Keats's Epic Design in *Hyperion*

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The fact that Keats left *Hyperion* unfinished has naturally given rise to speculations as to what he intended the completed poem to be. These speculations range between two extremes: Ernest de Selincourt's restrictive estimate that it would have been made up of only four books, including a minimum of incidents, and centered on the meeting of Apollo and Hyperion—and Edward B. Hungerford's reconstruction of a comprehensive plot, leading to Saturn's reign in the British Isles, describing "the progress of Poesy" and making room for prophecies. The reason for these discrepancies is that the evidence as to Keats's intentions is slight, and mostly external rather than contained within the poem. The most precise indications are provided by Keats's friend Woodhouse, who asserts that "the poem if completed would have treated of the dethronement of Hyperion, the former god of the Sun, by Apollo—and incidentally of those of Oceanus by Neptune, of Saturn by Jupiter, etc. . . , and of the war of the Giants for Saturn's re-establishment with other events of which we have but very dark hints in the mythological poets of Greece and Rome. In fact, the incidents would have been pure creations of the poet's brain." But, even if we assume that Woodhouse's recollection was accurate, Keats may well have limited or otherwise transformed his ambitions when he came to actual composition, or during the course of it. The same remark applies to the letter (of January 1818) in which he says that "the nature of *Hyperion* will lead me to treat it in a more naked and grecian Manner [than *Endymion*]," and that "the Apollo in Hyperion, being a foreseeing God will shape his actions like one," instead of being "led on, like Buonaparte, by circumstances”—although this shows that the question of the sort of action needed for the poem was on his mind some ten months before he actually got to work on it. We also have the publishers' advertisement to the poem which states that "the poem was intended to have been of equal length with *Endymion*, but the


2. Quoted in De Selincourt, p. 486.

reception given to that work discouraged the author from proceeding.” But their statement is much weakened by Keats’s own comment on one of the copies of the book: “I had no part in this; I was ill at the time.” The advertisement gives no valid proof that he had actually intended to go to the length of ten books.  

We cannot be sure, then, that Keats started to work with a definite narrative outline, however sketchy, fixed in his mind. On the other hand, it is impossible to believe that, after having thought about the poem for months, he embarked on his task with no idea of what it was to be about. And, in fact, there is some internal evidence as to his intentions: there are some details (mostly in his handling of the mythological elements) that are significant as clues, and have not, I believe, been fully explored. The purpose of this article is definitely not to re-construct the hypothetical structure of a poem never written, but to indicate that Keats, at certain points, gave himself opportunities for interesting developments; and this may enable us to gain a clearer view of the difficulties that led him first to recast the poem, and then to leave it aside altogether.

A few lines in the speech of Oceanus (II, 191-201) form a compact but precise cosmogony, leading up to the creation of the characters:

“From Chaos and parental Darkness came  
Light, the first fruit of that intestine broil,  
That sullen ferment, which for wondrous ends  
Was ripening in itself. The ripe hour came,  
And with it Light, and Light, engendering  
Upon its own producer, forthwith touch’d  
The whole enormous matter into Life.  
Upon that very hour, our parentage,  
The Heavens and the Earth, were manifest:  
Then thou first born, and we the giant race,  
Found ourselves ruling new and beauteous realms.”

The passage is thematically relevant, since it explicitly illustrates the central idea of the necessity of evolution. It exemplifies Keats’s skill in diversifying and modernizing, quite unobtrusively, the traditional genetic metaphor (begotten and conceived) by suggesting, and contrasting, slow organic development, and change in a flash through lightning. It demonstrates his intention to fashion a complete epic, at least in miniature—not necessarily on a grand scale, but with all its cosmic background, with the reminder of the origins that is essential to myth. Incidentally, it also provides some indications as to his selection

4. See De Selincourt, p. 487.
and treatment of the "sources." For those lines (as for most of the basic mythological data) the most likely sources are: Hesiod's *Theogony*, of course, which he knew in Cooke's translation—and Hyginus' *Auctores Mythographi Latini*, since we know that he bought a copy of it when he was at work on his poem. He would naturally supplement this information with the help of such classical dictionaries as Leprièvre's or Baldwin's, which gathered much more miscellaneous information, but for his description of the origins he is unlikely to have taken the trouble to reassemble genealogies by comparing scattered articles. We see that his Genesis has little to do with Hesiod, the origin of the traditional version, who makes Chaos the single source of the universe—"of all the origin" (in Cooke's words). He gives, in fact, a simplified version of Hyginus, whose successive stages are: "Ex Caligine, Chaos"—then "Ex Chao et Caligine, Nox, Dies, Erebus et Aether"—then, "Ex Aethere et Die, Terra, Caelum et Mare."\(^5\) Keats drops the first stage, unless we are to take the adjective "parental," used for Darkness (Caligo) and clearly related to the meaning of its Latin origin "parere" to describe the feminine role in procreation, as referring the reader not merely forward to Light, but also backward to Chaos (Darkness being first the mother and later the wife of Chaos). In the second stage, Light (Dies) is treated as the male element "engendering" upon its mother Darkness: the simplification here consists in using the basic contrast Night/Day, and fusing "Nox" (the sister) with the synonymous Darkness already given. As to the product, Life, it includes within itself the two opposed elements, male and female, of Heaven and Earth. The first of these two elements appears in the poem as Coelus, and also as that ancient figure, "starry Uranus," named by Saturn (\(\pi, 134\)); the other appears as Tellus, invoked by Hyperion (\(i, 246\)), and as "the Mother of the Gods," that is, here, of the Titans (\(\pi, 389\)).

