

Keats's Skepticism about Poetry's Therapeutic Power

Yi-Hsuan Tso

Intergrams 11.2(2011):

<http://benz.nchu.edu.tw/~intergrams/intergrams/112/112-tso.pdf>

ISSN: 1683-4186

Abstract

In an early poem, "Sleep and Poetry," Keats presents his thought on poetry's healing power, arguing that poetry can be both therapeutic and transcendent. From the examples Keats affords in "Sleep and Poetry," "The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream" and elsewhere, it can be deduced that the consoling effects of what I call Keats's "therapeutic poetry" arise from the mingling of illusion and disillusionment. This poetry creates an illusive world in which readers can not only temporarily escape from the frets of reality, but also experience an awakening from the dream of the poem, a moment that lifts the reader's mind to a higher level of tranquil meditation. In many of Keats's poems, innocence and experience as well as illusion and disillusionment overlap in one dream to produce the therapeutic property defined by Keats in "Sleep and Poetry." However, this advantage of a *mélange* is missing in "The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream." The poem starts with a critique of the illusive aspect of poetry. And yet, the poem ends with the feeling that illusion is still an essential and important component of poetry. Near the end of the second dream, an illusion is inlayed again through the light of the sun god, Hyperion. The unfinished fragment ends in a vision which affirms the value of illusion with some reservation.

Keywords: John Keats, skepticism, Hyperion, therapeutic, illusion, dream

In an early poem, “Sleep and Poetry,” composed from October to December 1816, Keats comments about poetry’s healing power, arguing that poetry can be both therapeutic and transcendent: “[F]orgetting the great end / Of poesy, that it should be a friend / To sooth the cares, and lift the thoughts of man” (ll. 245-47) (*Poems of JK Stillinger* 556; *JK Cook* 40). By examining “Sleep and Poetry,” “The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream” and other poems, it can be deduced that the consoling effects of what I call Keats’s “therapeutic poetry” arise from the commingling of illusion and disillusionment. This poetry creates an illusive world in which readers can temporarily escape from the frets of reality, while a moment of transcendence lifts the reader’s mind to a higher level of meditation. This strain of poetry is more than just escapist poetry because it contains this moment of final disillusionment.

“The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream” starts with a critique of the illusive element of poetry, yet it closes with the idea that illusion is still an essential and important component of poetry. In structure, “The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream” consists of an introduction and two dreams. The first dream of paradise confers an illusion. The second dream set in hell probes into disillusionment and serves as a comment on the first dream’s pleasant encounters. Yet near the end of the second dream, an illusion is inlayed again through the light of the sun god, Hyperion. This reprise of illusion suggests that Keats cannot render philosophical disillusionment without an illusion that accords the poem its consoling power. However, it is notable that the illusion is not fashioned by the light of the god of poetry, Apollo, but by the ray of the fallen sun god, Hyperion (*JK Cook* 304). This structural design and the ending of “The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream” suggest that Keats is skeptical about the maneuver of illusion and the therapeutic property of poetry he adopted in his earlier poem, “Sleep and Poetry.” In this second poem about Hyperion, Keats attempts to compose poetry of a solemn nature about experience.¹ For example, in this poem and in his letters Keats maintains that a poet who has a deep sympathy for human tribulation can write poetry of great strength. The end of this unfinished poem about the sun god affirms the value of illusion with some reservation; it has in its grip some of Keats’s skepticism towards illusion as well as his eye towards the necessity of disillusionment or awakening.

Like Hyperion, Keats stands on the threshold of the new and the old as he experiments with styles. In “The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream,” he gives expression to his skepticism about the ideas of poetry’s therapeutic power that he advanced earlier in life.² However, near the end of “The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream” Keats returns to the strategy of illusion, which, in addition to knowledge about suffering, is one of the two prime conditions of his therapeutic poetry.

¹ Keats started composing “The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream” near the end of July 1819 and abandoned it by September 21 the same year (*Poems of JK Stillinger* 670). The poem is meant to be a revision of “Hyperion: A Fragment,” commenced toward the end of the year 1818 and abandoned “in or before April 1819” (*Poems of JK Stillinger* 638).

² Timothy Ziegenhagen maintains that Keats did not finish “Hyperion: A Fragment” for a similar reason: for Keats, Apollo does not suffice “as a symbol of poetic healer” (296).

Tilottama Rajan explains that Keats's poetic career progresses from "the sentimental" to "the ironic" and then to "the tragic" phase (145). According to Rajan's theory, at the end of "The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream" Keats relapses to the anterior ironic style, and I argue that Keats does so for a good reason. The "deathwards progressing" of Moneta and other Titans in this poem runs in the opposite direction of Keats's "Soul-making," which emphasizes changing for the better (1: 260) (*JK Cook 297; JKL 2: 102*). In a word, the world of the Titans in the second dream is antithetical to Keats's poetics of "Soul-making" (*JKL 2: 102*). For example, in Canto I, Thea and Saturn return to the woods to waste away in pain and despair (1: 462-63) (*JK Cook 302*).

