


# Kinds of Ode: A Comparative Study

S. Udhayakumar

Assistant Professor, Department of English and Comparative Literature

School of English and Foreign Languages

Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, Tamil Nadu, India

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3779-3935>

## OPEN ACCESS

Manuscript ID:  
ENG-2021-09023717

Volume: 9

Issue: 2

Month: March

Year: 2021

P-ISSN: 2320-2645

E-ISSN: 2582-3531

Received: 14.12.2021

Accepted: 07.01.2021

Published: 01.03.2021

Citation:

Udhayakumar, S. "Kinds of Ode: A Comparative Study." *Shanlax International Journal of English*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2021, pp. 43-47.

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.34293/english.v9i2.3717>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License

## Abstract

*This paper brings a comparative analysis of three types of ode poems, i.e., the Pindaric, Horatian and Irregular odes. Its major focus is on the evolutionary changes of odes from its inception at Grecian to English Romantic odes which were greatly influenced by many like Roman influence, Italian influence, Renaissance and Romantic period etc. Moreover the paper gives a clear picture of ode poetry, its characteristics, form and structure and the functions of each type. Through a comparative study the distinct characteristics of the three types are explicated. Some of the ode poems of English poetry such as "The progress of Poesy: A Pindaric ode" by Thomas Grey, "Ode on Solitude" by Alexander Pope and "Ode on a Grecian Urn" by John Keats have been taken as the English models of the three kinds respectively. These poems were compared with the original classical models and critically analyzed.*

**Keywords:** Odes, Pindaric, Horatian, Irregular Ode, Romantic Poets and Greek Poets

## Introduction

Comparative literature is a recently originated area of study which opens a wide scope of linguistic, social, cultural and scientific investigation surpassing the chronological and geographical boundaries. The term comparative literature is originated from a Latin word "Comparativus" which means, "make equal with" or "bring together for a contest." Hence, it is the observation of the different and similar elements between diverse fields of study. In fact, the term comparative is first articulated by Shakespeare in his play King Henry IV. Subsequently, John Dryden the father of English criticism has uttered it, stating that tragedy can be better understood when analyzed comparatively. This is how Dryden's critical approach centers upon various comparative topics and so many scholars attribute Dryden to be the pioneer of comparative criticism which paved way for Comparative Literature. Later, Mathew Arnold, the cultural critic suited the name comparative to literature in the work "Histoire Comparative" in 1848. The famous quotation "Everywhere there is connection, everywhere there is illustration" is given by him in a conference under the title "On the Modern Element in Literature." He is the one who seeded the basic concept of comparative literature to his contemporaries. Following the perusals of the predecessors, the 20th and 21st century theorists embarked it in their versions. Susan Basnett a translation theorist and scholar of Comparative literature has defined Comparative literature in such a way that "Anyone who has an interest in books embarks on the road towards comparative literature." It suggests that, book of any field is connected at some points. She says that comparative literature can unify different disciplines and can facilitate a common meeting place. Moreover, structural linguists believe that everything in this world is a part of a structure and the trace of connection is possible. Thus comparative literature makes connections possible irrespective of disciplines and of different place and time.

Comparative literature has been developed as a separate field of study after the 19th century. The growth of Comparative literature was much impacted by many schools of thoughts such as French School, American School and Russian School through their divergent principles. First, the French school initiated the base work for comparative literature though it's "Influence Study". Secondly, the American school brought an opposing theory on the title "Parallel Study." At last the Russian school worked in merging the early two schools of thoughts. It introduced West-Centrism by eliminating the biases of former concepts. This is how these schools of thoughts formed a strong theoretical base work for Comparative literature. It even took the form of world literature mainly because it shelters a vast works of different languages. Comparative literature breaks the boundaries between various disciplines like music, painting, dance, movie, literature, science, etc. Hence it got the name 'literature without boundaries.'

Having the liberty of comparing anything, scholars experiment and find out comparative and contrastive elements of different variants. Literature has lots of variants like its genres, regional writings, works written during different periods of time, etc. Even written literary text is compared with non-literary works like historical text, scientific text, movies, etc. This paper is focusing exclusively on the types of Ode poems. By comparing its types, an impressive result is comprehended. There are three types of ode. They are Pindaric, Horatian and Irregular odes. Each type has its own significance and uniqueness. A sample from each type of odes is compared with the other for having a wider perspective of Ode poetry. They are Thomas Gray's "**The Progress of Poesy**", Alexander Pope's "**Ode on Solitude**", and John Keats' "**Ode on a Grecian Urn**" which demonstrates the peculiar nature of each Ode.