It is well known that the following generation is a mixed group. Keats brings together some legitimate Titans (born of the union of Earth with Heaven) and some Giants who have the same origin, but in a different way, since (according to Hesiod and the common tradition) they sprang up from the Earth when she was fertilized by the blood of Uranus after he had been castrated by his rebel son, Saturn. Keats cannot have done so by mistake, since both Hesiod and Hyginus make the distinction, and Leprièvre (in the article "Gigantes") warns

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his readers that the Giants are often "ignorantly confounded" with the older race. The confusion was deliberate, and can be explained in two complementary ways. First, the gory incident of Saturn emasculating his father, which was the cause of the difference, is left out as inconsistent with the tenor of the poem. Then, as we shall see when we come to Enceladus, Keats intended to treat the two different actions in which Titans and Giants were supposed to have been engaged (both rebellions against the supremacy of the Olympians) as two distinct episodes in one and the same action. In any case, there had already been some amount of confusion among ancient mythographers (Iapetus, for instance, being a Titan for Hesiod and a Giant for Hyginus), and that gave him plenty of freedom.

Whether Keats actually started from the genealogy of Hyginus or not, we can use it again as a convenient starting-point. Hyginus makes a simple distinction between two generations—the Titans being the sons and daughters of Earth and Heaven, and the Giants coming later as the offspring of Earth, but engendered by Tartarus (who was one of the brothers of the Titans, but was not retained by Keats). Keats's cast, then, includes four Titans proper: Hyperion, Gyges, Briareus, and Atlas. We also find five characters of the same parentage, but not described by Hyginus as Titans: Saturnus (who is not the first-born of the race in the legend), Dolor, Oceanus, Themis, and Ops (Hyginus being his authority for substituting her for Hesiod's Rhea as the wife of Saturn and the mother of the Olympians). Moneta belongs to the group; she is given by Hyginus as the mother of the Muses, instead of the more traditional Mnemosyne, but will only be used in The Fall of Hyperion. Among the Giants, Keats selects: Typhon, Iapetus, Enceladus and Phorcus. He also adds Porphyryon, to whom Hyginus had ascribed a different origin as the son of Night and Erebus. It may be remarked that four out of the names that have appeared so far (namely Dolor, Porphyryon, Enceladus, and Moneta) are not given in Hesiod, who besides relates Atlas to a later breed (l. 771 in Cooke). On the other hand, Keats did make use of Hesiod, directly or indirectly. To complete his list of high-sounding names at the beginning of Book ii, he adds some Titans that are unrecorded by Hyginus but mentioned in The Theogony (between lines 215 and 238 in Cooke's translation): Thea (the wife of Hyperion), Coeus, Phoebe, Creus, Cottus, and Tethys—and it is Mnemosyne that is for him, as for Hesiod, destined to be the mother of the Muses. Phorcus is called "sea-born" (π, 385), which describes his origin according to Hesiod (l. 364 in Cooke) but not according to Hyginus. Clymene (who has in the poem an important
speech in support of Oceanus) is listed by Hyginus as one of the fifty Nereids, and by Hesiod (I. 550 in Cooke) as an Oceanid (one of the daughters of Oceanus and Tethys): Keats describes her sobbing in the lap of Tethys (II, 76), and she calls Oceanus “Father” (II, 252). The most significant change, however, concerns Asia: like Clymene, she is a Nereid for Hyginus and an Oceanid for Hesiod, but Keats gives her, without any mythological warrant, the status of an original Titaness.

