

ous faculty" of the poet (ll. 88-89). In short, we are all partakers in the divine reality; finite though we are, we are sharers in divinity. All of us have power to experience the moment of vision, whether on Snowdon; or in Hopkins' "Golden-grove" or on the road to Damascus; while the poet has power to recreate that vision ("I would build that dome in air"), and to share his vision with us.

Now we have come full circle, back to the passage with which we began: "This spiritual love acts not, nor can exist/ Without Imagination" (ll. 188-189). But what is this "spiritual love"? To answer, we need to consider the preceding passage, beginning with the splendid lines: "By love subsists/ All lasting grandeur, by pervading love;/ That gone, we are as dust" (XIV, 168-170). There follows what at first blush one might think of as something like the medieval "ladder of love," beginning with the fields in spring-time, the "rising flowers," the "tender ways" of the lamb and its mother (ll. 170-173), ascending to the love of lover and beloved (ll. 175-180), and then to "a still higher love" (l. 181), directed to the "Almighty's Throne" (l. 187). However, I believe this seeming progression is not merely an ascent from lower to higher love. This "higher love" is not, on a more careful reading, simply directed to God. Return for a moment to the love of the lover for "the One who is thy choice of all the world" (l. 178). This love is said to be "with delight/ Impassioned, but delight how pitiable!/ Unless this love by a still higher love/ Be hallowed" (XIV, 179-182).

This "higher love—love "by heaven inspired" (l. 184)—is not only an end in itself but also a means by which all other loves are "hallowed." Lesser loves (like Donne's "dull sublunary lovers' loves") are "pitiable" unless they are seen as somehow sharing in the life of the eternal. Immanent reality—whether the beauties of inanimate Nature, the simple

life of the animal world, or human love—are transformed, even given more permanent meaning, by their intrinsic relationship with the transcendent. Good already in themselves, they are "hallowed" by the "higher love." Thus the "spiritual love" the poet speaks of is not simply love of God, but the love of all things seen in the light of divine reality; and imagination is the enabling—and ennobling—human faculty that makes this vision of the world possible. Imagination alone enables us, not just the poet but all of us, to "hold fit converse with the spiritual world." It is "the feeding source" not only for the poet but for us all.

NOTES

¹All quotations from *The Prelude* will be taken from *The Fourteen-Book Prelude*, ed. W.J.B. Owen (1985).

²James A.W. Heffernan, in *Wordsworth's Theory of Poetry: The Transforming Imagination*, p. 239-245, writes interestingly and helpfully about Wordsworth's "mystical" experience.

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Hyperion, *The Fall of Hyperion*, and Keats's Poetics

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According to many critics, John Keats gave up *Hyperion* and later recast it as *The Fall of Hyperion*, first, because he had experienced some fundamental change in his outlook on life, on the course of human history and the place of suffering in the world; and, secondly, because he had come to see that his poetics of "negative capability" was incompatible with his new understanding of the poet as healer and a poetics of empathy which he expounded in his "vale of Soul-making" letter, spring, 1819. In this view, *The Fall of Hyperion* would be the embodiment of "a vastly altered vision of world destiny and its significance" (Sperry 196).¹ I believe that there is no

evidence for such a change, that, on the contrary, there is a remarkable continuity of his thinking between the autumns of 1818 and 1819. Indeed, his progress as a poet during this decisive period of his life is based on this very continuity. I believe, in other words, that the poetics of "negative capability" are reformulated in the "vale of Soul-making," and the changes between *Hyperion* and *The Fall of Hyperion* were all made for cogent narratological and logical reasons. In other words, Keats recast the material when he realized that in the apotheosis of Apollo in *Hyperion* he had written himself into a narrative corner. While *Hyperion* is a fragment because of a

narrative and conceptual problem, *The Fall of Hyperion* is a necessary fragment, its form making a definite statement about language, history, narratability and meaning—a statement that could not possibly have been surpassed by a continuation of the tale. *The Fall of Hyperion* is complete. So much by way of introduction.

