

SHELLEY'S "ADONAI'S" AS A PASTORAL ELEGY (3)

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So far we have considered two thirds of "Adonais" as concretely as possible as a pastoral lamentation. Now, we have come to the final third in which Urania, the chief mourner, disappears and the pastoral imagery suddenly becomes abstraction. This final third is composed of the last 17 stanzas, which we will discuss as a philosophical consolation. These stanzas can be classified into two stages: stanzas 39 to 46 (the fifth stage) and 47 to 55 (the six and final stage).

Let us first see the former part of stanza 39, which is the following seven lines:

Peace, peace! he is not dead, he doth not sleep—
He hath awakened from the dream of life—
'Tis we, who lost in stormy visions, keep
With phantoms an unprofitable strife,
And in mad trance strike with our spirit's knife
Invulnerable nothings — We decay
Like corpses in a charnel;... (lines 343-49)

This passage is "deeply infused with Platonism....possible sources in Plato for the idea that death may be life and life death. The images of 'the dream of life,' 'stormy visions,' 'phantoms,' and 'Invulnerable nothings' suggest the illusionary nature of the world, shadow of a transcendent and eternal reality."¹ In other words, the mundance world is regarded as a temporary life in which 'We decay/Like corpses in a charnel;':

The next stanza 41 begins with the following line: "He has outsoared the shadow of our night;" (line 352). It is "an expression of mortality embodied in the Platonic metaphor of shadow....The shadow cast by earth away from the sun."² Then, there is another important line: "A heart grown cold, a head grown grey in vain;" (line 358), which suggests that "Shelley [is] thinking of

Southey, whose youthful liberalism [has] hardened into [conservatism]." ³ As a whole, "the stanza is one of the most beautiful and moving in the poem: a magnificent Spenserian measure, it has been widely commented on." ⁴ This commentary makes us reconsider a sublime rhythm suitable for an elegy created by the Spenserian stanza.

In the stanza there are various classes of alliteration, assonance and consonance which enhance certain musical effects— that is, many echoes of rhymed sounds. To put it concretely, alliteration echoes /n/ and /s/ sounds twice; assonance /ei/ twice; consonance /t/ and /d/ twice and /n/ five times. Among these sounds /n/, which has the sense of elasticity, predominantly echoes as many as seven times in all. Also, the stanza has comparatively many monosyllabic words which cause to make rather swift movement in rhythm. Thus, the rhythm provokes the auditory impression that Adonais' soul had quickly leapt up into a Paradise in Heaven. This is probably because of the most frequently rhymed sound /n/ as well as the relatively swift movement in rhythm.

Stanza 41 begins with such a line as "He lives, he wakes—'tis Death is dead, not he;" (line 361). This line makes us clear that Adonais is alive in the eternal and spiritual world. The following gives an acceptable explanation to the stanza:

The stanza continues the development of the idea that Adonais is alive in the forms and essences of nature. The tone is increasingly triumphant, calling upon Dawn, Earth ("caverns," "forests," "flowers," "fountains"), Air, and Sky ("the joyous stars") to cease the lamentation....There are other echoes of earlier imagery and phrases: " 'tis Death is dead, not he" (line 361) recalls the first announcement of "he is not dead, he doth not sleep" (line 343); "Mourn not for Adonais" (line 362) is a reversal of the refrain of grief "O, weep for Adonais" (lines 2, 19, and 73) and the call to "sad Hour" to "mourn our loss" (lines 4, 5); and the "young Dawn" (line 362) recalls the tearful Morning (lines 120-22). So too the stanza points toward the end: the

“joyous stars” (line 369), the first occurrence of this imagery since the description of the poet’s reaching heaven in stanza 5, prepares for the extended star metaphor in the concluding stanza.⁵

It is pointed out that stanza 42 is “another one of the most beautiful and powerful of the poem.”⁶ Therefore, let us cite the whole lines of the stanza:

He is made one with Nature: there is heard
His voice in all her music, from the moan
Of thunder, to the song of night’s sweet bird;
He is a presence to be felt and known
In darkness and in light, from herb and stone,
Spreading itself where’er that Power may move
Which has withdrawn his being to its own;
Which wields the world with never wearied love,

Sustains it from beneath, and kindles it above. (lines 370-78)

We need to examine the implication of significant words in this passage. First, the words “night’s sweet bird” refer to the nightingale, Keats’s favorite. Next, “that Power” is “the eighteenth-century philosophical term for an impersonal God.”⁷ Then, the word “kindles” illustrates “growth and achievement” in poetic, physical or spiritual powers.⁸ These words suggest that Keats’s poetry has a sort of deity which leads us to live a noble life. As a whole, the stanza expresses the idea of complete fusion of Adonais into Nature in the spiritual world. Thus, the fusion implies a magical view of the world in which man has a spiritual communion with Nature. Also it connotes a form of pantheism that means a faith in Nature as the revelation of deity and deity itself. The deity is identified with the various forces and working of nature. Man finds bliss in living together with such divined nature. Furthermore, in this stanza there sounds a heavenly harmony – that is, musical notes combined together in a pleasant sound in the heaven – in which Keats’s poems are infused with such heavenly music.

