The Identity and Difference
between Keats's *Hyperion*
and *The Fall of Hyperion*
— on Theme

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Forward

John Keats (1795–1821) wrote *Hyperion* and *The Fall of Hyperion*. Both of them are fragments. *Hyperion* is the first version and *The Fall* is the second one. We know when he wrote them mainly through his letters. He began to write *Hyperion* about the middle of September 1818 and had been writing for two months from late September until December 1st when Tom, his youngest brother, died. He sometimes referred to the poem in his letters and continued to write it. But he could not go ahead in February or March 1819 and gave up by April 20, 1819. The first edition was published in 1820. *The Fall* was begun to write as a revision of *Hyperion* in July 1819 and abandoned on September 21, 1819. It was first printed by Richard Moncton Milnes or Lord Houghton in 1856.

In this paper I would like to compare these two fragments, point out differences and things in common concretely, and clarify the characteristics of both poems and Keats's humanity as a poet.

1 The Themes Keats intended

One of the themes Keats intended is Hyperion, or, more clearly speaking, the fall of Hyperion. We understand this not only from the titles of both poems but also from his following letter. He wrote to his brother and sister-in-law, George and Georgiana Keats, who had immigrated into the United States, on December 18, 1818:

I think you knew before you left England that my next subject would be
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‘the fall of Hyperion’ [sic] (II, 12)

Hyperion is the sun god of Greek mythology. We must remember the fact that Keats does not distinguish Greek mythology from Roman mythology but considers both mythologies as Greek mythology. He takes the god names from both mythologies. Generally speaking, Roman names seem to be used more often. For example, he does not use Cronos of Greek mythology, but uses the Roman Saturn. He prefers Jupiter of Roman mythology to the Greek Zeus. Therefore, in this paper, I don’t differentiate Greek mythology from Roman mythology, but treat both of them as Greek mythology, following Keats’s standpoint. From this perspective I will explain Hyperion more in details. He was the sun god of “the golden age” when Saturn reigned. According to Greek mythology, Saturn was deprived of his throne and then “the silver age” began. At the same time the status of Hyperion was occupied by Apollo, who was also the god of poetry and music.

Another theme is Apollo, or the apotheosis of Apollo. We understand this from the letter Keats wrote to Benjamin Robert Haydon, his artist friend, on January 23, 1818. He says as follows:

... and one great contrast between them [*Endymion* and *Hyperion*] will be—that the Hero of the written tale [*Endymion*] being mortal is led on, like Buonaparte, by circumstance; whereas the Apollo in Hyperion being a fore-seeing God will shape his actions like one. (I, 207)

As this letter shows, Keats considered Apollo as the hero of *Hyperion*. This is the same thing in *The Fall*, because Keats does not distinguish *Hyperion* from *The Fall*.

By having chosen the two above-mentioned themes, he accomplished what he had affirmed in the preface of *Endymion* and the fourth book of the work. This preface was dated on April 10, 1818 and states:

I hope I have not in too late a day touched the beautiful mythology of Greece, and dulled its brightness: for I wish to try once more, before I
In the fourth book of *Endymion* the poet says to Endymion who marries the goddess of the moon, Cynthia, "Thy lute-voic'd brother will I sing ere long" (774). These words reveal Keats's intention to write a poem on Apollo who becomes the brother-in-law of Endymion. "The beautiful mythology of Greece" gave wings to Keats's imagination.

2 The Degree of Completion of the Themes

How far could Keats complete the themes of the fall of Hyperion and the apotheosis of Apollo in *Hyperion* and *The Fall*? Both poems are unfinished. *Hyperion* ends at Book III, 1. 136 (1. 136 has only one word). *The Fall* stops at Canto II, 1. 61. The difference between the divisions of "Book" and "Canto", as it is often pointed out, shows the influence of *Paradise Lost* of John Milton and *Divina Commedia* of Dante Alighieri. That is, *Paradise Lost* is divided into Books and *Divina Commedia* is divided into Cantos. Besides such a formal point, from the whole tone of the poems we can say that Hyperion is influenced by *Paradise Lost* and that *The Fall* is influenced by *Divina Commedia*. Later I will explain this in detail. Now, I would like to examine how far these two poems complete the themes. In *Hyperion* Hyperion speaks his anxiety with his own mouth (I, 227–50). And the apotheosis of Apollo is described, though halfway (III, 108–36). Here I will quote the last lines:

---At length

Apollo shriek'd; — and lo! from all his limbs
Celestial * * * * * * * *
* * * * * * * * * * * * *

(*Hyperion, III, 134–36)

At this point *Hyperion* breaks up. On the other hand, in *The Fall* anxious Hyperion's figure is mainly told indirectly, through Moneta's mouth. And the description of Hyperion consists of only a few lines:
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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  

* * * * * * * * *

(*The Fall, II, 57–61*)

Here *The Fall* stops. The story doesn't continue until Hyperion speaks his feeling with his own mouth. Nor Apollo dose appear. By the way, the last line of *The Fall* corresponds to *Hyperion*, I, 227. Therefore, when we consider these poems as the stories of the fall of Hyperion and the apotheosis of Apollo, the story continues until Book III, 136 in *Hyperion*, but only until Book I, 227 in *The Fall*.

According to the advertisement of the publisher, Richard Woodhouse, "The poem [*Hyperion*] was intended to have been of equal length with *Endymion*.

If this is true, *Hyperion* would have consisted of about 4000 lines. *Hyperion*, however, consists of 934 lines and has merely accomplished about a quarter of the whole. *The Fall* has only 529 lines and about an eighth completion. We cannot but conclude that the poems stopped at the beginning. It is suspected that the structure of the whole poem or the main thoughts had not yet been formed as clear images in Keats's mind. Next I will examine how Keats treated his intended themes in both poems.

### 3 Treatment of the Themes

*Hyperion* is a pure story of blank verse to describe the fall of Hyperion and the apotheosis of Apollo. The characters of the poem are Hyperion, Apollo, Saturn and other fallen Titans. It is the world of Greek mythology. In this sense the poem belongs to the genre of the classical epic, such as Milton's *Paradise Lost* and *Iliad* of Homer. Of course, in this poem Keats speaks his philosophy, judges the value of things, and shows his view of life through the characters. On the other hand, in *The Fall* the persona "I" (poet) enters the stage as well as Hyperion, Saturn and other Titans. Concerning the entry of "I", this poem resembles
Dante’s *Divina Commedia* and belongs to the modern or romantic epic, such as *The Prelude* of William Wordsworth. In *The Fall* the poet affirms his definition of poetry in the first eighteen lines and then the story begins. The poet goes from the paradise to the temple, meets a priestess there, and through her sees the story of the fall of Hyperion and the apotheosis of Apollo. Therefore, *The Fall* is not strictly a narrative of the fall of Hyperion and the apotheosis of Apollo, but these two themes form only a part of the poem. This part, however, is an important factor and plays an essential role in the humane growth of the poet.

In *Hyperion* it was enough for Keats only to narrate the psychology and motion of the characters and the events, following the linear passing of time, objectively. In *The Fall*, however, he must do two things: describe the humane growth of the poet (himself), and tell the fall of Hyperion and the apotheosis of Apollo. In *The Fall* he is not merely a storyteller, but also influenced by the story itself. And he must exemplify himself changing with the influence. In other words, he must narrate both the story and the figure of himself interacting with the story. Besides it is the story of immortal gods and it is he, a mortal, who is in front of the immortal gods. He must affirm the difference between immortal gods and a mortal man, too. He must describe both gods and a man, who have different dimensions and great disparity.

As one of the means to conquer this difficulty he makes Moneta, a priestess serving Saturn, enter the stage. *A Latin Dictionary* by Lewis and Short says: “*Moneta, ae, f. [moneo]*, the mother of the Muses, a transl. of Gr. Μνημοσύνη.” This derives from Latin verb, “moneo”. Consulting the dictionary, “moneo” means: “*moneo . . . to admonish, advise, warn, instruct, teach.*” Moneta will be the admonisher, adviser, Warner, instructor, and teacher of Keats as well as the mother of the Muses, immortal goddesses of poetry. In fact she teaches the poet various things so that he can understand as follows:

Mortal, that thou may’st understand aright,
I humanize my sayings to thine ear,
Making comparisons of earthly things:
Or thou might’st better listen to the wind,
Whose language is to thee a barren noise,
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Though it blows legend-laden through the trees.

*(The Fall, II, 1–6)*

And through her the poet understands the world of the gods and their agony. Considering thus, we must say that it was very suitable for the poet to have chosen Moneta as a mediator between the gods and himself.