All the Titans of the poem form in a sense a coherent group and they strongly feel the tie of brotherhood. Keats differs in this from Hesiod, followed by most of the others, who shows us Cottus, Briareus, and Gyges fighting on the side of Jupiter against their brothers and becoming their gaolers in Tartarus. But the Titans are also facing a critical situation, and under the strain the unity of the group is beginning to disintegrate. The poem opens at a definite stage in an action that has already started. A battle has been fought and lost, and it is briefly evoked. Saturn bitterly remembers the “bursting forth” of the new power (I, 104); Thea alludes to his loss of the thunder (I, 60), and Coelus to his tumble from the throne (I, 322); Enceladus scornfully reminds the old Monarch of the Waves of the “scalding in the seas” he received (II, 320). The Titans are scattered, “self-hid,” or “prison bound” (I, 161)—for some of the most formidable ones are already imprisoned and chained under ground. Still, all hope is not lost: if Saturn is stunned and bewildered, and Oceanus in favour of peace and the acceptance of the new dominion, Hyperion retains his power and Enceladus will soon appear ready to resume the fight. The parallelism between the second book of Hyperion and the Council in Hell that opens Paradise Lost (even to the resemblance in inspiration with the speeches of Moloch and Belial) is too obvious to be stressed, and the theme developed from the situation is widely different. But it remains a situation of which Keats, with the precedent of Milton’s twelve books in mind, had no reason to despair, if his project was to write a poem on an epic scale. It is true that the Titans have now no real chance of victory, but the main issue could never have been in doubt: the fixed nature of the myth gave Keats no more scope for that sort of suspense than Milton’s religious scheme. In other respects, he enjoyed more freedom than his predecessor. The new gods do not have the haughty self-assurance of monotheistic omnipotence: the angry voice of Saturn “made quake / The rebel three”—that is Jupiter, Neptune, and probably Pluto (I, 146-7). Jupiter is still insecure, and without experience: his lightning “in unpractised hands / Scorches and burns our once
serene domain" (Thea, i, 62-3). This is obviously suggested by the legendary misadventure of young Phaeton when he tried to drive the sun-chariot of his father Helius; but Keats may also have had in mind the Jupiter of Aeschylus’ Prometheus Bound, who is at first arbitrary and cruel, intoxicated by his new power, but is later converted to more moderation and wisdom. The main asset of the new gods (as Apollo will demonstrate) is their capacity for growth and their freedom from the bonds of selfhood. Even the older race is not rigidly committed to an attitude of opposition: they differ from Milton’s Satan and his followers in their absence of rebellious pride, and in not being forced to choose between hopeless resistance and unconditional surrender. There were opportunities for finely shaded and significant contrasts.

To emphasize the theme of the gradual passage to higher forms of life, Keats connects the present with the past. Coelus, the primeval God, is heard, not seen:

“I am but a voice;
My life is but the life of winds and tides...” (i, 340-341)

His whisper is “low and solemn,” slow and tentative; it is painstakingly articulated according to the laws of speech, but retains a non-human quality. He is not individualized into a mythical character, because his existence is hardly disengaged from his being as one of the natural elements. Keats’s achievement here is similar to that of Shelley in Prometheus Unbound who presents the Earth, through such ambiguous phrases as “stony veins” (Act i, 153), as having a status half-way between a cosmic force and an organic being with the gift of consciousness. Coelus has not been overthrown and mutilated, because he has recognized the wonders of the new life that came out of him and went beyond him: he has yielded precedence to the oldest (Saturn) and to the brightest of his sons (Hyperion). But now his dim foreknowledge cannot take him further, and he hopes that his sons will retain their power, mistaking their relative superiority to him for an absolute. He sees their new susceptibility to the disturbing emotions of mortals (fear, hope, and wrath) as the accidental cause of a temporary crisis, not for what it is: the mere sign that they are being outstripped by a necessary evolution.

When Oceanus asserts that the Titans are “beyond that Heaven and Earth / In form and shape compact and beautiful” (π, 208-209)—when Saturn calls them “the first-born of all shap’d and palpable Gods” (π, 153)—both implicitly describe their parents as relatively formless and diffuse. But they differ in their reactions to their present
plight. Oceanus accepts the idea that he must be superseded on account of “the eternal law / That first in beauty should be first in might” (π, 228-229). He preaches a conception of sovereignty based on stoicism: not grumbling resignation to the inevitable, but joyful acceptance of what is worthier. He yields to the beauty of Neptunus, the young God of the seas. And, as he has moved beyond the temptation of a struggle, he can only play (as he does here in the Council) a choric part in the action.

Saturn is bound to be of a more central importance, because of his very blindness to the realities of the situation. The effect of Keats's admirable description of him at the beginning of the poem is to convey the vision of a character slow, massive, roughly hewn, powerful in repose like one of Michelangelo's huge unfinished statues. He is more individualized than Coelus, but he is still connected by the subtle links of the metaphors with the life of stones and oaks. He is great, but he lacks the litheness of movement and the grace of form that are requisites for the beautiful. His reactions, in his first speech, are subtly balanced by Keats: they reveal his majesty and his feebleness, his tragic despair and the complete incomprehension of what befalls him, all the intensity of genuine emotion with an element of self-pity carried at times to petulant querulousness. This last note is much stronger in the revised version of the speech (in The Fall of Hyperion), but it is already perceptible here.

What he cannot see is conveyed to the reader by the means of dramatic irony. When Saturn evokes what is for him the golden age of his happy reign (ι, 107-111) or when Enceladus is nostalgic for “the days of peace and slumberous calm” that are fled (π, 335), we are taken very far from the world ruled by Hesiod's wily and cruel tyrant: to a world of pastoral simplicity and harmony where the old Gods exercise a benevolent, paternalistic, and absolute domination. But there is also, and not merely in the adjective “slumberous,” the suggestion of slow, torpid life—something of what, in Blakean terms, would be called “the vegetable existence.” There is a striking similarity between this and Shelley's brief description of Saturn's reign (in Prometheus Unbound, ι, iv, 34ff.):

“Such the state
Of the earth's primal spirits beneath his sway,
As the calm joy of flowers and living leaves
Before the wind or sun has withered them,
And semivital worms. But he refused
The birthright of their being, Knowledge, power. . . .”
Shelley's intentions are more directly political than Keats's, and his faith is revolutionary, not evolutionary, so that the trust placed by Prometheus in Jupiter will prove a mistake, and the new God will simply be a tyrannical version of the old Father-figure. But in *Hyperion*, too, the reign of Saturn is represented as a stage, not the goal: Life must be "touched" and quickened by another Light.