Keats begins *Hyperion* in the autumn, 1818, a large part of it written at the deathbed of his brother Tom, but after Books I and II, progress is painfully slow. In April, 1819, Keats hands over his manuscript to Richard Woodhouse as a failed attempt. Then he composes, in quick succession, the great spring odes, *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, and *Lamia*, as if setting *Hyperion* aside had opened the floodgates. By July, he returns to *Hyperion* and redrafts it radically as *The Fall of Hyperion*, which he gives up on September 21st, a second failure in five months: “I have given up *Hyperion*” (2:167),² he writes to Reynolds—“*Hyperion*” being Keats’s shorthand for both attempts: for him, it was the same project. With whatever minor changes he may have introduced, the 1820 *Poems* contain only the earlier, aborted version, with a misleading “Advertisement” by the publishers. In his lifetime, this aborted *Hyperion: A Fragment* was Keats’s most critically acclaimed poem. But, for my argument, the *Hyperion* project spans his entire *annus mirabilis*. *Hyperion* starts it all—and *Hyperion*, as his last great poem, marks its end. Therefore, the re-working of this material becomes a record of Keats’s poetic development in that year. Why he gave it up in April, resumed it in July, and gave it up again in September are important questions.

Keats called *Hyperion* a “very abstract poem” (2:132). He uses the myth of the overthrow of the Titans by the new Olympian gods to dramatize his ideas of history, change, and progress. Since the abstract becomes concrete in myth, these ideas can be re-deciphered on various levels of abstraction. The ousting of an *ancien régime* is a political story while the replacing of Hyperion by Apollo, the god of poetry and healing, is a story of cultural change and poetic progress—as well as, on a personal level, the story of the growth of a poet’s mind. And since *Hyperion* is itself an example of what it purports to teach, it is a radically auto-referential epic—and in this lies one of the seeds of its “failure.”

As in *Endymion*, Keats takes some liberties with his mythological material. He has eliminated everything sensational, crudely and simplistically political about this dynastic and generational war. The poem opens after the Titans have lost the first battle and the focus is on the causes and the psychological consequences of this unexpected defeat. Saturn and Thea are immobile “in the shady sadness of a vale,” an objective correlative for their utter dejection and despondency. Like Lear, Saturn’s identity consists exclusively in his rule and power: he must be king—or nothing. Keats shows in him the awful helplessness of “strong men” who have lost power. Rather than a multiplicity of transient selves, Saturn thinks he “has” or “owns” an identity (until he loses it), which

is the opposite of Keats’s ideal poet who “has” no identity. As he explained in the same letter announcing *Hyperion* (October 27, 1818), “the poetical character itself, [. . .] it is not itself—it has no self—it is every thing and nothing—It has no character” (1:386). The lack of an identity is the prerequisite for the poet’s protean ideations, his variegated amoral incarnations (Imogen and Iago), the precondition for artistic freedom and versatility: “A poet is the most unpoetical of anything in existence; because he has no identity” (1:387). At the end, Keats even embraces the possibility of subject-less writing: “If then he has no self, and if I am a poet, where is the Wonder that I should say I would write no more? [. . .] It is a wretched thing to confess; but is a very fact that not one word I ever utter can be taken for granted as an opinion growing out of my identical nature—how can it, when I have no nature?” (1:387). In this poetics of impersonality, the poet acknowledges the power of subject-less discourses at the interfaces of which the annihilated and self-less poet becomes a catalyst and a receptacle of new intertextual interweavings. If this is Keats’s poetic ideal, even before Apollo’s appearance, Saturn’s speech is full of dramatic irony: the concepts he invokes—“identity, selfhood, egotism, delight in power for its own sake” (Coote 202)—have caused his downfall. When he asks, “But cannot I create?/Cannot I form? Cannot I fashion forth/Another world?” the silence answers: No, you cannot. Move over, Saturn. Your time is up.

The rest of the first book of *Hyperion* is about Hyperion, the only Titan who is not yet fallen, still in his celestial palace bathed in hues of gold, bronze and red—but darkness looms. To delay his impending doom, he considers letting day break six hours before its time: it cannot be. In this universe, gods do not create laws; they only execute them—and they can be replaced by others who will execute them just as well. They are dispensable and transient in their power: *Hyperion* is, among other things, the drama of temporality as it shatters a divine eternity. Consequently, Book II of *Hyperion* is largely a negotiation of the questions of necessity, law, and temporality—questions which are introduced through the various responses to inevitable change and existential downfall.

