

Ode on a Grecian URN

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Thou still abstract citation of a text,
Thou child of digital and human time,
Tech librarian, who canst thus express
a poem's line more sweetly than our rhyme:
What epic tale is hidden in thy ref
Of deities or mortals, or of both,
Before the Scaean Gate and walls of Troy?
What men or gods are these of doubtful troth?
What keening cries of mourning wives bereft?
What din of battle, and what shouts of joy?

All links resolved are sweet, but those that last
Are sweeter: therefore, O ye Muses, sing;
Not to the sensual ear, as in the past,
but now to future tech your voice let ring:
No failing server can your song deceive,
Nor browser leave you with a 404;
Bold Reader, never, never canst thou pass
Directly to the text, but do not grieve;
Thy reference cannot fade, and always lasts,
For ever canst thou find it, as before!

O URN! Fair attitude! with brede
of colons and of namespace overwrought,
With arbitrary strings, as IDs need;
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,

“Truth is citation — URN is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.”

Neel Smith
Co-architect, Homer Multitext project
Co-designer, the CITE architecture