Saturn is unable to acknowledge this truth because he has become so absorbed in the duties and pleasures of his "peaceful sway" that he has identified his self with the exercise of power. The core of his speech is this brief passage:

"I have left
My strong identity, my real self,
Somewhere between the throne, and where I sit,
Here in this spot of earth." (i, 113-116)

The very words used by Keats connect the theme of his poem with one of the deepest trends in his thought, the meditation on identity. Two brief references will suffice. As early as 22 November 1817 (*Letters*, i, 184), he opposed the Men of Genius, who "have not any individuality, any determined character," to the Men of Power, who are "the top and head of those who have a proper self." On 27 October 1818, he writes that "the poetical character itself" (that at least to which he belongs) is distinguished from "the Wordsworthian or egotistical sublime" in having "no self," "no identity" (*Letters*, i, 386-387). The same letter shows that the theme of *Hyperion* is at that time very much on his mind: "Might I not at that very instant [have] been cogitating on the Characters of Saturn and Ops?" And the sentence: "I am ambitious of doing the world some good" has some relevance to the Genius of Apollo. The fault of Saturn is not merely that he is selfish, but that he is an egotist: he lacks the "poetic" or imaginative faculty of going out of himself, of stepping beyond the dull round of the world he knew and ruled, on to a brighter and richer future. And the cause of his deficiency is that he has allowed his nature to be restricted to that of a Man of Power: his limitation, as Oceanus points out to him, is that he is "the King, / And only blind from sheer supremacy" (π, 184-185). He still has some power, for his threats make Jupiter "quake," but he can only use it unimaginatively, in a cyclic and not in a progressive way: the only course of action he is able to conceive is to destroy in order to recreate the same world out of another Chaos (π, 141-146).

The future that is left for him in the poem must depend on his capacity to change. There is no sign of evolution in what Keats has
left us. Saturn finds no clue in the "old spirit-leaved book" saved from "the shores of darkness," which is the basis of his power (II, 130-135), and he suffers himself to be acclaimed as war-leader. It is clear that he is doomed to defeat. But the final destruction or enslavement of the god, who is hoary and respectable for all his blindness, is not likely to be part of the conclusion intended: it would run counter to the general tendency in the poem to minimize violence. It is tempting, then, to retain E. B. Hungerford's suggestion that Saturn's destined end was to be the ruler of the Western part of the earth. This conclusion could be sanctioned by some elements in the legend concerning the Titans. Keats, for instance, may have been impressed by Jacob Bryant's contention (in his Ancient Mythology, iv, 77) that the story of their being imprisoned underground is based on a misinterpretation of the word "darkness," which must be taken to mean, not "the Kingdom of night," but "the realms of the setting sun to the West." Besides, an important passage in Virgil's Aeneid shows us Saturn exiled by his victorious son, but allowed to give laws to the Latins and to become the founder of Roman civilization. That Keats knew his Virgil is obvious, and Saturn's evocation in the poem (I, 110) of his "peaceful sway above man's harvesting" seems to condense Virgil's description of the king who "ruled his people in tranquil peace" and first taught them to "garner the fruits of the earth" (Aeneid, viii, 325 and 317). Asia, who is obviously intended by Keats to play her part in the rise of Eastern civilization, would find her natural counterpart in Saturn and his Western kingdom. On the other hand, there seems to be no real support for Hungerford's further suggestion that Keats meant to exploit the late developments of the legend that make Saturn King of the British Isles; and this would make his myth uncharacteristically patriotic. The main point, however, is that any conclusion that saves Saturn for further use must be preceded by his change of heart, his getting rid of his obsession with power, in any of the ways ranging from stoic submission to real enlightenment. In describing the god's earlier attitude, Keats is in no way "preparing us for a later Saturn," "fit to be the ruler of a Golden Age."6 The infancy of the world is not its future. Keats's prospect is not benevolent despotism: it must involve greater responsibility for mankind, another extension of "will, in action free, companionship" (II, 210), a further advance along the road on which the Titans have already made one step forward. Saturn's values can only be retained (to use a metaphor from a dif-

6. For the passage under discussion, see Hungerford, p. 155.
ferent spiritual context) in the sense in which the old Mosaic Law has been preserved and transcended in the new dispensation.

