

# A Deconstructive Stylistic Reading of Keats' *Ode on a Grecian Urn*

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## ABSTRACT

*The present paper applies Deconstructive Stylistics on John Keats' Ode on a Grecian Urn. Stylistics that evolved from the Structuralist movement in literature makes use of the formal criterion in linguistics in the reading of literary texts. It treats a text as an autonomous entity and aims at objective description of the lexical, syntactical and phonological features in order to explore the meaning of a text. Stylistics is often seen as an attempt to put criticism on a scientific basis. Deconstruction, contrary to Stylistics, regards a text as an open-ended entity without a core or a centre to assign it absolute and final signification. Deconstruction initiates its premise from de Saussure's concepts of 'difference' and 'binary opposition' and extends them to 'différance' to recognize the indefinite, ambiguous and intertextual nature of a text that leads to postponement of signification. A deconstructionist believes that a writer is never able to express what he intends to express through his writings and therefore always leaves a trace and a critic; therefore, he has to engage himself in the endless pursuit of exploring the intended meaning of the writer. Deconstructive criticism hence becomes an attempt to read a text in order to approximate the intended meaning of the writer. Keats' odes are the finest examples of entertaining mysteries, doubts and uncertainties surrounding the questions pertaining to human existence through imagination rather than a rational outlook. The annihilation of self, anti-egoistic stand, skeptical attitude towards things and the conflicting moods towards different aspects of themes provide a fine deconstructive reading of Keats' odes. The present paper endeavours to explore the formal stylistic means and grammatical devices employed by Keats in Ode on a Grecian Urn to escape any finality, absoluteness, resolution and unification of the opposites.*

*Keywords:* stylistics; deconstruction; odes; negative capability; aporia

## INTRODUCTION

The interdisciplinary concept of Deconstructive Stylistics makes use of formal stylistic markers in discovering the inherent tensions, polysemy, undecidability and open-endedness in a text. It is an approach to discourse that extends the concept of linguistic stylistics in reading a text in order to examine indeterminacy, instability, tentativeness and suspended oppositions inherent in it. Stylistics endeavours to comprehend a text by studying its formal linguistic-features in relation to the context in which they are used. Deconstruction regards a text as a differential network consisting of a free play of signification. It believes that meanings are assigned through 'difference' and are also 'deferral'. A deconstructionist is aware of the potential of heterogeneity and looks at various conflicting elements with equal admiration without showing preference for any of them but to keep on suspending the opposition between them without coming to any resolution and reconciliation. As is evident from the reading of Keats' letters and poems, Keats possessed a deconstructive mindset. In his letters and Odes, Keats reminds us of the necessity of such a flexible mindset in acquiring the state of negative capability and in writing pure poetry, free from the limits of fixed philosophy, dogmas and doctrines. Keats' odes are the exemplification of his oscillating moods towards paradoxical treatment of his theme. In the different odes, Keats uses the formal stylistic means of negatives, interrogatives, alternants, and adversatives to create conflicts, to postpone an argument, to provide choices, to engage in speculations in order to escape reaching after any judgment, philosophy and rational explanation. The present paper

is an attempt to apply the concept of Deconstructive Stylistics in reading Keats' *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, which is a representative poem of Keats' wavering temperament along with *Ode to a Nightingale*.

### KEATS' POETIC TEMPERAMENT: PREFERENCE FOR MYSTERIES, DOUBTS AND UNCERTAINTIES

Keats' poetic character and temperament, as evident from his letters and practised in his odes and other poems, is characterized by his ideal of negative capability which he defines as a state of mind in which "man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts without any irritable reaching after fact and reason" (Keats in Gittings 1970, p. 43). Keats' letters refer to his preference for paradoxes and self-contradictions because he believed "that in the intensity of paradox, in the dramatic conflict, life could best be realized" (Slote 1958, p.30). Keats was convinced that fascination of mystery in other things and a sympathetic identification with them was greatly needed by a poet. In his letter of 27 October 1818 written to Woodhouse, Keats writes:

As to the poetical Character itself...it is not itself – it has no self – it is every thing and nothing – it has no character – it enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated – It has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen. What shocks the virtuous philosopher delights the camelion Poet (Keats in Gittings 1970, p.157).