An understanding of stanza 43 may require of us some knowledge of the Platonic tradition in English poetry, which leads us to approach the right

interpretation of the verses of the stanza. In the stanza “the extraordinary richness of Platonic imagery and concepts...suggests that Shelley was imbued with Platonic thought, even if his philosophical position is not explicitly and consistently Platonic.”⁹ In particular, “the one Spirit’s plastic stress” (line 381) is worthy of notice. “The expression of ‘plastic’ nature [comes] through the Platonic tradition rather than directly from Plato himself, most likely through Wordsworth and Coleridge....The concept in ‘the one Spirit’s plastic stress’ is...that ‘of a unifying force within matter rather than a transcendent spiritual godhead of which the world is an imperfect reflection.’ ”¹⁰ In brief, the stanza implies that the one Spirit’s power infuses all living things – plants, animals and mankind – into “the Heaven’s light.” (line 387).

In the beginning of stanza 44, “The splendours of the firmament of time” (line 388) are the souls of great poets. In the stanza the Platonic epigram “becomes relevant when Shelley likens the stars of the sky to the world’s great poets....The white radiance of the One Spirit, far beyond human ken, is best mirrored by the greatest poets, the brightest stars.”¹¹ Here are four lines from this stanza:

....When lofty thought
 Lifts a young heart above its mortal lair,
 And love and life contend in it, for what
 Shall be its earthly doom, the dead live there (lines 392-95)

The stanza can be summarized as follows: Adonais’ “lofty thought” is lightening on the earth after his death, and the lightening is not extinguished forever. In other words, “the creative minds of the dead are a living influence on ‘a young heart.’ ”¹²

In stanza 45 the expression “The inheritors of unfulfilled renown” (line 397) has a latent meaning of “young poets who died at a young age, before their poetic powers were fully developed.”¹³ Shelley here draws a parallel among three other poets who died young. They are Thomas Chatterton who committed suicide in 1770 at age 17; Sir Philip Sidney who died in 1586 at age 32 from a wound received while fighting in the army; Lucan, the Roman poet who conspired against Nero and committed suicide in A.D.65 in his 26th

year.¹⁴

In order to make a full understanding of stanza 46, it is necessary to examine several important expressions. First of all, there is an expression "Thou art become as one of us," (line 410) which "suggests a resolution of Shelley's skepticism about the nature of immortality: Adonais is welcomed by the dead young poets as one of them."¹⁵ Next, "an Heaven of Song" (line 413) is "no doubt an allusion to the Ptolemaic system of astronomy in which the songs of the concentric whirling spheres blended into a celestial harmony."¹⁶ Then, the "Vesper of our throng" (line 414) is "Hesperus, the evening star, and is a direct allusion to Platonic epigram at the beginning of the poem."¹⁷ After all, the stanza implies that Adonais has ascended the throne among a great number of nameless young poets in an poetic realm ("amid an Heaven of Song. / Assume thy winged throne, thou Vesper of our throng!") (lines 413-14). In short, Shelley admires such poetic genius in the young Keats.

Now, we come to the sixth and final stage—stanzas 47 to 55—of "Adonais", which we can spilt into two sections to make a better discussion about it. In these two there can be five stanzas—47 to 51— and four stanzas—52 to 55— according to thematic structure.

