

The Significance of Symbols in Interpreting
Keats,
Ode to a Nightingale and Ode on a Grecian Urn

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Abstract:

The present study aims at presenting interpretation of two of Keats' odes: "Ode to a Nightingale" and "Ode on a Grecian Urn" with special concentration on the significance of the symbols. The Statement-Evidence-Approach is to be followed as a procedure in presenting the interpretation of each one of the odes separately. The intended interpretation enhanced with quoted material from the original text as "evidence". The comparison between the two odes is made to determine the central symbols the "Nightingale" and the "Grecian Urn" and the minor symbols in the two poems. While the "Nightingale" is dynamic and vital the "Urn" is static and lifeless. Some other features of the romantic poetry are expressed in different ways in both of the odes through the symbols that express the beauty of nature, love, superstition, mythological, religious and historical notions. The paper ends up with some conclusions, appendices and a list of references.

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**أهمية الرموز في تفسير قصائد
"نشودة للعندليب" و "نشودة على أبريق افرقي"
لكيتس**

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المستخلص:

تهدف الدراسة الى تقديم تأويل لقصيدتي الشاعر جون كيتس "نشودة للعندليب" و "نشودة على ابريق اغريقي" مع تأكيد خاص على ما قد تم توظيفه من رموز. تم اتباع الحالة والدليل كمنهج لتقديم التأويل لكل قصيدة على حدة و يدعم التأويل المنشود بأدلة مقتبسة من نصي القصيدتين لتحديد الرموز الرئيسة فيهما "العندليب" و "الابريق الاغريقي" على التوالي فضلاً عن ما ذكر من رموز اخرى ثانوية، فبينما يعدّ "العندليب" مفعماً بالحيوية والحركة نجد "الابريق الاغريقي" ثابتاً مفتقراً للحياة. ثمة خصائص أخرى للشعر الرومانسي قد تمّ التطرق اليها بطرق مختلفة في كل من القصيدتين من خلال الرموز التي تعبر عن جمال الطبيعة و الحب و الخرافة و الميثولوجيا و الافكار الدينية والتأريخية . تختتم الدراسة ببعض الاستنتاجات و ملحقين وقائمة بالمصادر التي استعان بها الباحث .

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1. Introduction

The present study aims at presenting interpretation of two of Keats' odes: "Ode to a Nightingale" and "Ode on a Grecian Urn" with special concentration on the significance of the symbols. The Statement-Evidence-Approach is to be followed as a procedure in presenting the interpretation of each one of the odes separately. The intended interpretation enhanced with quoted material from the original text as "evidence". The comparison between the two odes is made to determine the central symbols the "Nightingale" and the "Grecian Urn" and the minor symbols in the two poems. While the "Nightingale" is dynamic and vital the "Urn" is static and lifeless. Some other features of the romantic poetry are expressed in different ways in both of the odes through the symbols that express the beauty of nature, love, superstition, mythological, religious and historical notions. The paper ends up with some conclusions, appendices and a list of references.

2. The Definitions of Ode

As a type of poetry, ode is worthy to be dealt with but hard to define. "Ode" is originally derived from the Greek word that stands for "song". The word "ode" was applied to refer to song generally in all times and places (Sendry and Giannone, 1971: 15). The birth of "ode" as a distinguished type of poetry was in the fifth century B. C. through the works of a Greek poet who is called Pinder. Ode is developed four centuries later through the works of the Roman poet Horace (ibid).

The revelation of ode was in the seventeenth century with the coming of English poets like Milton, Cowley, and Gray and above all Keats' contemporaries of the early nineteenth century Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelly (ibid).

An ode is the poem that "addresses a person, thing, or abstraction and extends over several stanzas with elaborate and elevated language, and marked formal and stately tone" (Thorne, 2006: 39). Ode is characterized with being complex and carrying a lofty style and tone. It contains a glorification to the subject that it has been written about (ibid: 415).

