

We are the Music Makers: About the poem

Published in 1873, O'Shaughnessy's *'The Ode'*, also known by its first line *'We Are The Music Makers'* was featured in the collection of poems titled *Music and Moonlight* and is actually an ode of nine full stanzas. The first three of the nine stanzas have been frequently published under the title "We Are the Music Makers" and is more popular than the complete ode. Sparkling with exuberant optimism, this poem celebrates art, lauds the creative spirit and asserts that the dreamers of dreams have an active role to shape the age they live in. It is a tribute to artists, poets, writers and musicians who shape the world through their art. The poem celebrates those who refuse to play by the book and create a world of their own, who, despite being misunderstood by people play a great role in shaping the age they live in. This poem describes the life of an artist, the beauty of their artworks and their impact on their surroundings and on the world outside. It doesn't limit itself to a particular form of art but **includes all the creative and artistic endeavors** pursued by humans.

We are the Music Makers: Explanation

First Stanza

We are the music-makers,
And we are the dreamers of dreams,

The speaker's voice in this ode, in the first person "we", is the collective voice of all artists – poets, musicians, painters and the like. So, unlike in a traditional ode, the subject is the speaker and not the addressee. The poem makes a straightforward appeal to the artists across different realms. He calls them 'the music-makers', and 'dreamers of dreams'. Since it avoids mention of a particular art-form, it applies equally to artists across the globe, across different segments. And, thus the massive appeal! So, this poem gives art an encompassing definition.

All artists, according to the poet, are makers of music in the sense that they create sweetness and harmony. They are dreamers of dreams i.e., they are capable of creating dream-like utopian world. Their dreams are those which we dream. Whereas our dreams vanish, their dreams get powerful expressions in the shapes of stories, poems, paintings, sculptures etc. no doubt they live a lonely life, away from the hustle and bustle of life.

Wandering by lone sea-breakers
And sitting by desolate streams;

In these lines, the poet describes the artists and their soul-searching. How they wander alone by sea-breakers, and sit by the desolate streams. The poet tries to focus on the desolation of spirits of these artists that actually shapes up their creativity which is worth such admiration.

They are strangely escapists as they remain outside the active life. They wander by sea beaches watching sea breakers trying to find some meaning in them. Or they sit by forlorn

streams to watch the beauty in nature. This withdrawal is necessary for the creation of “art”. **This aloofness is vital in the creation of art as it gives them the space to utilize their creativity and imagination to produce something praiseworthy.**

World losers and world forsakers,
On whom the pale moon gleams;

O'Shaughnessy now builds upon the travails that these artists go through. He calls them 'World losers' and 'world forsakers'. Being outside our material world, they are “losers” and “forsakers”. They are not successful in the worldly sense. They sacrifice or renounce the material world for artistic pursuits. They remain in oblivion – “on whom the pale moon gleams”

This highlights the difficult life the artists lead to shape up their creation. Often it gets difficult to survive solely on their art. **'The pale moon' points to the little or meagre sustenance they manage to gain for themselves through their art.**

Yet we are the movers and shakers
Of the world for ever, it seems

Despite that, the poet says these artists are the 'movers and shakers' of the world. By the phrase, he means that artists are rebels who shake the status quo by challenging it and pushing the society forward. They are escapists, yet they are “the movers and shakers” in the sense that they give birth to ideas which inspire men of action to change the status quo by rebelling against it and initiating a forward movement in society. They move and shake the world not through action but through their ideas, ideals and dreams.

They push the society on the path of progress in the realm of ideas by shaking it from its stagnation and slumber. In other words, artists, remaining outside, bring about desirable changes in our world. Their ideas act as a catalyst to cause that change, bring dynamicity to an otherwise static world.

Second Stanza

With wonderful deathless ditties
We build up the world's great cities.

In the second stanza, the speaker draws our attention to the contributions of artists to the world. The poet celebrates creation and fantasy and the artist's ability to give birth to something new. They stay away from worldly pleasure but at the same time, they are able to address issues through their art that pushes the society forward.

Artists have the gift of imagination through which they help manifest a new world, build new cities and create a glorified empire out of their stories. In this stanza, the poet highlights the effects of the artists on the world. He draws our attention to the power of the artists. He extols the role of fantasy in creation and thus pushing forward the society. We know how the artists inspire generations of men with new, revolutionary ideas. The wonderful, immortal (deathless) songs created by the artists' soul are capable of building the world's great cities. They are capable of building and rebuilding new cities, new settlements, and new civilizations by arousing radical thoughts, feelings and realizations in people's mind.