Asia and Clymene have the same origin in the legend, but here they are clearly not cut out for similar parts. Clymene brings her timid support to her father Oceanus’ plea for peace and acceptance. She relates that she was at one time making melody “with poor skill” in a shell, and was of a sudden transported as well as put to shame by the “new blissful golden melody” and a sweet voice crying the name of Apollo. What she felt was “joy and grief at once” in the experience of “a living death”: a joy so intense that it is also pain, the pain connected with the dying into a new life (π, 262-299). What has happened to her can be sketched largely in terms taken from Keats’s letters: she has known “a regular stepping of the Imagination towards a Truth” (Letters, i, 218; 30 January 1818); she has not really seen Apollo, but she has come within an inch of “a Vision in the form of Youth, a Shadow of reality to come” (Letters, i, 185; 22 November 1817). She has for a moment overstepped the bounds of her natural self, and caught a glimpse of an unknown Beauty as Truth, which reconciles her to the loss of the old life. But she is too weak to act, to live up to her vision, or even to convey it with enough power to convince Saturn; she can only provide a more sentimental counterpoint to her father’s choric part, and there is no evidence here that Keats intended to use her later in a role of mediation as the wife of Iapetus and mother of Prometheus.

But Keats had something more definite in mind for Asia. Promoting the young Oceanid to the rank of an Earth-born Titaness, he also throws her into relief in different ways. She is truly gigantic: it is she “Who cost her mother Tellus keener pangs, / Though feminine, than any of her sons.” Her complexion is exotic (“dusky face”). The father ascribed to her is unknown to classical or to any other mythology: “most enormous Caf.” De Selincourt is probably right in suggesting that the name is derived from the fabulous mountain Kaf surrounding the world (in The Arabian Nights), and it fits in with other associations. For Asia, instead of being absorbed in the present plight of her race, is looking forward in hope to her future: she is “prophesying” in her mind, contemplating in imagination her “Palm-shaded temples and high rival fanes.” Her cult will prevail in a region placed first (in a cancelled line) between Tigris and Ganges “and far north”—then, more precisely, “By Oxus, or in Ganges’ sacred isles,” that is in the area in and around Cashmere, connecting India, Tibet and Siberia. That is, in fact, and for similar reasons, the “Indian Caucasus” which Shelley
made the scene of the trials and triumphs of Prometheus, and in which a strong tradition (recorded in J. S. Bailly among others) sees the original homeland of mankind. Asia's role seems due to be limited to one half or part of the world, but the rise of her "rival" religions (Buddhism separating from Hinduism?) symbolizes Eastern culture, as opposed to the Western one over which Saturn will probably preside (see π, 52-64). Although Keats at that point seems to have no definite and concrete idea of the way to exploit his own clues, he is heading towards a conclusion conceived in the spirit of the tradition that makes the Titans, defeated and then reconciled to the loss of godhead, the leaders of mankind on the way of progress.

This means that Asia, like Saturn, will have to be kept in reserve and more or less aloof from the actual fighting—whereas the militant part is obviously intended for Enceladus and, in a different sense, Hyperion. Enceladus appears immediately after Asia:

> Now tiger-passion'd, lion-thoughted, wroth,
> He meditated, plotted, and even now
> Was hurling mountains in that second war,
> Not long delay'd, that scar'd the younger Gods
> To hide themselves in forms of beast and bird. (π, 68-72)

This passage gives important indications as to Keats's narrative design. The fusion of the Giants with the Titans into one group and within a single action remains consistent with the presence of two distinct phases in the war. The episode of the second war here alluded to belongs traditionally to the War of the Giants against Jupiter, when (in Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, v, 321ff., and in the words of Sandys) Typhon, "from earth's gloomy entrails rais'd," was victorious for a time and put to flight all the gods—so that "Jove turn'd himself . . . into a ram," while "Bacchus a goat, Apollo was a crow." The son of Earth and Tartarus, called Typhaeus in Cooke's Hesiod and Ovid's Latin, is known as Typhon in Hyginus' catalogue, in Sandys, and in Keats, where he is described (π, 21-2) as being one of the "brawniest in assault," but already "pent in regions of laborious breath." Enceladus here takes up his role, and also acquires some of the aura of Atlas, whose fate to bear the world on his shoulders as the punishment for his rebellion against Jove is recalled by Hyginus (in his Fable 150) : to words of peace, Enceladus would prefer the Atlantean burden of "world on world upon these shoulders piled" (π, 313). The wish is intended to be prophetic, for the Giant (not mentioned in Ovid's brief tale) is certain to be remembered by all the readers of Keats as the one
mentioned in Virgil's *Aeneid* (iii, 578ff.), who was scorched by the lightning of Jupiter and buried under Mount Aetna, and whose convulsions are the cause of earthquakes.

Although Enceladus plays the part of Moloch in Milton and gives his sentence for open war, he is far from ignoble and brutish. He used to be "tame and mild / As grazing ox" (ii, 66-67), and he regrets the old Saturnian days of peaceful pastoral innocence; but Keats's comparison also implies bovine stubbornness rather than mental agility. He clings to the past, he cannot reconcile himself to the loss of his power (however benignly exercised); he is stung into fury both by his sense of injustice suffered and his lack of imagination, and prepares to rush into a desperate fight.

