‘The load of this eternal quietude’
Keats, Wordsworth, and the Poetics of Belatedness

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Synopsis
The later version of Keats’s epic poem, ‘The Fall of Hyperion’, adopts the first-person narrator and takes the form of dream-vision. The intentions of the visionary framework merit exploration in terms of the poet’s revisionist approach to Wordsworth, the most original poet of his times, and in relation to his pursuit of a new epic voice, which virtually starts with ‘Ode to a Nightingale’.

With its highly introspective voice, the Nightingale Ode approaches associationist psychology and circulating notions of originality, which makes it comparable to a group of Wordsworth’s poems called ‘Moods of My Own Mind’. While Wordsworth’s typical ‘mood’ poems specify a time and place, Keats’s poem offers an impersonal train of thought, which has a different effect on the reading process. The closing stanzas of the Ode also undermine the optimistic reaffirmation of personal identity (as in ‘To the Cuckoo’) by the speaker’s act of identifying himself with the bird, and its result.

An analysis of the ways in which Wordsworth introduces the Wanderer in The Excursion suggests that, in Canto 1 of the second ‘Hyperion’, Keats is guided by similar concerns as a post-Christian, post-Milton poet; among these is the need to commemorate his muse Moneta within the Enlightenment tradition, as well as to qualify the poet-dreamer for a meeting with the goddess. Moneta emerges as a guardian figure of the ‘Soul-making’ theory, while the Wanderer is a sage of natural wisdom. Moreover, Moneta, who favours Keats’s hero with the vision of Hyperion, is characterised by her reticence, which contrasts with the Wanderer’s eloquence and didacticism. As a criticism of Wordsworthian first-person voice, this trait and the underlying
politics of reading are intended to amplify the meaning of Homeric objectivity, and to turn the fact of the poet's belated appearance in the literary tradition into the basis for his claim to originality.

In the summer of 1819, after composing Part 1 of 'Lamia', Keats started recasting his epic poem 'Hyperion' as 'The Fall of Hyperion'. This re-working represented a new departure in the narrative structure. Adopting first-person narration, he chose to provide the story with a visionary framework often called Dantesque. However, such an attempt is questionable in terms of his preference for 'old Poets' over 'modern poets' and his complaints against the latter. In 'Hyperion' the poet narrates through the Muse in accordance with Homeric tradition, as does Milton in Paradise Lost. John Barnard observes that subjectivism was 'the impasse which he believed modern poetry had reached in Wordsworth', and that the first 'Hyperion' was an effort to 'create an objectivity which reached beyond the dangerously solipsistic self-consciousness of the modern poet'. How, then, is the revised version consistent with Keats's anti-modern poetic beliefs unless it signifies his conversion to Wordsworthian egotism?

The aim of this paper is to examine the origins and development of Keats's later epic voice in terms of Wordsworth's influence on his poetry and on the shaping of his identity. The best place to start is, I believe, 'Ode to a Nightingale', for this poem is filled with allusions to Wordsworth's minor poems and literary practice, showing the embryo of a strategy by which, as I shall discuss, Keats constructed the visionary framework of the second 'Hyperion'. In the mainstream of Romantic lyricism, the Ode also tells us that Keats's claim to originality was now consciously made within the sphere of modern poetry, which Wordsworth seemed to be exploring in his lyrical and semi-epic poems. Placing special emphasis on Keats's revisionist approach to Wordsworth, I shall argue that his confrontation with the elder poet's modern method finally led to the birth of a new voice in 'The Fall of Hyperion' which is subjective in form but objective in an important way, and this unique voice will suggest that Keats exploited a misfortune of modern poets, the sense of being too late – after Milton – for an epic poem of Homeric range and objectivity, for the purpose of his own survival as a poet.
Leon Waldoff stresses the importance of Wordsworth for Keats’s understanding of literary tradition:

While the burden of the past produces anxiety, his identification with Wordsworth enables him to transform the relationship and his seeming belatedness into an inheritance. He has, in effect, developed a notion of poetic succession that makes a place for him among the English poets.