Judging from the viewpoint of narrative progress, critics, including Ben Coffey, maintain that in "Hyperion: A Fragment," Keats, through Oceanus, introduces his idea of the "progress myth" (48). Christoph Bode explains that a conflict exists between progress and no progress as bound up in reader's sympathy for the past, which the poem fosters: "the story is told from the perspective of the Titans, creating sympathy for the past, which is fatal in an epic celebrating progress, requiring a joyful welcome for the rebels" (34). Likewise, Ellen Brinks maintains that the readers' identification with the fallen Titans eventuates in "fixity" and obstructs the narrative progression (438). Likewise, Vincent Newey suggests that the entering of the poet-narrator of "The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream" into the realm of the fallen Titans is "the antithesis of any story of progress" (81).³

Keats remarks about poetry's therapeutic potency in his earlier poem "Sleep and Poetry," in which he maintains that great poets should write poetry that soothes the soul:

And they shall be accounted poet kings
Who simply tell the most heart-easing things. (ll. 267-68) (*JK Cook 40*)

In this poem, Keats correlates poetry's power with illusion, which he compares to the effects of light and suggests that his poetry holds sway through gentleness, which is one of its features:

. . . A drainless shower
Of light is poesy; 'tis the supreme of power;
'Tis might half slumb'ring on its own right arm.
The very archings of her eye-lids charm
A thousand willing agents to obey,
And still she governs with the mildest sway: (ll. 235-40) (*JK Cook 39*)

³ With regard to why Keats left the poem unfinished, Katey Castellano, to a certain extent agreeing with Rajan's and my arguments about styles, suggests that the abandonment of "Hyperion: A Fragment" attests to Keats's skepticism about the "epic form" (36). Unlike Castellano, Bode surmises that Keats revised "Hyperion: A Fragment" because of the conflicts between his poetic theory of "negative capability" and his ideas of the "vale of Soul-making" in this poem (Bode 31; *JKL 2: 102*). Bode maintains that Keats left "Hyperion: A Fragment" unfinished because he ran out of thoughts for the narrative (31).

Moreover, an example of this poetry is a poem on the subject matter of love in a pastoral setting:

Till in the bosom of a leafy world
We rest in silence, like two gems upcurl'd
In the recesses of a pearly shell. (ll. 119-21) (*JK Cook 36*)

To Keats, this poetry does not just distill the pleasures of life in a pastoral scene but can also raise the spirit and imbue one with hopes in life:

. . . [L]et there nothing be
More boisterous than a lover's bended knee;
Nought more ungentle than the placid look
Of one who leans upon a closed book;
Nought more untr tranquil than the grassy slopes
Between two hills. All hail delightful hopes! (ll. 259-64) (*JK Cook 40*)

A "lover's bended knee" and "the grassy slopes" between hills constitute idyllic scenes that lighten the heart (*JK Cook 40*). "[T]he placid look" on a reader's face emblemizes transcendent reflection (*JK Cook 40*). As Keats defines it, this strain of poetry not only assuages the soul with enchanting scenes but also affords the vantage point of a calm philosophical contemplation on life's delights.

In addition to pleasures, for its subject, this therapeutic poetry also portrays humans suffering under colossal forces. Keats claims that the therapeutic power of poetry is magnified in proportion to a poet's capability to commiserate; the more a poet delves into human miseries and has compassion for them, the more high-minded his poetry will be. For example, in "Sleep and Poetry," Keats evokes a fallen angel to personify "strength" or power as another subject of poetry, which feeds on misery:

But strength alone though of the Muses born
Is like a fallen angel: trees uptorn,
Darkness, and worms, and shrouds, and sepulchres
Delight it; for it feeds upon the burrs,
And thorns of life. . . . (ll. 241-45) (*JK Cook 39-40*)

According to this symbolism, the strength of therapeutic poetry resides in a poet's reflections on the disconsolateness of the human condition. Therefore, for Keats, poetry's therapeutic power can arise from either the illusion contrived in the verse about pleasures as well as from the

empathic portraiture of human plights. I argue further that the latter cannot do without the former for the therapeutic puissance as well as the progress of a poem.

Keats's second poem about Hyperion continues to attest to this belief in poetry's therapeutic potency by suggesting that a poet is a "Physician to all Men" (l: 190) (*JK Cook* 295). Both Saturn's priestess Moneta and the poet-narrator maintain that poetry has the power to alleviate the mishaps of life: a poet "pours out a balm upon the world" instead of vexing it (l: 201) (*JK Cook* 296). Ziegenhagen maintains that the new sun god, Apollo, has the double roles of a poet—divulged by the lyre he carries—and of a healer (293). In this same vein, Percy Bysshe Shelley perceives this healing competency of Keats's poetry, and, on this subject of the poet-healer, alludes to Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" in his "A Defense of Poetry": "A Poet is a nightingale who sits in darkness and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds; his auditors . . . feel that they are moved and softened, yet know not whence or why" (486). As Shelley suggests, though poetry may treat a private subject matter, it alleviates the vexations of the reader through its power to transport the reader to the world that the poem sketches.