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Before the Romantic Movement, the ode was characterized with an exclusive tone of celebration. The romantic poets tried to get rid of such a feature, instead, they exploited ode as a reflection of the real life problems with the aid of the expressive language in order to glorify the subject matter of the poem (Thorne, 2006: 39).

Although it is hard to define, the ode may be distinguished from other types of poetry since “the term ‘ode’ is usually employed for a long lyrical poem, serious in subject, elevated in style, and elaborate in its stanzaic structure” (Abrams, 1957: 61). The ode is characterized with a basic form that glorifies the subject matter but at the same time it can be considered as more philosophical and reflective (Throne, 2006: 39).

As a type of poetry, ode consists of several types. In English, however, the Pindaric ode is considered as the initiation of this form. In this type “the strophes and antistrophes should be written in one stanza form, and the epodes in another” (Abrams, 1957: 61). Such a type of Pindaric ode is called “the regular Pindaric ode”. The other type of Pindaric ode is “irregular Pindaric or Cowleyan ode”. The Cowleyan ode appeared for the first time in 1656 by Abraham Cowley. Cowley neglected the strophic triad which is considered in the first type of Pindaric ode. The Cowleyan ode is characterized with being free in the choice of the “pattern of line lengths, the number of lines and rhyme scheme” (Abrams, 1957: 62). This is considered as the most common for the English ode.

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are characterized with the development of recognizable type of ode through the poems of Milton, Cowley, and Gray and above all Keats and his contemporaries namely Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelly (Sendry and Giannone, 1971: 15).

Keats achieved a significant contribution to the history of the ode. Keats’ ode is characterized with the exploitation of the “conventional epithets and symbols (such as night and the colour black and the like), and the reader is sure to recognize what he means” (ibid: 25).

Keats focused on the exploitation of imagination in order to recreate a sequence of the most peculiar sense of impressions. It is worthy to

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state the strategy of which is adopted by Keats while the former believes in the conceptualizing power of intellect, the latter considers his imagination and feeling what should be trusted. Moreover, what characterizes Keats then is the ability “to begin with a traditional form like the ode and traditional subject like a personified abstraction” (Sendry and Giannone, 1971: 25).

3. Symbolism in Poetry:

Symbolism plays a significant role in poetry since there is an intimate relationship between symbolism on one hand and the devices used in poetry like simile, metaphor and personification on the other. Symbolism is the way of elaborating on the words on the page, in other words, it indicates more than the literal meaning of the words. At the same time, it does not base much on the actual resemblance although the association and sensory resemblance are of great importance in the creation of symbol. The importance of the symbolic use in poetry is clearly illustrated by Throne (2006: 77) “references to objects and people, descriptions of places, events and actions, the expression of ideas can assume a symbolic significance that resonates through a poem.”

It is worthy to differentiate between image on one hand and symbol on the other. The differentiation may be presented in terms of the function which is fulfilled by image and symbol respectively. According to Throne (ibid), an image functions as “a sense-based representation of a particular place or experience” while a symbol goes far from this sensory level. It can be considered as a literal image and it indicates a richer, more powerful and abstract field of meaning. This duality enables the reader to distinguish a symbol especially when the literal interpretation is not quite enough and that may lead to believe that an image sometimes has symbolic function.

The use of symbols may fulfill certain functions. A symbol may be used to avoid calling something by its name directly like “slang, swearing, argot, fashionable jargon, euphemism, and taboo.” These may be considered as the source of creating new words and such

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creation may influence literature since these new words as codes or symbols are known clearly on the part of the writer and the reader alike, for instance, 'rose' as a symbol may refer to love (Herbon, 2004: 154). Hence, it is not a condition to determine an intimate relationship between a symbol and the thing it refers to (Jones, 1986: 72). Moreover, the symbol helps to interpret the context in which it occurs through the realization of the association between the context and the symbol which is employed (Thorne, 2006: 77).