It is impossible to overemphasise the influence of Wordsworth’s poetry of experience and human knowledge on the making of Keats’s Great Odes. In a letter dated 3 May 1818, to which Waldoff alludes, Keats describes Wordsworth as an explorer of human knowledge and himself as another, with both of them succeeding to Milton (Letters, i, 282). Yet the manner of Keats’s identification with Wordsworth becomes more complex when we consider the subtlety of his poetic method in ‘Ode to a Nightingale’.

While altering Keats’s own early style of composition – to be open to an impulse of a moment and follow the train of images and ideas without any definite end – the Nightingale Ode also rejects the Wordsworthian effusion of personal history. In contrast with Wordsworth’s shorter poems, Susan J. Wolfson writes:

The idioms of the odes are those of a shared cultural imagination – its myths, its literature, its art. The past is not that of intimate autobiographical recollection; its instances are transhistorical and representative [. . .].

In the Ode, Keats is more careful to depersonalise the style. The speaker abstracts his thoughts on human nature from their particular circumstances: for example, ‘Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes, / Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.’ The instances of the present are representative, as well as those of the past. In the fifth stanza, set in darkness, flowers in the garden are imagined, rather than viewed, so that a garden typical of ‘the seasonable month’ (44) might be conjured up. This is in striking contrast with Wordsworth’s specifying practice in ‘To
a Butterfly' (‘I’ve watched you’), a piece found in a group of his poems called ‘Moods of My Own Mind’: ‘This plot of orchard-ground is ours; | My trees they are, my Sister’s flowers [. . .]’.6

These two compositional attitudes affect the reader in different ways. John Hamilton Reynolds analyses Wordsworth’s poetry, as follows:

[. . .] it must actually bring the mind of the reader up to a full and thorough participation and communion with itself, in all its views, enjoyments, and discoveries, – or it has no effect upon him at all.7

Reynolds says that Wordsworth’s self is active and distinct in the whole process of reading. In other words, readers with a similar bent can find their alter ego in Wordsworth. His effusions are equal to soliloquies of a dramatic character, as suggested by Hazlitt’s observation of the way that Lear interacts with the reader: ‘while we read it, we see not Lear, but we are Lear; – we are in his mind’.8 Actuated by ‘a radically individual sense of the past’ (Wolfson, p. 302), however, Wordsworth’s association of ideas tends to be singular and even exclusive, as Reynolds hints in the added sentence. The first of Keats’s axioms to be laid out in a letter is a reaction against such a tendency: ‘it [poetry] should strike the Reader as a wording of his own highest thoughts, and appear almost a Remembrance’ (Letters, 1, 238). In his poetry, nature is described with the awe and humility of a classical poet, as Reynolds writes in a review of Endymion. ‘He knows that Nature is better and older than he is, and he does not put himself on an equality with her’; in effect, his readers commune with human nature with immediacy: ‘You do not see him, when you see her’ (SP, p. 227).

Despite such a difference in the reading process, Keats may have shared with Wordsworth the same notion of originality which was circulating in their time. In an essay entitled ‘Originality’, Hazlitt defines the sources of originality under the influence of associationist psychology and the Enlightenment view of nature, as follows:

