

『ジョン・キーツのオードにおける詩想』

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Introduction

Keats's thought has continuously developed since he first read Chapman's "Homer" and began to know the delight of poetry-writing. In Keats's view the pursuit of ideal beauty cannot be accomplished without removing selfishness and solitariness. Keats thought the pursuit of beauty should be accompanied with the love of humanity and it was already related in "Sleep and Poetry". Keats's mind developed continually and came to have a profound insight for life. And it was at this period that Keats wrote "Endymion". He wrote such poetic tales as "Sleep and Poetry", "I stood Tip-toe", "Isabella", "Hyperion" and "The Eve of St. Agness" and so on, but in this treatise I should like to discuss some of his works of mature imagination; the famous five odes which were written from April to May in 1819. Keats could not satisfy himself with expressing the third person objectively, and chose the lyrical form he could describe the depth and ardency of subjectivity.

To comment about Keats we should understand his imagination and have to say something on his 'negative capability'. So I would like to pick up his odes and I am going to interpret 'negative capability' in his odes.

First of all in the first chapter I am going to try to analyse the *Ode on Indolence* and the *Ode on Melancholy*, and to explain 'negative capabi-

lity' in them.

In the second chapter I intend to relate the symbols of human soul in the *Ode to Psyche*.

In the third chapter I would like to choose the *Ode to a Nightingale* and discuss the immediately experienced happiness in the nightingale's song and the eternity of natural beauty.

In the fourth chapter I would like to pick up the *Ode on a Grecian Urn* and discuss the eternity of art beauty and transient human life in the *Ode on a Grecian Urn*.

Chapter I

The Meaning of 'Negative Capability'

Keats was not indeed a philosopher; therefore Keats's words of philosophical speculation are very obscure. The word "truth" in "Beauty is truth, truth beauty." is one of the instances. When Keats represents his view of life, he expresses it by his own personal experience. For him his words of "Axioms in philosophy are not axioms until they are proved upon our pulses." shows his view of life. He spent his life with speculation over speculation and became aware of great defects in his poetic ability. He thought that poetry should be philosophical and must have philosophical background based on the experience of life. When Keats reflected on himself, he became aware that his poems are lacking in it. He earnestly tried to fulfill this equipment, and then turned his mind to knowledge or philosophy. In consequence of that, Keats thought the relation between sensuous joy and speculative life, and was satisfied with himself to a certain degree. But soon his thought which developed unceasingly could not fully content himself with the knowledge based on only theory, and so

his mind fell into confusion. At times Keats rejected reason, disliked philosophy and longed for imagination. This is clearly related in his letter to Benjamin Bailey, Saturday 22, Nov., 1819, in which he says:

“However it may, O for a life of Sensation rather than of Thoughts!” Keats sincerely thought to combine his experience with life experience, and he felt the inner conflict of his mind. Namely the most important thought in Keats’s poems is shown in the phase of his inner struggle. I’d like to quote his words though they are somewhat long letter, in which we can realize how he tried to establish his poetic position in pain, unsafeness or suspicion and understand what is his ‘negative capability’.

I had not a dispute but a disquisition, Dilke on various subjects; several things dove-tailed in my mind, and at once it struck me what quality went to form a Man of Achievement, especially in Literature, and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously — I mean Negative Capability, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason, — Coleridge, for instance, would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the penetralium of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half-knowledge. This pursued through volumes would perhaps take us no further than this, that with a great poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration.¹⁾

We can understand the following things from this letter. The first thing is that Keats tries to combine his art experience with life experience. Two different elements — Keats as a sensual poet and Keats as a speculatist — are always struggling in Keats. The second thing is that his ‘negative capability’ is the ability which denies himself and watches reality as it is, or such moods in his mind.

To Keats, the necessary condition of poetry is the poets’ insight into real things as they are, and poets never try to intellectualize things into

something else and the necessary condition of poetry is the poets' submission to people as they are without trying to instruct them. In Keats the mood of negative capability began to grow up at that time; it was under such mood that *the Ode on Indolence* was written.

