

upon her. Even she, whose faults are thus translated to virtues, has no joys to give Keats which are:

so sweet as drowsy noons,
And evenings steep'd in honied indolence

The sensuous concreteness of indolence makes the three figures ghosts by contrast. Keats's mood is a *pensoroso* one; he is sinking back deliberately into the bower celebrated as the poet's first phase in *Sleep and Poetry*. Yet he makes it clear that he wants a creative repose, to gather force for his final attempts at poetry:

Farewell! I yet have visions for the night,
And for the day faint visions there is store

He parallels Shelley's lyric *To Night*, in which imaginative consciousness is equated with natural darkness, and ordinary consciousness with the heavy burden of noon. The farewell to Poesy in the *Indolence* is a farewell to the conventional idea of poetry, the pseudo-pastoral namby-pamby land of Leigh Hunt:

For I would not be dieted with praise,
A pet-lamb in a sentimental farce!

This is Keats's break with any sentimentalities about nature, and its "places of nestling green for poets made." From his defiant indolence, a true poet's trance, there arises the vision of tragic humanism that ends his career as poet, *The Fall of Hyperion*.

5. Tragic Humanism:

THE FALL OF HYPERION

Keats begins *The Fall of Hyperion* by distinguishing poetic from religious and primitive dreams. The religious (here unkindly called "fanatics") have their dreams, and use them as evidence for the existence of a paradise beyond sensuous apprehension, and reserved for members of a particular sect. Primitive man has his dreams, from which he less confidently attempts to guess at Heaven. The content of both the fanatic's and the savage's dream

remains largely latent, for both believe themselves to possess a reality beyond the reach of language, and so both lapse into mystery:

For Poesy alone can tell her dreams,—
 With the fine spell of words alone can save
 Imagination from the sable chain
 And dumb enchantment

Imagination is involved in the dreamings of religion and primal mythology, but imagination is ill-served by them, and is bewitched into silence and darkness. Keats implies that the fanatic and the savage are imperfect poets, with a further suggestion that religious speculation and mythology are poetry not fully written. Keats is about to give his own dream of paradise, and knows that only posterity will decide if it is a realized poem or not:

Whether the dream now purpos'd to rehearse
 Be poet's or fanatic's will be known
 When this warm scribe, my hand, is in the grave.

The visionary paradise Keats finds himself standing in is the paradise lost by our Mother Eve. He sees an arbor, and before it, spread upon a mound of moss, a feast of summer fruits. As he comes closer, he sees the feast as what it is, the refuse of an apparently interrupted meal. The reference may be to the repast given by Eve to the Angel Raphael in *Paradise Lost*, or, more likely, I think, to a meal Milton does not mention, the last eaten in paradise by Adam and Eve before their expulsion into the fallen world. In vision Keats has re-entered Eden, and he now eats deliciously of the remnants of the fruit forever barred to us. This feast of naturalistic communion with archetypal man is climaxed by a toast to mortal life existent and remembered:

And, after not long, thirsted; for thereby
 Stood a cool vessel of transparent juice,
 Sipp'd by the wander'd bee, the which I took,
 And, pledging all the mortals of the world,
 And all the dead whose names are in our lips,
 Drank. That full draught is parent of my theme.

He sinks down into a slumber within a dream, and awakens to find himself within a ruined and gigantic ancient sanctuary, with a dome

over his head and marble at his feet. As he looks down he finds not the remnants of a feast of summer fruits but the abandoned paraphernalia of religious worship—robes, golden tongs, censer, holy jewelries. He raises his eyes to fathom the space around him:

The embossed roof, the silent massy range
 Of columns north and south, ending in mist
 Of nothing; then to eastward, where black gates
 Were shut against the sunrise evermore.
 Then to the west I look'd, and saw far off
 An image, huge of feature as a cloud,
 At level of whose feet an altar slept,
 To be approach'd on either side by steps
 And marble balustrade, and patient travail
 To count with toil the innumerable degrees.

For this faith, the way east is barred; there are to be no more dawns. To turn aside, north or south, is to seek to evade reality, only to end in the mist of nothing. Keats faces to the west, to the stairs of purgation and the unknown altar, to natural completion, sunset, man's death.