Nature presents an endless variety of aspects, of which the mind seldom takes in more than a part or than one view at a time; and it is in seizing on this unexplored variety, and giving some one of these new but easily recognized features, in its characteristic essence, and according to the peculiar bent and force of the artist’s genius, that true originality consists. (CW, xx, 297)
If Keats makes ‘original’ discoveries, it means that they are those varieties of nature which correspond to the unique constitution of his mind. The problem with this theory is that to obey the ‘peculiar bent and force’ of one’s own mind is to risk mannerism, which in the same article Hazlitt calls ‘the bane (though it is the occasional vice) of genius’ (CW, xx, 300). As a poet who adores the sympathetic imagination of Shakespeare, Keats perhaps feared such a consequence of the associative activity of the mind. The epistle to Reynolds (‘Dear Reynolds, as last night I lay in bed’) describes the imagination vulnerable to the ‘wonted thread | Of shapes, and shadows, and remembrances’ (2-3); these form an image unaccountably shaped or combined with another: ‘Things all disjoined come from north and south’ (5). Towards the end of the poem, the cause of the poet’s fear is told: in modern times the imagination may be unable to refer to ‘any standard law | Of either earth or heaven’ (81–82), for it is perverted by ‘Moods of one’s mind’ (106). This motif is repeated in the Nightingale Ode. On ‘the viewless wings of Poesy’ (33), and with his ‘ears in vain’ (59), the speaker annihilates himself and enters the memory of the ‘immortal’ (61) bird. He thus goes back to mythological times, yet his casual utterance of the word ‘forlorn’ (70) precipitates him into the realisation of ‘my sole self’ (72). The phrase ‘thy plaintive anthem’ (75) reveals that his perception is affected by his own mood. His earlier statement is now invalid: his heart aches ‘not through envy of thy happy lot, | But being too happy in thine happiness’ (5-6).

This is, however, not to show that the Ode is a mere complaint about the fate of the modern imagination; Keats is more deliberate and strategic than he might appear. In the final stanza, the speaker experiences a state of suspension: he cannot decide whether his time travel was ‘a vision’ inspired by the bird or ‘a waking dream’ originating in envy or any other feelings of his own (79). Then, a question follows, attached by a dash: ‘Do I wake or sleep?’ (80). This reaction is typically Keatsian in that, for a chameleon poet continually ‘filling some other Body’ (Letters, i, 387), the bird has an intensity of the same degree as his own existence. This moment of indeterminacy can be juxtaposed with the climax of Wordsworth’s ‘To the Cuckoo’. The Nightingale Ode abounds in similarities with the Cuckoo poem, as Thora Balslev’s comparative study shows. Among them is the parallel movement of these poems, which the critic fails to mention. Unlike Keats’s bird, the cuckoo is not something valuable for its own
memories, but a medium through which the poet, to use Hazlitt’s words, ‘contemplates a whole-length figure of himself’ and ensures ‘the unbroken line of his personal identity’ (CW, viii, 44). Wordsworth asserts that the bird is ‘no Babbler with a tale | Of sunshine and of flowers’ (9-10); it is rather ‘a mystery’ (16) because as a boy he often roved in search of the bird in vain. The poet recalls hearing the ‘same’ (17) voice, while Keats’s speaker says that ‘the self-same song’ (65) was heard by a biblical figure, Ruth. The cuckoo continues singing until the listener revives ‘That golden time’ (28), in short, the earlier period of his life. Wordsworth’s poem thus ends with the transfiguration of the earth into ‘an unsubstantial, faery place’ (31) and by inference the reaffirmation of the poet’s identity. In contrast with such an internal flight of the imagination, Keats’s time travel takes the speaker through the remote past of the world, finally revealing the sea in the ‘faery lands’ (70), that is, a scene from the period still as unenlightened as one’s infancy. Moreover, his version is not concluded by any reconciliation whatever: in its last moment, the speaker tumbles into the uncertainty of his identity, as we have seen.