Keats writes a letter to George and Georgian Keats on 19 th March in 1819, in which he says that he feels tiresome and idle and such mood makes him comfort both his mind and body. This letter is an important key to interpret the *Ode on Indolence*; its essence is that:

Neither Poetry, nor Ambition, nor Love have alertness of countenance as they pass by me; they seem rather like figures on a Greek Vase.²⁾

It is in the *Ode on Indolence* that Keats chants such feeling of his mind. It seems that Keats denies and refuses all creativeness and passions to compose a poem, and that he shows his feeling that he wishes to spend everyday leisurely without doing anything in vain. This kind of mood, however, was one of various fits which occurred in Keats mind. On the other hand Keats had a passion to move actively; at the same time Keats wanted to have enough rest because of the fatigue in his mind and body. Since Keats was always on the strain of passion to move actively, he would sometimes search for vain things. Anyhow even the desperate frame of his mind lurks in the last stanza of this Ode; that is to say, it begins at the parting words "Adieu" and ends with the separation words "never return!" in the last line.

We find, of course, many fervent voices of Keats's real mind in the several lines of the second or third stanza. These are, for instance, the last five lines in the second stanza or the first four lines in the third stanza; also there are full of Keats's peculiar, abundant and splendid

words in the fifth stanza. We can see Keats's skilfulness of epithet in the three lines from the second lines to the four, and also learn his skilfulness of personified expression in the last two lines.

In Keats the harmony of imaginative life and real life had ended with a mere desire, and they did not accord with his thought. The life-blood was sucked from Keats's body by "Demon Poetry", and was deprived of vitality of "Disease". Keats suffered from love, as if his life were deprived of love, and he spent his short life in anguish. Keats who had such doom could not get rid of a desperate struggle in a certain period; in consequence of such a struggle and impassioned contemplation Keats came to bind up his mind with the objects of immediate sensuous experience. Keats came to think that art was to seize the immediate beauty, to find out enjoyment in the immediate beauty and describe it. Keats longed for a world in which such immediate beauty could become eternal. It was in such a world that Keats searched for ideal beauty, and also the other Odes are closely bounded up with this theme of transience and eternity.

Now, I'd like to change my eye to the *Ode on Melancholy*. First of all we feel strangeness in the Ode, for there are several negative words at the beginning of the first stanza. Keats consciously uses this diction and by doing so he tries to get reader's assent thoroughly. In such negative words we can make out a great deal of mental circumstance which he had experienced before writing the first stanza of this poem. This is the very Keats's own feeling of bodily fatigue that he described in the *Ode to Indolence*. The first stanza of the *Ode on Melancholy* begins at the denial of melancholy anyhow, and in the second stanza the poetic circumstances — "But when the melancholy fit shall fall" — are obviously going on in the development.

Keats find out beauty in the profundity of all melancholic emotion or

things. He earnestly, skilfully and symbolically insists on us his imagination that melancholy has not its significance if it is not combined with beauty, terror or sorrow. Keats's poetic feeling fulfills the highest poetic achievement in the third stanza.

She dwells with Beauty — Beauty that must die;
And joy. whose hand is ever at his lips
Bidding adieu; and aching Pleasure nigh,
Turning to Posison while the bee-mouth sips; ³⁾

In the first line Keats manifests all poetic imagination which he wants to tell us in this Ode. While he intensely feels the transience of beauty and enjoyment, and he is excessively being astonished at the beauty of melancholy, and he is attracted by it. With this serious attitude he tries to extend his new peculiar poetic circumstances where beauty and melancholy are combined with each other and this trial of his is completed with good success. Thus in Keats beauty and melancholy are combined with each other by his abundant imagination and ingenious poetical craft, and then his beautiful melancholy changes into a joy of life.

Ay, in the very temple of Delight
Veil'd Melancholy has her sovran shrine,
Though seen of none save him, whose strenuous tongue
Can burst Joy's grape against his palate fine, ⁴⁾

A great poet like Keats would not have been born if he had not been able to find his joy in his life.