Symbols are of several types. Some of the symbols have a historical, cultural, or mythical background that exists outside the context of a poem. Such a type of symbols is more accessible to the reader. Another type of symbols contains the symbols of natural, religious, or mythical indications which are considered all in all as a part of the common heritage. While some symbols are created with a personal reference, symbols of this type are considered less straightforward because of their private contents (ibid).

4. The Significance of Symbols in Interpreting the Two Odes

The present section deals with the significance of the symbols in presenting acceptable interpretation of the two odes through the relationships between the mentioned symbol and the thought which is supposed to be conveyed. It is intended to associate between the symbol on one hand and the context in which it lies. However, the symbols in Keats odes 'Ode to a Nightingale' and 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' are going to be determined respectively with some sort of justification.

4. 1. Symbols Used in Ode to a Nightingale

The central symbol in Keats' Ode to a Nightingale is the nightingale itself so the relationship between the nightingale and the speaker is very intimate because the bird is a living, dynamic thing. There are some suggested symbolic meanings concerning it as a central symbol in the ode. The possible meanings can be stated as it follows:

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1. pure joy 2. The artist, with the bird's voice being self-expressing or the song being poetry and that is the reason behind the poet's intention to be identical with the bird. 3. the music (beauties) of nature and that justifies the use of a number of symbols that express the beauty of nature along with of the fundamental symbol which is the nightingale. 4. idealism, the poet considers the nightingale as the ideal and suitable way to escape the world of misery.

Table (1): Symbols Used in Ode to a Nightingale

<i>The Central Symbol</i>	<i>The Minor Symbols</i>	<i>The type of Symbol</i>	<i>The Number of the Line</i>
The nightingale	Lethe	Mythological	4
	Dryad	Mythological	7
	Flora	Mythological	13
	Hippocrene	Mythological	16
	Beauty	Nature	29
	Love	Nature	30
	Bacchus	Mythological	32
	Queen-Moon	Mythological	36
	Fays	Mythological	37
	Flowers	Nature	41
	Incense	Nature	42
	Boughs	Nature	42
	Grass	Nature	43
	Thicket	Nature	45
	Fruit-tree	Nature	45
	White hawthorn	Nature	46
	Pastoral eglantine	Nature	46
	Violets	Nature	47
	Leaves	Nature	47
	Musk-rose	Nature	49
	Flies	Nature	50
	Requiem	Religious	60
	Emperor	Historical	64
	Ruth	Religious	66
	Fairyland	Superstition	70
	Elf	Superstition	74

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The symbols used in Ode to a Nightingale fall into two groups according to the notions that these symbols express. These groups of symbols express mythology, superstition, nature, religion, and history. In terms of frequency of their occurrence in the poem, there are (14) symbols that indicate the beauty of nature in the poem while there are (7) symbols that refer to mythology are mentioned. The other groups of symbols occur respectively as it follows: (2)symbols expressing superstition ,(2) symbols expressing religion and finally only one historical symbol has been stated (See Table 1).

The group of symbols that are associated with nature and the beauty of nature (including beauty and love) is dominating among other groups. Such a result helps to understand and interpret the ode as a pure romantic poem in which imagination plays a remarkable role to get rid of the misery of the real life. Moreover, the other groups of symbols like mythological, symbols expressing superstition , religion and history function as illustrations to make the scenes clearer and more vivid.

4. 2. Symbols Used in Ode on a Grecian Urn

The central symbol in Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn" is static but it achieves permanence. Keats employs the Grecian urn as a symbol of life. He refers to the Greek piece of art as being immortal, with its message told to eternity. The Grecian urn is a changeless lifeless object but Keats exploits it as changeless because it resists the various types of conditions across the time. That is why it is described as immortal. In spite of being a lifeless object, the urn is considered by Keats as vital and fresh since it functions as a 'historian' that tells a story through the figures found upon its surface.