Oceanus’s long answering speech in Book II offers the historico-philosophical core of *Hyperion*, not only a theory of historical evolutionary change but also an explanation of the blindness of rulers and autocrats. Oceanus advises that wisdom lies in understanding and accepting the inevitable: *insight into necessity* equals true comfort and consolation. But Saturn is barred from this consolation by the occupational disease of sovereigns and egomaniacs: “blind[ness] from sheer supremacy.” They cannot see themselves in an historical perspective, in a relationship to a before and an after. In contrast, true sovereignty consists in knowing one’s place as a transient phase in an evolutionary process that strives towards ever greater beauty, purity and freedom.

Oceanus is an Enlightenment god. Through his praise of evolutionary progress and acceptance of historical necessity, Keats lets the twilight of the Titans, the end of the golden age, coincide with the advent of an *historical* consciousness: there are only *lost* paradises, and this sense of loss, the necessity of it, partly constitutes historical consciousness. In positive terms, just as this loss is outweighed by an evolutionary, ameliorative gain, so the past is not wholly lost but dialectically “*aufgehoben*” in its threefold Hegelian sense: it was a necessary stage, indispensable for what comes after (cf. 215-228). But just as it is an “eternal law” that each temporary peak of the evolutionary process of refinement and perfection should rule—“for ‘tis the eternal law/That first in beauty should be first in might” (228/229)—it is foreseeable that one day this will again be supplanted and replaced: “Yea, by that law, another race may drive/Our conquerors to mourn as we do now” (230/231).

This idea of history is a gradual realization of perfection, or, to stress the open-ended nature of this process in Godwinian terms, of perfectibility. Described in a letter to Reynolds, May 3, 1818, even before *Hyperion*, Keats’s version has special regard for cultural and literary evolution. Positioning himself in relation to Milton and to Wordsworth, Keats tries to clarify his idea of a “modern” poetry, of what is new about the new poetry, and how the literary achievements of an individual poet stand in the general evolution of society, culture and civilization. Keats finds it hard to judge “whether Milton’s apparently less anxiety for Humanity proceeds from his seeing further or no than Wordsworth,” because “we find what he says true as far as we have experienced and we can judge no further but by larger experience” (1:278/279). That is the crux of any “placement” or evaluation in literary history: as historical beings, caught up in ones own growth, one can only evaluate experience from an historically limited and changing point of view. Therefore, determining whether one poet looks further than another requires a kind of differential calculus, taking into account the relativity of two movements against each other, without anyone having the advantage of a stable, privileged “objective” third point of observation outside human history and the process of individual maturing.

This first basic lesson in historicism lies at the core of Keats’s “Mansion of Many Apartments.” In the second or Chamber of Maiden thought, there occurs a

sharpening [of] one’s vision into the heart and nature of Man—of convincing ones nerves that the World is full of Misery and Heartbreak, Pain, Sickness and oppression—whereby This Chamber of Maiden Thought becomes gradually darken’d and at the same time on all sides of it many doors are set open—but all dark—all leading to dark passages—We see not the ballance of good and evil. We are in a Mist—We are now in that state—We feel the ‘burden of the Mystery,’ To this point was Wordsworth come, as far as I can conceive when he wrote ‘Tintern Abbey’ and it seems to me that his Genius is

explorative of those dark Passages. Now if we live, and go on thinking, we too shall explore them (1:280/281).

