **The lines about love are almost unbearable** in the intensity of their yearning.
 - **“More happy love! More happy, happy love!”**

□ -the vast unbridgeable gulf separating the ideal
from the real

- -the perpetual renewal of warm, young love on the urn
- “For ever warm and still to be enjoy’d, For ever panting, and for ever young”
- -from the throes and fever of breathing human passion
in real life.


- 
- This sorrow pervades the following stanza and unites it emotionally with what has preceded


 - unrelated thematically

- 
- the poet turning to another scene depicted on the urn
 - he is once more the curious observer asking particular questions.

- the priest leading the heifer to sacrifice is most life like
in its detail:

- 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?


- 
- Keats felt, no doubt, that the poem had to be rounded off by a stanza that would give the reader a more complete sense of time and place, a more fixed impression of that far-off Grecian age in which the urn itself was fashioned.


- 
- So, though the stanza is not about the permanence of nature, youth, love, and beauty in art and its transiency in the real world, the description of the pagan ritual creates in our minds a definite picture of the society in which these human figures moved.

- The little town "by river or sea shore,/Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel" further widens our knowledge of background. And the poet's feeling for the little town further deepens the compassion that runs through the whole poem: And, little town, thy streets for evermore Will silent be; and not a soul to tell Why thou art desolate can e'er return.

- These lines are somehow more moving, even, than the poet's compassion for melodist, lover, and maiden. The town in all its desolation suggests total silence, just as the sacrificial rite, the priest leading the heifer low- ing at the skies, suggests ancientness and slow time.

- In the last stanza the poet again stands apart from the object.
- He is no longer absorbed in it; it stands before him, a "shape," an "attitude," a "silent form."
- Its timelessness is awe-inspiring: it teases him out of thought as does eternity

- 
- Standing silent and inscrutable, it is too large an object for human comprehension in the sense that, while it records history ("sylvan historian"), it possesses a long history of its own ----- it spans innumerable generations, innumerable creations and destroyings.


- 
- We cannot think about it, we can only wonder at it as we wonder at eternity.
 - It shares the coldness of eternity - Cold Pastoral - unfeeling, imperturbable, the figures etched on its surface frozen, requiring a meeting of the mind, an active imagination, to give them warm life


- 
- The poet's mood at this point is comparable to his feeling in the Ode to a Nightingale,

- 
- after the spell of the nightingale's song is broken:

"Forlorn! the very word is like a bell / To toll me back
from thee to my sole self!"

- In the midst of ecstasy (imaginative flight) he experiences joy and exultation, but he always faces reality at the end.

- 
- "A sense of real things comes doubly strong . . . like a muddy stream" (*Sleep and Poetry*); he makes the long "journey homeward to habitual self" (*Endymion*); fancy is a "deceiving elf" (*Ode to a Nightingale*)

- 
- and the urn is a cold pastoral.
 - Yet even when absorbed in the urn, he knew that art was not so fine as life, just as marble men and maidens are not so fine as breathing human beings.

