Lyrical poetry is nothing but an emotional expression of thoughts and feelings and can be accompanied by music. This type of poem is primarily written to be sung. Altogether, the nature of its language, tone, mood and emotional expression lie in the poem's lyrical composition. Lascelles Abercrombie, A British poet and literary

critic has defined lyrical poetry that "a poet does not compose in order to make of language delightful and exciting music; he composes a delightful and exciting music in language in order to make what he has to say peculiarly efficacious in our minds" (Preminger 462). He points out that, a lyrical poem is very natural in reaching the reader's mind. Lyrical poetry includes many types such as hymns, psalms, ballads, elegies, ode, sonnets, pastorals, idylls, epitaphs that talks about nature, love, God, patriotism, etc., melodiously.

Ode is a lyrical form of poetry originated in Greece and indeed the name is derived from Greek "Aeidein" which means to sing or chant. It is originally invented to make public performance during some occasions like athletic victories, celebration of ancient warrior's and their heroic deeds, etc. Odes are short or sometime long lyrical poems, accompanied by musical instruments to express praise of an individual or an event. Further, Ode poetry has a peculiar structure and expresses the message in formal and ceremonial tone. They are originally composed at least in five stanzas with rhymes. They are usually structured with three acts. They are the Strophe, the Antistrophe, and the Epode. The strophe is a set of verses forming a separate unit with in the same poem. It tells the story in one perspective while the antistrophe gives the thematic picture of the poem and reveals the story in other perspective. The Epode that comes in varying metrical pattern, gives the summary and conclusion to the Ode.

Among the three types of odes Pindaric, Horatian, and Irregular, Pindaric ode is the prototype of all odes. It is named after the ancient Greek poet Pindar, who lived between 518 BC and 488 BC at Thebes. He is one among the nine canonical lyric poets of ancient Greece and ranks the greatest among all. Pindar innovatively brought choral ode form in Greek but earlier to him, there were two Greek women lyrical poets Alcaeus and Sappho who were writing monodies or single voice ode that is sung by individuals and they belong to the same period. However, Pindar's 45 surviving victory odes laid the foundation for the later odes. Pindaric odes were sung by chorus with music and danced during ceremonial occasions like Olympian or Pythian, Nemean or

Isthmian athletic victories. Also it is performed on events like coronations, anniversaries and funeral ceremonies. These odes had three stanzas and are composed with strophe, antistrophe and an epode having different metrical patterns. Horace who lived between 65 BC and 8 BC was a Roman lyrical poet who introduced ode poem in a different form and structure. It emerged from the Aeolic ode tradition. He broke the strictness of Pindaric ode and made it less formal and less ceremonious. It is mainly written for reading rather than performing. Even though, it is not written to read aloud, it followed regular stanza and metrical patterns. Horace advocated single voice style which became the favorite for the Romans like Catullus, Juvenal, Ovid and others who made some tuning changes by adding music to make it more personal. These odes are intimate, reflective in nature which deals with friendship and love. Irregular odes are also known as Cowleyan ode named after the 17th century English poet Abraham Cowley. These odes are mainly popularized by the Romantic poets and as a result, a large number of odes were composed during the 18th century. Irregular ode is structured in the formal mode of ode poetry retaining the tone and themes of the classical models. It has no proper set of lines but has rhymes.

Ode poems were reviewed in English during 16th and 18th century by Renaissance and Romantic poets respectively. The first ever written ode poems in English were “**Epithalamion**” and “**Prothalamion**” by Spenser. Remarkably, Elizabethan poets made odes to boom. Poets like Ben Johnson, Andrew Marvell and John Milton fused the life experience and religious devotion to create a new form of ode poetry. Cowley who introduced the irregular structure, neither took influence from Horatian nor Pindaric structure, however, he got inspired by John Dryden and Alexander Pope. Nevertheless, Romantic poets are the masters of ode. They revised odes to communicate their feelings. They elevated odes to a greater height. John Keats’ contribution is immense in the process of reviving the classical odes. The ode poems such as, “**Ode to a Nightingale**” and “**Ode on a Grecian Urn**” are the best among all odes. Those odes are also called Romantic ode. Significantly, the Romantic poets followed Petrarchan, Horatian and Irregular types of odes. After the Romantic poets,

20th century poet, W.H. Auden’s contribution is very much significant.