Three essential points: First, Keats knows about suffering, about “Misery and Heartbreak, Pain, Sickness and oppression,” before he even begins *Hyperion*. Secondly, an evolutionary model of human history requires an historicist position, deprives one of an a-historical gauge for measuring “advanced-ness,” and makes proximity to an historical phenomenon a decisive aspect of its assessment. One can’t help feeling closer to what is, well, closer. As Keats defines the evolutionary direction of poetic progress in terms of a greater, fuller unfolding of subjectivity, Wordsworth can only be “closer” to Keats than Milton, and is therefore more “advanced.” It is a matter of perspective, of how the lines of evolution are defined. In Keats’s sketch, Wordsworth is more “modern,” because he has chosen “the Mind of Man” as “[his] haunt and main region of [his] song” (*The Recluse*)—he is the paradigmatic poet of the refinement and differentiation of human consciousness.

Thirdly, Keats does not attribute this “advanced-ness” to Wordsworth as an individual but to general cultural progress: “Here I must think Wordsworth is deeper than Milton—though I think it has depended more upon the general and gregarious advance of intellect, than individual greatness of Mind” (1:281). Every great mind, such as Milton’s, he argues, is confined by the limitations of its age, which hindered him, like a Titan, from looking deeper and further: “He did not think into the human heart, as Wordsworth has done—Yet Milton as a Philosopher, had sure as great powers as Wordsworth—What is then to be infer’d? O many things—It proves there is really a grand march of intellect—, It proves that a mighty providence subdues the mightiest Minds to the service of the time being, whether it be in human Knowledge or Religion” (1:282). If the “grand march of intellect” defines the level on which individual poets function, in spite of all its splendour and beauty and grandiosity, even *Paradise Lost* has become, with time, “a curiosity” (2:212). Keats adheres to this optimistic belief in a “grand march of intellect” until the end of his poetic career, explaining it again, sixteen months later, at the time of the official burial of the *Hyperion* project, in his long journal letter to the George Keatses, September 17th and 27th, 1819.

Hyperion ends with the apotheosis of Apollo as he looks into the face of Mnemosyne, goddess of memory and mother of the muses: “Knowledge enormous makes a god of me” (113ff.). This replenishment is painful: in agony, he “die[s] into life.” The pain of an Olympian being deified is even greater than the pain of the dethroned Titans:

During the pain Mnemosyne upheld
Her arms as one who prophesied.—At length
Apollo shriek’d; and lol from all his limbs
Celestial *****
***** (133-136)

Hyperion begins in silence and ends in a shriek (Coote 200). Between the silence and the scream lies language. The apotheosis itself illustrates Keats's poetics: Apollo is the poet without identity who, looking into the face of the personified memory of humankind, absorbs the totality of its experience. He is, moreover, a poet who contains within himself the unalloyed and unrelieved tensions of human existence—"joy and grief at once," as Clymene puts it (289). In ideal fashion, this empty and identity-less Apollo displays that capability, "negative capability," which Keats deemed indispensable in great poets. Only the empty poet can contain the totality of human experience. There is, then, no contradiction between Keats's theory of negative capability and his depiction of Apollo, which critics such as Gittings (36) believed.

There is likewise no contradiction between the triumph of *beauty*, as heralded by Oceanus, and Keats's epistolary poetics which speak of a gain of *consciousness*, because it is exactly this opposition between beauty and truth, specious and in itself totally unhistorical, which is transcended by the concept of negative capability. Since, for Keats, the identity-less poet of negative capability takes in both "joy and grief," both pleasure and pain, and stores them unmixed, his poetry contains the full range of human experiences, even the negative ones. This exploration of the "darker passages" is, as Keats noted of Wordsworth, the *differentia specifica* of an art that is "modern," a necessary farewell to *les beaux arts* in a naive and restricted sense. The apotheosis of Apollo and the replacement of the good-natured and naive Titans who believe in and know only "beauty" in the old sense of the word dramatize the change of paradigm: *die nicht mehr schönen Künste* [the no longer beautiful arts]. Progress in poetry is the increasing capacity to include wider spheres of human experience, to explore them, to process them, to find a language for them.

