

Study on Keats's Poetics

济慈诗学研究



赵玲洁 著

河北人民出版社

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前言

济慈一生短暂而悲惨，经历了亲人的失去、病痛的折磨、爱情的夭折、社会的歧视等各方面的打击。然而，在经过一段时间的迷茫之后，他能够乐观地面对人生，并勇敢的挑战人生。美是他终生追求的目标。他的人生观、哲学观、自然观、美学思想都体现在他的创作过程和最终形成的创作理论中。所以“天然接受力”是一种“积极”的而非“消极”的能力。他的诗作在时间和内容上都是连续的，其中的思想发展正是“天然接受力”的最好体现。

本书通过济慈的创作理论“天然接受力”来分析他的诗作，从美学、宗教、哲学等多方面、多角度对这位 19 世纪英国诗人的诗歌及其人生进行研究，用全新视角对其创作理论“Negative Capability”进行诠释。他提出的“天然接受力”包含了现代性、后现代性思想，而其“美即是真，真即是美”的“物我合一”、“人景交融”的超越尘俗的审美观与中国古代哲学家、美学家庄子宣扬的“天人合一”哲学思想有异曲同工之妙。本书借助其诗歌及书信作品深刻剖析济慈诗歌创作的心路历程及其对人生、对美真的追求。本书从以下几个方面进行研究：

第一章主要研究了济慈的人生哲学与其“Negative Capability”创作理论及美学理论之间的关系。同时还对庄子“物化”哲学与济慈的“天然接受力”中的“物我合一”、“人景交融”做了对比研究。从济慈的生活背景及他的思想发展过程对他的人生观的形成产生的影响来分析他的“天然接受力”的真正含义，探究这一理论所包括的对人生、对艺术的理解和追求过程中经历的三个阶段。济慈作品中“迷茫”和“强度”是他在人生和艺术探索过程中必然要经历的。但他并不是被动地沉陷于现实与理想的沟壑中，而是积极地思索并寻找解决办法。他的“美即是真，真即是美”包涵了深层意义，即美可以消除一切，也可以包含一切。济慈在《秋颂》中真正达到了真与美的和谐与统一，这也是他的“天然接受力”的最高境界。在美与真中，他找到了人生和艺术的答案。从而说明济慈对人生的乐观和对美的追求正是他的“天然接受力”的最高目标。

第二章结合济慈的诗歌展现诗人基于“天然接受力”消除自我身份

后充分发挥想象力，并最后达到物我交融境界的心理过程，尽管这个过程会

有矛盾和不稳定的因素，但济慈相信所有不和谐终将融为一体。

第三章研究了济慈诗中的宗教观。济慈的诗学理论体现着神性的光芒。他有关“天然接受力”的学说，准确的捕捉到了创作者主观要达到的与外界最契合时的状态，他凭着感觉和直觉，让想象纵横驰骋，从而在瞬间把握真理，从须臾看出永恒，这种沉思状态，是物我同一的精神境界，也是一种宗教境界。济慈的前期诗歌创作，体现了自己最初的宗教探索，他的三首叙事诗，其宗教思想得以彰显，完成救赎和飞升；济慈的后期创作中宗教思想更加圆通，原先诗中的人生困惑，已经转化成诗歌内在的动力，成为诗人持续关注的焦点：艺术之美、世界之美、真与美的沟通联合等等。他的宗教思想也在这种对中级问题的关怀中达到了前所未有的平衡，而凌驾在梦幻底色上的是基督的受难意识和获得拯救的信仰。

第四章着重研究济慈的自然生态观。济慈的自然观是一个发展演变的过程，包括了从早期超越自然，转折时期对想象力的怀疑，到后期回归自然。济慈在早期诗歌强调想象力和艺术的作用，展现出了超越现实自然的观点。在转折时期济慈在诗论与诗歌中体现出自然观的转变。首先他在这个时期的人生经历和对哲学与知识意识的觉醒为其自然观的转变提供了背景，其次在济慈的传奇作品中，体现了从想象的境界中逐渐觉醒的现实主义意识。济慈在后期最终摒弃了早期对想象力的强调，体现了他探索现实自然理论的发展，他的颂诗最终回归自然的主题，确立了诗人与自然的和谐关系，代表济慈自然观的最终境界。同时，济慈诗中的生态自然观也得以体现，作者希望通过对济慈自然观演变的论述，引起读者对济慈的自然观和自然诗学以及生态自然的关注。

第五章主要结合济慈的人生经历及前四章的论述来研究济慈诗歌中的精神价值。一是他的乐观主义精神对我们现代人的激励价值。济慈一生命运多舛，然而却从来没有被苦难所征服。痛苦与哀伤磨练了诗人的性情和意志，使其更加敏感热切地追求着诗歌梦想与生命中的美好。他努力冲破苦难的牢笼，从痛苦中寻找希望和欢乐。总之，苦难净化了诗人的心灵，激励着诗人在短暂的一生中创造了无限的精神财富。体现了诗人对生活、对人类文化最“积极”的体味与感恩意识。二是他对自然与人类和谐共处的渴望也为我们提高生态保护意识提供了参考价值。