Keats believes that a poet must have the capacity to distinguish moral sense from the dramatic sense as an artist is not concerned with what is deemed fit by a philosopher. Keats was against seeking any final solutions to the vexed issues through rational explanations but wanted to explore them through intuition or imagination. According to Aubrey Thomas de Vere, "He (Keats) fancied that he had no access to philosophy because he was averse to definitions and dogmas, and sometimes saw glimpses of truth in adverse systems" (1971, p.344). Keats preferred a wavering temperament for a poet than a resolute one that imposed its own dogmas and doctrines on his art. He wrote to his brother George "The only means of strengthening one's intellect is to make up one's mind about nothing – to let the mind be a thoroughfare for all thoughts. Not a select party" (Keats in Gittings 1970, p.326). Negative Capability enables a poet to accept the world as it is – in its light and shade, pain and joy. He wrote to Bailey:

I scarcely remember counting upon any Happiness – I look not for it if it be not in the present hour – nothing startles me beyond the Moment. The setting sun will always set me to rights – or if a Sparrow comes before my Window I take part in its existence and pick about the Gravel (Keats in Gittings 1970, p.38).

The impersonal tone, skeptical attitude towards things, uncertainty and indeterminacy created to distance him from taking a fixed position, openness to receive contrastive experiences reflect Keats' deconstructive mindset and bring him near to Derrida. In the next part of the paper, a brief introduction to stylistics and deconstruction is given with an end in view to explore the evolution of Deconstructive Stylistics, the interdisciplinary approach that I propose to apply on Keats' *Ode on a Grecian Urn* in the subsequent part of the paper.

## STYLISTICS

Stylistics, an extension of the application of principles of structural linguistics employs empirical and explicit methods of analyzing linguistic peculiarities embedded in a literary text to comprehend its meaning. It aims to explore the linguistic devices used by a writer to express and highlight his thematic concerns and preferences. Earlier approaches to the study of literature were mainly subjective and impressionistic and used biographical, moral, philosophical, social and psychological and other types of extra-textual details to elucidate a work of art. Referring to the factors that led to the birth of Stylistics and answering, “What is Stylistics”, Stanley Fish aptly writes,

“Stylistics was born of a reaction to the subjectivity and imprecision of literary studies. For the appreciative raptures of the impressionistic critic, Stylisticians purport to substitute precise and rigorous linguistic descriptions and to proceed from these descriptions to interpretations for which they can claim a measure of objectivity. Stylistics, in short, is an attempt to put criticism on a scientific basis” (Fish 1973, p.64).

Stylistics regards a text as an autonomous entity where language is used in a creative and foregrounded manner. In comparison to ordinary conversational language, which is direct and denotative, literary language is used in a creative and foregrounded manner in order to communicate the message effectively. Stylistics studies the specific use of linguistic items in a given context to yield a text. According to Lodge, stylistics uses a “more precise, inclusive and objective methods of describing style than the impressionistic generalizations of traditional criticism” (Lodge 1967, p.52). It is the deviant and specialized use of content and language that comes under the purview of the study of style. The deviant and the specialized use of language make a literary text emotive, connotative and figurative. A Stylistic analysis, therefore, may help us in decodifying and understanding the real intent of the writer without going astray from the text by taking recourse to extra-textual details.

## DECONSTRUCTION

Derrida (1966) questions the fundamentals of Structuralist’s paradigm about the underlying recurrent patterns and rules which they claim to provide stability and final signification to a text. Derrida (1966) initiates his discussion from de Saussure’s concept of the relationship between signifier and signified. Derrida agrees with de Saussure that signifiers achieve signification through their opposition with the other signifiers. However, Derrida disregards Structuralist’s logocentric notion of finality and transcendental signification. According to him,

“it was necessary to begin thinking that there was no center, that the center could not be thought in the form of a present-being, that the centre had no natural site, that it was not a fixed locus but a function, a sort of non locus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play. This was the moment when language invaded the universal problematic, the moment when, in the absence of a centre or origin, everything became discourse – provided we can agree on this word – that is to say, a system in which the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences. The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely” (Rice and Waugh 1992, p.151-152).