Since Keats identifies with Apollo, creates Apollo in his own image, why doesn't Apollo speak? Why has the new poet no voice of his own? Why does the text break off at exactly the point when "the new" would have to articulate itself? Why the scream instead? Why is *Hyperion* a fragment? The answers lie in Keats's three mistakes. The first is *sequence*: he is so successful in depicting the misery of the Titans that they are pitiful and engage the reader's sympathy. Therefore, when Apollo enters in Book III, one can hardly switch over to his perspective. This mistake in sequence leads to the second, *perspective*: although authorially mediated, the story is told from the perspective of the Titans, creating sympathy for the past, which is fatal in an epic celebrating progress, requiring a joyful welcome for the rebels. But the third is the ultimate mistake, a logical flaw, which appears when Keats sets out to lend a voice to Apollo and to give him language.

Allow me to elaborate. *Hyperion* displays an acute awareness of the difficulty of translation. At the beginning, the narrative voice claims that what follows is a necessarily weak translation from the language of gods into the language

of mortals (47-51), a language that the gods themselves claim is inadequate, a painful groping for words to overcome speechlessness. The fallen gods have no words for what has happened to them. What they say is a periphrasis, or circumscription, of how they feel. *Hyperion* is centrally concerned with translation and periphrasis. In addition, language in *Hyperion* is temporal and historical. There is this *new* experience, for which a *new* language is sorely needed—the old language will not do, since it doesn't know this new experience. But there is, in *Hyperion*, also the opposite example, the image of a language which is superseded and finished, so much so that its signs are totally illegible: the hieroglyphics, an ancient language, undeciphered until 1822, and explaining the association of the Titans with Egypt. Hieroglyphics are a reminder of how language is threatened by temporality. Here language is expected to express something for which there are not yet any words and which can only be expressed approximately. On the other hand, the results of this absurd endeavour are always in danger of falling into the abyss of time, of becoming illegible *chiffres*, extant in form only, but void of any meaning.

Apollo confronts this problem of translation and of the temporal fixation of meaning. Mnemosyne does not answer him in language; she remains silent. She answers in *images*, which Apollo reads in her face. The "knowledge enormous" which makes a god of him is a pre-linguistic, visually stored knowledge that he, as the new god of poetry, has to bring to language, in poetry. While I agree that this failure of language explains Keats's breaking off the poem, that he was unable to devise a new kind of language for Apollo, I believe the problem was even larger. If Apollo were to embody the new kind of poetry—and *Hyperion* were to be "Apollo's poem" (W.J. Bate 394)—, then, since the change would have occurred before the narration began, the whole epic would have to have been written in this new diction. A poem that narrates its own genesis, that is an example of what it announces, requires a new language. How can one exceed one's performance yet have been on that higher, superior level all the time? The Dutch engraver, Escher, designs such impossible staircases on which human figures are perpetually ascending to a level from which they paradoxically started out in the first place. Although caught up in a paradox of his own temporality, Keats writes an epic on the historicity of poetry. Written from a purportedly a-historical perspective, the poem collapses in self-contradiction or *aporia*.

Within a couple of weeks, while writing the spring odes, Keats discovered, *en passant*, how to redress these three fundamental mistakes, closely related as they were, in one single operation. First, he changed the sequence and began with the apotheosis, then treated the fall of the Titans. Secondly, to control the perspective, he introduced a narrator. Taking the place of Apollo, this narrator ensured, thirdly, that the whole text would be historically situated and that the point of view would be inside the fictional world. And after this radical change in the narrative situation, there would no

longer be any danger of the final aporia that killed *Hyperion*. *The Fall of Hyperion* is a rescue operation, to salvage the material of *Hyperion* through a radically new, subjectively perspectivized framing, or series of framings: “a very tricky piece of dove-tailing” (Ridley 274). The theme is still historicity, temporality, change, process, evolution—but it becomes subjectively refracted, which is why nothing could be further from the truth than to say the poet was now outside the action (Vitoux 180)—quite the contrary: the action is now inside of him.

In a soberly modern way, the new opening lines address the issue of the permanence of poetry: the most banal, but only necessary and not yet sufficient precondition is writing, letters. Then, after communing with his predecessors (no longer present), the narrator is granted the “dream within a dream” that will give him access to an innermost truth: Only somebody who has acknowledged his belatedness knows his historical place and is therefore admitted to a temple whose columns allow only one direction of movement: westward like the course of the sun. For all the subjectivity of the human mind and the uniqueness of an individual genius, the march of poetry (cf. Thomas Gray, *The Progress of Poesy*, 1754) still follows historical necessity; the individual, embedded in these conditions, run a pre-ordained route.

