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“Sad Spaces of Oblivion”

Keats and the Writing of Hyperion

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Abstract

John Keats decided to turn to poetry merely five years before his death in 1821. Despite not enjoying extensive classical education, Keats was greatly inspired by classical mythology. The purpose of this study is to find out to what extent Keats relied on secondary reference works, such as the classical dictionaries written by Lemprière, Tooke and Spence, during the composition of the 1820 epic *Hyperion: A Fragment*. Moreover, this study aims to investigate the abandonment of this work by studying the stylistic influence that Milton exerted on Keats, as well as by examining this epic in the political framework in which it was written. This study offers a close reading of *Hyperion*, which is contrasted with the classical dictionaries as well as with Milton's *Paradise Lost*. This study finds that Keats relied heavily on secondary sources for his classical knowledge, however liberally adapted classical mythology to fit better the purposes of his writing. Besides, Keats's writing style was profoundly influenced by Milton's work, something he was quite aware of. This Anxiety of Influence, along with the political controversy surrounding Keats, led to the abandonment of *Hyperion*.

Keywords: Andrew Tooke, Anxiety of Influence, classical mythology, *Hyperion*, John Keats, John Lemprière, John Milton, Joseph Spence, Romanticism

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Introduction

On January 23rd 1818, John Keats wrote to Benjamin Haydon that he intended Apollo to be the protagonist of the upcoming epic *Hyperion*: “the hero of [*Endymion*] is being led on, like Buonaparte, by circumstance; whereas the Apollo in ‘Hyperion’ being a foreseeing god will shape his actions like one” (Keats 2005: 73). To Keats, Apollo was not only the God of poetry, but also of medicine, two matters he held in high esteem (De Almeida 17). Douglas Bush states that “Apollo [...] is Keats” (1963: 120), further emphasising the connection between the two. Apollo is even mentioned to be “the Father of all verse” in *Hyperion*. In other words, Keats greatly identified himself with the Olympian Apollo. However, owing to his tuition at Guy’s Hospital, Keats did not enjoy extensive classical education. He had been in medical training until 1816, a mere five years prior to his death, before deciding to give up a future in medicine and resolving to become a poet. Nonetheless, Keats appeared to be greatly inspired by classical mythology, and specifically Apollo. This has raised the question of how Keats became aware of this particular subject. Several critics (Bush 1935: 118; Vitoux 167; Watkins 89) have claimed that Keats studied the classics through translations, for example Thomas Cooke’s translations of Hesiod and George Chapman’s translations of Homer. Other scholars (De Almeida 17; Gallant 6; Hebron; Roe 62) add to this that Keats gained knowledge of classical mythology through secondary reference works such as John Lemprière’s *Classical Dictionary* (1788), Andrew Tooke’s *The Pantheon* (1693) and Joseph Spence’s *Polymetis* (1747).

The main aim of the present study is to examine how exactly Keats utilised these secondary reference works as a basis for the 1820 epic *Hyperion: A Fragment* (hereafter referred to as *Hyperion*). The distinction is here made between *Hyperion* and *The Fall of Hyperion* (henceforth *The Fall*), the reconstructed version of *Hyperion* first published posthumously in 1865. Despite the fact that Keats might have treated these two versions as

one and the same, this study will focus mostly on the version published in 1820. Besides, this dissertation focuses solely on the classical dictionaries since analysing the way in which the translations of the classics affected Keats's writing is beyond the scope of this study.

Considering that Keats aimed at independent writing (Keats 2005: 193), thus implying that he thought himself susceptible to the influence of other poets, it is essential to provide insight in how non-poetical secondary sources have impacted Keats's writing. Consequently, this study aims to shine a light on the sources of Keats's classicism.

The first part of the present study will provide a critical overview of the research already conducted on the subject of Keats's classicism. This paper will then move on to provide a close reading of Keats's *Hyperion* by comparing instances of classical mythology to their counterparts in the works of Lemprière, Tooke and Spence, by addressing similarities and discrepancies. Subsequently, this paper will apply the main points outlined in the introduction to the close reading of *Hyperion*. Lastly, this study aims to provide insight into the abandonment of *Hyperion*.