The structure that Keats slowly moves toward is derived primarily from Dante, probably by way of the Cary translation, but also from the description of the sanctuary of Jehovah in *Exodus*, and from reminiscences of Keats's readings about ancient Egyptian, Greek, and Celtic temples. The steps and marble pavement are like those leading up the graded and steep sides of Mount Purgatory. The temple horns are those grasped by the suppliant in Jehovah's sanctuary and symbolized His power and glory, and man's salvation by them. The details of the dome, pillars, and hall mix Pericles' temple, Egyptian monuments, and Fingal's cave. Keats blends five religious traditions—Christian, Jewish, Egyptian, Olympian, Druidic—because he wants the abandoned temple of Saturn to represent the shrine of religious consciousness itself. The death of one god is for Keats the death of all, and Saturn in this second version of *Hyperion* is not less than ancient and displaced piety, in all its historical forms. Moneta, who serves the ruined altar, is a priestess of intense consciousness doing homage to the dead faiths which have become merely materials for poetry. Keats, in approaching the altar and its purgatorial steps, is assuming the position of the young

Apollo of *Hyperion* as the god approached Mnemosyne. But the differences are profound: Apollo met sympathy and love; Keats encounters scorn and a challenge of his right to exist.

As he draws closer to the shrine, he sees a sacrificial flame rising from it:

and there arose a flame.

When in mid-May the sickening east-wind
Shifts sudden to the south, the small warm rain
Melts out the frozen incense from all flowers,
And fills the air with so much pleasant health
That even the dying man forgets his shroud;—
Even so that lofty sacrificial fire,
Sending forth Maian incense, spread around
Forgetfulness of everything but bliss,
And clouded all the altar with soft smoke

This passage is derived from the *Purgatorio*, where it precedes a blessing on those whose hunger is measured by righteousness, and follows the appearance of a tree that is a shoot from the one whereof Eve tasted the fruit. Keats's use of it is ironic, for, like Eve, he has just tasted fruit of paradise, but, unlike Dante, the breeze's fragrance upon him presages not a blessing but a sharp and painful test. Out of the white fragrant curtains of smoke the voice of Moneta comes, to begin a series of dialectical exchanges akin to those between Rousseau and Shelley in *The Triumph of Life*. As in Shelley, the tense and lucid dialogue moves on a poetic level of sublimity more chastened and austere than either poet had achieved before. Menace and energy, and an ultimate inevitability of diction are combined in Moneta's challenge:

"If thou canst not ascend
These steps, die on that marble where thou art.
Thy flesh, near cousin to the common dust,
Will parch for lack of nutriment,—thy bones
Will wither in few years, and vanish so
That not the quickest eye could find a grain
Of what thou now art on that pavement cold.
The sands of thy short life are spent this hour,
And no hand in the universe can turn
Thy hourglass, if these gummed leaves be burnt
Ere thou canst mount up these immortal steps."

The thrust and power of this passage are unmistakable, and so is the reference to Keats's own approaching death, imported into the poem because the poet's mortality is at the center of its theme. The poet requires nutriment that can be gained only by ascending these purgatorial steps, and warmth which lies beyond these icy stairs. And there is only a limited time; the leaves are burning. Keats hears the warning, sees the burning leaves, and pauses to reflect on the fineness and subtlety of the two senses that feel the tyranny of that fierce threat. The pause and reflection are characteristic of this most sensuous of all poets, and they nearly undo him:

—when suddenly a palsied chill
Struck from the paved level up my limbs,
And was ascending quick to put cold grasp
Upon those streams that pulse beside the throat!
I shriek'd, and the sharp anguish of my shriek
Stung my own ears

The shriek is parallel to Apollo's shriek of death and birth as he dies into life. It arouses Keats to a supreme effort:

I strove hard to escape
The numbness, strove to gain the lowest step.
Slow, heavy, deadly was my pace: the cold
Grew stifling, suffocating, at the heart;
And when I clasp'd my hands I felt them not.
One minute before death, my iced foot touch'd
The lowest stair; and, as it touch'd, life seem'd
To pour in at the toes

He has died into life, and is naturalistically twice-born. But he does not know why he has been saved, and is confused, like Apollo, as to his very identity. He questions Moneta, and the still-veiled Shade replies:

“Thou hast felt
What 'tis to die and live again before
Thy fated hour; that thou hadst power to do so
Is thy own safety; thou hast dated on
Thy doom.”

But why had he the power? What is he, to stand on a height that ought to have slain him:

“High Prophetess,” said I, “purge off,
Benign, if so it please thee, my mind’s film.”
“None can usurp this height,” returned that shade,
“But those to whom the miseries of the world
Are misery, and will not let them rest.
All else who find a haven in the world,
Where they may thoughtless sleep away their days,
If by a chance into this fane they come,
Rot on the pavement where thou rotted’st half.”

This magnificent reply, with its significant allusions to Wordsworth’s *Excursion* and Shelley’s *Alastor*, is the beginning of the poem’s attempt to awaken the imagination by distinguishing among the classes of men. Keats half rotted on the pavement before his painful salvation. Those who enter this temple of poetry and are not humanists rot altogether on the icy marble. And yet, why is Keats in the shrine alone? He knows of greater humanists than himself:

“Are there not thousands in the world,” said I,
Encourag’d by the sooth voice of the shade,
“Who love their fellows even to the death;
Who feel the giant agony of the world;
And more, like slaves to poor humanity,
Labour for mortal good? I sure should see
Other men here, but I am here alone.”

