

## *Original Paper*

# Stylistic Analysis of a Poem “ODE ON A GRECIAN URN”

Written by John Keats

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### **Abstract**

*This research paper aims at investigating the text of the poem “Ode on a Grecian Urn” written by John Keats. We made a stylistic analysis of this poem at three levels: phonological level, graphological level/grammatical level and lexical level. This research paper provides an easy understanding of the poem.*

### **Keywords**

*style, stylistics and stylistics analysis*

### **Introduction**

Style is a Latin word that is derived from “stilus” which means the way of expression/the way of doing something is known as style. Swift defines style is “proper words in proper places”. According to Leech (1969) style leads to the structure, patterns and arrangement of words to form sentences in spoken and written form.

### **Stylistics**

It is a branch of applied linguistics that concerns the study of style in a text. It also studies the formal features of a text. Before the 20<sup>th</sup> century it deals with the literary text. But in the 20<sup>th</sup> century it also studies the non-literary text. Stylistics is used to interpret the writer’s thoughts and tries to find out the hidden meanings of a text. The main focus of Stylistics is to study the particular style of a text which differentiates one piece of text to another text. According to Tariq (2018), “Stylistics, therefore, attempts to study and analyze the deviation in a literary text, a text which does not subscribe to the norms and models of linguistic description”. The core aim of stylistics is to unfold a literary text to examine the deviation made by writers to get especial expressions. Widdowson takes stylistics as “the

study of literary discourse from a linguistic orientation”.

### Levels of Stylistics Analysis

There are four levels of stylistics analysis which are given below. We analyze the text of a poem according to these levels.

- 1) **Phonological level:** it deals with the study of the sound pattern of a given language and how words are pronounced in a text is understood through the study of Phonological level.
- 2) **Graphological level:** it analyzes the expression of a language which distinguish from other’s writings. It also focuses on the physical characteristics of a text.
- 3) **Grammatical level:** in this level, we deal with the internal structure of a sentence and how words can be put together.
- 4) **Lexical level:** in this level we study the individual word in a given text.

### Introduction of a Poem

“Ode on a Grecian Urn” is a romantic poem by John Keats, an English poet. In this poem he describes the unfaded beauty of urn and its antiquity. He shows his love towards the beauty of an urn because the time does not affect the surface of the urn. So, it gives immortal sense to the beautiful urn.

### Phonological Level

“Ode on a Grecian Urn” poem consists of five stanzas. Each stanza carries 10 lines and it is divided into two parts; quatrain and sestet. The poet uses iambic pentameter in his poem.

**Table 1.**

No.	Quatrain				Sestet					
Stanza-i	A	B	A	B	C	D	E	D	C	E
Stanza-ii	A	B	A	B	C	D	E	C	E	D
Stanza-iii	A	B	A	B	C	D	E	C	D	E
Stanza-iv	A	B	A	B	C	D	E	C	D	E
Stanza-v	A	B	A	B	C	D	E	D	C	E

We find variation in sestet because they vary in their rhyme order.

When we read this poem “Ode on a Grecian Urn” we find some major poetic devices (Alliteration, Assonance, Caesura, Chiasmus, Enjambment and Personification). These devices are discussed below.

### Alliteration

It is a repetition of consonants sound at the beginning of words.

Example 1

**Of marble men and maidens overwrought**

In the second example we can find the repetition of a consonant sound /m/. As we can see in these words; marble, men, and maidens.

Example 2

**Beauty is truth, truth beauty,-that is all**

In the above example we can see the consonant sound /t/. For example /t/ sound is prominent in a given line. Beauty, truth and that are showing alliteration on the above example.

### Assonance

Repetition of a vowel sound in a line of verse. These similar sounds are combined to produce echo and resonance.

Example 1

**Thou foster-child of Silence and slow Time**

When we read this line of the verse we may find assonance and we can hear the vowel sound /o/ while reading. It shows the repetition of the same vowel sound in the same line. For example; Thou foster-child of Silence and slow Time.