The theme of the poet's knowledge about human ordeals recurs in "The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream." Here Keats suggests that though a poet is a healer of souls, he cannot cure his own "sickness not ignoble"—his abiding pensive mulling over human misfortunes (l: 184) (*JK Cook* 295). Feeling the tribulations of other fellow human beings with whom a poet empathizes, the poet-narrator experiences "all his days, / Bearing more woe than all his Sins deserve" (l: 176) (*JK Cook* 295). And yet, these bitter experiences of the poet or others are beneficial to a poet in the process Keats calls "Soul-making" (*JKL* 2: 102). According to Keats's poetic of "Soul-making," an identity gradually accrues and evolves into a soul as a person gains experience in the world (*JKL* 2: 102-03). Therefore, the poet-narrator in "The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream" asseverates delight in being admitted to the vale of the Titans and in accepting teachings from Moneta, which are medicines for his "sickness": "By such propitious parley medicin'd / In sickness not ignoble, I rejoice, / Aye, and could weep for love of such award" (l: 183-85) (*JK Cook* 295). Just as Keats proclaims the world to be the "vale of Soul-making," the Titans in the poem dwell in a "dusk vale" (2: 50) (*JKL* 2: 102; *JK Cook* 303). This verbal hint substantiates the claim that this poem pertains to Keats's idea of "Soul-making." Moreover, one important factor underlying the leitmotifs of both sorrow and healing in his two poems about Hyperion is Keats's own experience of tending to his sick brother Tom while composing "Hyperion: A Fragment" ("Chronology" *JK Cook* xxxii).

Interpreting the two Hyperion poems from another perspective, Newey sees the transformation of human mortality into the mythic and sublime in the two poems as therapeutic (76). However, I argue that the issue at stake in the second poem about Hyperion is that illusion stands alone from the test in purgatory, and that Keats does not include illusion until the last few lines of this unfinished poem. Analyzing the disadvantage of the dearth of illusion in this poem, Brinks canvasses the issue of "the male Romantic poet as a Gothic subject" in Keats's two

poems about Hyperion: “It is, perversely, the unmoving, passive Titans to whom Keats gives the burden of narrative progression in” these two poems (431, 436). I agree with Brinks’s assertion that the Titans cannot propel the poem towards the healing goal Keats sets forth early in “The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream.” And I think that the problem springs from Keats’s own skepticism at this point in his career about the validity of illusion in his poetry and about his own identity as a poet. For example, skeptical about his own mastery of craftsmanship, the poet-narrator of “The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream” expresses his concern that he has not yet matured into a poet: “That [a poet] I am none I feel” (1: 191) (*JK Cook* 295). These words belie Keats’s waning self-confidence and self-doubt as a poet at this moment of the poem’s unfolding.

In this paper, I argue that rather than being an example of therapeutic poetry, “The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream” is, as a whole, a critique of the concept of therapeutic poetry; instead of constructing a world that allays the reader’s sorrows, the poem treats the joviality of innocence and the bitterness from experience, as well as illusion and disillusionment, in two discrete dreams.⁴ Thus disjointed, the first dream of innocence seems too naïve, because it decouples with disillusionment, whereas the second dream of experience is exceedingly dour, because there is no illusion to counterweight the “cruel pain” accrued from experience (1: 346) (*JK Cook* 299). Lilach Lachman’s comment about “Hyperion: A Fragment” aptly elucidates the cruelty in “The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream” as well: “By introducing the mortal Titans into a poem that seeks to materialize itself in the ideal figure of Apollo, Keats inserts decay and death within an allegedly perfect civilization” and into the new hierarchy of gods and goddesses (296). The Titans and the landscape in the second dream are unsettling because the fallen world inspires in the poet-narrator the feelings of awe, fear and despair. For instance, when the poet-narrator awakens from sleep, Saturn’s temple fills him “with awe” (1: 81) (*JK Cook* 293). Next, the poet-narrator feels the threat of death when a voice from a yet unidentified source pronounces this caveat: “If thou canst not ascend / These steps, die on that marble where thou art” (1: 107-08) (*JK Cook* 293). With great exertion and “[s]low, heavy, [and] deadly” paces, the poet-narrator finally climbs “the lowest step” of the “shrine” (1: 128-29, 137) (*JK Cook* 294). Though the poet-narrator gladly receives as an “award,” a lesson about the immortal sorrow in the eyes of Moneta, the still of the vale is excessively heavy for the poet-narrator to endure (1: 185) (*JK Cook* 295):

. . . Without stay or prop
By 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. (1: 388-92) (*JK Cook* 300)

⁴ Rajan comments that Keats investigates “the relationship between innocence and experience” with regard to the “past and present” in his two Hyperion poems, though Rajan does not go further to associate these elements of a poem with its therapeutic effects (145).