Compared with Wordsworth’s optimism in the mood piece, the closing stanza can thus be seen as an attempt to describe a poet’s vision as it should be, and to record the mental state involved. This hidden strand of the poem, developed in the form of a flight from the limited self, is in line with the depersonalisation of the speaker; his self-reflection is made free from a time and place so as to ‘strike the Reader as a wording of his own highest thoughts, and appear almost a Remembrance’, as was discussed earlier. These two reactions against modern poets will help shape the action of the second ‘Hyperion’ with different shades of meaning or further elaboration. Likewise, Keats’s attitude to the modern imagination is not necessarily backward-looking, given that its inward-turning nature, as manifested in the speaker’s failure in total immersion in the world of the nightingale’s memory, seems to be dramatised for the purpose of reviving the manner of the ‘old Poets’. Through structuring the visionary framework of ‘The Fall of Hyperion’, Keats will finally develop the potential of his belatedness in order to contend with Wordsworth, while turning to The Excursion for a specimen of modern requirements for first-person narration.
Keats's indebtedness to Wordsworth in 'The Fall of Hyperion' may be traced by referring to a brief sketch of his procedures for transforming Milton's epic voice to suit his needs in The Excursion and the 'Recluse' project as a whole. The Excursion naturalises and humanises Milton's vindication of the ways of God to man in Paradise Lost. Wordsworth's spokesman, the Wanderer, replaces the bard's muse, Urania or the Holy Ghost. He narrates the tragic course of Margaret's life, and the story is recorded by the narrator-listener, the Poet. The Margaret story, originally composed as 'The Ruined Cottage', is brought to The Excursion along with 'The Pedlar' in order to provide a sketch of the Wanderer's career. However valid contemporary reviewers' criticism of his low origins may be, he is one of the 'Poets that are sown | By Nature'. Although the 'accomplishment of Verse' (1, 84) is not his, he became 'Sublime and comprehensive' (1, 257) through learning to 'look on Nature' (1, 264). He also read Milton closely: 'Among the hills | He gazed upon that mighty Orb of Song, | The divine Milton' (1, 271–73). Thus qualified as a Wordsworthian sage, the Wanderer offers his observations and opinions, apparently essential to 'a system' mentioned in the Preface. His peculiar education also reminds us of what is referred to as a personal part of the author's project, that is, the examination of 'how far Nature and Education had qualified him for such employment' in an autobiographical poem (The Prelude). The lives of both Wordsworth and the Wanderer function as an invocation, comprising the extended prologue to, respectively, 'The Recluse' and the story of Margaret - extended, because it is necessary to justify the author's decision to dismiss the Muse, Christian or classical, before the narration of the main story.

Similar preparations are made in Canto 1 of 'The Fall of Hyperion'. The growth of modern consciousness, as described in the well-known 'simile of human life' letter, is dramatised from a new angle before the Hyperion story unfolds. When forcibly transported from an Edenic garden to the solemn atmosphere of the temple, the poet-dreamer moves from the inside to the outside of his 'Chamber of Maiden-Thought' (Letters, 1, 281). On the one hand, by indulging his appetites in the bower, he embraces
the pleasure principle for his poetic education. Inside the temple, on the other hand, he suffers from moral inanition, and narrowly escapes from death, in a trial to see whether he can break the habit of self-love and thus is entitled to undergo a sublime vision. In addition to expressing a pattern of moral struggle in humanistic terms, through his hero’s encounter with Moneta, Keats also examines his identity as poet and something more: not only does their dialogue turn upon the difference between ‘poet’ and ‘dreamer’, but it also brings to light a vital concern for Romantic poets, the vindication of a poet’s imagination as undertaken most notably by Shelley in A Defence of Poetry and, to some extent, by Wordsworth in The Prelude. As Moneta declares, ‘the dreamer venoms all his days, | Bearing more woe than all his sins deserve’ (1, 175–76). Because of his inferior poethood, Keats’s hero is not assured of the contribution of poetry to the public good, thus imploring his interrogator to confirm that ‘not all | Those melodies sung into the world’s air | Are useless’ (1, 167–69).