Derrida coined the term ‘defferance’ to include both ‘differ’ and ‘defer’. Derrida believes that like signifiers, signification of a text is indeterminate and deferred endlessly due to the presence of contradictions, paradoxes, metaphors, allusions and references. A deconstructionist believes that a writer is never able to express what he intends to express through his writings and therefore, he always leaves a trace to be filled in by an interpreter or a critic. A critic takes the words of a writer as a trace and engages himself in an endless pursuit of exploring the intended meaning of the writer. Deconstruction explores the dynamic nature of linguistic signs and investigates the plurality and multiplicity of their interpretation. In deconstruction, ideas such as ‘centre’, ‘main’ and ‘truth’ are not taken for granted and assigned canonical status but placed under ‘erasure’. The inherent instability of the concepts is shown by reliance on plurality of meaning, substitution, individualism, intertextuality and reversals. In deconstructive reading of a text, the meaning of a text expands infinitely. Even the contextual meaning is not fixed and even a context yields a new context. According to Roland Barthes,

“The text is plural. Which is not simply to say that it has several meanings, but that it accomplishes the very plurality of meaning: an *irreducible* (and not merely an acceptable) plural. The Text is not a co-existence of meanings but a passage, an overcrossing; thus it answers not to an interpretation, even a liberal one, but to an explosion, dissemination” (Rice and Waugh 1992, p.168).

### DECONSTRUCTIVE STYLISTICS

Deconstructive Stylistics (Mishra 2011) explores how some formal stylistic markers such as approximants, interrogatives, negatives, indefinites, adversatives and alternants, perform deconstructive functions of postponement, indeterminacy, open-endedness, opposition, cancellation, tentativeness and speculation. As stated previously, stylistics studies the use of various linguistic devices in interpreting the meaning of a text. Enkvist (1973) believes that the end product of stylistic analysis is the inventory of style markers. Writers use certain formal stylistic markers to organize a text structurally as well as semantically. Stylistics investigates these formal linguistic devices, which contribute to the signification of the textual message. Deconstruction, contrary to Structuralism, denies any stability and finality to the meaning of a text. A deconstructionist believes that signification of a text is deferred endlessly due to the presence of heterogeneous, oppositional, paradoxical, figurative and tentative elements in it. Deconstructive Stylistics, the paradigm used in the present paper, attempts to investigate the application of the formal linguistic devices to defer the arguments and discussion endlessly in order to remain non-committed and inconclusive and to make a text forever readerly and open-ended. It is assumed that a writer uses some formal linguistic devices to postpone his arguments infinitely in order to remain open to all types of thoughts and impressions without siding with any of them. Deconstructive Stylistics looks at exploring the inventory of deconstructive stylistic markers used in a text. This would assist in impersonal, deconstructive and readerly interpretation of a text. Therefore, in the next part of the paper, the concept of ‘Deconstructive Stylistics’ has been applied on Keats’ ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’ to examine whether formal stylistic markers in the poem lead to polysemy, open-endedness of arguments and signification.

### A DECONSTRUCTIVE STYLISTIC READING OF “ODE ON A GRECIAN URN”

Parhi (2002) compares Keats’ romanticism with Derrida’s post-structuralism and regards the note of indirection and indecision closer to the anticentric positions of Derrida and Foucault. He finds the reading of Keats’ odes as discontinuous texts where the free play of signifiers results in what Roland

Barthes calls the readerly text. Rajnath (2004) regards Keats near to Derrida and deconstruction for his preference to sensations and state of negative capability that entertains mysteries, doubts and has a preference for undecidability. Making a deconstructive reading of Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn", Rajnath explores the element of indeterminacy with respect to the simultaneous depiction of the idealization and limitations of the two opposite worlds of nature and art from each other's canon and suspending the judgement endlessly without favouring any one and bringing reconciliation between them. In the present paper, the following discussion and exercise extend the previous studies to the exploration of the inventory of stylistic markers which provided freedom to Keats to escape any finality, fixity and preference to suspend the arguments continually without taking any final stand.