Climbing of the stairs of the altar with a near-death experience (141-145) has, or so it seems, proved his excellence. He is told that only those who experience the misery of the world as if it were their own have the strength to survive: empathy, compassion is the key. But this apparent distinction becomes a flaw: “thou art here for thou art less than they,” explains the figure of the shadow, less than they who are actively engaged in “labour[ing] for mortal good,” improving the lot of humankind. In contrast to them, the dreamer, with his excess of imagination, “venoms all his days,/Bearing more woe than all his sins deserve” (175/176). That is the drawback of empathy: if it does not translate into action, it spoils every moment of one’s life. Now, the dreamer, this self-torturing “poor thing,” is merely “suffer’d in these temples” (180). Like in a nightmare, each supposed elevation turns out to be a debasement, a new humiliation. Even after the dreamer has self-deprecatingly admitted that even amongst real poets, he doesn’t feel like one of them (“as vultures feel/They are no birds when eagles are abroad,” 191/192), the voice does not console him, but it confirms his worst suspicion: You are not a poet. It is true: a poet can, after all, influence the world—if only indirectly, like a healer, not like a radical politician or a practical philanthropist. But he is not (*yet*) such a poet.

This dialogue between the dreamer and the majestic shadow, who is later revealed as Moneta, the priestess of this temple of Saturn, is controversial: it is not clear whether Moneta’s differentiations between “visionaries,” poets and dreamers make sense. But Moneta does not address the narrator as a poet; in fact, she explicitly denies it. When Moneta

says, “the dreamer venoms all his days” (175), the narrator assumes she means the poets as well. But Moneta sets him aright: that doesn’t yet make you a poet. Once more, the difference between necessary and sufficient conditions: empathy is a necessary but not sufficient quality in a poet. There has to be something else—if that is lacking, he remains a dreamer and “vex[es] the world.” This passage is the critical and remorseless self-questioning of a potential poet in doubt of his vocation and his abilities, the dramatization of a phase in his evolution.

The encounter of the dreamer with Moneta is the new version of the encounter between Apollo and Mnemosyne, re-cast from a first-person perspective. In contrast to *Hyperion*, there is no performative contradiction here: the distinction is clear between the narrating “I” and the narrated “I”—the narrator of *The Fall of Hyperion* is the former dreamer. He has changed, because something happened to him, namely that which will be told. Since her fall, Moneta is, like Glaukos in *Endymion*, subject to temporality, but condemned to remember the scenes of the fall—she is immortal. She is the vessel, the receptacle which contains a consciousness of the past as an eternal present, endlessly repeating itself. The dreamer is eager to see the spectacle inside “the hollow brain,” to see “what high tragedy/In the dark secret chambers of her skull/Was acting” (277-279). The wish is granted even before it was uttered: “for thy good will” (242) he is given the privilege to see the past as present, in imposing images, inside a ‘cinema in the head’. As Moneta and the dreamer stand “side by side” (!), her eyes become *projectors*, and he enters a virtual reality, the reality of the fall of the Titans:

No sooner had this conjuration pass’d
My devout lips, than side by side we stood,
(Like a stunt bramble by a solemn pine)
Deep in the shady sadness of a vale,
Far sunken from the healthy breath of morn,
Far from the fiery noon, and eve’s one star. (291-296)

Because the last three lines are identical with the first three lines of *Hyperion*, that is the connecting piece. The two texts are dovetailed, docked on to each other. But the objective epic of *Hyperion* has become a thrice framed vision: a vision within a dream within a dream. The epic characters of *Hyperion* are here visualized images of a consciousness in dialogue with itself:

Whereon there grew
A power within me of enormous ken,
To see as a God sees, and take the depth
Of things as nimbly as the outward eye
Can size and shape pervade. (302-306)

The divine look perceives the deeper meaning of things as easily as human beings perceive any sense data. What was the apotheosis of Apollo in *Hyperion* is here a lesson contained in

“historical consciousness” for the benefit of the dreamer, who will turn into a poet once he has understood. The understanding of pain and misery overcomes the self-torture of the present: it must be seen “in perspective.” The sight will still be painful to the empathetic observer—and *The Fall of Hyperion* is about “the pain of consciousness” (Barnard 129, 137) and the burden of awareness. But since the scene is within a consciousness visually communicating with itself and empathetically suffering as part of that scene and scenario (which *we* are related to via language), the text can point a way out of this misery and “unchanging gloom” (391).