Just as the banishment of the Muse necessitates the authorisation of a storyteller in Wordsworth, Keats is required to invest Moneta, the Muse-like figure responsible for the story that follows, with appropriate values. The Temple of Saturn is called into being as a place for the service of the goddess. ‘So old the place was, I remembered none | The like upon the earth’ (1, 65–66), the narrator-hero recalls. Compared with its overwhelming presence, he adds, the earthly sanctuaries of past and present are no more than ‘the faulture of decrepit things’ (1, 70). Undermining the dignity of established religions is intentional. Into the architectural and ornamental styles of the Temple, Keats blends five religious traditions—Christian, Jewish, Egyptian, Olympian (classical), and Druidic.\(^\text{11}\) Whether symbolising the religious consciousness itself (Bloom) or suggesting the impermanency of world religions (Barnard), it is certain that the syncretistic Temple is replete with the ethos of the ‘Soul-making’. As Robert M. Ryan points out, Keats had long subscribed to the view that religions were either unnecessary complications or superstitious corruptions of the original simple faith called natural religion; and his theory, originating in this faith, provided him with some type of justification for earthly suffering in place of the Christian response as exemplified in the phrase ‘this vale of tears’.\(^\text{12}\) What is necessary for a visitor to the temple of Enlightenment values to survive is not to explain away misfortunes from an established point of view. Saved from death in the place are, the
goddess says, ‘those to whom the miseries of the world Are misery, and will not let them rest’ (I, 148–49). Keats’s moral effort to complete the individual soul links with his usual emphasis on the free play and indeterminacy of the mind: for example, writing in 1819 that ‘the only means of strengthening one’s intellect is to make up ones mind about nothing’, he criticises his friend Charles Wentworth Dilke for seeking over-hastily for a sense of personal identity, calling him a ‘Godwin-Methodist’ (Letters, II, 213). Through portraying his first-person hero and the place for his ‘wandering, Keats extends the impersonalising practice in the Nightingale Ode into a criticism of religious, moral, and intellectual egotism.

In basing the formation of his first-person narrative on a post-Milton or post-Christian intellectual milieu, as we have seen, Keats follows in the path already trodden by Wordsworth – though with a covert or open vein of satire on bigotry and self-love – but starts to diverge when introducing a visionary moment in the hero’s inward journey. The opening of the Hyperion story is suggestive:

Onward I look’d beneath the gloomy boughs,
And saw, what first I thought an image huge,
Like to the image pedestal’d so high
In Saturn’s temple. Then Moneta’s voice
Came brief upon mine ear – “So Saturn sat
When he had lost his realms.” – 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. The lofty theme
At those few words hung vast before my mind,
With half unravel’d web.

(1, 297–308)

In terms of his criticism of Wordsworth, to better understand the possible effects of this meticulous attention to the hero’s perceptual change, it is necessary to see how Keats approached Milton or Dante, his earlier precursors, for a model of visionary presentation, and observed the art of storytelling in The Excursion. As Stuart M. Sperry points out, the supposition that in the second ‘Hyperion’ Keats was rejecting Milton in order to embrace Dante as his new master is a half-truth. Milton’s grand conception of the Fall and Redemption of man was helpful in the
transformation of 'Hyperion' into 'an allegory of poetic sin and expiation through intensity of suffering'; the pair of Moneta and the poet-dreamer resemble that of Michael and Adam in the closing books of Paradise Lost in that both the interogates need the knowledge of a saviour, Christ or Apollo (Sperry, p. 316, pp. 316–33). The use of vision as the vehicle through which to encounter an epiphany also comes from Milton, rather than Dante. From the top of a mountain, Adam looks out with the ‘film’ removed from his corrupted eyes. Likewise, Keats's hero is furnished with 'a power [. . . ] of enormous ken' so as to 'see as a God sees', as quoted above. The influence of Dante’s first-person narration, on the other hand, is recognised on the vividness of recollection which characterises the visionary experience described in the poem. In the lecture ‘On Poetry in General’, Hazlitt observes that Dante’s poetry ‘gives the same thrilling and overwhelming sensation, which is caught by gazing on the face of a person who has seen some object of horror’ (CW, v, 17–18). This passage reminds us of the tension felt by the poet-dreamer seeing Moneta’s face. It also suggests a point of divergence from the Comedy in Keats’s narration, lying behind the shared atmosphere of the guided visionary pilgrimage. The way of communicating stories in Dante’s Hell is not to bring them to reality by use of machinery; to cite one instance, Francesca narrates her love affair with Paolo from memory. Meanwhile, Keats’s hero is to ‘see what things the hollow brain | Behind enwomb’d’ (i, 276–77). He represents a theatre audience, rather than a listener to whom a story is addressed.