The "Ode on a Grecian Urn" presents a conflict between immortality of art represented by the world of the urn and the mutability of nature. The two antithetical worlds – the world of art and the world of nature - are endowed with their own blisses as well as curses when judged from each other's canons. The world of art, is not only blessed by eternity, but also cursed by frozenness, lifelessness and stagnancy. Similarly, the world of nature, is not only blessed by human warmth and passion, but also cursed by ephemerality. Not only are both the opposite worlds – world of art and world of nature - juxtapositioned in the poem but the opposition between the two worlds remains unresolved and suspended till the end of the poem. Keats idealizes the world of art by repeatedly referring to the eternal nature of the objects of art depicted on the urn; but he simultaneously trivializes the immortality of art by referring to its want of human passions, warmth and life. This simultaneous depiction of the idealization and trivialization of the two opposite worlds – world of art and nature - judged by each other's standards continues till the end of the poem, and the reader remains uncertain whether Keats is favouring the former or the latter. According to Professor Rajnath:

He idealizes the world of the urn and also criticizes it for its limitations. It is this simultaneous presence of opposite attitudes which results in an aphoria. ....From one point of view the world of art embodies the ideal, but another point of view idealizes nature, and finds the world of art deficient. This is the element of undecidability in the text. The reader is unable to decide whether to idealize art or nature. It is not that the idealization of art is rejected for the idealization of nature: what is postulated is the impossibility of idealization or valorization. Warring implications within the text do not unite at a higher level, but only pull it in opposite directions (Rajnath2004,p.27).

The urn, as it is mentioned in the very first stanza of the poem, can narrate the history of the old Greek days more effectively than poetry:

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: (Ode on a Grecian Urn).

But it is found that the urn fails to tell the whole story and instead, as it is evident from the number of interrogatives used by the poet in the first stanza, is rather engaged in speculations. The series of questions asked through the stylistic device of Interrogatives without providing any answer perform the deconstructive function of creating mystery and open-endedness. Keats asks questions repeatedly and creates puzzle around the urn to escape any certain and final solution. He questions in the first stanza:

What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?  
What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?  
What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?(Ode on a Grecian Urn).



According to Perkins:

Owing to the silence of the urn, all the uncertainties implied in the poem remain “mysterious”, shrouded in ambiguity and enigma. One perplexity, for example, revolves about the identity of the figure on the urn. Are they “deities or mortals” are they “both” or are they rather, as the last stanza suggests, mere “marble” men and maidens” – creatures having no genuine identity?(Perkins 1965, p.235).

The first stanza of the “Ode on a Grecian Urn” abounds in interrogatives. Interrogatives are used as a foregrounding device and are repeated to express the poet’s wonder and bewilderment at the sight of the unusual world of art and his sense of uncertainty arising out of his ignorance about the identity of the objects. The interrogatives used in the first stanza create scope for the poet to engage in a number of surmises and gradually deepening the mystery rather than providing ready-made solutions. Not only does the poet use interrogatives to express his bafflement at the sight of the unusual figures carved on the urn that seems to him more mysterious than the world of nature, even he is undecided on whether the figures carved on the urn are “men or gods or of both”. The poet uses the formal stylistic device of alternant ‘or’ to provide a choice and to desist himself in reaching finality. Alternants are the grammatical devices that perform deconstructive function of providing choice in a discourse and contribute to the atmosphere of open-endedness and indeterminacy. Keats writes in the first stanza:

What leaf-fring’d 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?(Ode on a Grecian Urn).

By providing opposition between two statements, adversatives perform the deconstructive function of creating conflicts and contradictions rather than reaching after fact and truth. Adversatives create paradox and perform the deconstructive function of reversing the general beliefs. In “Ode on a Grecian Urn” Keats presents a conflict between the world of art and the world of nature by using the adversative ‘but’ to create a paradox to expose the opposite of what is generally believed and expected. He writes in the second stanza:

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:”(Ode on a Grecian Urn)

Rajnath, referring to the conflict between art and nature, makes a deconstructive reading of the poem and writes:

In “Ode on a Grecian Urn” the conflict is between art and nature. That the work of art is superior to nature is forcefully admitted in “Heard melodies are sweet but those unheard are sweeter” but the undercurrent of emphasis on nature undercuts this glorification of art. At the end, the idealization of art on the one hand, and of nature on the other makes it difficult for the reader to decide whether Keats intends the former or the latter (Rajnath 2004, p.24).