There is great pride in these lines, but a great desolation, and a Wordsworthian weight of solitude as well. Moneta’s reply is both a rebuke to pride and an affirmation, and seems to me the finest moment in Keats’s poetry:

“Those whom thou spak’st of are no visionaries,”
Rejoin’d that voice,—“they are no dreamers weak;
They seek no wonder but the human face,
No music but a happy-noted voice—
They come not here, they have no thought to come—
And thou art here, for thou art less than they.
What benefit canst thou do, or all thy tribe,
To the great world? Thou art a dreaming thing,
A fever of thy self—think of the earth;

What bliss, even in hope, is there for thee?
 What haven? every creature hath its home;
 Every sole man hath days of joy and pain,
 Whether his labours be sublime or low—
 The pain alone, the joy alone, distinct:
 Only the dreamer venoms all his days,
 Bearing more woe than all his sins deserve.
 Therefore, that happiness be somewhat shar'd,
 Such things as thou art are admitted oft
 Into like gardens thou didst pass erewhile,
 And suffer'd in these temples: for that cause
 Thou standest safe beneath this statue's knees."

These lines are the culmination of Keats's work, and need the closest kind of reading, while they demand an energy of response which vitalizes the reader's imagination. Humanists, Moneta replies, are of two kinds, and Keats is alone in his generation in being the lesser kind, both a humanist and a visionary. The pragmatic humanists do not need the invented wonders of weak dreaming. The object of their quest is directly before them. They write no poems, for their music is in human happiness, and their truth and beauty in the human face. The poet is a fever of himself, caught in the anguish of his own selfhood. But the earth is enough, if he would but think of it, and the earth need surrender to no heaven. Those for whom the earth is not enough can have no home, and no happiness even in their own hopes. Having moved so close to Keats's own malady, his involvement in the pain of the unresolved contraries of nature and imagination, Moneta strikes at what is most central in Keats, his inability to unperplex joy from pain. Men, humanists or not, except the dreamer, can experience joy and pain unmixed. No line in Keats is more intense with baffled aspiration than the one that separates him from the generality of men:

The pain alone, the joy alone, distinct

The indictment seems crushing, and the rhetorical irony turned on Keats by Moneta is cruel. Such things as Keats is, Moneta tells him, are admitted into a state of innocence, that happiness may be *somewhat* shared, and are suffered within the temple of poetry. Moneta's tone has the ironic and mocking pity that Blake extends

to the "gentle souls," the quietists like St. Teresa and Fenelon, who are given minor gates of Jerusalem to guard. But Keats is more than a gentle wanderer in Beulah, and his sense of the dignity of poetry provokes a dialectical response that compels Moneta to modify her severe categories:

"That I am favour'd for unworthiness,
 By such propitious parley medicin'd
 In sickness not ignoble, I rejoice,
 Aye, and could weep for love of such award."
 So answer'd I, continuing, "If it please,
 Majestic shadow, tell me: sure not all
 Those melodies sung into the world's ear
 Are useless: sure a poet is a sage;
 A humanist, physician to all men.
 That I am none I feel, as vultures feel
 They are no birds when eagles are abroad.
 What am I then: thou spakest of my tribe:
 What tribe?"

It is an astonishing and very great recovery, expressed with tact and firmness. Keats accepts the admonitions, but deftly refers to the poet's oxymoronic sickness as being "not ignoble." Poetry has its humanist use, as Moneta in her dialectical zeal seems to have forgotten. The poet is a great therapist, in the Wordsworthian sense of consolation and spiritual renewal. Yet, Keats modestly admits, he himself is not quite a poet in so high a sense. His questioning moves the dialectic onto a more earnest level, and Moneta now corrects herself by distinguishing between two kinds of poets, another cross-category to add to the distinctions between poets and other humanists, and between humanists and men who merely rot if they attempt greatness:

"Art thou not of the dreamer tribe?
 The poet and the dreamer are distinct,
 Diverse, sheer opposite, antipodes.
 The one pours out a balm upon the world,
 The other vexes it."

Keats's dialectical victory is that for the first time she must reply with a question. He has asked again for his identity, but this time

in such a way that the question compels her to a more generous answer. She is now in doubt. Is Keats one of those who heal or vex the World by their writing? His own response to her last distinction settles the issue. With a vehement outcry, he separates himself from those who merely seek relief and aggrandisement for the ego by their poetry:

Then shouted I
Spite of myself, and with a Pythia's spleen,
"Apollo! faded! O far-flown Apollo!
Where is thy misty pestilence to creep
Into the dwellings, through the door crannies
Of all mock lyrists, large self-worshippers
And careless Hectorers in proud bad verse?
Though I breathe death with them it will be life
To see them sprawl before me into graves."