Example 2

**Ah, happy, happy boughs! That cannot shed**

In the above example we can find the repetition of a vowel sound which is /i/and it is felt in the word **Happy** /happi/.

### Caesura

It is a pause in a line of verse which is usually caused by punctuation in a short or medium line. It breaks the natural flow of verse in poetry and verse of poetry becomes more complex.

Semi-colon and commas are used to break the natural flow of poetry.

Example 1

**Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard  
Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;  
Not the sensual ear, but more endear'd,  
Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone:**

Caesura is used to avoid the poem from monotonous because old English writers try to avoid the same tone of a poem. Sometimes caesura is used to emphasize the line of a verse through using a pause. As

we can see above that shows the importance and contrariness of a poem. Here **Keats** shows that **unheard things** are more **attractive** and **sweet** as compared to **heard things**.

### Chiasmus

It is a literary device in which clauses are combined in a reverse order to produce a literary effect in a line of poetry.

Example 1

**Beauty is truth, truth beauty**

Here the above verse is the best example that shows the reverse order in a sentence and it produces a literary effect in the poem and it also captures the reader's attention. This line describes that every beautiful thing is considered as truth because it is universal and it can never be changed in any circumstance. So that's why beauty is equal to truth.

### Enjambment

When a line is not punctuated and runs on to the next line is known as enjambment.

It is a thought or sense, phrase or clause which does not come to an end at the line breaks. It runs to the next line without any punctuation marks.

Example 1

**Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed  
Your leaves, nor ever bid the Spring adieu;**

There is no punctuation mark in the first line it runs to the next line because the first line thought is not completed and it is connected to the next line through the sense of same thought which is completed in the second line.

### Personification

Personification is a literary device in which human attributes are given to inanimate objects.

Example 1

Thou still **unravished bride** of quietness;  
Thou **foster-child** of Silence and slow Time,  
**Sylvan historian**, who canst thus express

Here we can see that the writer uses personification at different instances because he wants to immortalize the beauty of an **Urn**. He compares **unravished bride of quietness** to the urn because it is as quiet as a ravished bride. It does not tell who they are (the men, gods and mortal)? He also compares that urn looks like a **foster child** because time is slow down in the moment of no shelter. **Sylvan Historian** knows history and **Urn** portrays the best history of rural life that had happened in the past.

All these expressions are used to show the immortal beauty of an urn which can never be faded.

### Graphological Level

- 1) This poem is divided into five stanzas.
- 2) We can easily see the usual capitalization in a poem.
- 3) We can also find different punctuation marks in the poem.

“It deals with the study of the expression of the writer’s style: how the writer portraits his thought by using different choices of words. It describes the way of writing which particularly belongs to a writer’s personality.

### Contraction

It is a process in which some sounds/alphabets are omitted. Contractions are used to maintain the amount of syllables in a line of poetry.

Example

Unravish’d	Endear’d	Enjoy’d	Cloy’d
Lead’st	E’er	Say’st	

Contractions are used in poetry to maintain/lower the number of syllables in a line. Through this we can maintain the meter also. It helps us to make a proper rhythm in a poem.

### Colons

A colon is used to introduce the material that explains, amplifies and summarizes what has preceded it. Keats uses colon three times in his poem.

Example 1

**A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:  
What leaf-fringed legend haunts about thy shape  
Of deities or mortals, or of both,**

As we can analyze the colon is used in the first line and the second line describes what has already done in the previous line. Here we can say that the writer describes the eternity of urn and it is a better mode of describing the rural life rather than poetry. Through this beautiful urn we can get immense interpretation and it shows that urn becomes immortal and it works beyond the language because of language changes gradually. So the urn is free from any boundary and it shows a universal message to the rest of all world.

### Semi-colon

A semi-colon is used to combine or join two or more independent clauses with each other to make a sentence.

It creates a connection between two ideas and thoughts in one sentence.

