

『グレイシアン・アーン』における
ジョン・キーツの詩想

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One of the modern investigator of John Keats, E. C. Pettet says about Keats's 'Ode on a Grecian Urn'

The more we know of Keats, of his sensibility, attitude, interest and experience, the more inevitable seems the composition of some such poem as his Ode on a Grecian Urn.¹⁾

The Ode on a Grecian Urn was written in 1819. The five famous Odes — Ode to Psyche, Ode on a Grecian Urn, Ode on Indolence, Ode on a Melancholy and Ode to a Nightingale—were written from the end of April to May in 1819, and to Autumn was written in September in the same year. After Keats wrote down the poetic tales, he could not content himself with objected depiction, and felt vanity about it, so he tried to create his own lyrical poetry that could completely express depth of subjectivity.

Now, we need to quote an opinion of Garrod's about this poem.

The Grecian Urn we may suppose to have been written in a mood of strong revulsion from the thesis of Melancholy.²⁾

To Benjamin Bailey

Staturday 22 Nov, 1817

O I wish I was certain of the end of all your troubles as that of your momentary start about the authenticity of the Imagination.

I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of Imagination — what the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth — whether it existed before or not—³⁾

From this letter, we can find out the development of Keats's thought, and also we can understand the central thought of the Ode on a Grecian Urn in his letter to B. Bailey written on Saturday 22, Nov. 1817. Keats thought that the starting-point of beauty in art was sensation and imagination. Between April and May Keats had a very happy time in his life, but in this period, Keats was possessed with a Grecian habit.

Keats tried to express his Hellenism and his own romanticism in the Ode on a Grecian Urn.

The first stanza of the Ode on a Grecian Urn is a faultless harmonization of thought, sentiment, and language as Garrod says. Also, E. C. Pettet praises about the first stanza as follows:

The first stanza of the Ode on a Grecian Urn is probably as good a poetic exemplification as any of the opinion Keats had once expressed to Reynolds: "Poetry should be great and unobtrusive, a thing which enters one's soul, and does not startle it or amaze it with itself, but with its subject."

It begins smoothly, quietly, calmly, with two lines in that measured, deep-breathing rhythm that characterize so much of Keats's best writing, this effect being strengthened by the repeated long 'it' sound and two immediately following speaking stress that weight the end of the second line:⁴⁾

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

J. M. Murry makes an objection against Dr. Bridges's opinion. There is not 'the supremacy of ideal art over Nature' in the first stanza as

Murry says.

Dr. Bridges declares: 'The thought as enounced in the first stanza is the supremacy of ideal art over Nature, because of its unchanging expression of perfection; and this is true and beautiful.' Possibly this thought is, indeed, both true and beautiful. But where in the first stanza of Keats's Ode is it enounced? ⁵⁾

Though still unravish'd bride of quietness,
Though forster-child of silence and slow time,
Sylvan historian, who canst thus express
A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme.⁶⁾

This phrase is a puzzling and surprising one. But, if we are aware of an effective prelude note to the last part of the stanza, we must feel that this stanza starts with a great quietness and changes in four lines, 'A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhym' and at last its ends a Grecian ecstasy. I think there is... 'a change of Nature' in this variation — quietness and Grecian ecstasy. Next, I'd like to quote Pettet's fine opinion on the first stanza.

the paradox of the 'unravish'd bride' serves to announce one of the basic themes of the second and third stanzas.

This prelusive effect is by no means confined to the phrase 'still unravish'd bride'. Admitted by the two opening lines, if we choose to dwell on their meaning, are a little vague and obscure: they are typically Romantic in expression, an antithesis of Augustan explicitness.⁷⁾

In the third stanza, I find that Keats's sensibility was possessed with vegetation, and I cannot doubt that these trees, a youth who is playing a pipe, on the urn symbolize sensuous beauty. Keats is now himself passionately in this stanza, and increasingly, identified with his imagination. It seems to me that it is the best scene of this poem. By the way let us

quote Garrod's explanation on the last three lines of this stanza.

The lover whom the Urn figures loves, not a 'beauty that must die' but that which, from the nature of art, 'cannot fade'.

The song that he sings, 'not to the sensual ear', but 'to the spirit',

All breathing human passion for above,
That leaves a heart high sorrowful and cloy'd,
A burning forehead, and a parching tongue.⁸⁾

In the fourth stanza, we are still within the world depicted by the urn. In the last line of the fourth stanza, especially the last three lines;

And, little town, thy streets for evermore
Will silent be; and not a soul to tell
Why thou art desolate, can e'er return.

Garrod says,

every reader is conscious, I should suppose, of an undertone of sadness, of disappointment.⁹⁾

,but Garrod points out, "I don't feel an undertone of sadness, and of an disappointment." Though I feel an obscure impression against the former parts of the stanza, as Brook says;

The little town which has been merely implied by the procession portrayed on the Urn is endowed with a poignance beyond anything else in the poem.¹⁰⁾

Keats depicts the eternity of the Grecian Urn in the last line.