For the second rebellion has not yet begun. The passage I have quoted is often taken to apply to the past: and there is in fact some inevitable ambiguity in the use of the past tense to describe an action which in all its phases (past and future) already belongs to the past from the standpoint of the narrator. But it is clear that the thoughts of Enceladus are turned to "plotting," towards the future—that he is now in his imagination anticipating his future actions, "even now" hurling rocks in the second war soon to take place ("not long delay'd"). It is of course impossible to know what Keats intended to make of it, and in what form (narrative or report): in fact, the problems involved in the treatment of the scenes of action were certainly among the difficulties he was discovering as he went along. On the other hand, de Selincourt's objection—that the episode here alluded to must be outside the scope of the narrative, because otherwise Keats would not have thus spoilt the interest—disregards the epic practice ("Sing, Muse" etc.) of stating the outline of a theme to be later developed. In any case, Keats is giving Enceladus the nature and the stature of a heroic leader in the fight, and leading all those who have read Virgil to expect for him the fate that awaits violent rebellion against the laws of the higher Gods.

This is not inconsistent with the position occupied by Hyperion as the real protagonist on his side of the quarrel. It is clear that Keats had moved towards the subject of his poem by starting from an interest in Apollo (that is, from his conception of what was to be the spiritual climax). Apollo is the "lute-voiced brother" of Endymion whom Keats intended to sing later. His letter to Haydon, in which he expresses his intention to write the new poem "in a more naked and grecian Manner" than *Endymion*, also states that "the hero of the written tale being mortal is led on, like Buonaparte, by circumstances; whereas the
Apollo in Hyperion being a fore-seeing God will shape his actions like one. But I am counting etc. . . . (Letters i, 207; 23 January 1818). The remark also makes it clear that Apollo’s inner experience and deification must result, not in a simple vision, but in real action. It is true that Keats, as he confesses at the end of the paragraph just quoted through his allusion to the beginning of a well-known proverb, is here counting his eggs before they are hatched, since the poem is not yet begun; but it is hard to believe that he could actually have started from Hyperion without some idea, however vague, as to how the two would meet. Hyperion’s importance is justified because he is Apollo’s natural counterpart in the older generation. At the beginning of the poem, he has retained his kingdom and his brightness. But he feels threatened, he is assailed by phantoms, and he discovers the limit of his power: the hours refuse to obey him and to rise before the time appointed for dawn. Even a god cannot bend the iron laws of necessity, and his impatience betrays his trouble. He is no longer at home in what he describes as the “haven of my rest” (i, 235), “my centre of repose” (i, 243). Old Coelus is pathetically both right and wrong in lamenting his loss of the “unruffled” equanimity that is for him the attribute of divinity. Within the perspective Keats is building up for our ironic apprehension of the Titans’ fate, he is right in relation to the Saturnian past, and wrong in so far as Apollo will soon demonstrate that unrest and pain are the conditions for the accession to a higher divinity. But, at the moment, Hyperion’s reaction is purely negative: he is self-centered, concerned with power, full of fear and anger, and determined to fight. It is not likely that Keats intended to involve him in a conflict for which the legends offered no material. On the other hand, as W. J. Bate remarks, Hyperion is “the only character in the poem capable of tragic development.” But the development could be treated in an original way. The position of Hyperion—between Oceanus (who has already accepted his destiny) and an enfeebled Saturn on the one hand, and, on the other, Enceladus who seems committed to senseless action—gave Keats a golden opportunity, that of transforming the traditional climax of the epic, taking the form of a battle, into something internal and connected with the theme of the poem: the necessity of change and the wisdom of accepting it. The very vagueness of Hyperion as a mythic character was an asset: he was largely a name, he was often confused with his son Helios (to whom

the palace described properly belongs), he was in fact ready to merge with a later development of the Sun-god myth and to be absorbed in his successor.

At the beginning of Book III, there is a breakdown in the continuity of the narrative, and the poem rushes to a premature "deification" of Apollo from which nothing derives in terms of action. Bate is probably right in believing "that these lines were written only after Keats had decided not to go on with the poem . . . and that they were jotted down to get the section off his chest and to provide, to any eye that looked at the poem in its present state, some hint of what lay ahead."8 But this does not mean that Keats is losing his grasp upon his theme in the abstract. The theme had already been foreshadowed at the beginning of the poem in the description of Thea's face:

But oh! how unlike marble was that face:  
How beautiful, if sorrow had not made  
Sorrow more beautiful than Beauty's self. (I, 34-36)

This beauty, not cold as marble but heightened by sorrow, leads straight to Walter Pater's famous description of La Giocanda as the embodiment of "a beauty wrought from within upon the flesh," "into which the soul with all its maladies has passed," "sweeping together ten thousand experiences." The difference is striking between Pater's aesthetic complacency and the sorrow of Thea, but the parallel can help us to realize the conception of beauty in the full awareness of suffering that Keats had set out to present not only in one of the defeated but through the victory of the younger god. The description of Apollo, his unrest, his tears, his insistent questioning, form a clear thematic contrast with the placid self-certainty of the Titans before their decline. He also differs from their now fallen condition in his eagerness to learn and change, his lack of self-centered concern: his ignorance is "aching," yet "fearless" (III, 107). He is then ready, as they are not, for the revelation that comes to him through silent empathy, through looking into the eyes of Mnemosyne:

"Knowledge enormous makes a God of me.  
Names, deeds, gray legends, dire events, rebellions,  
Majesties, sovran voices, agonies,  
Creations and destroyings, all at once  
Pour into the wide hollows of my brain,  
And deify me, as if some blithe wine  

Or bright elixir peerless I had drunk,
And so become immortal." (III, 113-120)

His chaotic perception of what is stored in immortal Memory also includes a foreknowledge of events still buried in the womb of time. It carries images of disorder and misery, the cycles of life and death, of power and destruction, including incidents of legendary rebellions that might be included in the loose structure of an epic. What it does not convey, however, is the sense of godlike serenity derived from the apprehension of order beyond confusion.