Let us proceed to stanza 47, which takes a sudden turn for new development as follows: "Mourning abates, and is replaced by an alternately defiant and celebratory mood. Grieving for Adonais is now considered to be folly."¹⁸ The following are the first second lines from the stanza:

Who mourns for Adonais? oh come forth,

Fond wretch! and know thyself and him aright. (lines 415-16)

In this passage "Who mourns for Adonais?" is a "final repetition of the refrain with which the poem opened and begins the final and most personal movement."¹⁹ Here the poet expresses that "it is foolish ('fond') to mourn for Adonais. The 'fond wretch' is the reader to whom Shelley addressed himself for the next four stanzas....The 'fond wretch' sympathetically associated with grief for the dead, expresses the foolishness of mourning the mortality of man."²⁰ Then, have a look at the last two lines of the stanza:

And keep thy heart light lest it make thee sink

When hope has kindled hope, and lured thee to the brink. (lines 422-23)

In these lines "Shelley exhorts the 'fond wretch' to keep his heart light so that when death is near ('lured thee to the brink'), he has not built too much hope on immortality ('hope has kindled hope')."²¹ In other words, Shelley suggests that "fond wretch" means Shelley himself as well as the reader who mourns over the dead Adonais. It can be said that Shelley attains a new philosophy about Adonais' fate—that is, he resigns himself to his premature death. Or he may have a hollow feeling for lamenting over Adonais' fate because the youth is one of the mortals.

The next four—48 to 51— stanzas describe Rome which is "the only specific locale described in the poem and gives added significance to the historical and personal allusions."²² This is the second allusion to Rome in the elegy. The first allusion to the city is in stanza 7 which "establishes Rome as the place where Keats is brought to rest."²³ In both allusions "Shelley is concerned to link the cemetery to the broader urban context of which it is a part."²⁴

Stanza 48 begins with the description of Rome as follows:

Or go to Rome, which is the sepulchre

Oh, not of him, but of our joy:...

(lines 424-25)

These lines suggest that "Rome cannot claim Adonais as another of its victims. His physical death is no longer of any consequence in itself, and becomes... a symbol of his spiritual life."²⁵ Also "Rome is now considered a battleground between the spiritual few ('kings of thought') (line 430) and the destructiveness of those who merely serve Time."²⁶ Next, "the kings of thought" are interpreted to "include Chatterton, Sidney, Lucan and others 'whose names on Earth are dark' (line 406), who greeted Adonais in stanza 46. These poets and others struggled against reaction and corruption in ages past."²⁷ After all, the stanza may be summarized as follows: "Adonais ('he') lends, rather than derives ('borrows'), glory from being buried among the wreck of ages, empires, and religions; these pass away, while the influence of creative minds (such as Adonais) lives on."²⁸

In stanza 49 Shelley also begins with the description of Rome as follows:

Go thou to Rome, —at once the Paradise,

The grave, the city, and the wilderness; (lines 433-34)

Here, Rome has such four features as “the Paradise, / The grave, the city, and the wilderness.” These features “produce the complexity of the Roman scene—a world of the spirit and a world of the flesh impinging one upon the other, a Paradise seen always in relation to exile and death.”²⁹ That is, the “Paradise” implies that great poets enjoy themselves in the spiritual life after death. Rome is the grave because they are buried in the world of the flesh. “The ‘city’ is, of course, also the ‘high Capital’ of stanza 7, but that epithet, we remember, was immediately applied to the death’s kindship:… The term ‘wilderness’ describes a city of ruins and wild vegetation.”³⁰ This stanza ends with following lines:

Where, like an infant’s smile, over the dead

A light of laughing flowers along the grass is spread, (lines 440-41)

The simile “like an infant’s smile” alludes to “Shelley’s son William who died suddenly at three years of age in June 1819, and was buried in the Protestant Cemetery near the spot where Keats was later buried.”³¹ Besides, “the flowers unite with the pyramid, as images of light and fire, to symbolise the blessing, in this mortal world, of a transcendent presence.”³² “The pyramid itself, however, is the symbol of both mortal life and immortality, and both at the same time: the pure spirit flows back to its origin, the ‘burning fountain’ ”.³³

Stanza 50 still refers to Rome, especially the cemetery. For example, the “grey walls” (line 442) are “those of Rome…which bound one side of the cemetery....The ‘pyramid’ is a monument and...dominates the cemetery.”³⁴ The similes “like slow fire” and “Like flame transformed to marble” (lines 443, 447) have the “images of light and fire.” In addition, the phrase “Heaven’s smile” (line 449) corresponds to “an infant’s smile” to which we have referred in the preceding stanza, and at the same time, both phrases suggest that the initial grief for Adonais’ death turns to an eternal joy in Heaven.