And out of a fabulous story
We fashion an empire's glory:

Similarly, out of a fabulous, mythic story they can fashion a glorious empire. This means that the fantasy that comes to an artist's mind can shape up things he builds. It is after all poems, stories, songs, paintings and other arts that mark the glory of a civilisation. We often talk about the artistic height of an empire to judge its greatness.

One man with a dream, at pleasure,
Shall go forth and conquer a crown;
And three with a new song's measure
Can trample an empire down.

The poet further says that one man with a dream and adequate opportunity (pleasure) at hand can give that dream a concrete structure. He is the one who shall go ahead and conquer a crown. The 'crown' refers to an extraordinary achievement. The poet adds to say if more (three) people come together on any such new, novel idea (new song's measure), they can trample an empire down.

Thus with their ideas, artists can give one man the liberty to "dream at pleasure" and to move forward to conquer a crown. At the same time artists can inspire a few revolutionaries to trample an empire down. Art is a vehicle for social change. It can arouse people's emotions and inspire them to rebel and rally for a change. The artists can bring more change in people's mind than anyone else.

If not directly, then indirectly, they are the real leaders of the world. Their art needs to be celebrated.

Third Stanza

We, in the ages lying
In the buried past of the earth,
Built Nineveh with our sighing,
And Babel itself with our mirth;

In the third stanza of the *Ode*, '*We are the Music Makers*', the poet continues to applaud the power of artists; the poet tries to equate art with divinity as he alludes to the Biblical cities of Nineveh and Babel. The artists were present in all ages (in the ages lying). In the past the artists built the ancient city of Nineveh that was abandoned in 612 BC (in the buried past). 'Sighing' probably means the torture those enslaved people received to build the buildings, streets and all. Again, Babel (Babylon) was created with mirth, with the artists like the architects and sculptors working together happily. (Nineveh was a flourishing capital of the Assyrian empire, founded by Nimrod but it had a tragic fall. The tower of Babel was built to reach the heavens. It is the symbol of human unity and coordinated effort, as also human arrogance to claim equality with God. God punished the builders by giving them different languages and confusing them.). It is believed that Nineveh was created by artists out of distress whereas Babel was created out of joy. Nineveh and Babel are symbolic of an artist's ability to destroy and create. The poet refers to the cities of Babel and Nineveh, fostering the idea of art as a divine creation. The speaker almost equates the artists with some divine figure possessing the God-like attribute of creation and destruction.

And o'erthrew them with prophesying
To the old of the new world's worth;
For each age is a dream that is dying,
Or one that is coming to birth.

The poet further states that the artists are capable of overthrowing the old world with their prophecy of the new world. Artists demolish the old decadent world by predicting about the new desirable one. He attributes an almost Godly manner to the idea of the artist, and shows that it is ultimately the artist himself who creates and kills his own mythology. Each age is the result of dream of these artists; this is again replaced by another dream — dream of a new modern world. Thus there will always be other artists, and there will always be other myths. Myths and dreams take only new shapes. Art is, therefore, unkillable. Art, thus, is continuous, for myths and dreams never die. It is ultimately Art which is left in the world. Art is immortal; the lasting effect of Art outlives civilizations.

An artist's contribution to their society is thus commendable and praiseworthy. They are apparently the “losers” and the “forsakers” of the world but at the same time they are the “movers and shakers of the world forever.”

THEME

The underlying **theme of the poem** is the appreciation of art. The **poet** encourages the readers to dream like artists who shape the world through their imaginative capabilities. The transformative power of art, the ability of the artists to cause changes and the timelessness of art are the major concerns in the **poem**.

This poem is a celebration of the art and the artists on every platform. It is an ode of pure appreciation to the gifted artists who are brave enough to rebel against dull, unimaginative and monotonous existence. Though artists do not involve themselves in the mainstream society and prefer to stay aloof, their art still makes them the “movers and shakers” of the society. This poem clearly identifies the sacrifices these artists have made to prove their loyalty to art and salutes them for their bravery and creativity. Art is a gift of God to this world and the artists are the promoter of this gift. Artists are the revolutionaries who have been inspiring millions for generations. They are the true leaders who lead every generation and bestow them with the gift of art. They arouse inspiration and the will to dream and help to escape from the clutches of the society and the bitter reality.

ODE

The poem ‘We are the Music Makers’ is an ode.

An ode is a serious and dignified composition. It is exalted in subject matter and elevated in tone and style. The theme or its treatment cannot be trivial or undignified. It is written to praise or glorify someone or something.

In this context the poem 'We are the Music Makers' is an ode proper. It is serious in its content and treatment. It praises, rather admires creative artists. It celebrates the life of an artist, the beauty of their artworks and their impact on their surroundings and on the world outside.(elaborate with examples from the poem).