Provided with the moment of Adam-like transcendence in the subjective world of the mind, Keats’s ‘high tragedy’ (i, 277) is associated, by contrast, and in method, with the Margaret story. Through introducing the powerful storyteller the Wanderer, Wordsworth naturalises Milton’s machinery, virtually exploiting the potential of Dantesque auditory presentation. Seated on a bench at Margaret’s cottage, the Wanderer begins his story by saying to the Poet, ‘I see around me here | Things which you cannot see’ (i, 504–5). The poet-listener testifies to the sage’s power of narration: ‘the things of which he spake | Seemed present’ (i, 651–52). This power is demonstrable in the very absence of the events he relates, as it manifests in the form of pathos: the ruined cottage, the overgrown garden, and even the ‘useless fragment of a wooden bowl’ (i, 528), become something deeply moving for the Poet. The equivalents of such objects fill
Dante’s poetry: ‘the immediate objects he [Dante] presents to the mind’, Hazlitt says in the same lecture, ‘are not much in themselves’ and ‘want grandeur, beauty, and order’, yet they ‘become every thing by the force of the character he impresses upon them’ (CW, v, 17).

Wordsworth’s practice is likely to attract the reader’s attention to the mental and moral character of the storyteller, and often the poet himself. Long before writing a skit on Peter Bell in 1819, Reynolds admired Wordsworth, betraying a hint of envy, for the ‘beatific abandonment’ and the ‘spiritual fullness of faith’ felt in his autobiographical poems, and even went so far as to defend the egotism of modern literature by saying that ‘The “moods” of a great poet’s mind are valuable at all times’ (SP, p. 83, 62). Yet there can be a strong counter-reaction, too. We should not ‘be bullied into a certain Philosophy engendered in the whims of an Egotist’, Keats warns Reynolds, by ‘a few fine imaginative or domestic passages’ (Letters, 1, 223). The progress of The Excursion might illustrate the meaning of his statement. Possibly Keats admired the Margaret story in its showing of natural wisdom with the avoidance of established creeds. The story is recollected in tranquillity and, as a result, lightens ‘the burden of the mystery’. After learning of Margaret’s unfulfilled hope for the return of her husband, the Poet recalls:

I stood, and leaning o’er the Garden wall,  
Reviewed that Woman’s sufferings; and it seemed  
To comfort me while with a Brother’s love  
I bless’d her – in the impotence of grief.  
(The Excursion, 1, 964–67)

Still, Keats must have believed that soon afterwards Wordsworth’s method backfired. The poet’s flight from vision in The Excursion, as Geoffrey H. Hartman argues, may lend strength to the story, ‘the purest example of Wordsworth’s art’, but it causes weariness in the ensuing dramas of his churchyard heroes.15 The Wanderer’s voice turns argumentative, with the entry of the Solitary, and the sage’s natural teachings are aligned, albeit tacitly, with the Pastor’s orthodox doctrines and, in an earlier place, with his own inimical remark about Voltaire. In the final Book, the Wanderer assumes the eloquence of a preacher, with his enthusiasm waxing in advocacy of the government’s efforts to expand its cultural influence across the world. Hartman sees this change as a transgression caused by the
closeness of religion and eloquence, believing that it was unfortunate for the author, who wished to ‘combat despair by purely human arguments’ (Wordsworth’s Poetry, p. 300). ‘His laudable zeal for the efficacy of his preachments,’ Francis Jeffrey observes in his review of the poem, ‘he very naturally mistakes for the ardour of poetical inspiration.’