本书不仅使读者可以欣赏其诗歌中所具有的天籁般永恒之美，领略诗人的崇高品格。更重要的是，他对待生活和生命的积极态度，在当今浮华的社会，对读者仍是一个很好的启示。除此之外，济慈还是位具有生态意

识的生态诗人，他的自然诗体现了他对自然美的追求和人与自然和谐相处的愿望。这在当今一个生态环境持续恶化、生态危机日趋严峻、生态灾难越来越频发的时代背景下，提高当今人们的生态意识，保护环境具有非常重要的现实意义。

由于作者才学疏浅，还望学术前辈及同行不吝赐教！

作者

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INTRODUCTION

John Keats, a British Romantic poet of the 19th century, was one of the most outstanding representatives of the Romantic Movement. Many of Keats's poems have now become the cream of British poetry and world literature. For a long time people believe that Shakespeare owed everything to a sort of wild power; that he came into the world of literature and dominated it without any of the received qualifications of training and rank. The thing seems somehow miraculous. In the attitude of a small group of friends early in the nineteenth century towards Shakespeare's ardent worshipper, John Keats, a similar notion of the wonderful, appears to have played a part ----- that he should write poetry in spite of his unpoetic origins, that he should write it at such an early age, and that it should be so accomplished and glorious for generations. The poems of Keats have been enjoyed, imitated and venerated, and most important, his poems have aroused argument for generations, especially about his "Negative Capability" concept and his great odes in 1819. ¹ The reasons why Keats's poetry has been constantly receiving attention from critics lie in the following aspects: the life experiences and poetic career, the Romantic features of his poetry, the uniqueness, and the foresightedness.

Keats was not widely known as a great poet during his lifetime but severely attacked by critics. His fame soared after his death. He uses his imagination to depict a beautiful world with natural and Greek images, describing human's pursuit for beauty and permanent ideal for bright future in order to ease and comfort bitter feelings in life. Reading Keats's poems,

we can get splendid spiritual enjoyment and be convinced that the world is beautifully worth our love. By soaking ourselves in Keats's poems, we can find spiritual homeland and support in modern world where material civilization gets increasingly rich.

As one of the representatives of English Romantic movement, John Keats is a leading poet in English literature, whose poems play an important role in Britain poetry and world literature. It is no doubt that the life experience of every author will, more or less, influence his artistic works. This is especially true when it comes to Keats, for many of his poems are in some sense quite personal. As an Indian scholar of Keats claims, "Any critical estimate of Keats as a poet must begin with a recognition of the fact that his life and poetry inextricably blended. Every poem of his has its root in the actual experience of his life."² Keats was the least fortunate one amid the Romanticists. He died at the age of only 26. Even before his death, his life was overshadowed by the terrible tuberculosis which took both his mother and brother. Unlike the well-to-do young aristocrats Lord Byron and Shelley, Keats was of very humble origin: his father was head hostler at a livery stable. What's more miserable is he suffered his parents' death at respectively nine and fifteen. As for career, ever since he abandoned medicine for poetry, he laid his aim at dedicating himself to poetry and believed that he would be "among the greatest English poets",² but his poetic ambition met with many setbacks and he never won the popularity he was thirsty for throughout his life. Keats developed an ambition of becoming a great poet, and made some attempts in writing poems as early as when he was a young teenager.

Keats's studies became prosperous in the 20th century, during which new methods and theories of criticism mushroomed. Studies shifted to Keats's personal development, Keats's poetic style, and his poetry-creating process. Keats's poems were studied from different perspectives with various methods. In the early period of this century, a considerable number of critics

did research on the influence from poets of the Elizabethan times on Keats and concluded that Keats's ideas on the aesthetic and philosophy of life most probably dated from the Elizabethan times. At the same time, another trend in Keats studies appeared, that was comparison. Commentators put their focus on the comparison between Keats and other poets such as Spenser, Shelly, Wordsworth and Shakespeare.

From the 1960s on, scholars seemed to realize that Keats's success not only lied in his imitation of great poets, but also in his ability to make breakthrough in his poetry. They began to reinterpret Keats's poetry from various new perspectives. There emerged writings on the research of Keats's aesthetics. Moreover, Keats's aesthetics of "Negative Capability" was discovered by critics but did not get great attention and deep analysis.