I

“The Genius of Poetry”

On the 8th of October 1818, John Keats wrote a letter to James Augustus Hessey in which he claimed that he intended to “write independently [for] the Genius of Poetry must work out its own salvation in a man” (Keats 2005: 193). The originality of Keats’s writing, and specifically the sources of his classical material, have long been the centre of discussion. The idea that Keats consulted secondary reference works such as those written by Lemprière, Tooke and Spence, has not been overlooked by critics. One of the most notable scholars to examine Keats’s source material is Douglas Bush. In one of his early studies on this subject, Bush sets out to find instances of Ancient Greek customs and mythology in Keats’s *Lamia* (1935: 785). In order to fully examine this subject, Bush relates these instances to their counterparts in John Potter’s *Archaeologica Graeca* (1722), of which Keats had a copy in his personal library at the time of his death (785). Bush contends that this particular reference work has often been overlooked by commentators of Keats’s work (785), which implies that not all of his sources might have been fully examined or even yet discovered. Furthermore, Bush claims that Keats consulted the *Archaeologica Graeca* initially because he “needed [...] information about ancient manners” (785). In a work written twenty years later, Bush also contends that Keats “altered mythology freely” and that he “welcomed post-classical accretions” (1963: 118).

The former claim is subject to considerable debate, as it has been noted that Keats’s liberal modifying of mythology can also be understood as him possibly “[coming] to feel inadequate to his subject” (Caldwell 1081). Along these lines, the latter claim implies that Keats might have assumed that the interpretations made by translators were part of initial classical mythology. Certainly, Keats appeared to accept what Homer Brown calls “a purely literary goddess” (49) in “Ode to Psyche”. By this, Brown refers to the poem’s veneration of

the deified Psyche, who did not appear in writing until the 2nd century AD and thus was absent from any Ancient Greek writing. This ties in closely with Bush's claim that Keats "welcomed post-classical accretions" (1963: 118) in his writing, thus making it plausible that he accepted interpretations of and modifications by translators and mythographers as part of the classical canon.

The concept that Keats did not have enough knowledge about ancient manners has also been explored by James Ralston Caldwell, writing only a year after Bush's 1935 piece in the same journal. His goal is to examine why Keats decided to abandon his first *Hyperion* draft. He considers three main views on the subject, the first being that Keats "came to feel inadequate of the subject" (1081). However, Caldwell rejects this idea by examining passages from *Hyperion* in which Keats appeared to have liberally employed his sources. Specifically, Caldwell refers to the discrepancy between the passive attitude of the Titans in *Hyperion* and their more active manners in Lemprière's *Classical Dictionary*. This incongruity has caused considerable debate and will further on in this study be examined to its full extent. Secondly, Caldwell studies Keats's own reason for the abandonment of the manuscript, namely that he found the work too derivative from Milton. On the 21st of September 1819 Keats wrote in a letter to John Reynolds that *Hyperion* contained "too many Miltonic inversions" (Keats 2005: 345). Keats had just stopped working on *The Fall* when he wrote this letter to Reynolds, which implies that Keats might have been referring to this work rather than *Hyperion*. However, Keats likely regarded the two versions as one single project. Despite the fact that Keats himself names this Miltonic influence as the primary reason for his departure from his work, Caldwell contests this claim and states that the influence of Milton was merely of secondary relevance to Keats's abandonment of *Hyperion* (1087). According to Caldwell, Keats experienced great emotional conflict while working on *Hyperion*. In a letter to his brother George on the 24th of September 1819, Keats expressed that he experienced trouble

concerning on the one hand the “poet’s duty to [...] sympathise with human suffering” (Caldwell 1091) while simultaneously expressing his feeling of “oppressed identity” (1089) through his writing. This opposition, Caldwell argues, caused Keats to ultimately give up on *Hyperion*. The last concept that Caldwell examines is that Keats abandoned the manuscript due to the large amount of criticism that Keats received over *Endymion* (1081). Moreover, Middleton Murry correctly points out that no hostile reviews appeared before Keats started working on *Hyperion* in April 1818 (Murry 79). However, despite that Keats received considerable critique over virtually all of his writings during his lifetime, he had never before quit any of his work (Caldwell 1081).

Tying in to the notion of Caldwell that Keats might have felt inadequate to write about classical mythology (1081), Daniel Watkins asserts in 1989 that it is more likely that Keats gave up on the writing of *Hyperion* because he misinterpreted some of his source materials, than that he liberally adapted classical mythology in his writing (89). Watkins bases this idea on the epic’s portrayal of the Titans as sympathetic and passive, whereas the Olympians are generally depicted as aggressive and villainous (89). However, Keats apparently aimed at celebrating the Olympian Apollo in *Hyperion* (91). According to Watkins, this gives the understanding that Keats misunderstood his sources, causing Keats to be in two minds about the nature of the Titans as well as the Olympians (89).