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Table (2): Symbols Used in Ode on a Grecian Urn

<i>The Central Symbol</i>	<i>The Minor Symbols</i>	<i>The type of Symbol</i>	<i>The Number of the Line</i>
Grecian urn	Sylvan	Mythological	3
	Flowery	Nature	4
	Leaf-fingr'd	Nature	5
	Tempe	Mythological	7
	Arcady	Mythological	7
	Mad purist	Nature (love)	9
	Struggle to escape	Nature (love)	9
	Bold Lover	Nature (love)	17
	Boughs	Nature	21
	Leaves	Nature	22
	Spring	Nature	22
	Happy love	Nature (love)	25
	Human passion	Nature (love)	28
	Sacrifice	Religious	31
	Altar	Religious	32
	Priest	Religious	32
	River	Nature	35
	Sea	Nature	35
	Mountain	Nature	36
	Attic	Mythological	41
	Men, maiden	Nature (love)	42
	Forest branches	Nature	43
	Trodden weed	Nature	44
	Pastoral	Nature	45
	beauty	Nature	49

The symbols which are used in Keats' Ode on a Grecian Urn can be classified into three main groups according to the thoughts that they convey. These main groups express nature (including beauty of nature, beauty and love), mythology and religion. Generally, "Ode on Grecian Urn" contains about 25 symbols and these symbols are distributed among the five stanzas of the ode. They fall into three main groups that have been mentioned above according to the frequency of the occurrence of each type of symbols. The symbols that refer to nature

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and the beauty of nature are frequently used for (18) times. Whereas,(4)symbols expressing mythological notions and(3) religious symbols are mentioned in the poem . (See Table 2).

According to what has been already explained in table 2, the group of symbols that focus on nature and the beauty of nature is the dominating group simply because the poem is romantic . The symbols used are helpful in understanding the subject-matter of the poem and interpreting it. The symbols which express the beauty of nature supply the lifeless Grecian urn with vitality through the figures on its surface which indicate various types of actions. In addition to that, such a type of symbols gives the Grecian urn the immortality that enables it to be the storyteller 'Sylvan historian' of different periods of time.

Moreover, the symbols that have mythological reference help to emphasize the idea that the ancient Grecian urn is changeless since it tells the truth and contains beauty. The religious symbols which are mentioned in the ode are of great importance since they have a complementary part. They complete the scene presented on this piece of Greek art since they tell about the religious ceremonies and some of the activities of the folk worship.

4.3. The Interpretation of the Symbols in Ode to a Nightingale

The symbols in "Ode to a Nightingale" can be grouped according to their thematic and stylistic significance .The classification of these groups facilitates the interpretation of the symbols. The first is "nature" group whose thematic significance indicates basically beauty of nature (See Table1).

"Beauty" and "Love" are used symbolically and in contrast with the "Nightingale" which symbolizes immortality .While beauty and love are mortal; the "Nightingale" is immortal. All the other symbols that indicate the beauty of nature are mentioned in the fifth stanza (See appendix1).the fifth stanza begins with "I cannot see ...",i.e. the speaker cannot see the beautiful things in the forest either because it

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was dim or because of the special vision bestowed by the flood of imaginative light in the forest dim.

The second group contains the symbols that have mythological themes .Lethe and Dryad are mentioned in the first stanza .The first stanza focuses on the speaker's desire to forget and escape from the misery of life with the nightingale. "Lethe" is the river of forgetfulness and "Dryad" can fly in the wood just like the nightingale that the poet addresses .The other symbols that have mythological themes"Flora, Hippocrene, Bacchus, Queen-Moon and Fays" are associated with the atmosphere of pleasure and gaiety .This atmosphere was created with wine ,harvest, Sunburnt mirth and the nightingale's song There are two religious symbols mentioned in the poem. The first symbol is "requiem". The poet compares the nightingale's song which conveys the poet's grief with the religious ceremony. The second symbol is"Ruth".Ruth suffers alienation from her people for loyalty to Naomi, her mother-in-law."Ruth" is introduced symbolically to express that the poet suffers alienation too.