The best of the Pindaric ode in English is “**The Progress of Poesy: A Pindaric ode**” was written by the pre-Romantic poet Thomas Gray and is published in the year 1757. The poem is a description of the heroic ambitions of English poetry during his time. This poem was widely criticized and commented by many writers and poets. Gray employed the structure, title and subject of the Ancient Greek ode. In fact, Pindaric structure and form is the core element of the poem. The poem is of nine stanzas through which Gray praises the Goddess of poetry, Muse for bestowing the poets of the past to his contemporary time with her blessings of poetic creation. Her generative power of poetry is praised. In addition, Gray describes the development of ode poems of great poets from Ancient Greeks, Romans and Italian poets to the English poets like Shakespeare, Milton, Dryden and many. The striking depictions of the poem are about the varying power of poetry, its origination, its political connections and the praise of the predecessors who laid the foundation in building ode poetry.

The poem is a historical account of the revolution in the poetic heritage from the ancient Greek to the author’s contemporary time. The poem is also an explanation of the Greeks and English poets’ contribution to poetry. He felt the need for interpretation of them to the general public. He says, “Vocal to the intelligent; for the many they need interpreters.” Eventually, he refers to Chaucer, Early of Surrey, Thomas Wyatt and Spencer for bringing the taste of Italian poetry in English. Also he acknowledges Shakespeare and Milton for improvising the ode. In fact, he comments Shakespeare as “Nature’s darling” and Milton as “He pass’d the flaming Bounds.” Above all, he praises Dryden for his rhymes and suggests Cowley to make attention on judgment, style and harmony. However, he criticizes Pope for not having that many merits. Lastly, he mentions himself as having the “Daring Spirit” to make an attempt on Ode. Finally, he quotes Pindar as “The ban Eagle” or the native of Thebes as the supreme head in introducing Odes. And he remarks at the end that anyone would prove the goodness and greatness of Pindar in future.

The poem contains Strophe, antistrophe and epode in a nine 12 line stanzas. Each segment has three stanzas. It follows Abba, ccdd, eeff scheme. The poem resembles a close imitation of the Pindaric form and structure. The final stanza has different rhyme scheme which forms the concluding epode. A lot of imageries are used to praise nature and art. The poem contains irregular and mixed metrical structure of iambic tetrameters and pentameters. Moreover, the poem has lots of allusions and references to early poets and mythological elements. Strikingly, alliteration was found in many places such as, “purple light of Love” “flagging wing.”

Alexander Pope’s **Ode on Solitude** is a perfect example for Horatian ode which is written in 1700 at his age of twelve handling a more matured concept. He is inspired by the natural landscape at his childhood days and wrote it. The lines “let me live, unseen, unknown,” reveal the young Pope who wishes to be alone. It is also said Pope suffered from illness during his childhood days which gave him a slightly disfigured body and due to his short height of 4 feet 6 inches and having curved spine he wishes not to be seen by others. Also he was frequently ridiculed by many. He wanted to hide himself from the rest of that world. So he says, “and not a stone Tell where I lie.”

It is a poem of five quatrains with ABAB rhyme scheme. The poem conveys that Solitude to be the best part of life and so one can be happy in the company of one self. With this idea, the poet tries to bring a paradise on the earth. The poem also talks about freedom, rights, happiness in life, and as well the harsh realities of life. As suggested by the title, the poet is expecting to be in solitude having minimum acres of land to lead a comfortable and self-sufficient life. Above all, he wanted to be blessed with good health and peaceful mind in his secluded life. Ultimately he wanted to live a life of innocence with no much desires.

The poem very well expresses the emotional state of the poet and what he feels in his secluded condition. The emotional pouring is a feature of Horatian ode. The poem has perfect rhymes and is long with five stanzas. However, it is convinced as an ode by the title. The tone and mood of the poem is joyful and happy as he expresses that in the lines,

“Happy is the man”, Sound sleep by night; study and ease.” The imageries make the reader to visualize the pastoral land and the benefits of solitude stated which is evident in the lines, “Whose flocks supply him with attire, Whose trees in summer yield him shade.” The poetic devices such as Rhymes, oxymoron such as “winter fire,” and alliteration such as “sound sleep”, “unseen unknown”, etc, adds musical quality to it.

John Keats’ **“Ode on a Grecian Urn”** is an example for Irregular odes. It is written in 1819. He presented a new form of ode which he inspired from Benjamin Haydon an English artist and writer. This ode is considered as the best of English odes by critics. The poem consists of five ten line stanzas which deal with mortality, art, beauty, truth and history. He sets three scenes and the first scene is the figure of gods and men playing musical instrument. The second is under a tree where lovers exchanging their love. The third is the group of people performing sacrifice to some god.