Considering Wordsworth’s depreciation of vision and its result, it seems that the Margaret story needed to be confronted by an able opponent, in short, the world of Moneta’s memory. The Wanderer is not, at least originally, a champion of existing morals, nor is Moneta: they are missionaries of, respectively, nature and the ‘Soul-making’ theory. But there appears an important difference in their ways of speech. The Wanderer preaches to his listener, taking advantage of his larger and deeper experience:

“My Friend! enough to sorrow you have given,
The purposes of wisdom ask no more;
Be wise and cheerful; and no longer read
The forms of things with an unworthy eye.
(The Excursion, i, 975–78)

In contrast, Moneta is strikingly reticent: neither opinions nor admonishments come from her tongue. The goddess does offer information, but in a way confined to the profile of the Titans whom the poet-dreamer is watching, largely consisting of names and situations. Moneta often compares the divine objects to mortal things in order to facilitate his perception (i, 300–1, 332–35, 460–63; ii, 1–6, 15–24, 42–44), yet goes no further with instructing him. Charles J. Rzepka has pointed out that the theatrical structure of the vision exempts Keats from the duty of explaining what it means or imposing a single interpretation. Rzepka is right in that the well-wrought scenes are aesthetically self-sustaining, yet it is technically possible to present them in a didactic way, as Milton’s Michael teaches Christian morals through the vision. It follows, then, that Milton’s visionary teaching is purged of its obtrusiveness in Keats.

The effect of this removal of eloquence and didacticism is striking: the fallen Saturn is felt to be all the more oppressive for Moneta’s quiet presence. Without any explanation, ‘the burden of the mystery’ is placed on the onlooker:
Moneta silent. Without stay or prop
But my own weak mortality, I bore
The load of this eternal quietude [. . .].
(i, 388–90)

Sperry argues that the hero’s escapist desire – ‘Oftentimes I pray’d | Intense, that death would take me from the vale | And all its burthens’ (i, 396–98) – does not lead to the ‘Soul-making’, concluding that ‘the visionary framework cannot sustain the weight of human need and questioning it must support’ (334). Instead of revealing the inefficacy of the poem’s framework, however, the Titans’ motionlessness, exhausting for the onlooker, is intended as a rite of passage through which the reader develops the right attitude towards a more abandoned type of vision, a series of events which retains their original crudeness – ‘The lofty theme | At those few words hung vast before my mind | With half unravel’d web’, as quoted above – and awaits the formation of its network of meaning as an experience which goes with the intensity of remembrances. In ‘Hyperion’, indeed, Apollo’s apotheosis represents the reading process which such a vision can provide. On confronting Mnemosyne, Apollo cries: ‘Mute thou remainest – mute! yet I can read | A wondrous lesson in thy silent face’ (iii, 111–12).

It is now clear that, by shaping Moneta and the poet-dreamer as figures of, respectively, writing and reading, Keats visualises (externalises) the objectivity and range of the first ‘Hyperion’. The silence of Moneta, the Muse in the earlier version, implies that he dismisses an interpretive poet or storyteller, in his words, the ‘intellectual monopolist’, as subjugating and enervating the audience’s mind. As the ‘reader-surrogate’ (Bennett), the dreamer-narrator watches the scenes without a mediating frame of thought, thus placed in a state of uncertainty and doubt which indicates the depth of Keats’s respect for individual freedom. Such politics of reading – for convenience, we may describe it as egalitarian – underlie the structure of the dream-vision in which a poet is to discover a ‘wondrous lesson’ by ‘plunging into abstract images’ (Letters, i, 369) taken, as they are, from a wider world of history than his mind. Keats once wrote in a letter – with an allusion to Wordsworth’s habit of making ‘a false coinage’ out of his speculations and deceiving himself – that ‘Every man has his speculations. [. . .] Many a man can travel to the very bourne of Heaven,
and yet want confidence to put down his halfseeing' (Letters, i, 223–24). The second ‘Hyperion’ sets an example to other poets who offer their speculations to the public; it attempts to re-define the poet-reader relationship in protest against the rise of a subjective poetry with obtrusive messages for a nation.