The poet-narrator feels stifled with the silence and despondency of the vale and wishes to escape through death: “Oftentimes I pray’d / Intense, that Death would take me from the Vale / And all its burthens” (1: 396-98) (*JK Cook* 300). With a “burning brain” fraught with this knowledge about suffering, the poet-narrator wastes away during his sojourn in the vale: “And every day by day methought I grew / More gaunt and ghostly” (1: 393, 395-96) (*JK Cook* 300).

We have good reason to believe that Keats transformed his own physical exhaustion while composing this poem into representation of human suffering in general. In a letter dated August 24, 1819, Keats recounts how his thoughts wearied him when composing “Hyperion: A Fragment”: “I think if I had a free and healthy and lasting organisation of heart and Lungs [sic]—as strong as an ox<e>’s—so as to be able [to] unhurt [sic] the shock of extreme thought and sensation without weariness, I could pass my Life [sic] very nearly alone though it should last eighty years” (*JKL* 2: 146-47).

By comparing “The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream” with other poems also written in dream narrative, we see why the separation into two dreams renders the poem outside the sphere of Keats’s therapeutic poetry. For example, Keats also implements his ideas of poetry’s therapeutic validity in poems such as “Ode to a Nightingale,” “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” “La Belle Dame Sans Merci,” and “Lamia.” The healing power of these poems is derived from the beauty wrought by dream-like illusion, which cushions the impact of the final awakening from the dream world. In this way, the awakening itself is transcendent with its blow having been mollified by illusion. In these poems, Keats throws a veil of dream over his descriptions and sets his dreams in an Arcadian pastoral landscape. An awakening from the illusion and a separation from the enchanting pastoral world ensues. The final awakening and parting from dream create a sense of exquisite sorrow owing to the ineluctable vanishing of dreams. Among these poems, the warning against tarrying in dreams is the strongest in “La Belle Dame Sans Merci” and “Lamia.” The “pale kings and Princes” and “[p]ale warriors” in “La Belle Dame Sans Merci” and Apollonius “in philosophic gown” in “Lamia” are characters embodying the caveat (ll. 37-38; l. 365) (*JK Cook* 274, 314). Like these characters, the Titans in the second poem about Hyperion emblemize this warning against torpor.

Keats is concerned that his poetry offers not just a mesmerizing illusion but also insight into life. Therefore, the introduction of “The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream” inaugurates a discussion of these two sides of Keats’s therapeutic poetry. In the introduction Keats makes a distinction between the dream of the dreamer, which is profuse with illusive enchantment that fades when the dream ends, and the dream of the poet, which accords insight that will last.

The introduction of the poem divides dreamers into two categories of people—the religious “[f]anatics” and “the savage” (1: 1-2) (*JK Cook* 291). And yet both types dream about an ideal world and have no thought of composing poetry: “pity these have not / Trac’d upon vellum or wild Indian leaf / The shadows of melodious utterance” (1: 4-6) (*JK Cook* 291). Since

the dreamer pays no heed to the trade of poetry, the dreamer will die anonymously without any accomplishments in the art: “[b]ut bare of laurel they live, dream and die” (1: 7) (*JK Cook 291*). By contrast, the dreams of the poets are visions and not a “dumb enchantment” because he transmutes them into an art with the magic of words:

For Poesy alone can tell her dreams,
With the fine spell of words alone can save
Imagination from the sable charm
And dumb enchantment. . . . (1: 8-11) (*JK Cook 291*)

Another disparity between a dreamer and a poet is hinged on one’s venture to remain conscious of the human condition and to ripen into a poet. The endeavor is represented by the poet-narrator’s exertion to scale the steps to Moneta’s altar in the second dream. Finally, at the end of the introduction, the poet-narrator declares that after he has gone into the grave, the reader can decide whether this poem is a religious fanatic’s reverie about paradise or a poetic vision: “Whether the dream now purposed to rehearse / Be poet’s or Fanatic’s will be known / When this warm scribe my hand is in the grave” (1: 16-18) (*JK Cook 291*).⁵ The poet-narrator claims that this poem about a dream is an astute vision written more for readers of a future generation than for a contemporary audience, and that the poet aspires for immortality.

In this way, the dreamer and the poet have disparate dreams, whereas both the fanatics and the savage tend always to envisage paradise. The fanatics’ dreams are speculations of a religious paradise: “Fanatics have their dreams, wherewith they weave / A paradise for a sect” (1: 1-2) (*JK Cook 291*). The savage are people who have not yet gained the knowledge of good and evil and remain in a state of ignorant innocence. They too dream about a paradise in their slumber: The “savage too / From forth the loftiest fashion of his sleep / Guesses at Heaven” (1: 2-4) (*JK Cook 291*).