The poem has iambic pentameter and divided into a two part rhyme schemes. The first seven lines of each stanza follow the rhyme scheme ABABCDE. The last three lines of each stanza are variables having the rhyme scheme of DCE, CED, CDE and DCE respectively which creates a two part thematic structure. In each stanza, the first four lines introduce the subject and last six lines are the development of the first. The poem altogether brings Keats’ explanation of the static nature of the sculpture and the urns through musical expression. He says that the age old urn conveys something and it does not perish as, “forever young.” Also, the figures in the urn never changes. The speaker asks different questions that he wanted to know details such as the story behind each picture as the urns never reveal whose or what story it is and who drew that.

Ode poetry has taken different forms during different periods. There is an evolutionary change in the odes from Pindar to Allen Tate. Those changes are influenced by time, political changes, life condition, regional influence etc. There is a purpose behind all its transformation. Especially, the Romantic poets wanted to convey emotion through music so they choose ode poetry. While analyzing the three odes, **“The progress of poesy: A Pindaric Ode”** follows the perfect structure of a Pindaric

model. As Pindaric celebrates or praises victories, this ode praises the progress or the growth of ode poetry. True to the original model, Gray employed the required elements like musical through language and sounds to create a ceremonious occasion and praised the contributors of ode poetry. Similarly the other two examples like “**Ode on Solitude**” and “Ode on a Grecian Urn” composed with arrhythmic concern but the subject differs from the earlier one. Since, “Ode on Solitude” is an imitation of Horatian ode; it has the elegance and dignity of the roman style. It contains five four line stanzas which is exactly opposite of the Pindaric structure and forms. The tone is serious and calm having expressed the emotional contemplation of being alone. “**Ode on a Grecian Urn**” doesn’t fit in to any of the other two odes but it has the mix of both. However, the last two types are monodies where single voice narrator or persona submits their inner feelings about their thoughtful matters. “**Ode on a Grecian Urn**” contains the pure Romantic spirit and it pictures the progress of poet’s mind. As expressionism is the key element of Romanticism, the Romantic poet Keats adapted it in his ode. Moreover, the three distinct poems are quite different in its original form but are similar due to it is musical nature which gives them the name ode.

### References

Brown, Calvin S. “John Dryden as Comparatist.” *Comparative Literature Studies*, vol. 10, no. 2, 1973, pp. 112-124.

Desai, Siddharth G. *Introduction: What is Comparative Literature? How it came into being?* - Susan Bassnet. 2011.

### Author Details

**S. Udhayakumar**, Assistant Professor, Department of English and Comparative Literature, School of English and Foreign Languages, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, Tamil Nadu, India, **Email ID:** [udhaynimallesh@gmail.com](mailto:udhaynimallesh@gmail.com)

Dev, Anjana Neira et. al. *Creative Writing: A Beginner’s Manuel*. Pearson, 2009.

“Glossary of Poetic Terms.” *poets.org*, <https://poets.org/glossary>

“Horace.” *Wikipedia*, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horace>

Keats, John. “Ode on a Grecian Urn.” *Gleeditions*, 2011.

Lattimore, Richmond. “The Odes Of Pindar.” *The University of Chicago Press*, 1947.

Lonsdale, Roger. *The Poems of Thomas Gray, William Collins, Oliver Goldsmith*. Longmans, 1969.

“Ode.” *Literary Devices*, <https://literarydevices.net/ode>

“Ode.” *Wikipedia*, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ode>

“Ode” *crossref-it.info*, <https://crossref-it.info/articles/397/the-ode>

Pindar. *The Odes*. Translated by Cecil M. Bowra, Penguin Classics, 1982.

“Poetry.” *Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/art/poetry>

“Poetry 101: What is an Ode? 3 Types of Ode Poems and Examples.” *Master Class*, 2020.

“Portal:Odes of Pindar.” *WikiSource*, [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Portal:Odes\\_of\\_Pindar](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Portal:Odes_of_Pindar)

Sangia, Rohib Adrianto. *Comparative Literature An Overview*, 2014.

von Geldern, James. “The Ode as a Performative Genre.” *Salvic Review*, vol. 50, no. 4, 1991, pp. 927-939.

[http://www.webexhibits.org/poetry/explore\\_classic\\_ode\\_background.html](http://www.webexhibits.org/poetry/explore_classic_ode_background.html)