Chapter II

A Symbol of Human Soul

Let us quote one sentence from Keats's letter which had been written on the Ode to Psyche before he wrote it. Its essence is this:

The following Poem — the last I have written is the first and the only one with which I have taken even moderate pains. I have for the most part dash'd off my lines in a hurry. This I have done leisurely — I think it reads the more richly for it and will I hope encourage me to write other things in even a more peaceable and healthy spirit.⁵⁾

Keats, moreover, relates "You must recollect that Psyche was not embodied as a Goddess —." in that letter.

'Mid hush'd cool-rooted flowers, fragrant-eyed, Blue, silver-white, and budded Tyrian.⁶⁾

Before the expression of this two lines, Keats says to Psyche, "I saw you in daytime dream." and he describes two Gods Cupid and Psyche who are playing in the wood. It is described in the three lines as follows: "Couched side by side —". The two lines (L. L., 13-14) which describe the flowers are a very skilful expression. The depth of sensuous effect of modification which succeeds to the first series adds to a gleam in the first stanza. It is, for instance, the words of modification, "cool-rooted flowers", "fragrant-eyed", or "Blue, silver-white" and "budded Tyrian". In this case, especially effective words are Blue and silver-white. The modification of cool-rooted follows after the words of hush'd; and this is one of reasons that succeed in this line. The word of fragrant-eyed after cool-rooted is rich in variety and all of these words do not express the superficial beauty of flowers but explain the personal beauty which deeply enchants

one's heart. In the first stanza Keats shows his sharp, sensuous characteristic feature, and he gives the vitality and soul to both mythical persons. Success of the first stanza in this Ode depends on Keats's strength of skillful, poetical craft which gave ordinary two gods to the active vitality.

In all of the second stanza Keats sings in praise of goddess of beauty, Psyche. The method of praise is "Fairer than Phoebe's sapphirine-region'd star or Vesper"; and yet the interesting things are as follows: there are, for instance, no temple, no altar heaped with flowers, no virgin-choir, no voice, no lute, no grove, no oracle and no heat of pale-mouthed prophet dreaming and so on. Keats's mind that he says these things do not exist has not a general god which comes to be the contrast of belief in our world; it is a heretical goddess, Psyche. Now, let us especially notice the sensuous and heretical words in the last half stanza. This is one point of poetical sense in Keats. Keats emphasizes consciously with the following words, for instance, "lute" in the sense of hearing, "incense" in the sense of nose and "heat" in the sense of touch. These senses and last concluding, mysterious and profound words make this stanza transparent and make a deep impression on us as excellent beauty.

In the third stanza we can see Keats's artistic excellence; that is, he uses alliteration, for instance, "f" or "h" and "wh", and he tries to give smoothness and elegance to this Ode. But this third stanza is tedious and ends without showing strength. The last six lines follow the last six lines of the second stanza. We can entirely know Keats's ambition that changes "no" to "they", and tries to give another effect on formal or sensuous expression in the field of modification. In the former part of this stanza, though the words are different, the meaning follows the former part of the second stanza; and yet this part ends without adding new consciousness. This is the chief reason why this stanza closes in failure, because we can-

not see new development in the third stanza, in spite of the fact that the first and second stanzas play their important parts.

The third stanza is skilfully rhymed and composed, but we can hardly see the new development of the thought — which he wants to express truly from the beginning of this Ode. In the fourth stanza the poetical thoughts manifest themselves. Keats suddenly begins to sing it with the high pitched words of his own vocabulary. It is full of the feeling of the intensity, as if it showed the top of his own life with various and peculiar confusion. Its delivery is splendid and skilful. In this last stanza we can see fragrance of symbolism and colouring harmony. The last four lines in this stanza are those which have the most important meaning. They are an expression with strength which brings into unity the words that are closely related with the first stanza. “Beauty goddess” Keats says “Many things which I present to you are ‘soft delight’ which only my obscure thought can obtain well.” He contrasts ‘soft delight’ with ‘shadowy thought’. In this point we can see the poetical mind of Keats at the bottom of his heart.