With such distinctions made, the poem then proceeds to elaborate on the poet-narrator’s two dreams. The disparity between the dreamer and the poet is the focal point on which the two dreams in the poem unfold. Though the two dreams in Canto I are both dreams of the poet-narrator, they betoken the dreams of the fanatics and the poet respectively. The first dream conjures up the paradise of the religious fanatics, whereas the second dream adduces the poet’s

⁵ The first dream is cast in a ravishing illusion with its pastoral landscape. The scenery reminds us of the Garden of Eden in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*; both Keats and Milton depict an immense variety of trees:

Methought I stood where trees of every clime,
Palm, Myrtle, oak, and sycamore, and beech,
With plantane, and spice blossoms, made a screen; (1: 19-21) (*JK Cook 291*)
His far pleasant garden God ordained;
Out of the fertile ground he caused to grow
All trees of noblest kind for sight, smell, taste; (Milton 84)

vision of the miseries of the world. The second dream, which occupies nearly nine-tenths of the poem, serves as a skeptical comment on the first dream and is the main theme of “The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream.”

In his first dream, the poet-narrator finds himself in a paradise and gorges himself on a feast of summer fruits. This feast symbolizes abundance and enjoyment in life: “Still was more plenty than the fabled horn / Thrice emptied could pour forth” (1: 35-36) (*JK Cook* 292). The poet-narrator gormandizes unreflectively, neither brooding over life nor accomplishing any tasks in this first dream. Like the fanatics and the savage, who are “bare of laurel” and just “live, dream and die,” the poet-narrator will not be rigorous enough to compose any poems if he pursues this sensuous way of life (1: 7) (*JK Cook* 291). Therefore, the poem’s plot so devises that in his thirst he drinks a “draught,” which induces sleep and transports him to the second dream (1: 46) (*JK Cook* 292).

The second dream produced by the draught is the mainstay of the poem, as the poet-narrator remarks: “That full draught is parent of my theme” (1: 46) (*JK Cook* 292). The poet-narrator awakens to find himself in the glum realm of the Titans, in which he will be inculcated into their sorrow, a dark passage that will help him gain immortal fame in poetry. In the second dream, the condition of the Titans is a parody of the life of the poet-narrator in the first dream. Their dreamy state is a forewarning to the poet-narrator: if he does not labor to become a poet, he will “dream and die” like the dreamers in the introduction or the Titans in the second dream. Like the poet-narrator who fills himself with food but does nothing else, the Titans in the second dream are dreamers who do not strive toward fame or accomplishments (1: 7) (*JK Cook* 291). The Titans embody people with no attainments: they sleep, sink into the past, weep or pine away. For example, Saturn is in slumber when the poet-narrator gains access to the vale, so that the poet-narrator first erringly believes Saturn to be an “[i]mage” (1: 213) (*JK Cook* 296). Saturn represents the type of person who becomes numb and insentient because he has lost his hope of success.

In one of her aspects, Saturn’s priestess Mnemosyne symbolizes people who flee from reality by living in the past. The appellations of Mnemosyne remind us that she is a denizen of the underworld; in the poem, she is variously called “veiled shadow,” “Majestic shadow,” “the shade,” “the tall shade” and “Shade of Memory” (1: 141, 187, 211, 155, 216, 282) (*JK Cook* 294-96, 298). As she is among the dead, it is natural that she possesses intact memory of the past, very little that of the present, and none of the future. Though the locus of the dreamland of the Titans is not identified in the poem, it is presumably in hell. It reflects Hesiod’s descriptions in “Theogony, or the Generation of the Gods” in Thomas Cooke’s translation, which is one of Keats’s sources of Greek mythology (*Poems of JK Allott* 395). Hesiod portrays that Jove hurls the Titans into “Tart’rus,” part of Hell (771).

This demarcation between the dreamer and the poet broached in the introduction is sustained in Canto I in the dialogue between the poet-narrator and Saturn’s priestess Moneta. The poet-narrator is anxious not to be misconstrued as a dreamer and hopes to be touted as a poet. This anxiety stems from a concern about his immortality as a poet in history. If he is a mere

dreamer and dreams only about paradise instead of mediating human pangs, his poetry will not have sufficient depth, and he will not enter the ranks of literary masters. However, if he aspires to be a poet and writes poetry about his observation of human calamities, he will outlast those “mock lyrists” and see them “sprawl before” him “into graves” (1: 207, 210) (*JK Cook* 296). In this poem, the goddess as Mnemosyne guards memory of miseries; she teaches the poet-narrator about human miseries, which in Keats’s view are vital to the advancement of the art of poetry. Later in the poem, identified as “Shade of Memory,” the goddess imparts the narrator knowledge about life’s misfortunes (1: 282) (*JK* 298). For instance, her thoughts are occupied by memories of the past, whose “scenes / [s]till swooning vivid through” her “globed brain / [w]ith an electral changing misery” (1: 244-46) (*JK Cook* 297). The goddess exhibits a keen memory of the past; her eyes contain the entire record of the war among the immortals. Her “power” to summon the past to mind, which is her “curse” and her “immortal sickness,” impairs to a certain extent her ability to grapple with events of the current moment (1: 243, 258) (*JK Cook* 297). This flaw is most conspicuous when the poet-narrator describes her incapacity to see things right before her eyes. For example, her eyes do not behold the poet-narrator: she does not know “[w]hat eyes are upward cast,” and her eyes “saw” him “not, / [b]ut in blank splendor beam’d like the mild moon” (1: 271, 268-69) (*JK Cook* 297).