In *Sleep and Poetry*, Keats had begun to separate himself from his chief contemporary rivals, Wordsworth, Byron, and Shelley. *Endymion* had attempted to refute *Alastor*, and the great odes practice an art of Mammon, loading every rift with ore, which is what Keats had none too kindly advised Shelley to do. I am one of the few readers now extant, so far as I can see, who think Keats a very great poet but Shelley an even greater one, so I am not altogether happy with this passage, though its principal reference is probably to Byron rather than to Wordsworth or Shelley. Keats himself half-apologizes for these lines, but they are necessary to his poem. He shouts with the spleen of Apollo's Pythian oracle, directly inspired by the god of poetry, and in spite of himself. It is not a pretty sentiment to say that it will be life for him to see his rival poets sprawl before him into graves, even on the undoubted symbolic level that is intended, where the reference is clearly to their poetry and not their persons. In any case, this outburst of spleen is what convinces Moneta to give her ultimate gift of enlightenment to Keats. This is, after all, a very harsh and purgatorial poem, written with the heart's blood of a poet who senses that death is all but upon him. If he is harsh toward others, he is also terribly harsh toward himself.

This Pythian spleen reminds us that Apollo, father of all verse and of medicine, is father also of pestilence. And pestilence haunts

the remainder of *The Fall of Hyperion*, though it is the pestilence of tragedy, "an immortal sickness that kills not."

Keats has won for himself a fuller sense of identity, but he still needs to know where he is, at whose altar he stands, and who Moneta is. She replies with altered tone to his fresh questionings. But what she tells, which is essentially the story of the first Hyperion, is less important to Keats or to us than is her own silent countenance, when she finally unveils it to the poet. Just as the *Purgatorio* climaxes at the end of the thirty-first canto, when Beatrice unveils herself to Dante, so *The Fall of Hyperion* attains its vision of truth when Keats gazes upon the revealed face of the surviving Titaness:

Then saw I a wan face,
 Not pined by human sorrows, but bright-blanch'd
 By an immortal sickness which kills not;
 It works a constant change, which happy death
 Can put no end to; deathwards progressing
 To no death was that visage; it had pass'd
 The lily and the snow; and beyond these
 I must not think now, though I saw that face.
 But for her eyes I should have fled away.
 They held me back with a benignant light,
 Soft mitigated by divinest lids
 Half closed, and visionless entire they seem'd
 Of all external things

The face of Moneta is a symbolic eternity, for it has passed beyond the strife of contraries, passed the lily and the snow, passed even the discursive antithesis between being and non-being. It is a wan face, but it has assumed the authentic expression of tragedy, and is no longer pined by human sorrows. A series of oxymorons follows, playing upon the meanings of sickness, change, and death, and so modifying those barren meanings that they become a thousand things, and so their barrenness exists no more.

Keats's problem from this passage on is precisely the reverse of the problem that caused him to abandon *Hyperion*, and one may wonder whether a solution was possible in either poem. In *Hyperion*, Keats began with the myth of the fall of Saturn, and had to manage a transition to his personal myth of poetic incarnation.

In the *Fall*, he began with his own dying into the life of tragic poetry, and next had to externalize this theme into its affinities with the story of the Titans. But the affinities are strained, and the Titanic myth is irrelevant to Keats's more intense concerns. Apollo is really all Keats needs for his own myth, and so *The Fall of Hyperion* tends to break into two poems, the one I have been discussing and the remainder, which is mostly a revision of the first *Hyperion*. Only two passages more add anything to the theme of Keats's relation to the content of his own vision, his status in his own poetry. In the first, as soon as he sees Saturn, and hears Moneta identify the god, he applies to himself Apollo's words of self-deification:

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.

To see as a god sees, in depth, is now to see as a poet sees, directly into the phenomenology of inner realities. In a second passage, Keats lauds the strength of what is mortal as being enough to sustain the final intensities of tragic vision:

Without stay or prop,
 But my own weak mortality, I bore
 The load of this eternal quietude,
 The unchanging gloom and the three fixed shapes
 Ponderous upon my senses, a whole moon

This is not the kind of expressiveness one expects to find in epic or even in romance; Keats is moving toward the tragic drama he was not to survive to compose. *The Fall of Hyperion* has neither the high finish of style nor the radical unity of *The Triumph of Life*, but like the *Triumph* it leaves us with the impression of a perfection grasped, and of a personal art brought to its moral limits.

TO AUTUMN

To Autumn is the subtlest and most beautiful of all Keats's odes, and as close to perfection as any shorter poem in the English lan-