Ode on a Grecian Urn

Thou still unravished bride\(^1\) of quietness,
   Thou foster child of silence and slow time,
Sylvan\(^2\) historian, who canst thus express
   A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:
What leaf-fringed\(^3\) legend haunts about thy shape
   Of deities or mortals, or of both,
   In Tempe\(^4\) or the dales of Arcady?\(^5\)
What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?
What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
   What pipes and timbrels?\(^6\) 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 endeared,
   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,
   Forever 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 forever new;
More happy love! more happy, happy love!
   For ever warm and still to be enjoyed,
   For ever panting, and forever young;
All breathing human passion far above,
   That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloyed,\(^7\)
   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 dressed?
What little town by river or sea shore,
    Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,
    Is emptied of this 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.

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.

1. unravished bride: Keats refers to the fact that the urn possesses its original purity and beauty
2. Sylvan: characteristic of forests or woods
3. leaf-fringed: the necks of Greek urns were frequently decorated with leaf patterns
4. Tempe: a valley in Greece; symbol of pastoral beauty
5. Arcady: Arcadia, a region in Greece; symbol of pastoral beauty and contentment
6. pipes and timbrels: shepherds flutes and tambourines
7. heart . . . cloyed: The speaker's heart is filled to excess with emotion.
8. Attic shape: a reference to the urn (The poet refers to the elegance and simplicity of the Athenian--Attic means Athenian-sculpture of ancient Greece.)
9. brede: a braided design; a piece of embroidery
10. Of marble . . . maidens: reference to the figures on the urn