Psyche symbolizes, of course, the soul in the old sense of the word, and the sum total of the human consciousness. For Keats, I am sure, the most important element of the consciousness was the imagination. In relation to worship Psyche, he allegorically says that he becomes a psychological poet and analyzes the human soul. He says, too, that he studies the human mind in order to show how awareness of its complexity could enrich human experience.

It is especially appropriate to say that Keats chose Psyche as his object of worship, for him the best ways of approaching the immortal world was through the use of the most active element of the human soul and the imagination. Psyche is an excellent symbol for the imagination as an

instrument to bridge the gap between the mortal and immortal. For she had been mortal and she could become a goddess.

After all, Keats thought through this Ode, at its essence, is that Psyche is a symbol of human soul that is given immortal life by love. Keats intends to enshrine Psyche in the untrodden realm — the realm of his mind.

Chapter III

The Eternity of Natural Beauty

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
 My senses, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
 Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
 One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk: ⁷⁾

In Keats, this 'heart aches' or 'drowsy numbness' spring from a peculiar condition of health, mind and circumstances. Like the *Ode on Indolence* or the *Ode on Melancholy*, we can see a melancholic shade in this ode. When we readers, however, listen to the song of a nightingale — which sings of summer in full-throated ease — through Keats's imagination, the gloomy shade makes us forget real world and enter the world of imagination.

I don't think the second stanza is superior to the first stanza, but it has enough enchantment to bewitch us by the poetic feeling. Keats's imagination is especially active in the first half of this stanza.

O, for a draught of Vintage! that hath been
 Cool'ds long age in the deep-delved earth,
 Tasting of Flora and the country green,
 Dance and Provencal song, and sunburnt mirth ⁸⁾

In this four lines we cannot help imagining the South European scenery in which flowers bloom, grasses and trees grow thick, and people are dancing of singing songs and enjoying to be bathed in the sunlight.

That I might drink, and leave the world unseen
And with thee fade away into the forest dim ⁹⁾

In this last two lines we can see Keats's figure which desires to escape from his real life and suffer from heartlessness of real life.

The third stanza continues from the second one, and the torture in Keats's real life and the desire for escape from the real society come out with the passage 'already with thee!' in the fourth stanza.

Away! Away! for I will fly to thee,
Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,
But on the viewless wings of Poesy,
Though the dull brain perplexes and retards:
Already with thee! ¹⁰⁾

In the last three lines,

But here there is no light,
Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown
Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways ¹¹⁾

an objective expression which lies among the subjective lyricism appears quite skillfully.

Keats's peculiar poetic thought — imagination — and the glorification to death are expressed smoothly and beautifully in the six stanza, and we cannot read them without being enchanted.

Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight with no pain ¹²⁾

We can also find out Keats's desire to death in one of his sonnets.

Verse, Fame, and Beauty are intence indeed,
But Death intenser — Death in Life's high meed.¹³⁾

This feeling expressed in the sixth stanza, I think, is essentially characteristic of Keats. Keats who was in poor health and lost his parents and his brother in early age would naturally come to express the problem of death; and from the expectation of death Keats came to entrust all of his life to intuition. At the same time Keats, from his desire for death, grieves the rapidity and the transience of human life. On the other hand he chants that the beauty of nightingale — the beauty of nature will not change for ever. “Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!”, this one line is Keats's poetic thought which tales Keats's eternity of beauty, just as the phrase of “Beauty is truth, truth beauty” shows the constancy of art beauty. We can also see Keats's mind that he grieves for the rapidity or heartlessness of life in the *Ode on a Grecian Urn* and the *Ode to a Nightingale*. We can say, after all, that the theme of the *Ode to a Nightingale* is a symbol of the eternity of natural beauty. So far from being immortal, the nightingale has a considerably shorter life than we human beings. Therefore it is a paradox to say that a nightingale is immortal. The immortal nightingale means that a nightingale's song is immortal for a man who listens to its sons; and this audacious paradox is able to accomplish only in Keats who has abundant imagination. Real life is transient. Keats who realized happiness in life was able to seize the ideal beauty by grasping the immediate beauty; and so he tried to eternalize the immediate beauty in his odes. The *Ode to a Nightingale* is the most enchanting one among Keats's five odes in the point of the richness of imagination, skilfulness of words and the appropriateness of metre.