Many critics both abroad and at home give various interpretations about "Negative Capability" according to their own understanding. Some critics understand it only from the literal meaning, especially from the word "negative". Most of the time, people understand "Negative Capability" as "passive capability". Some critics treat it as escapism. J.M. Murry explains the line "the feel of not to feel it" as the

◦ ◦ phenomenon of "Negative Capability".³ He sees in line an evocation of a state of affectlessness similar to Coleridge's in the Dejection ode. He relates it to recurrent moods of spiritual torpor that afflicts Keats.⁷ Stuart M. Sperry calls "Negative Capability" "escapism" after he analyzes Keats's earlier poems and letters.³ Sperry thinks that in Keats's poems "In Drear-nighted December" and "The Human Seasons", Keats tries to build an analogy between man's life and nature, but without real success. In the two poems, "the all-too-human poet reaches out wishfully towards the natural process as a healing balm, an antidote, for the pains of his humanity."⁴ In Sperry's eyes, Keats remains in the negative state.

From another poem "On Fame", Stuart M. Sperry also finds Keats's

passiveness. He writes, "Keats had just written a sonnet describing Fame as a 'wagward girl' who is 'coy' to those who woo her too actively, 'But makes surrender to some thoughtless boy, / And dotes the more upon a heart at ease.' Those categories (activity, thoughtlessness, the passive 'heart at ease') unexpectedly take on large meaning."⁵ Sperry says, "Keats writes a poem not about servitude to fame but about the human mind itself. This wish for secular 'grace' through art arises from the passionate human desires for permanence, the inability of the mind to reconcile itself to mortality. Again Keats turns to nature as a model of passive unselfconscious participation in the rhythm of the life process."⁶

Stuart M. Sperry still tries to prove that Keats's "Negative Capability" to be "escapism" and "passiveness" in Keats's letter, the one in which he includes "What the Thrush Said" (with its message of "O fret not after knowledge").⁷ "This letter will suffice if we take note of the recommendation of 'passive and receptive' feminine sexuality of the flower, 'budding patiently under the eye of Apollo,' (1:232) against the active and masculine bee, 'buzzing here and there impatiently from a knowledge of what is to be arrived at.'" (1:232) For Sperry, this is Keats's "wise passiveness".⁸ But there is a darker side to Keats's "wise passiveness" in the poem "To Sleep", for "it partakes not only of sex but of extinction."⁹ In this poem Keats replaces the 'Sweet forgetting' of the natural process with the 'forgetfulness divine' of Sleep, but the longing for "the feel of not to feel it" is only the more intense. Also in this poem, Keats follows the logic of his own desire for passive insentience by concluding in a wish for easeful death. Keats uses the same effect for the purpose in the Nightingale ode: "To thy high require become a sod."¹⁰ Stuart M. Sperry thinks that Keats in the poem "To Sleep" achieves greatness. He earns his escapism by being more than an escapist.¹¹

Kenneth Muir in his essay "The meaning of the odes", studies of

Keats's "Negative Capability" linked with his odes. He mentions that "The indolence was closely linked with "Negative Capability" he felt to be a characteristic of the best poets, alternating moods of activity and indolence being, in fact, the rhythm of the mind is necessary for the exercise of "Negative Capability". It is arguable, indeed, that since during the act of creation the poet must organize, choose and reject, he can exercise "Negative Capability" only during his moods of receptive indolence ---- what Wordsworth called 'a wise passiveness'".¹²

In China, there are also some critics who regard Keats's "Negative Capability" as "passiveness" or "escapism". Luo Yimin studies Keats's "Negative Capability" from the interrogative sentence structure of Keats's odes, showing that Keats always remains in "uncertainties, Mysteries, and doubts" instead of trying to go out of this state, even at the end of "Ode to a Nightingale": "Do I wake or sleep?"(VIII.10) Keats still cannot break up the "Negative Capability". Luo Yimin believes that Keats practices his "Negative Capability" by creating a "mysterious world" in his odes.¹³ Two other scholars, Qian Chaoying and Xi Yanping, separately analyze Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and "Ode to a Nightingale" in terms of Keats's "Negative Capability" from the "beauty" point of view.¹⁴ Wang Jing writes a thesis entitled "Keats's Negative Capability". But she understands it as a kind of Psychological phenomenon, pointing out that "Negative Capability" only means self-consciousness completely lost or partly lost. Still, Keats can only abstract himself into objects to find freedom.¹⁵

All the explanations above are limited to part of the meaning of "Negative Capability", based on "being in uncertainties, Mysteries, and doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason...from being incapable of remaining content with half knowledge"(I:193). In fact, if we study his whole life and his philosophy of life, Keats's "Negative Capability" is not only limited to such a narrow meaning. "Uncertainty" is only a little

part of “Negative Capability”, and it exists in the earlier stage of his mind in the process of writing. Also impersonality does not mean passiveness or escapism. In fact, Keats is always seeking the solution to the contradictions between life and art, imagination and reality, pleasure and pain, beauty and truth. Sometimes he even experiences the pain and pleasure by going out of himself, and tries to find beauty by imagination, but truth is real, so Keats’s permanent aim is to pursue the beauty in truth. And that is the highest stage of “Negative Capability”.