Keats idealizes the world of art when he refers to the urn as a “still unravished bride” and “a foster child of silence and slow time” and further when he says, “Heard melodies are sweet but

those unheard are sweeter” but, simultaneously in the following lines, he refers to the limitations of the world of art by referring to its frozenness, stagnancy, lack of dynamism and human warmth and passions. As Parhi puts it:

Keats strikes his note of indirection, indecision, precision and long debate all at the same time. Neither we disagree that the ‘fair youth would remain young for ever’ nor we disapprove his coming to terms with this world (Parhi 2002, p.33).

Keats repeatedly uses negatives ‘never’, ‘nor’, ‘not’ in the following lines as stylistic markers to foreground the limitations arising out of the frozenness and unchanging nature of the world of art. He writes in the second stanza:

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,  
For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair! (Ode on a Grecian Urn).

Keats uses ‘negatives’ as cancellators to cancel his earlier view and to create paradox by providing an opposite view. Through the use of negatives ‘not’, ‘never’ and ‘nor’ Keats saves his statement from being closed-ended and by providing opposite views, he creates mystery and uncertainty in the poem. In the stanza above, Keats realizes that in the stagnant and frozen world of art lovers will have to maintain the status quo, and the world of art will not allow their love to be consummated in marital bliss. As Middleton Murry says:

He envies the felicity of the participants who are immune from mortality and decay. But they are human still. Mortality and decay have slipped from them, like a garment; but that is all. They are mortals as we are; who have wandered unawares into an enchanted land, whence they can never return. This felicity has its tinge of sorrow, the poet who began by envying, ends almost by pitying. They are, as it were, lost to humanity (Murry 1930, p.221).

Intensifying further the contrast between the positive and the negative aspects of the worlds of Art and Nature, Keats feels that the figures of the Pipers engraved on the urn are granted eternity by Art and therefore, will tirelessly go on piping but will not be allowed to rest like human beings. Similarly, trees carved out on the urn will not be allowed to shed their leaves even if the cycle of seasons changes whereas the real beauty of Nature lies in the change in seasons. Keats continues the oppositions between the two worlds in stanza No. 3 where he describes the ‘boughs’, ‘the melodist’ and ‘the lovers’ engraved on the urn as ‘happy’ as they are safe from the effects of sorrow, sufferings and decay destined to the world of Nature. Though the lovers depicted on the urn will always remain young, they will be denied human passions and bear the pangs of separation. Figures carved on the urn seem to be blessed ones due to eternity granted to them by the world of art, but from the perspective of the world of Nature they are deprived of the bliss of human life, passions and dynamism. This tone of opposition and undecidability continues in the fourth stanza also in which the poet sees on the Greek vase persons moving in a procession to sacrifice a heifer decorated with garlands on both sides. The procession is led by a priest who is described by the poet as a mysterious one as he is the denizen of the world of art and not nature. The heifer depicted on the urn is a fortunate being as it will escape death due to eternity granted to it by the world of Art. The town depicted on the urn will always remain desolate as its inhabitants are not mobile and dynamic as are human beings, and consequently, will not be able to return and fill it. So repeatedly Keats weighs the positive and negative aspects of the

world of Art and Nature, simultaneously treating the strengths and wants of both from the perspectives of each other and suspending his decision infinitely whether art is superior to nature or vice-versa. According to Parhi:

The urn is the text of life and its manifold interest; a gallery of pictures, perceptions and pseudo-physical details. But the whole text is ambiguous. And the poem is a tension between the two worlds of life and art. The idealization of sculpted lovers about to kiss is weighed against the desolate looking town without the hope for anybody to return. So art piles up the materials of life, its discordant, asymmetric, chaotic stuff which in turn may lend to total nothingness(Parhi 2002, p.32).

In the opening lines of the last stanza, Keats once again dwells on the inert and inanimate features of the urn by calling it ‘cold pastoral’ and ‘silent form’ just as he calls it ‘unravished bride of quietness’ and ‘foster-child of silence and slow time’ in the first stanza. Keats once again creates the impression that the urn is a product of art and so remote from man and nature. At the same time, he strikes an opposite note by calling the urn a friend to man to whom it has a lesson to convey. Keats, thus, from the very first stanza till the last one continues to explore two different attitudes towards the urn – one is of its passivity and fixity as an object of art and second of its being endowed with human attributes – without siding with anyone but to remain in a state of postponement and undecidability. The last stanza below illustrates this.