In her alternate significance as Moneta, “the protectress of money,” Saturn’s priestess informs Keats’s satirical view that financial apprehension elicits sorrow (“Moneta”). The month before Keats started composing “The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream,” owing to a financial crisis, Keats entertains the idea of working as a surgeon on a ship as he recounts in a letter written in June, 1819: “I have my choice of three things—or at least two—South America or Surgeon to an I[n]dian—which last I think will be my fate” (*JKL* 2: 114). In the poem, the goddess first reveals her identity to the poet-narrator as Moneta: “I, Moneta, left supreme / Sole Priestess of his [Saturn’s] desolation” (1: 226-27) (*JK* 296). Moneta’s self-introduction reflects Keats’s consternation about his financial situations in 1819.

Among the Titans, Thea and Saturn at least essay to change the status quo, but their actions are ineffectual. Thea’s speech is full of self-doubt; she seeks to wake Saturn but reverts her decision and bids him to “sleep on,” seeing no gleam of hope to reverse their fate, and she chooses to weep beside Saturn instead: “With such remorseless speed still come new woes / That unbelief has not a space to breathe” (1: 366-68) (*JK Cook* 300). Saturn awakens eventually and delivers a speech to cheer up his fellow Titans and to call for their support to wage another war against the Olympians; however, his enervated and “awful presence” gives “a deadly lie” to his words (1: 448-49) (*JK Cook* 302). He is not strong enough to clinch a victory in war against the Olympians, and other Titans, as dreamers, do nothing but “waste in pain / [a]nd darkness for no hope” (1: 462-63) (*JK Cook* 302).

The poet-narrator dreads to transform into a dreamer like the Titans. Similarities between the Titans and the poet-narrator thicken the sense of warning in the poem. For instance, just as the poet-narrator grows “[m]ore gaunt and ghostly” “every day by day” in the vale, so the Titans

“waste in pain” in this realm (1: 395-96, 462) (*JK Cook* 300, 302). Just as the poet-narrator is ushered into the second dream after he falls asleep, so Saturn has already sunk into sound slumber when the poet-narrator first describes him. Furthermore, the poet-narrator senses “a palsied chill” before he mounts the steps of Moneta’s altar (1: 122) (*JK Cook* 294). Likewise, Saturn is transfigured “into a shaking Palsy” after his fall (1: 426) (*JK Cook* 301). These portraitures of the narrator and Saturn imply that if the poet-narrator cannot grasp the bleak side of life, he will become “palsied” and write poetry without adequate depth: he will “[r]ot on the pavement” like those dreamers who “thoughtless [sic] sleep away their days” (1: 122, 153, 151) (*JK Cook* 294). Or he will be obliterated by time because his poems do not last, as Moneta warns:

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. (1: 109-113) (*JK Cook* 293)

The poet-narrator shrieks when through a sensation of chilliness he senses the immanent threat of “numbness” (1: 128) (*JK Cook* 294):

. . . [W]hen 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. . . . (1: 122-26) (*JK Cook* 294)

Piercing through his own ears, his shriek reminds him that he must raise himself to the indubitable status of a poet (*JK Cook* 294). Furthermore, as in the case of physical laborers, the shriek stimulates and urges the poet-narrator to master his strength to scale those steps.

Fortunately, the poet-narrator exerts himself and ascends the lowest step of Moneta’s altar; as such, the shriek connotes the poet-narrator’s endeavor to triumph in the world through poetry. Likewise, in “Hyperion: A Fragment,” Apollo’s shriek also accompanies his travail to access new life:

As hot as death’s is chill, with fierce convulse
Die into life: so young Apollo anguish’d:
His very hair, his golden tresses famed
Kept undulation round his eager neck. (3: 129-32) (*JK Cook* 247)

. . . At length

Apollo shriek'd. . . . (3: 134-35) (*JK Cook* 247)

For this wish to become a poet and his labor, the poet-narrator is awarded the privilege of being cognizant of human sorrow through Moneta's eyes. And in Keats's view, knowledge about human plights is of paramount importance to a poet, as a parallel scenario in the first poem about Hyperion imparts. Just as the poet-narrator gains knowledge about human woes from Moneta, so Apollo learns from Mnemosyne that knowledge is the fount of his immortality: "I can read / A wondrous lesson in thy silent face: / Knowledge enormous makes a God of me" (3: 111-13) (*JK Cook* 246).