So “Negative Capability” has extension of several thoughts, with at least three further extensions. First, a great poet should have the capability of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, and doubts. Second, the excellence of every art is its intensity. Third, beauty overcomes everything.

Keats’s great odes are closely linked with his “Negative Capability”. The year 1819 was very important for Keats, because this was his most productive year, in which he experienced a lot of pain in his life, and wrote his famous great odes including “To Psyche”, “Ode on Melancholy”, “Ode on Indolence”, “Ode to a Nightingale”, “Ode on a Grecian Urn”, and “To Autumn”. These odes express successive moods of the poet, and only in these odes can Keats exercise “Negative Capability”. Through these odes we can see the changing process of Keats’s mind, from uncertainty to certainty, from naivety to maturity. In his odes, Keats expresses his “uncertainties, Mysteries, and doubts” about the art and reality, and shows a maximum of intensity. After a period of painful experience, he can develop himself to a mature poet. He can face and accept the reality calmly and optimistically, and even tries to find ways to solve the disagreeable things in life and art. So we can say Keats’s “Negative Capability” is a creative process as well as a creative theory. It is a “positive capability” rather than a “passive capability”.

This book consists of five chapters.

Chapter One explores Keats’s philosophy of life and its relationship

with “Negative Capability”. Keats’s life was harsh and sad: He first experienced the grimness of life in the tragic deaths of his father and his mother; then he experienced the shattering of the family for Tom’s health; later Keats spit blood, and another agonizing period in Keats’s life, of anxiety and fear, was starting; his hopeless love with Fanny Brown also tormented him. It is probably hard for anyone brought up in the last twenty years to feel, in the way Keats must have felt, the thrill of horror and doom which the diagnosis of consumption could provoke. It carries with the suggestions of fate, misery and terror. The experiences of life make Keats aim at richness, intensity and complexity. He is an impersonal and a dramatic poet, but in a special sense. He is dramatic in his ability to imagine himself into an object, or to contemplate his own emotions objectively. But he does not indulge in mere pleasant fancies or evade unpleasant realities; he is trying to get the truth. “Beauty is Truth, truth beauty.” stands for his permanent belief. His “beauty” is the product of inclusiveness, unified by intensity of mind and technique. All these are what “Negative Capability” contains. And because Keats gets the idea from Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, so in this part I will mention the “Negative Capability” phenomenon in *King Lear*.¹⁶

Chapter Two is about the Psycho-Aesthetical Interpretation of Keats’ Poetry, In this part, the author makes a study about the aesthetic sentiments and uncertainties through theoretical views of psychology. After experiencing the uncertainties, Keats finally reaches his highest stage: beauty overcomes every thing, including the pain in mind and the ugliness of the reality. Combining with the uncertainties and the intensity expressed in Keats’s odes. Keats thinks that “the excellence of every Art is its intensity”(I,193). Keats achieves intensity by adopting a number of expedients to show a kind of intense feeling or intense art. This is clearly reflected in the odes of “Ode on Melancholy”, “To Psyche”, “Ode to a Nightingale”, and “Ode on a

Grecian Urn”. These odes not only express the intensity of contradictory feeling of the poet in different ways but also show the poet’s great worship for the Grecian classical art. The “Negative Capability” is fully reflected in this part.

Chapter Three makes a research on Keats’ Philosophy of Nature which has gone through a process of evolution, from his early craving for the transcendence of nature to his final option for nature. Evolution and development resort to the early enthusiasm in imaginative creation of supernatural world and final return to accept the actual nature. Keats’s philosophy of nature marks his reputation and contribution to the tradition of nature in romanticism.

Chapter Four reveals Keats’ philosophy of religion. Keats has different attitude towards religion in different stage of his life. From the rejection to acceptance, nobody can explain better than Keats himself his grander system of salvation in his “the vale of soul-making”.

Chapter Five explores the Spiritual Value of Keats’s Poetry in modern society. This part includes the inspiration of Keats’s optimistic attitude in our modern society and his concern about harmony between human being and nature.

This book will try to follow the appreciation way of classical Chinese poetry to analyze Keats’s aesthetic principle, Keats’s philosophy of life, Especially through the analysis on Keats’s Negative Capability, readers can have a deep understanding about Keats’ “Negative Capability”, therefore, readers can experience the beauty of Keats’s poetry, and comprehend the ideological content and spiritual values of his poems. More important, the social and cultural functions of Keats’s poetry are probed into in this book. What’s more, Keats’s strong willpower in fighting against the misfortunes in his life is extremely encouraging, and could help people develop an optimistic view in face of difficulties. What’s more, his ecological principle