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 Pastrol!  
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.(Ode on a Grecian Urn).

The urn is overwrought with marble men and maiden, forest branches and the trodden weed which are all artificial and inanimate and not the real human beings. According to Rajnath:

The urn is as puzzling and enigmatic as eternity, and one is unable to tease out all its implications. The word “tease” in the poem may remind one of Barbara Johnson’s definition of deconstruction above. Text as viewed by a deconstructionist is like the urn which defies attempts at coming to grips with its meaning: the text irritates the reader as does the urn(Rajnath 2004,p.26).

Keats regards the urn a friend to man as it is the beautiful world of art engraved on it that triggers his imagination and makes it possible for him to impartially participate in the paradoxical world of art without reconciling its opposite traits and reaching out to any finality. The message of the urn summed up in the last two lines of the last stanza,

Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty’ – that is all  
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know (Ode on a Grecian Urn).

when seen in the background of the poem and Keats’s letter to Bailey, “I am certain of nothing but the holiness of the Heart’s affections and the truth of imagination. What the imagination seizes



Beauty must be truth – whether it existed before or not”( Keats in Gittings 1970, p. 36-37) provides us clues to interpret them from the perspective of ‘Deconstruction’. To Keats, Beauty and Truth are one and they are perceived through imagination and not by reason as facts and reason are essentially mundane and confined to the phenomenal world. A mind biased with personal prejudices cannot be a fit receptacle to the ultimate truth. It is imagination that frees a poet from preconceived notions and aids him in participating in all types of experience: pain or pleasure, life or death, youth or old age, health or decay, eternity or evanescence, mortality or immortality and modernity or antiquity. Imagination deconstructs the minds of the poet and ensures the unbiased participation of the poet without leaning towards any dogma and philosophy. It is only through imagination or intuitions a poet can transcend physical beauty and approach aesthetic beauty that is only identical with truth. The Greek life perceives through imagination, which enables the poet to remain receptive to all type of experience even conflictive ones, without deciding in favour of one of them is beautiful and since it is free from the ego and prejudices of a poet, it becomes truthful.

### CONCLUSION

The deconstructive stylistic analysis of the “Ode on a Grecian Urn” in the previous section of the paper substantiates the premise that formal stylistic markers may also assist and facilitate in deconstructing the meaning of a text. This approach provides a new perspective to the study of literature. It lays the empirical foundation for the deconstructive reading of a text. It is pedagogically relevant and viable too as it provides an interesting exercise to the students, not only in the learning of the use of various linguistic items used by a poet, but also in exploring the deconstructive functions performed by them. For example, in “Ode on a Grecian Urn” interrogatives, negatives, alternants and adversatives are skillfully used by Keats to keep on fluctuating his mood and stand and to remain in a state of ‘mystery’, ‘doubts’ and flux. Keats uses interrogatives to express his astonishment and bafflement in order to create an atmosphere of uncertainty. He leaves a question mark without providing an answer. Through the repeated use of negatives, Keats cancels the earlier stand taken by him and provides alternative choices in order to keep alive his endless exploration. Alternants like ‘either...or’ and ‘or’ are also often used by Keats in his odes to suspend a conclusion as we notice in the last lines of “Ode to Nightingale”:

Was it a vision, or a waking dream?  
Fled is that music: – Do I wake or sleep? (Ode to a Nightingale).

Keats also uses adversatives – but, as observed in “unheard melodies are sweet but those unheard are sweeter” - to create paradoxes and conflicts to express the unexpected than what is commonly believed and taken for granted. In this way, a teacher may ask his students to spot out some repeatedly utilised formal markers used by a poet to create foregrounding effect and to leave scope for tentativeness, polysemy, open-endedness and undecidability. The approach leaves enough scope for discussion and debate by keeping interpretation open-ended. It will also help students become active learners by encouraging them to participate in the discussion by coming out with their own interpretations. It will ultimately develop their creative and critical faculties and will create enough confidence in them to become autonomous learners.

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