If we regard the *Ode to a Nightingale* as a lyrical, we will find out a little unnatural scenes in this ode. If we compare this ode with Shelley's lyrical poem, "*To the Skylark*", we will find it somewhat inferior to Shelley's poem in the point of the fluency of melody. If we compare Shelley with Keats, it seems that Shelley's poem is gay like a skylark itself and gives a musical, liquid impression. But on the other hand Keats perseveringly grieves the sorrow of the real life in his mind. Shelley expresses the extensive beauty that always develops from the inside to the outside. But we can say Keats describes pictorially the beauty of the inside of his mind.

Chapter IV

The Eternity of Art Beauty

We can say the *Ode on a Grecian Urn* takes up the thought of the seventh stanza of the *Ode to a Nightingale*; that is to say, its theme is that mortal beauties pass away, but those of art never pass away. The first stanza is an introduction to the passage which Keats is going to relate on art beauty.

Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,
Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,¹⁴⁾

In calling the Urn "unravish'd bride of quietness", Keats praises the mysterious urn, and at the same time he is astonished at the mysterious art beauty of how to enter their presence, and describes his astonishment with the word of "foster-child of silence and slow time". Keats's thought that searches for the immediate enjoyment as well as ideal beauty obtains the supreme expressive form in this *Ode*. The beauty which Keats searches

is accomplished only in a world of his imagination, just as in the other odes.

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.¹⁵⁾

This unheard music is what Keats finds a player on the *Urn*; and the music that we cannot hear comes to be sweeter than any music heard only by his imagination.

In the second, third and fourth stanzas Keats expresses his main subjective — unchanging art beauty which he intends to manifest in this *Ode*; that is in the second stanza he draws a fair youth beneath the trees, who is playing on a soft pipe, in the third stanza unwearied, happy melodist and more happy love!, and in the fourth stanza mysterious priest and a little town. By doing so he accomplishes creative ecstasy that the artist makes perpetual in a masterpiece.

The fifth stanza is a conclusion of this *Ode* and the expression of his thought which we can find out his view of beauty. The main subject of the *Ode on a Grecian Urn* is that 'art is long and life is short'. In this theme Keats expresses quite skillfully the eternity of art beauty; but if we think Keats is a poet who chants aestheticism or wants for love to humanity, it would be a great mistake.

The last two lines in the fifth stanza are apt to bring such a misunderstanding:

Beauty is truth, truth beauty, — that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.¹⁶⁾

Then we have to rightly interpret the meaning of the fifth stanza in order

to understand the above lines. Keats thinks if we stare at an excellent art-article *Grecian Urn*, we unconsciously forget ourselves and enter the world which exists beyond our real lives. It is not a world we can imagine. No matter how hard we try to associate with an eternal world, we cannot imagine such a world. The pastoral sculpture which is drawn on marble urn may seem to be cold by reason of marble. If we contrast a possessor of "a burning forehead and a parching tongue" with the *Urn*, we will think the *Urn* is very leisurely. But the art beauty which is represented by this *Urn* is not indifferent to human agony. The people after the age of Keats as well as the people in the age of Keats could see the *Urn*, and they were comforted and encouraged by the *Urn* without changing for several thousand years. The people of the times would have sorrow, which was different from that of Keats's age. "Beauty is truth, truth beauty" means the words of comfort and encouragement to the people. The meaning of "truth" in this famous *Ode* does not mean philosophical truth.

Let us cite Keats's letter which expresses the thought of "Beauty is truth, truth beauty", and use it as a key to solve the problem:

November, 22 nd, 1817, to Benjamin Bailey:

I am certain of noting but holiness of the Heart's affection and the truth of Imagination — what the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth — whether it existed before or not.¹⁷⁾

December 21st, 1817, to George and Thomas Keats:

The excellence of every art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate, from their being in close relationship with Beauty and Truth.¹⁸⁾

These both letters are based on the same thought of Keats. From these passage we can comprehend the thought of beauty that Keats represents in the last two lines of the *Ode on a Grecian Urn*. That is to say,

we can understand well Keats's saying "What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth."; because the imagination has a special insight into the true nature of things.