It is pointed out that in stanza 51 “the mourner is exhorted not to break the seal on the fountain of Shelley’s grief for William.”³⁵ (lines 453-55)

Consequently, this stanza, along with the previous stanzas 49 and 50, suggests that Shelley cherishes a deep affection of a parent for his dead son. Then, what does Shelley mean by the last line of the stanza?: “What Adonais is, why fear we to become?” (line 459) The poet suggests to us his wish that William could enjoy an eternal life in a Paradise just like Adonais could. After all, however, Shelley praises death “not merely for the sake of Adonais, but for the sake of the mourners as well, including the poet himself.”³⁶

Now, we have come to discuss the last four stanza—52 to 55—of “Adonais,” which make a new thematic turn leading to the climax of the elegy. Here are the first six lines from stanza 52:

The One remains, the many change and pass;
 Heaven’s light forever shines, Earth’s shadows fly;
 Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
 Stains the white radiance of Eternity,
 Until Death tramples it to fragments. —Die,

If thou wouldst be with that which thou dost seek! (lines 460-65)

The first line implies the existence of the absolute in the universe in which all things perpetually flow and move—the universe is in a state of flux. Then, the first two lines produce such sound effects as follow: “the repetition of vowel *a* in the first line and *i* in the second; the play on *m-n* in the first line and on *f-sh-s* in the second—for ever *shines...shadows fly*.”³⁷ The analysis of these sounds clarifies that vowels *a* and *i* have /ei/ in *remain* and *change*; /e/ in *many*; /a:/ in *pass*; /ai/ in *light* and *shines*, and *fly*. Thus, they mainly echo the diphthongs /ei/ and /ai/ which go with a long and complicated sense. The sounds /m/ and /n/, having the sense of flexibility and elasticity, make a rather liquid tone with a liquid /l/ in *light* and *fly*. The consonants /f/, /ʃ/, /s/ are voiceless and accompany a soft and silent sense. In brief, these sound effects enhance the appeal of this stanza through the sense of complexity, flexibility, elasticity, and softness.

Furthermore, the stanza describes that “just as sunlight shining through stained glass separates into many colors, so eternal unity is broken into many individual persons and things on earth.”³⁸ Next, “death smashes the dome and

tramples it into fragments, but the fragments are at least brightly colored, for they are identical with the azure sky, with flowers, ruins, statues, music, and the words of Shelley's own poem."³⁹ In short, death implies to enjoy an eternal life in heaven rather than to go the way of all flesh on earth.

Next, we will see the first part of stanza 53:

Why linger, why turn back, why shrink, my Heart?

Thy hopes are gone before: from all things here

They have departed; thou shouldst now depart! (lines 469-71)

"With this stanza, the poem becomes intensely personal; Shelley addresses himself 'my Heart' and questions his life and fate. There is deepening pessimism about the meaning of his life and the value of his poetry, and increasing sense of personal isolation and alienation."⁴⁰ In the middle of the stanza "the year revolves again, yet a light has passed away from it forever, and everything left behind is caught in the strife of contraries, 'attracts to crush.'"⁴¹ Then, the stanza ends with the following lines:

'Tis Adonais calls! oh, hasten thither,

No more let life divide what Death can join together. (lines 476-77)

In this passage we sense as if the poet were listening to Keats's voice in a Paradise. We are very impressed by his wish to fly up as quickly as possible to "The soft sky" (line 475) where he could forever live together with Keats. Thus, death is not lamentable but rather a blessing to great poets, who go to Heaven which is a Paradise for them. In the final stage of the elegy Shelley is considered to attain such a view of life and death through Christian faith rather than Platonic immortality.

It is pointed out that the final two stanzas 54 and 55 "describe the burning away or purgation of the bard's mortality by the cosmic radiance of heaven (stanza 54) and his ascent through the 'massy earth' and 'sphered skies' toward the star-like soul of Adonais (stanza 55)."⁴² In the stanzas also "the fire imagery flourishes throughout the conclusion and reaches completion.... his [Adonais'] soul burns like a star 'through the inmost veil of Heaven.' He has become a portion of the One Spirit."⁴³

Needless to say, however, these stanzas can be considered independently

from each other. Stanza 54 is interpreted as follows:

For a last time Shelley states his now pragmatically hopeless faith: ...In this straining upward, the natural world that is given to us becomes only a darkness, into which we are born by an eclipsing Curse, and within which we weave our sustaining web of Love quite blindly. This is the undersong of the Spirit's immense declaration, for the overt emphasis here is on the salvation that brings us finally back to the burning fountain.⁴⁴

From stanza 55 we quote the last three lines:

Whilst burning through the inmost veil of Heaven,
The soul of Adonais, like a star,
Beacons from the abode where the Eternal are. (lines 493-95)