Whereas in Canto I of "The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream," where the poet-narrator embodies Keats's aspiration to become a poet, in Canto II, Hyperion represents Keats's skepticism that his talent in poetry is on the wane. For instance, the poem compares Hyperion's angst to that of a genius, who has qualms that his gift is fading: "For as upon the Earth dire prodigies / Fright and perplex, so also shudders he" (2: 18-19) (*JK Cook* 303). The unfinished poem ends with Hyperion scudding across the sky manifesting his power:

Anon rush'd by the bright Hyperion;
His flaming robes stream'd out beyond his heels,
And gave a roar, as if of earthly fire,
That scar'd away the meek ethereal hours
And made their dove-wings tremble; on he flared— (2: 57-61) (*JK Cook* 304)

Hyperion "still keeps / His sov'reignty, and Rule, and Majesty," "yet unsecure" (2: 13-14, 17) (*JK Cook* 303). A parallel passage in "Hyperion: A Fragment" illuminates that Hyperion at this moment is incensed because, though he still possesses power, he is anxious about losing it:

He enter'd, but he enter'd full of wrath;
His flaming robes stream'd out beyond his heels,
And gave a roar, as if of earthly fire,
That scar'd away the meek ethereal Hours
And made their dove-wings tremble. . . . (1: 213-17) (*JK Cook* 230)

Other passages in "Hyperion: A Fragment" attest that the dread about losing power in the future haunts Hyperion even in his dreams:

. . . 'O dreams of day and night!
O monstrous forms! O effigies of pain!

Of spectres busy in a cold, cold gloom! (1: 227-229) (*JK Cook* 231)
Why do I know ye? why have I seen ye? why
Is my eternal essence thus distraught
To see and to behold these horrors new?
Saturn is fallen, am I too to fall? (1: 231-34) (*JK Cook* 231)

The poet-narrator and Hyperion are two figures in the vale who are still capable of exertion but have not been able to abscond from the vale and from the tribulations of the past that weigh upon their minds. Just as the Titans present a parody of the poet-narrator in the first dream, so the second dream performs as a satire of the illusion of the first dream. However, at the end of Canto I of “The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream,” the poet-narrator is still in the second dream, in Tartarus, and has not returned to earth. Though the poet-narrator passes Moneta’s test, he is not in the world of the living (*JK Cook* 294). The remaining problem for the plot would be to contrive the awakening of the poet-narrator. Instead of rousing the poet-narrator from the second dream, Keats positions the poet-narrator within the dream and further veils the dream with illusion. Keats realizes that the second dream is in want of a dash of illusion to redeem the vale from its deathlike stasis.

The poet-narrator’s vision is acuminated by two sorts of knowledge from Moneta and Hyperion respectively, and both types of knowledge are indispensable to the narrator in the poem. For example, in Canto I, he gains the knowledge about human agony from Moneta, and his vision improves with this new knowledge: “Whereon there grew / A power within me of enormous ken, / To see as a God sees” (1: 302-04) (*JK Cook* 298). In Canto II, near the end of the unfinished poem, the poet-narrator procures a different vision via the light of Hyperion, who is concerned with the power of illusion. For the first time he discerns the vale clearly, when Hyperion the sun god sets out on his journey of the day. The poet-narrator feels relieved from the murk of the vale when he bathes in the light of Hyperion: “Now in clear light I stood, / Reliev’d from the dusk vale” (2: 49-50) (*JK Cook* 303). Hyperion delivers light in which the whole vale glitters in its elusive beauty as never before. In the vale there are “bowers of fragrant and enwreathed light, / And diamond paved lustrous long arcades” (2: 55-56) (*JK Cook* 304). This conversion of the tenebrous vale into a more entrancing and cheerful site reaffirms the magic of illusion. Near the poem’s closing Keats reappropriates the technique of illusion to institute therapeutic effects with the aid of Hyperion’s light. Yet, the visible presence of the fallen Titans creates an impediment, which precludes Keats from transforming the vale into an innocent world of illusion, and in light of this obstruction, he ends the poem with Hyperion. Like Hyperion, Keats is capable of wrapping the fallen world in illusive light, but at this moment in his career, he dreads that this illusion has lost its potency.

Moreover, Keats’s choice to write not about Apollo but about the fallen Hyperion in “The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream” betrays his doubt about his rapport with the god of poetry. The poet-

narrator professes that he would prophesy the future rather than evoke the past, comparing himself to Pythia, Apollo's priestess who delivers his oracles: "Then, shouted I / Spite of myself, and with a Pythia's spleen" (1: 202-03) (*JK Cook 296*). Yet throughout the second dream, the poet-narrator lingers in the realm of the past. Contrary to his assertion, in this poem the poet-narrator, who dwells on the theme of Saturn's "desolation," more strongly resembles Moneta than the priestess of Apollo (1: 227) (*JK Cook 296*).

