**English Romantic Verse** One-Page Guides

**Poet: Keats**

Poem: Ode on a Grecian Urn

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| Context (biographical, Romantic attitudes, social/historical etc) | Written in April 1819 during a painful time in Keats’ life where he suffered from health and financial troubles and the deaths of family members.  He stated that it is “necessary a world of pain and troubles to school an intelligence and make it a soul” |
| A poem about… (Interpretations, key Romantic themes, nature, mortality) | Immortality & eternity  Classical Gods and legends  Imagination vs reality  Pastoral bliss  Art and beauty |
| Speaker (who? talking to whom? attitude to subject- ironic, reverent etc) | Speaker talking to the Urn – ode form  “thou” – classic pronoun used to address inferiors or loved ones, in this case the Urn is being admired  The vase captures the moment but the speaker’s imagination tells the story |
| Form (sonnet, ballad, verse form, rhyme and rhythm) | Same length stanzas with similar rhyme scheme throughout  “Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know” – back to iambic pentameter, “ye” is old-fashioned  Ode form is composed of three parts: address, question and reflection |
| Overall structure (shifts, changes, climax of narrative etc) | “who are these coming to the sacrifice?” – change of tone  Rhetorical questions in first stanza have a broken rhythm and juxtaposes first half of stanza which is controlled and relaxed |
| Language (vocabulary - heightened or demotic; rhetorical features etc) | Personification of Urn – “unravish’d bride” suggests the marriage between the urn and stillness of time  Rhetorical questions show passion and moment of contemplating reality  “thou shalt remain” – art remains when people don’t  “unheard melodies are sweeter” – musical reference, shows the power of the imagination to create a world better than reality |
| Sound effects (harsh and soft, onomatopoeia etc) | Long open vowels in “slow time” slows down pace of the poem – mimics the stillness of life on the urn |
| Imagery (metaphor, simile, images etc) | “sylvan historian” – the urn can express itself and tell mythical and ancient tales  “Arcady”, “mens and Gods” – places and images of Ancient Greece that represent paradise on the urn  “trodden weed” – man trying to conquer nature  “cold pastoral!” – the world of the urn experienced through imagination  “old age” – we’ll fade away but the urn will stay meaning that imagination is immortal |
| Patterns of language (semantic fields, repetitions, oppositions) | “beauty is truth, truth beauty” – the truth is in art and therefore, the truth is immortal because art can never fade  Repetition of “happy” and “For ever” show the pastoral blissfulness of the life on the urn. However, it could also show speaker’s anxiety and desired state projected onto the urn. |
| Punctuation and grammar (sentence length, end-stopping, caesura, verb mood - imperative, declarative, interrogative, exclamatory) | Caesura and end stopping included  Goes to declarative by the end of the poem |
| Links to other poems | Rime of the Ancient Mariner – beliefs and mythology  Ode to a nightingale – beauty and imagination in natural things  Ode to Autumn – nature/beauty  Intimation of immortality – youth/power of the imagination |