And it goes like this: Like *Hyperion*, the text of *The Fall of Hyperion* insists on being a translation. The truth of Moneta/Mnemosyne is not a linguistic truth. She shows him images which he must translate into language if he wants to prove himself a poet. As in *Hyperion*, the main subject here is change and transformation without an Oceanus to offer explanation. No oratory—only images that can be translated into language, for the reader to re-visualize. Undoubtedly, they are more powerful than Oceanus’s speech, and more impressive than the dialogue between Moneta and the narrator. But they remain translations, in need of re-translation. To say that Apollo and the narrator in *The Fall* “read” in the face of Moneta/Mnemosyne is catachresis. *We* read what they *see*. This necessary metaphor constitutes the transformation of dream into poetry. The dream leaves a mind or consciousness in catachrestic translation—and in this form, as poetry, it becomes accessible, communicable, it can be shared. The text is the “necessarily false” transitional stage of communication. Words are mere vehicles, necessary, but not the thing itself—an unavoidably “wrong” notation.

And how should this procedure transcend the place of suffering and misery in the world? In the letter of April, 1819, the “vale of Soul-making,” man is first a biological being, subject to the same stresses and frustrations as all other living beings. Even if an earthly paradise could be created, there would still be the fact of death, and all the troubles and dread now spread over the years of a lifetime would then assault the dying person in his few final days, subjectively concentrated in unbearable weight. “But in truth,” Keats writes, “I do not at all believe in this sort of perfectibility” (1:101). Humans cannot transcend their biological being in a material world. All utopias which attempt this follow a foolish dream. Where there are wants and desires and drives, there will always be frustrations. Other than for those who believe in the “pious frauds of Religion,” the world is not a “vale of tears,” but rather a medium that makes souls out of intelligences: “Do you not see how necessary a World of Pains and troubles is to school an Intelligence and make a soul?” (2:102). Suffering and pain are not a punishment for some sin; they are the means by which human beings, in the fullest sense of the word, are created. In a world of circumstance, pains and troubles serve a positive, evolutionary function: to help the growth of a personality. On an individual scale, pain runs parallel to “the grand march of intellect,” refining

human consciousness and sensation. According to Keats, it is not only impossible but also *not desirable* to spare mankind negative experiences; these are necessary for perfection.

And how would a poetry based on “negative capability” containing “joy and grief at once” come to terms with pain? Are “negative capability” and empathy not irreconcilable, because “negative capability” disregards the moral dimension of characters and actions, whereas empathy seems to be an eminently moral act of partisanship? In other words, how can an amoral art possibly have moral effects or consequences? Disinterestedness of mind, Keats explains, is a rare achievement—as unselfishness and empathy, it is a *moral* phenomenon, as *Einfühlung* in the sense of identity-less negative capability, the indispensable precondition for *true poetry*.

But, and this is the crucial point, poetry *does not speak* or spell its assessment of what it presents—“we hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us” (1:224). Poetry relies on the power of its images, on the intensity of its imagery. Art transcends “all disagreeables” (1:192), including pain, by the sheer force of “intensity,” by the power of images. *The Fall of Hyperion* is a series of such powerful images. Speeches such as Oceanus’ encourage the erroneous notion that their “explanation” could be adequate. Explanations lead away from “the point”; periphrasis and catachresis are as close as one can get. Dissolving the catachresis of the text, which only prolongs, perpetuates and increases the ineptitude of expression, is always a category mistake, a sure sign of a failure of nerve, of a lack of confidence in the power of one’s images. It always fails in its delusion to say something more directly, more accessibly than the difficult, complicated and long-winded diction of poetry. There is no substitute for understanding—neither for the understanding of images, nor for the understanding of suffering.