Example 1

**Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness;  
Thou foster-child of Silence and slow Time,**

These two lines are connected through semi-colon. In which the writer gives the human characteristics to the urn. In these lines he tries to show the eternity of urn by giving human qualities.

Example 2

**Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard  
Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;**

These beautiful expressions are all about urn which describes the immortality of urn. In these lines, the writer uses a paradox which increases the beauty of an urn. Heard melodies are sweet but unheard are sweeter. This music is ever new for us which we get from the surface of the urn. It is more attractive than real music which is produced by different musical instruments. Because we never heard the music of urn so it is sweeter than anyone heard music.

### Comma

It is a punctuation mark that is used to make a pause in speech.

Example 1

**That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd,  
A burning forehead, and a parching tongue.**

In poetry most of the time comma is used to tell the reader where to pause. We also used a comma to maintain the rhythm of a poem. Sometimes we use it to avoid the confusion about things. It clarifies the idea by separating words through commas.

### Question Mark

It is used to indicate a question. We use it to express doubt or uncertainty about something.

As we can see that Keats poses some questions in his poem.

Example 1

**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?**

In the first stanza of the poem “Ode on a Grecian Urn” poet raises some questions about the legends, deities, and mortals. He is not sure who they are and what the stories are related to them. Sometimes questions are the source of mystery and it creates pleasure in the mind of a reader. It is a way of capturing attention from readers.

### Exclamation

It is used to express a sudden outcry, excitement, finality or just add emphasis.

Example 1

**For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!**

In this example we find permanence of emotion in which the writer describes that the lady will be loyal to you in every situation because the art on the surface of the urn will show that it will never fade and love remains the same among two lovers.

Example 2

**Ah, happy, happy boughs! That cannot shed**

In this verse we can examine that a tree that is drawn at the side of the urn will show us that it is immortal because leaves will never shed down due to the permanent effect of sculpturing. So here we can say that urn is as beautiful as truth.

### Quotation Mark

The primary function of the quotation mark is to represent the exact language that has come from somebody else.

Example 1

**“Beauty is truth, truth beauty”**

It is a conclusion line of a poem and it is considered as the last words of the urn which sum up the whole idea in five words. It is written by using a quotation mark to highlight the last message of the urn.

**Table 2. Lexical Level**

<b>Nouns</b>	<b>Pronouns</b>	<b>Verb</b>	<b>Adjectives</b>	<b>Adverb</b>
Bride	Thou	Enjoyed	Still	Thus
Quietness	Who	Cloyed	Slow	Sweetly
Foster-child	What	Drest (dress)	Flowery	Therefore
Sylvan historian	Thy	Built	More	Endeared
Legend	Those	Emptied	Loath	Never
Leaf-fringed	Ye	Will	Mad	Yet

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Deities	She	Be	Wild	Forever
Mortal	That	Tell	Sweet	Evermore
Tempe	Your	Desolate	Heard	Ever
Arcady	Us	Return	Sweeter	Out of
Men	Other	Trodden	Soft	
Gods	Whom	Doth(does)	Sensual	
Maidens	Ye(you)	Waste	Fair	
Pursuit		Shalt(shall)	Bold	
Timbrels		Say'st(say)	Happy	
Winning		Know	Unwearied	
Boughs		Need	Piping	
Spring		Unravished	New	
Melodist		Canst(can)	Warm	
Adieu		Haunts	Human	
Heifer		Escape	High	
Priest		Leave	Panting	
Attic shape		Hast(have)	Young	
Citadel		Be	Sorrowful	
Garland		Shed	Burning	
Seashore		Grieve	Parching	
Eternity		Fade	Green	
Pastoral		Bare	Mysterious	
Beauty		Kiss	Silken	
Truth			Little	
			Peaceful	
			Pious	
			Attic	
			Trodden	

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### Conclusion

“Ode on a Grecian Urn” shows the mastery of Keats in using different kinds of poetic devices to create charming sound effect. It seems that he was fully aware of using different types of lexicons and has skill in constructing sentences according to the need of versification. Indeed the poem is the masterpiece of linguistic expression.

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