

Keats

"If poetry come not as naturally as the leaves to a tree, it had better not come at all."

Negative capability: Keats believed that great people, especially poets, have to the ability to accept that not everything can be resolved. The truths found in the imagination access holy authority and cannot be otherwise understood. John Keats claimed that great artists possessed what he called "Negative Capability." Such artists were "capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason." Explain how Keats' concept of "negative capability" might be applied to a reading of Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn."

Keats doesn't focus on the same subjects as the other romantic poets, like religion, ethics, morals or politics. He writes about sensations and experiencing the richness of life.

Conflicts in Keats' poetry

- Transient sensation/enduring art
- Dream/reality
- Joy/melancholy
- Ideal/real
- Mortal/immortal
- Life/death
- Separation/connection
- Being immersed in passion/desiring to escape passion

A lyric poem is a short poem with one speaker, not necessarily the poet, who expresses thought and feeling. A lyric poem stresses moments of feeling and seeks to make an impact in a brief period of time (kind of like a 3 minute song or a 15 second commercial)

Ode: usually a lyric poem of moderate length, with a serious subject, elevated style, and elaborate stanza pattern. Often the Romantic poets start the ode with a meditation on something in nature, like Keats in "Ode to a Nightingale" or Shelly in

"Ode to the West Wind."

The ode has three parts in the Romantic era:

1. The description of a particularized outer natural scene;
2. An extended meditation, which the scene stimulates and which may be focused on a private problem or a universal situation or both

- The occurrence of an insight or vision, a resolution or decision, which signals a return to the scene originally described, but with a new perspective created by the intervening meditation.

"Ode on a Grecian Urn" is based on a series of paradoxes and opposites: (1) the discrepancy between the urn with its frozen images and the dynamic life portrayed on the urn; (2) the human and changeable versus the immortal and permanent; (3) participation versus observation; (4) life versus art.

Ode on a Grecian Urn

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 men or gods are these? What maidens loth?
 What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
 What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?

The word "still" has two meanings—"as yet" and "unmoving" or "quiet." The urn seems virginal, something not yet explored.

Not a real child of silence and time, but a "foster-child," something discarded rather than cherished.

Why are the maidens "loth"? Think back to the "unravished" bride

Who are these gods and men depicted on the urn? He wants to know more.

He calls the urn an "unravish'd bride of quietness" because it has existed for centuries without changes. It is a foster-child of silence and time because it has been adopted by silence and time. He wants to know who the "loth" maidens are and what activity is taking place.

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,
 Though winning near the goal—yet, do not grieve;
 She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,

Oxymoron—how can this be?

There's a contrast between the seeming negativity of the unattained and the fact that the unattained will never fade.

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Using paradox and oxymoron, Keats says that the silent music from the pipes and timbrels is more pleasing than audible music of real life because the urn's music is for the spirit. He notes that although there can never be human consummation, there will also never be death

For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!

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.

These people are free
from time, but frozen
in time.

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More figures added—trees that don't shed leaves,
musicians who don't get tired, lovers who don't get
old.

He thinks the trees are happy because they'll never lose their leaves and the piper is happy because his songs will continue forever and the man's love for the girl will always be "warm and still to be enjoy'd" as opposed to love in the real world which brings pain and sorrow.

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 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.

Human imagination
imagines what's not
there.

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The town that all the people are coming from will always be empty because the people will always be here, celebrating the activities of the urn.

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.'

Urn will remain after
people are dead

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The lovers will always be in love, the musicians will always be playing. But life as portrayed on the urn is static and therefore not life. And the last lines aren't necessarily true.

Keats only lived a little over 25 years. He wrote three of his great odes—"Ode to a Nightingale," "ode on a Grecian Urn, and "Ode on Melancholy" in one month. Most of his poems were written between his 23rd and 24th years.

His epitaph—"Here lies one whose name was writ in water."