In this passage the star and light imagery of Adonais are almost as one since stars give off that light which is symbolically the illumination of the creative spirit of imagination.⁴⁵ Also, the following is a very interesting commentary on this final stanza: "The imagination holding life open to death is not the burden of this great but suicidal stanza, Shelley is surrendering to Heaven, though it is the Heaven not of any orthodoxy but of his own agnostic will. A known is yielding to an unknown, and vision collapses into mystery."⁴⁶

Looking back at this climax (stanzas 52-55), Shelley contrasts the life on earth with the blessing in Heaven. That is, "Life, like a d'ome of m'any-c'oloured gl'ass, / St'ains the wh'ite r'adiance of Et'ernity," in stanza 52, whereas in stanza 54 "That L'ight whose sm'ile k'indles the Ún'iverse, / That B'eauty 'in wh'ich 'all things w'ork and m'ove." (lines 479-80)⁴⁷ By rhythmic implication the latter regular *iambic pentameter* means that Heaven is in perfect order, which is a sharp contrast to a chaotic state of affairs on earth that is suggested by the former irregular *trochaic pentameter*.

Furthermore, Shelley sees in stanza 55 "Whilst b'uring through the 'inmost v'eil of H'eaven, / The s'oul of Ádon'ais, 'like a st'ar, / B'eacons fr'om the ab'ode where th'e Et'ernal 'are." As we have s'anned, the first two lines and the third can have regular *iambic pentameter* and mixed (*trochee-iambus*) *hexameter*, respectively. The regularity of these meters suggests that harmonious rhythm

is prevalent in Heaven.

In conclusion, Shelley adapts the classical Aphrodite and Adonis myth in "Adonais," but he appends a consolation of unprecedented length in it. The grief, which prevails in mythical narrative, gives way to the joyous tones of the philosophical consolation without apparent preparation. As for the unity of the elegy, which is found in a "symmetrical structure...composed of three sections of seventeen, twenty-one, seventeen stanzas."⁴⁸ These three are lamentation, philosophical disquisition and consolation. That is, the poet first presents a subject, depicting the situation of a youth's death, singing the grief on life and humanity. Then, apart from the death of the young beauty, he reflects on the philosophical significance of life and death. Finally, the poet convinces himself that he has a philosophical belief and attains a philosophical consolation in the conclusion of the poem. Probably, Shelley is strongly conscious of creating proper rhythm in each of these sections, to say nothing of its structure and imagery which we have already discussed. To put it concretely, he makes the best use of the Spenserian measure that produces solemn tones suitable for the pastoral elegy. In most cases, singing in such tones, Shelley incessantly repeats an ascending notion over and over again, from earth to heaven, from darkness to light, from agony to joy, from transient death to eternal life.⁴⁹

NOTES

1. Anthony D. Knerr, *Shelley's Adonais: A Critical Edition* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1984) pp.91-92.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 92-93.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 93.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 92.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 93.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*, p. 94.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 70.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 95.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 94.
11. Desmond King-Hele, *Shelley: His Thought and Work* (London: Macmillian, 1964), p.308.
12. Knerr, p. 96.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*, p. 97.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 97-98.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
18. Alan M.Weinberg, *Shelley's Italian Experience* (London: Macmillian, 1991), p. 176.
19. Knerr, p. 98.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 98-99.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 99.
22. *Ibid.*
23. Alan, p. 175.
24. *Ibid.*
25. *Ibid.*, p. 177.
26. *Ibid.*
27. Knerr, p. 100.
28. *Ibid.*
29. Alan, p. 178.
30. *Ibid.*
31. Knerr, p. 100.
32. Alan, p. 179.
33. Knerr, p. 101.
34. *Ibid.*
35. *Ibid.*
36. Milton Wilson, *Shelley's Later Poetry: A Study of His Prophtic Imagination* (New York: Colombia Univ. Press, 1961), p. 244.

37. Desmond King-Hele, p. 310.
38. Kneer, p. 102.
39. Halord Bloom; "The Two Spirits" *Shelley: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. George M. Rinenour (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1962); p. 167.
40. Knerr, p. 103.
41. Bloom, p. 167.
42. Alan, p. 197.
43. Silverman, p. 81.
44. Bloom, pp. 167-68.
45. Child Walcutt & J. Edwin Whiteshell, ed. *The Explicator Cyclopeda* Vol. II, *The Traditional Poetry: Medieval to Late Victorian* (Chicago: Quadrangel Books, 1968), p. 296.
46. Bloom, p. 168.
47. ピーター・ミルワード著、安西徹雄訳、『新・英文学史入門』（東京：三省堂新書、昭和48年）130～31頁
48. Wilson, p. 90.
49. ピーター・ミルワード著、安西徹雄訳、同書同頁