This discussion of the poem’s narrative style gives a fresh insight into the way in which Keats faced the problem of belatedness, a focal point of its criticism. From a cultural-psychological point of view, his solution may be sinister. Commenting on the scene of the poet-dreamer suffering under the ‘load of this eternal quietude’, Hartman argues that Keats is there dangerously conscious of being a middle-class Cockney author without a true gift for prophecy. While witnessing the giant agonies of the divine characters, the poet first feels ‘increasingly empty’, then ‘more of an ephebe than ever’, and finally of ‘a child-poet in epic Wonderland’, Hartman writes, concluding that ‘he cannot find a true self-objectification’; making a ‘flight from subjectivity and striving for Epic’ thus only left a sense of shame and perplexity (‘Spectral Symbolism’, p. 69). The scene in question, however, can be read more positively than as expressing the burden of authorship. In terms of Keats’s struggle with his precursors, Bloom describes it as, rather, ‘a last vision of himself’ which is ‘granted [...] in the splendor of an ultimate isolation’, a sign of his now standing apart from Milton and Wordsworth; it demonstrates that Keats gives perfect expression to his faith in the senses in a form ‘so sublime as to be unmatchable in humanistic poetry’. This faith, though rooted in his temperament, came from the young Milton and the young Wordsworth, according to Bloom. ‘If Keats purges it from himself,’ he argues, ‘he purges it also from the earlier splendors of his Great Originals’ (The Anxiety of Influence, p. 128). Yet Keats’s successful isolation from these poets, we should add, can be measured not only by his manner of expressing an aspect of humanism. His achievements in the poem include the workings of Moneta’s mental theatre, which were also a result of the poet’s interaction with Milton and Wordsworth, as we have seen; this mechanism takes its driving force from his peculiar approach to the greatness of the past, that is, transforming the fact of his belatedness into a principle integral to his poetic attitude and art form. Under the ‘burden of the narrative style’, his first-person hero begins to assimilate democratic sentiments on salvation as an element which is latent in the admirable objectivity of the ‘old Poets’
and can appear only to a poet of modern times. The commemoration of this process in a subjective poem of epic scope is a way that enables the author to emulate Wordsworth at the same time as keeping a safe distance from Milton.

Thus, the dreamer-poet’s final solitude announces the emergence of a poet who sublimates the ‘old Poets’ in a manner only possible in subjective days; in this light, rather than exposing a sense of shame or perplexity, his load – the equivalent of ‘the burden of the mystery’ – is transfigured into something that can compensate him abundantly. This is a conviction heralded by the opening scene of the poem. Wandering into an arbour, the hero finds

\[\text{a feast of summer fruits,}\]
\[\text{Which, nearer seen, seem’d refuse of a meal}\]
\[\text{By angel tasted, or our mother Eve [ . . ].}\]

(i, 29–31)

Symbolically, the remaining opportunities for originality seem scarce and insignificant at first sight, but the realisation soon follows that they are full enough for a sense of satisfaction: ‘Still was more plenty than the fabled horn | Thrice emptied could pour forth’ (i, 35–36). After gorging on the food, he drinks from ‘a cool vessel of transparent juice’ (i, 42), to enter a new stage of poetic awareness and practice: ‘That full draught is parent of my theme’ (i, 46).

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Notes

1 The Letters of John Keats: 1814–1821, ed. by Hyder Edward Rollins, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), i, 224–25. All further references to Keats’s letters are included in the text.

6 The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, ed. by E. de Selincourt. 2nd edn, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), ll. 10–11. All further references to Wordsworth’s poems except The Excursion are taken from this edition and given in the text.

7 Selected Prose of John Hamilton Reynolds, ed. by Leonidas M. Jones (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), p. 80; italics in original. All further references to this work, abbreviated as SP, are included in the text.

8 The Complete Works of William Hazlitt, ed. by P. P. Howe, 21 vols (London: Dent, 1930–34), iv, 271. All further references to this work, abbreviated as CW, are included in the text.


20 Geoffrey H. Hartman, 'Spectral Symbolism and Authorial Self in Keats's
"Hyperion"' in The Fate of Reading and Other Essays (Chicago: University of