Symbols that express superstition occur twice in the poem."Faery lands" is the first occurrence of such symbols. It suggests a haunting quality in the voice which casts a spell tinged with a risky voyage in a sea. The second occurrence of a symbol of the same kind is "elf". The poet uses "elf" symbolically to tell that the power of perception stimulated by the bird through its song is similar to a "deceiving elf".

There is only one occurrence of symbols that express history."Emperor" is a historical symbol that suggests the universality of the bird's voice that appeals to the highest and the lowest, the ruler and the ruled at the same time.

The stylistic significance of the symbols in Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale" can be stated in terms of collocation*.The symbols that are used as lexical sets belong to the same semantic area.

Symbols that express the beauty of nature collocate with each other .These symbols are "flowers, incense, boughs, grass, thicket, fruit-tree, white hawthorn, pastel eglantine, violets, leaves and musk-rose". The

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lexical items belong to the same semantic environment .The use of (11) lexical items that collocation with each other indicates that the poet focuses on the beauty of nature to create his imaginative world.

The other group of symbols contains lexical items that refer to ancient gods . These symbols are "Dryad, Flora, Baccus and Queen-Moon". The poet uses the gods and goddesses to associate between their high status and the atmosphere of gaiety and pleasure through the nightingale's song.

***See Halliday and Hassan (1976:285).**

4.4. The Interpretation of the Symbols in Ode on Grecian Urn

The interpretation of the symbols in Keats' "Ode on Grecian Urn" can be presented through grouping them. The purpose behind that is to shed light on their thematic and stylistic significance.

The romantic scene is well expressed through the symbols that refer to the beauty of nature and love. Symbols like "flowery,leave-fingr'd,boughs,leaves, Spring,river,sea,mountain,forest branches, trodden weed, pastrol and beauty" sxxpress the beauty of nature which is reflected on the "urn". It is important to refer to "love" as a part of nature .Symbols like "mad purist, struggle to escape, bold lovers, happy love, human passion, men and maiden" express the love story which is told by the "Grecian Urn".

The "Grecian Urn" is a historian that tells about the various activities that people are engaged in. In addition to the symbols that express the beauty of nature and love, there are symbols that have mythological indications like "Sylvan, Tempe, and Arcady and Attic"." Sylvan" the goddess of woods tells about silence and quietness of people's life while "Tempe"-which is created by the god Neptune and "Arcady" in Greece – emphasize the notion of silence and quietness too.

Religion as a part of life is well expressed through the symbolic use of "sacrifice, altar and priest ".The symbols express the people's worshipping rituals. They lead a "heifer" to the "green altar" and the poet

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addresses the "priest"(see appendix 2).These symbols illustrate the role of religion in the ancient people's life which is well expressed on the "Grecian Urn".

Stylistically, the symbols mentioned in Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn" can be grouped in terms of collocation .symbols like"flowery, leaf,boughs leaves, branches, weed" are lexical items that belong to the same semantic environment .Another group of symbols contains collocated lexical items like "lover and love, men and maiden".

5. Ode to a Nightingale and Ode on a Grecian Urn: A Comparison

Both odes "Ode to a Nightingale" and "Ode on a Grecian Urn" deal with the theme of beauty – ideal beauty. It can be seen that Ode to a Nightingale represents the beauty of nature through the beauty the nightingale's song on one hand and Ode on a Grecian Urn stands for the beauty of art which is reflected by the urn on the other hand (Gittings, 1978: 131).

However, Garrett (1987: 51 – 52) enhances what Gittings has already stated. He explains that in “in the ‘urn’ it is the realm of art that offers the escape, in ‘nightingale’ it is the voice of nature. The overturns from both worlds are responded to in the respective odes and their topographies are explored and their limitations exposed”.

In dealing with "Ode to a Nightingale", it is suggested "that Keats means he intends to focus on the dramatic relations between him as a poet and the nightingale as a symbol while concerning Ode on a Grecian Urn, the ‘on’ refers to a commentary that must be presented by the poet about the drama that he has seen on the other symbol namely the ‘urn’." (See Wasserman as cited in Bate, 1964: 149).