No post-metaphysical epic can *say* what the deeper meaning of suffering might be—or whether there is any meaning at all. You grasp it—or you don’t grasp it. A poetry that presents itself emphatically as the catachrestic overcoming of speechlessness cannot spare its readers the labour of understanding, which always includes the possibility of failure. The place of suffering in the world is not to be found on any map. It is a matter of empathetical understanding, and an understanding of images. Therefore, *The Fall of Hyperion* falls silent, in calm composure and sovereignty. It does not babble, assert, maintain or argue any point. It presents a fallen world, forever falling, narrating it and giving it permanence in images, carried by the vessels of language, so that these images can be shared. Nothing more. The text refuses all ‘consolation by content’. Consolation can be found, if at all, in the fact that something is told, that images are translated into language, communicated and shared. That is the way-out of a sole, solipsistic dream-consciousness—and out of pain: for pain and inner images, by definition private, converge and are transcended in sharing. It saves the suffering from their isolation in solitude, it saves the image from in-

communicability. This world will be present in the “hollow brains” of the readers as in the mind of Moneta, *if* the author of the text is a poet, *if* he can find a language for his vision. No collateral explanation by an entirely different kind of discourse could possibly balance failure here. Nothing can ever take the place of understanding.

The Fall of Hyperion is the necessary failure of a “belated narrative” (Aske 74; cf. Bennett 147, Gradman 129); its fragmentary form is emblematic of this necessary failure. As an attempt at a radically post-metaphysical epic, an epic without a metaphysical frame of reference, it is solely founded on the subjectivity of the poet and is enacted exclusively in his mind. Unlike *Hyperion*, it refrains from any epically-objective explanation of its own locus. *The Fall of Hyperion* has only two protagonists: not the “I” and Moneta, but the duality that comprises the whole of the text, the narrated “I” and narrating “I.” The difference between the two—and could there be better proof that the subject of *The Fall of Hyperion* is temporality—highlights the “conditions of possibility” (Kant’s “Bedingungen der Möglichkeit”) of this very poem.

The Fall of Hyperion is basically about why there is this poem—why the dreamer became a poet. Or rather, since there is no such place from which such a claim could be formulated, this radically subjective and subjectively perspectivized text, cannot say anything more about its own locus, about its necessity, than that it exists. But that proves only its contingency. *The Fall of Hyperion* is a virtual poem. Keats realized that under these conditions anything exceeding the contingency of the poem could only be *asserted*—but not demonstrated. Each continuation was unnecessary, even absurd. Proliferating series of imagery that could never outdo, never surpass each other. Instead, Keats connected them. The poem begins with the fall of the Titans, followed by an apotheosis—in the apotheosis, we see, in the mind of the deified, the fall of the Titans, to be followed by an apotheosis—and so on and so forth. How many repetitions does one need before the public and the critics understand? How many revolutions before they realize this will go on and on? “A dog came in the kitchen” or *For to End Yet Again*—Beckett is never far away when Keats is at his best.

The Fall of Hyperion is, as Harold Bloom once remarked, Keats’s testament, his last great poem (132). In the same let-

ter in which he gives up the project of *Hyperion*, and sketches the setting of *To Autumn*, another “last” poem, Keats writes, in retrospect: “It strikes me to night that I have led a very odd sort of life for the two or three last years—Here & there—No anchor—I am glad of it” (2:167). Without knowing it, he had come to an end. The last months had demanded and taken everything. *Ne plus ultra*.

NOTES

¹See also De Man (1962 and 1986), Coote, Gittings, J. Bate, and O’Neill: “[*Hyperion*] is a romantic fragment poem whose fragmentariness articulates its inability to believe full-bloodedly in a liberal, optimistic version of history” (223). An extended version of my argument can be found in Bode (1996).

²Citations to Keats’s letters are from *The Keats Circle*, ed Rollins (1969) and to Keats’s poetry, *Complete Poems*, ed Stillinger (1982).

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