We may pause at this stage to reflect on Keats's position when he put his first poem aside. With the exception of Hungerford (whose interesting speculations seem to me to go wild at an early stage), critics agree that Keats had resolved to keep down the elements of traditional epic narrative to a minimum. Douglas Bush voices a consensus when he says that Keats had rejected the plan he had sketched for Woodhouse: "his final plan avoided epic battles by starting after the defeat of the Titans and referring to war only in allusive retrospect. . . . how he would have ended the poem we can only guess."9 What I have tried to show, to qualify this view, is that in the poem itself we find some deliberate and significant rehandling of the legendary elements, leading up to the inclusion of a single warlike episode (involving Enceladus), which would prepare the way for peaceful developments (Saturn and Asia) after the fusion of the old world and the new (Hyperion and Apollo). We do not know whether Keats's intentions had taken the form of a definite pattern, nor is it to be expected that everyone will agree as to what precise directions the signposts point to: nothing short of the completed poem could carry full conviction. What matters, however, is that Keats had the conception, however dim, of a fairly elaborate narrative. That he would have met with difficulties in the handling of his material is clear, and I shall return to that point later. But he had also been confronted with another, and deeper, difficulty in his treatment of Apollo's transformation, and this is what led him later to recast the poem in *The Fall of Hyperion*.

The third book of the earlier version is clearly related to the central problem in the Odes soon to be written. Keats, in the Odes, is facing the pains of personal experience, and he is learning the proper use of the imagination: not as the means of a flight to the haven of a

dream-world, but as a way of looking at reality and of expressing through art the sense, both confused and unmistakable, of an ultimate harmony between reality and values. In *Hyperion*, the movement of the discovery had to be reversed. The poet's way is from experience to an apprehension of "beauty as truth"; he is a child of Time whose imagination (to use Coleridge's phrase) perceives "the translucence of the eternal in the temporal." Apollo, on the contrary, is a god who has the gift of natural beauty. He feels the limitation of his rounded perfection, and the revelation that enlarges his consciousness gives him the knowledge of Time, and raises him to a higher beauty, alive to evil and suffering. But, as a god, he cannot know the gropings of human experience and the fitfulness of our perceptions: his vision must be given him in a flash and with full certainty.

What Keats attempts in *The Fall of Hyperion* is to clarify the distinction between the poet's progress and the god's insight. As Irene H. Chayes puts it, "the subjective preparation of the poet" and "the process of objective poetic creation" are combined in one poem, but also kept separate as taking place "in two different phases and at two different levels." By inserting the narrative in the framework of a vision, Keats could isolate, in the induction, the problem of the nature of genuine poetry: he could describe as an initiation the existential quest leading up to the truth, until the truth could be embodied in the myth. In fact, the point where the connection can be made is reached when the poet, having passed all the tests, sees the face of Moneta unveiled. He feels a new power of vision: "Whereon there grew / A power within me of enormous Ken, / To see as a God sees" (*Fall of Hyperion*, i, 302-304). The narrative, having been thus framed, is now resumed, and opens again on the image of Saturn and the compassion of Thea. What has happened, however, is indicated by the striking similarity between the words describing the present situation and those used by Apollo in the earlier version: through his "power enormous" to see "as a God sees," the poet has taken up the same vantage point outside the narrative as Apollo had within it. Kenneth Muir is right in saying that Keats had now "used up the climax of the first poem in the first canto of the second version." In a sense, this is a change for the better.


11. "The Meaning of Hyperion," p. 120.
since it uses the framework for a clarification of roles. At the end of the induction, Keats is ready to move out of the dream and to give shape of his vision of the Titans, of the "gray legends, dire events, rebellions," which properly belong to him more than to Apollo. But, in "enormous Ken," the emphatic vagueness of the adjective here repeated betrays the permanent difficulty to achieve imaginative concreteness. Besides, he needs a new climax to be followed by Apollo's action, and he has come no closer to the steady certainty on which he could rest it. He had felt earlier, in May 1818, that he was in one of the "dark passages of the mind" where "we see not the balance of good and evil" and can only feel with Wordsworth "the burden of the mystery" (Letters, i, 281; 3 May 1818 and ii, 19; 31 December 1818). He has now twice attempted to force his way out of the darkness, but he has not come within reach of the truth he should be able to grasp and control. And yet, it is only from the clear perception of harmony beyond chaos that he can develop his capacity to use the dramatic form, to step out of the subjective world and revel in the interplay of opposite natures. So, he must leave the reader with a reflection of his uncertainties, and cannot give birth to an objectively realized mythic figure, the Sun-god, certain of his wisdom, confident in the prophetic quality of his insight, and ready to meet Hyperion with every chance of success.