The central thought of this *Ode* is that a real thing is art beauty; so excellent art-article, *Grecian Urn* is reality that has eternity. If we read this *Ode* with such an interpretation, we will be able to understand that "truth" in the two lines does not mean philosophical or scientific truth, but reality. Absolute beauty is essential and at once is a reality. Keats would intend to express such meaning. Now, we can say he spent his speculative life but was not a philosopher.

Accordingly, the "truth" that Keats used is obscure, and it has different meaning from the general meaning of "truth" in our times. Keats's poetic dictions are very hard to make out and obscure to follow; so in this respect Keats could not make himself understood in his poems. But if we can understand completely his central thought that human happiness seizes the immediately experienced happiness, we will fully be able to comprehend how excellent this *Ode* is! We can say Keats was a genius who had such excellent thought and left very splendid poems when young.

Conclusion

Keats began to write Odes after he had finished some of his poetic tales. That is to say, from April to May in 1819 Keats chanted famous five Odes; the Ode to Psyche, the Ode on a Grecian Urn, the Ode on Melancholy and the Ode to a Nightingale. Besides these five Odes, Keats has left the ode to Maia (1818), and to Fanny (1819) etc.

In this treatise I picked up famous five Odes, and tried to look into Keats himself longing for ideal beauty. In the Ode on Indolence I could see

Keats's characteristics in his various fits which occurred in his mind. He desired to spend every day leasurably doing nothing in vain. He tried to seize and express a moment when sensuous happiness was complete and sufficient; for him the immediately experienced happiness was the most real and important thing in his life. In the Ode on Melancholy Keats expressed that melancholy which differs from beauty is not significant. He could find out beauty in the profundity of all emotions or things. He also says melancholy has no significance if it combines with not beauty, but terror or sorrow.

In *Psyche* Keats expressed a symbol of human soul which was given immortal life by love, and tried to enshrine the *Psyche* in the untrodden realm—the realm in his mind. In the Ode to a Nightingale Keats grieved at the transience of real life, and considered the pursuit of ideal beauty was to search for the immediately experienced happiness. He also felt a poet's mission was to eternalize the natural beauty, and could succeed in eternalizing of a nightingale's song.

In *Grecian Urn*, as in the Ode to a Nightingale, he wished to express the eternity of beauty, that is the eternity of art. Keats's five Odes are all one feature in which he sensuously searched for ideal beauty. He continued to search for the immediate happiness in the transience of life, and tried to describe the immediate happiness in the eternal beauty. But we can say that though he could accomplish his ideal beauty in the world of his imagination, he was not able to link the real life with the imaginative life forever.

Notes

1. Letter, 32, p.71, ll. 11–24 (M. B. Forman, *The Letters of John Keats*, Oxford University Press, 1960)
2. Letter, 123, p.314, ll. 20–22 (*ibid.*)

3. Ode on Melancholy, stanza 3, LL. 1-4 (The poetical works of Keats, Ward Lock, London)
4. *ibid.*, stanza 3. 115-8.
5. Letter, 123, p.338, ll. 15-21.
6. Ode to Psyche, stanza 1, ll. 13-14 (*ibid.*)
7. Ode to a Nightingale, stanza 1, ll. 1-4 (*ibid.*)
8. *ibid.*, stanza 2, ll. 1-4.
9. *ibid.*, stanza 2, ll. 9-10.
10. *ibid.*, stanza 4, ll. 1-5.
11. *ibid.*, stanza 4, ll. 8-10.
12. *ibid.*, stanza 6, ll. 5-6.
13. Sonnet, Why did I Laugh to Night? ll. 13-14.
14. Poem, The Ode on a Grecian Urn, stanza 1, ll. 1-2.
15. *ibid.*, stanza 2, ll. 1-4.
16. *ibid.*, stanza 5, ll. 9-10.
17. Letter, 31. p.67, ll. 9-12.
18. *ibid.* 32, p.70, ll. 20-23.

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