Many critics and many Keats's reserchers express their opinions 'approval' or 'disapproval' for the last stanza in this Ode. Garrod points out the defect in the poetical composition, for instance, the first line 'O Athic shape! Fair attitude!' or the fifth line 'As doth eternity, or from seven

to eight line in midst of other woe, Than our...'. He says as follows:

I dislike, as much as Mr. Bridges does, the assonance Attic... attitude, in the first line of it, and the obscurely intended affectation 'brede'. I dislike, in the fifth line, the metrical carry-over 'As doth Eternity'—this is the only place in the Ode where a clear separation is not maintained between quatrain and sestet. In lines 7-8 the metrical carry-over 'in midst of other woe Than ours...' is, I think, almost equally objectionable—though the pause after it is less full. Indeed, the movement of the whole of the sestet is 'choppy'.¹¹⁾

And he continuously remarks 'more serious than any of these faults—and a fault of which these are symptomatic.' In his conclusion his opinion is as follows:

— the connexions of the stanzas both internally and in respect of the stanzas preceding are difficult. The theme of what has gone before is the arrest of beauty, the fixity given by art to forms which in life are fluid and impermanent, and the appeal of art from the senses to the spirit. The theme of the final stanza is the relation of beauty to truth, to thought. Nothing has prepared the transition to this.¹²⁾

Now, let us pick up J.M. Murry's idea on the last two lines. According to his opinion, he remarks that his own opinion about the two lines is not so different from Mr. Eliot's criticism, but he cannot agree with Dr. Bridges's opinion. His view is as follows:

Dr. Robert Bridges judgment on The Ode on a Grecian Urn is individual, and needs to be quoted entire. 'The thought as enounced in the first stanza is the spremacy of ideal art over Nature, because of its unchanging expression of perfection; and this is true and beautiful; but its amplification in the poem is unprogressive, monotonous, and scattered, in the attention being called to fresh

details without result, which gives an effect of poverty in spite of the beauty. The last stanza enters stumbling upon a pun, but its concluding lines are very fine, and make a sort of recovery with their forcible directness.' Thus, in the judgment of Dr. Bridges, it is these concluding lines which redeem a poorish poem.¹³⁾

And again Murry says about Dr. Bridges's opinion as follows:

My own opinion concerning the value of these two lines in the context of the poem itself is not very different from Mr. Eliot's criticism. At any rate, I disagree with Dr. Bridges's opinion that by their 'forcible directness' the Ode is enabled to make 'a sort of recovery.' To my sense the lines disturb the subtle harmony of the poem. Their very directness is disruptive, for the Ode as a whole is not, in this sense, direct at all. And therein, I think, lies the cause of Dr. Bridges's surprising condemnation of the poem, which he places 'last, or disputing place with the last' among Keats's Odes.¹⁴⁾

If we read this stanza rightly by Keats's letter to B. Bailey 22, Nov., 1817, we cannot agree with disapproval of Dr. Bridges's opinion and Garrod's opinion. Garrod makes a mistake by saying the following sentence, 'nothing has prepared the transition to this.' The reason is he tries to interpret the last two lines logically. We should not interpret them logically, philosophically in case of the Ode on a Grecian Urn.

When we indulge ourselves in a world of imagination with Keats, we will feel and understand the greatness of art and beauty, which are contained in the Ode on a Grecian Urn, though there are a lot of poetical defects pointed out by many critics.

(NOTES)

- 1) E. C. Pettet, *On The Poetry of Keats*, p.316, 11. 1-4, Cambridge, At the University Press, 1957.
- 2) H. W. Garrod, *Keats*, p.101, 1. 3-5, Oxford At the Clarendon Press, 1957.
- 3) M. B. Forman, *The Letters of John Keats*, p.67, 11. 7-12, Oxford University Press, 1960.
- 4) E. C. Pettet, *ibid.*, p.319, 11. 13-29.
- 5) J. M. Murry, *The Mistery of Keats*, p.164, 11. 32-37, Peter Nevill Limited, London.
- 6) Poem (*Ode On a Grecian Urn*), 11. 1-4.
- 7) E. C. Pettet, *ibid.*, p.321, 11. 14-25.
- 8) H. W. Garrod, *ibid.*, p.101, 11. 12-18.
- 9) H. W. Garrod, *ibid.*, p.104.
- 10) Cleanth Brooks, *The Well Wrought Urn*, p.161, 11. 24-26, A Harvest Book, Harcourt, Brace.
- 11) H. W. Garrod, *ibid.*, pp.101-102, 11. 25-7.
- 12) H. W. Garrod, *ibid.*, p. 102, 11. 9-17.
- 13) J. M. Murry, *ibid.*, p.162, 11. 8-21.
- 14) *ibid.*, pp.163-164, 11. 37-8.

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