To summarize, in *Hyperion* Keats's intended themes of the fall of Hyperion and the apotheosis of Apollo are adopted compliantly as they are, but in *The Fall* the growth of the poet becomes the main theme. To our regret we cannot see the whole aspect of the development of Keats's themes. Next I would like to compare the main thoughts of these fragments.

### 4 The Main Thoughts of the Fragments

The primary motif of *Hyperion* appears in the following words of Oceanus:

. . . 'tis the eternal law
That first in beauty should be first in might:

*(Hyperion, II, 228–29)*

and

. . . to bear all naked truths,
And to envisage circumstance, all calm,
That is the top of sovereignty.

*(Hyperion, II, 203–05)*

The former states the rule of the progress of the universe and the latter shows how to deal with the progress. The former reminds us of Keats as an aesthete, who tells "A thing of beauty is a joy for ever" in the first line of *Endymion* and makes the urn speak "Beauty is truth, truth beauty" in *Ode on a Grecian Urn*. In *Hyperion* Keats combines beauty with might or power. According to him beauty reigns over the world.
The latter presents us the concept of "Negative Capability", the ideal of Keats. He wrote to his two younger brothers on December 21, 1817, when he published his first collection of poems:

... it struck me, what quality went to form a Man of Achievement especially in literature & which Shakespeare possessed so enormously—I mean Negative Capability, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason— (I, 193)

Thus "Negative Capability" means that man can be perfectly calm when he is in "uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts."

This attitude is connected with the "disinterestedness of Mind", which, Keats said, only Socrates and Jesus Christ possessed and he hoped to have himself, too. As the above, in Hyperion the power of beauty, "Negative Capability", and the "disinterestedness of Mind" are told as the primary motifs.

On the other hand, in The Fall, as we said before, the theme is the growth of Keats as a human being and a poet and the primary motif appears in the following words of Moneta:

"None can usurp this height, " return'd that shade,
"But those to whom the miseries of the world
Are misery, and will not let them rest."

(The Fall, I, 147-49)

Yearning for "those to whom the miseries of the world / Are misery, and will not let them rest" had been in Keats's mind since the time when he stated in Sleep and Poetry published in 1817:

Yes, I must pass them [these joys] for a nobler life,
Where I may find the agonies, the strife
Of human hearts:

(Sleep and Poetry, 123-25)
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Sympathy with human agonies is found in many of his poems.

After mentioning the association with nature by the phrase, "A fellowship with essence", he refers to the dignity of love and friendship as things more charming than the association with nature:

... the crown of these
Is made of love and friendship, and sits high
Upon the forehead of humanity.

*(Endymion, I, 800-02)*

After this, Keats states the strength of the power of love. This "love" is not love between a man and a woman nor love for a special person, but love for humanity. *Endymion* describes Endymion's journey of love for an ideal woman, that is, Cynthia or the goddess of the moon. He hesitates in choosing "love", the ideal woman (Cynthia) or the real woman (an Indian maiden). But at last the Indian maiden turns out to be the same as Cynthia. In other words love for humanity leads to ideal love.

*Ode to a Nightingale* and *Ode on a Grecian Urn* are backed by his understanding of the suffering and mortality of humanity. It is one of Keats's ideals to enter the inner world of the human being, feel sympathy and pity with the world, and live by love for humanity. Keats exemplifies impressively the aspect of a humanist. In *The Fall* it appears conspicuously. In other words the admiration for beauty vanishes, and humanism and mental action become the characteristics. In this connection, in this poem Keats tells what he was thinking every day and has been writing in the letter, "what should a poet be?", "what role does a poet play in society?", and "I want to do some good to the world through poetry." It is this that makes the difference between *Hyperion* and *The Fall* in terms of theme and structure.

Finally I would like to mention the agony Keats described. In *Hyperion* he described the agony of Saturn and other fallen Titans (disappointment and grief), the agony of Hyperion whose fall is near at hand (uneasiness and anxiety), and the agony of the apotheosis of Apollo (suffering to "die into life"). Above all, this suffering to "die into life" had a significant meaning for Keats. When he
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calls this world "The vale of Soul-making", the agony of this world plays an important part in making soul.1

On the other hand, in The Fall the anguish of Moneta is described as well as the agony of Saturn and Hyperion. Keats relates us the endless anguish of the goddess with deep sympathy:

Then saw I a wan face,
Not pin'd by human sorrows, but bright blanch'd
By an immortal sickness which kills not;
It works a constant change, which happy death
Can put no end to; deathwards progressing
To no death was that visage;

(The Fall, I, 256–61)

And in The Fall Keats also expresses the human suffering has two aspects: first, the torture of the poet climbing the immortal steps, that is, the agony dying into life, which is similar to the suffering of Apollo who dies and lives again; second, the torture of the weak man bearing the agony of the still god and goddesses in profound grief:

Without stay or prop
But my own weak mortality, I bore
The load of this eternal quietude,

(The Fall, I, 388–90)

In these poems Keats presents the suffering of the gods and goddesses with deep understanding and sympathy. This proves that Keats gave a profoundly original meaning to the Greek mythology.

Notes

Introduction

The Identity and Difference between Keats's *Hyperion* and *The Fall of Hyperion*


"I wish I could say Tom was any better. His identity presses upon me so all day that I am obliged to go out — and although I intended to have given some time to study alone I am obliged to write, and plunge into abstract images to ease myself of his countenance his voice and feebleness." (Italics mine) (To C. W. Dilke, 21 September 1818) (I, 369).

"Might I not at that very instant [have] been cogitating on the Characters of saturn and Ops?" (Italics mine) (To Richard Woodhouse, 27 October 1818) (I, 387).

[18 Dec.] "I think you knew before you left England [on 24 June 1818] that my next subject would be 'the fall of Hyperion': I went on a little with it — but it will take some time to get into the vein again." [22 Dec.] "I took out my poem [*Hyperion*] to go on with it — but the thought of my writing so little to you came upon me and I could not get on." [31 Dec.] "... my large poem [*Hyperion*] which is scarce began [sic]." (To George and Georgiana Keats, 18, 22 & 31 December 1818) (II, 12, 14 & 18).

"I have not gone on with Hyperion — for to tell the truth I have not been in great cue for writing lately — I must wait for the sp [r] ing to rouse me up a little." (To George and Georgiana Keats, 14 February 1819) (II, 62).

Woodhouse copied this Fragment on 20 April 1819.

*Hyperion* was published in *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St. Agnes and Other Poems* in July 1820 by Taylor and Hessey in Fleet-Street of London and the following advertisement was added to it:

"If any apology to be thought necessary for the appearance of the unfinished poem of HYPERION, the publishers beg to state that they alone are responsible, as it was printed at their particular request, and contrary to the wish of the author. The poem was intended to have been of equal length with ENDYMION, but the reception given to that work discouraged the author from proceeding."

Crossing out this passage in the gift copy to Burridge Davenport, a Hampstead neighbor, Keats wrote above it: "This is none of my doing — I was ill at the time," and then beneath the last sentence, "This is a lie." Cf. W. J. Bate, pp. 650–51 and Amy Lowell, *John Keats* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1925), II, 424.

"... I have been all day employ'd in *a very abstr [a] ct Poem* . . . ." (Italics mine) (To Fanny Brawne, 25 July 1819) (II, 132).

"I have given up Hyperion [The Fall of Hyperion] . . . there were too many Miltonic inversions in it — Miltonic verse cannot be written but in an artful or
rather artist's humour. I wish to give myself up to other sensations. English ought to be kept up. It may be interesting to you to pick out some lines from Hyperion and put a mark X to the false beauty proceeding from art, and one # to the true voice of feeling. Upon my soul 'twas imagination I cannot make the distinction — Every now & then there is a Miltonic intonation — But I cannot make the division properly." (To J. H. Reynolds, 21 September 1819) (II, 167).


7 Another Version of Keats' 'Hyperion', Bibliographical and Historical Miscellanies of the Philobiblion Society (vol. iii, 1856).
11 "Very few men have ever arrived at a complete disinterestedness of Mind: very few have been influenced by a pure desire of the benefit of others . . . I have no doubt that thousands of people never heard of have had hearts completely disinterested: I can remember but two ——Socrates and Jesus——" (To George and Georgiana Keats, 19 March 1819) (II, 79–80).
12 "The common cognomen of this world among the misguided and superstitious is 'a vale of tears' from which we are to be redeemed by a certain arbitrary interposition of God and taken to Heaven —— What a little circumscribe[d] straightened notion! Call the world if you Please 'The vale of Soul-making' Then you will find out the use of the world." (To George and Georgiana Keats, 21 April 1819) (II, 101–02).