His plight, however, was not simply the consequence of what he called his immaturity. According to Douglas Bush, "by Milton's time, indeed by Virgil's, the conventional mold of the heroic epic had become inadequate for the increasingly abstract themes of modern and philosophic poets." What Bush has amply demonstrated, however, is that the Romantic poets were prepared to give the molds a new shape instead of discarding them, and were not content to leave their themes in the form of abstractions or to resort to private symbolism. Their intention was to enlist the compelling force of myth on the side of modern ideas. One of their difficulties was that they could not find myths embodying existing collective values (Milton was no doubt the last to enjoy that privilege). They had here (as Wordsworth remarked more

12. Walter H. Evert, in Aesthetic and Myth in the Poetry of Keats (Princeton: Princeton U. Press, 1965), concludes his study on an examination of To Autumn, considered as the only resolution in practice of the problems Keats had been struggling with in The Fall of Hyperion. In fact, one can get an abstract conception of the climax he needed by imagining the projection of the mood of the lyrical poem (serenity without complacency or delusion) into the sweeping vision of a god resulting in action.

generally) to create their own public, to arouse a new collective consciousness responding to the appeal of the modern sublime, the highest “poetic embodiment” of “high moral excellence.” The trouble was that the old epic material was not very tractable, being based on different values, and a different conception of human valour. In brief, two ways were open. One was followed by Landor in his Gebir. He selected an old legendary tale, hardly to be called a myth: the conquest of Egypt by the titular prince of Gades. He gave the theme an epic treatment (and a very classical one), but in order to treat a theme which is precisely the passage from the old to the new code of values: the conqueror is conquered by the spirit of love and brotherhood. The poem fails (although it has many great passages), partly because his invention, insufficiently propped up by a consistent myth, slides into the facilities of political allegorizing (the French Revolution against the bigotry in Church and State). Besides, Landor’s pessimism before the growth of French imperialism, which hardly seems to promise the triumph of democracy and concord, deprives his tale of all compelling force; and the secondary theme (involving Tamar and his nymph) undercuts the primary one instead of supporting it, in such a way as finally to impose the values of love in private life, a passive, not a militant, form of humanitarianism. What one sees here is some kind of pattern for the difficulties that lay ahead of Keats in his treatment of Apollo. Still, Keats’s choice of his subject brought him closer to the task undertaken by Shelley in his Prometheus Unbound. The myth gave Shelley an impressive and permanently attractive figure of heroic resistance to oppression; but he could neither leave him in a deadlock, unvanquished but bound, nor accept Aeschylus’ conclusion, which he saw as an immoral compromise between liberty and oppression. So, he had to describe the fight between the old order and the new—at the risk of jettisoning the very values the new myth was to uphold: forgiveness and love replacing hatred and violence. His solution was to limit physical action to the brief struggle between Jupiter and Demogorgon (who is an obscure Chthonian force rather than a character), while on a different plane the real victory is won in the heart of Prometheus, who releases the power of Demogorgon through his renunciation of hatred. But the connection is artificial (however artfully contrived) rather than convincing. Shelley cannot give shape to any clear conception of how an ideal can become a force. The dramatic scene remains unrelated to its ideal origin in Prometheus; and the consequences of Jupiter’s defeat, with the mystic diffusion of love and goodness in the universe, develop symbols more than an action.
We can see, I think, that Keats was in much the same situation as Shelley (with the perilous responsibility of having more to invent and less to adapt), and was facing the main problem of Romantic myth-making. When he was just about to give up his first attempt, Keats wrote (in March 1819) that he had had “great conceptions” and been “cheated into some fine passages,” but that it was not enough, and he added that he found himself “in a sort of qui bono temper, not exactly on the road to an epic poem.” However disheartened he may feel, the poem for him is still epic in design. The beginning of Book III expresses his doubts about his talent to handle “tumults dire,” but also his intention to return to “many a fallen old Divinity” later. He is in fact prepared to reduce war and violence to the minimum (Enceladus) without which the epic action would turn into the expression of a sentimental dream; but the rest of the poem must be informed by the spirit of Apollo’s vision and new divinity. It is hard to see how the two elements can be related and any military episode appear as other than an irrelevant anecdote, tending even to compromise the humanitarian theme. The point, however, is not of vital importance, for the success of the poem depends on Apollo, and there Keats finds himself in deeper trouble. His incapacity to conceive his second climax, to achieve with any confidence and conviction the vision that must be Apollo’s, that of harmony and beauty integrating evil and suffering, is due to his immaturity and may be an obstacle only for the time. But what lies beyond is the task of deriving his action from the vision, of treating his poem objectively by dealing with the spiritual crisis in dramatic terms. Apollo must be a hero as well as a seer, or else the result will be that Romantic substitute for the epic: a symbolic poem.

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