Keats indicates changeless beauty in his"Ode on a Grecian Urn" when he presents the lover that cannot capture his beloved since they are affirmed tightly as figures on the urn which means that such beauty is changeless forever. In contrast, whereas in the Ode to a Nightingale, Keats deals with‘beauty’ in a different way,beauty can fade away just like the human world‘where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,/Or

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new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow' (29–30) (Mayhead, 1967: 82).

It can be said that the two odes are similar with respect to form but they are different from each other in terms of the two central symbols used in both poems. The urn which is silent differs completely from the nightingale that was singing (Bate, 1963: 502).

The main symbols in the two odes are the nightingale and the urn respectively. The features of these symbols lead the reader to compare them for the sake of comprehensive realization of their importance in the two poems. Thus, the nightingale is a vital and elusive bird while the urn is created by the human hands and imagination at the same time. In addition to that, the nightingale cannot be seen, but, it can be felt by the poet whereas the urn can be seen closely and directly. Moreover, the nightingale is more vital, elusive and paradoxical while the urn excuses progressive development. The end of both the nightingale and the urn is also different, the nightingale flies away but the urn remains changeless. Finally, Ode to a Nightingale ends with questions while Ode on a Grecian Urn ends with assertion that contains wisdom.

In both odes the dominating type of symbols is the type that expresses the beauty of nature. The symbols that have mythological notions have been found in "Ode to a Nightingale" more than in "Ode on a Grecian Urn" due to the subject-matter. In "Ode to a Nightingale" the poet uses such symbols because they help him in creating the required imaginative world.

Symbols that express superstition are used in "Ode to a Nightingale" while there is no such a type of symbols in "Ode on a Grecian". The symbols that express religion are mentioned in "Ode on a Grecian Urn" more than in "Ode to a Nightingale" as the former focuses on religion in the people's life.

6. Conclusions

The symbols have an important role to play in interpreting the romantic poems, and Keats' 'Ode to a Nightingale' and 'Ode on a

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Singest of summer in full-throated ease. 10
O for a draught of vintage! that hath been
Cool'd a long age in the deep-delvèd earth,
Tasting of Flora and the country-green,
Dance, and Provençal song, and sunburnt mirth !
O for a beaker full of the warm South! 15
Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,
With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,
And purple-stainèd mouth;
That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,
And with thee fade away into the forest dim: 20

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
What thou among the leaves hast never known,
The weariness, the fever, and the fret
Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last grey hairs, 25
Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
And leaden-eyed despairs;
Where beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow. 30

Away! away! for I will fly to thee,
Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,
But on the viewless wings of Poesy,
Though the dull brain perplexes and retards:
Already with thee! tender is the night, 35
And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,
Cluster'd around by all her starry Fays
But here there is no light,
Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown

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Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways. 40

cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,
But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet
Wherewith the seasonable month endows
The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild; 45
White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;
Fast-fading violets cover'd up in leaves;
And mid-May's eldest child,
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
Themurmurous haunt of flies on summer eves. 50

Darkling I listen; and, for many a time
I have been half in love with easeful Death,
Call'd him soft names in many a musèd rhyme,
To take into the air my quiet breath;
Now more than ever seems it rich to die, 55
To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
In such an ecstasy!
Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—
To thy high requiem become a sod. 60

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
No hungry generations tread thee down;
The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown:
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path 65
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
The same that ofttimes hath
Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam

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Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn. 70

Forlorn! the very word is like a bell
To toll me back from thee to my sole self!
Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well
As she is fabled to do, deceiving elf.
Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades 75
Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep
In the next valley-glades:
Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
Fled is that music:—do I wake or sleep? 80

Appendix 2

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 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

**The Significance of Symbols in Interpreting
Keats,
Ode to a Nightingale and Ode on a Grecian Urn**

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, unwearied,
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

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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

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