In many of Keats's poems including those discussed earlier, innocence and experience as well as illusion and disillusionment imbricate in one dream to sustain the therapeutic impact defined by Keats in "Sleep and Poetry." However, this advantage of a *mélange* is absent in "The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream," which isolates the innocent world of paradise in the first dream from the world of experience in the second. The second dream commentates the first dream, but neither dream alone or the poem as a whole befits the definition of therapeutic poetry in this paper. In his analysis of Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn," Ronald A. Sharp explains that Keats's poetry is more beautiful than the urn because it combines both the brutality of the world and the beauty of the urn (150-51). Sharp maintains: "Keats suggests that bittersweetness, not sweetness alone, is the most consoling kind of beauty" (151). For Keats's poems, the consolation illusion confers is the keystone on which bitter views can be expressed without imperiling the healing power of a poem.

In "The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream," Keats ponders whether he should forgo his ideas of therapeutic poetry and his poetics of "Soul-making" altogether for a new poetic style (*JKL 2: 102*). As the end of the "The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream" suggests, Keats chooses to readopt his strategy of intermixing knowledge about the world's distresses and illusion. However, he is skeptical about whether illusion still holds sway in his poetry. Therefore, in the revised "The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream," Apollo is superseded by the poet-narrator, who enacts Keats's quest for fame, while Hyperion gains a more prominent role and imparts Keats's skepticism about his chance to prevail. Moreover, the contrasts between the dreamer and the poet and between the poet-narrator and the Titans unveil Keats's moments of doubt in his poetic career. Nonetheless, at the end of this unfinished poem, Keats endorses again his own notions of therapeutic poetry and of "Soul-making" and lets the poem dwell within the light of Hyperion that brightens the once dusky vale (*JKL 2: 102*). "The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream" begins as a skeptical inquiry into the therapeutic validity of illusion, as well as of poetry, but ends with a reserved acknowledgement of their value.

Works Cited

- Bode, Christoph. "Hyperion, *The Fall of Hyperion*, and Keats's Poetics." *The Wordsworth Circle* 31.1 (Winter 2000): 31-37.
- Brinks, Ellen, "The Male Romantic Poet as Gothic Subject: Keats's *Hyperion* and *The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream*." *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 54.4 (March 2000): 427-54.
- Castellano, Katey. "'Why Linger at the Yawning Tomb So Long?': The Ethics of Negative Capability in Keats's *Isabella* and *Hyperion*." *Partial Answers* 8.1 (Jan. 2010): 23-38.
- Coffer, Ben. "The 'Hyperions' and 'Hugh Selwyn Mauberly': The Common Historiographic Approach in Keats's and Pound's Fragment Poems." *The Keats-Shelley Review* 21 (2007): 46-55.
- Hesiod. "The Theogony, or the Generation of the Gods." *The Works of the English Poets: From Chaucer to Cowper*. Trans. Thomas Cooke. Ed. Samuel Johnson. London: J. Johnson, 1810. 20: 763-775.
- Keats, John. *John Keats*. Ed. Elizabeth Cook. The Oxford Authors. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990.
- . *The Poems of John Keats*. Ed. Miriam Allott. Longman Annotated English Poets. London: Longman, 1970.
- . *The Poems of John Keats*. Ed. Jack Stillinger. Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1978.
- Lachman, Lilach. "Time, Space, and Illusion: Between Keats and Poussin." *Comparative Literature* 55.4 (Fall 2003): 293-319.
- Milton, John. *Paradise Lost: An Authoritative Text, Backgrounds and Sources, Criticism*. Ed. Scott Elledge. New York: W. W. Norton, 1975.
- "Moneta." *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology*. Ed. William Smith. New York: AMS, 1967. 2: 1112.
- Newey, Vincent. "Hyperion, *The Fall of Hyperion*, and Keats's Epic Ambitions." *The Cambridge Companion to Keats*. Ed. Susan J. Wolfson. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001. 69-85.
- Rajan, Tilottama. *Dark Interpreter: The Discourse of Romanticism*. Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell UP, 1980.
- Rollins, Hyder Edward, ed. *The Letters of John Keats, 1814-1821*. Vol. 2. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1958.
- Sharp, Ronald A. *Keats, Skepticism, and the Religion of Beauty*. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1979.
- Shelley, Percy Bysshe. *Shelley's Poetry and Prose: Authoritative Texts, Criticism*. Ed. Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers. New York: Norton, 1977.
- Ziegenhagen, Timothy. "Keats, Professional Medicine, and the Two Hyperions." *Literature and Medicine* 21.2 (Fall 2002): 281-305.

Yi-Hsuan Tso

Assistant Professor, National Taiwan Normal University

E-mail : sarahtso@yahoo.com