As early as at the time of the writing of *Hyperion*, the idea that Keats was largely unaware of classical mythology was held by some of his contemporaries. Stephen Hebron, who also states that Keats could not read Ancient Greek and that he wrote about mythology “rather clumsily and sentimentally”, points to an 1819 review of *Endymion* in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*. In this review, supposedly written by John Gibson Lockhart but published under the initial Z, it is put forth that “Keats has acquired a sort of vague idea [...] that no mythology can be so finely adapted for the purposes of poetry as [Greek mythology]”

(qtd in Hebron). However, Nicholas Roe rejects this claim by Lockhart altogether, claiming that he belonged to a “radical ideological cult opposed to patrician classicism” (63). This is further explained by Hebron, who states that “some writers [...] saw it as an inappropriate preference for pagan mythology over Christianity” (n.p.). Roe draws upon a study by Linda Colley, from which it becomes clear that public schools only handled classical literature “to remind Britain’s élite of its duty to serve and fight”, and that the classics “could inspire without being in any way threatening [because the] societies they represented were emphatically dead” (Colley 168). This implies that Keats’s classicist material was negatively regarded by what Roe calls the “orthodox Christian establishment” (63). To put this into perspective even further, Roe draws upon the works by one of Keats’s biographers, Richard Milnes, who writes that “Tooke’s *Pantheon*, Spence’s *Polymetis* and Lemprière’s *Dictionary* were sufficient fully to introduce [Keats’s] imagination to the enchanted world of old mythology” (8). According to Roe, Tooke’s *Pantheon*, as well as Lemprière’s *Dictionary* and Spence’s *Polymetis*, gave direct access to classical mythology without the severity of classical education (68). By this, Roe attempts to contradict the assertions by Hebron and Lockhart that Keats’s employment of classical mythology was inadequate.

In view of all that has been mentioned, the question arises about the motives of Keats’s possible adapting of classical mythology. One of the key points made by Watkins is that even though Keats occasionally misinterpreted classical mythology, its employment in *Hyperion* can be best explained by placing the work in the political and ideological context in which *Hyperion* was written, which is the aftermath of the French Revolution. Classical mythology enabled Keats, and other Romantic writers such as Shelley and Byron, to write about contemporary political events because classical mythology “provided a means of formulating an idyllic past of human possibility [...] that could be used as a basis for once more energizing contemporary defenders of liberty” (Watkins 91). In other words, Keats

employed classical mythology liberally in order to provide a sense of optimism for those fighting for liberty and facing restoring monarchies across Europe. The similarities between *Hyperion* and the French Revolution have not gone unnoticed by commentators of the epic. A similar point to that of Watkins has been made by Christine Gallant, who contends that *Hyperion* can be categorised as a post-Napoleonic work due to the time it was written in (71). At the time of writing, it appeared that the goals of the French Revolution had not been achieved and that the old European monarchies were being restored through the collusions of the Holy Alliance (72). It does also not appear to be coincidental that Keats contrasts Napoleon Buonaparte with Apollo in the letter to Haydon on the 23rd of January 1818 (2005: 73). The reference made here to Napoleon Buonaparte implies that Keats believed that the leader of the French revolution lacked control over his forces. This could provide insight into the liberal adaptation of classical mythology as portrayed in *Hyperion*. The epic revolves around the replacement of the former deities by their successors much like the French Revolution was concerned with restructuring the former monarchies.

The connection between Napoleon and classical mythology can best be explained by the research conducted by David Irwin, who notes that “Napoleon’s favourite style in art was Neoclassicism” (4). Irwin argues that “Neoclassicism was stimulated by a vastly increased first-hand knowledge of classical antiquity [in] the second half of the eighteenth century” (8), and that “only after 1830 was its leading position seriously undermined” (4). This is also claimed by Andrew Motion, who wrote that “the influence of Neoclassical taste [...] had dominated English cultural life since the early eighteenth century” (150). Given the fact that classicism was ubiquitous at the time of the writing of *Hyperion*, it is rather difficult to extract what was original, and what was not, about Keats’s view on classicism. This could indicate that Keats perhaps intended to reflect the spirit of the age when writing *Hyperion*. Motion also states that “[Keats’s] sense of the Neoclassical tradition was [...] sophisticated”

(151), and that Keats regarded it as something “he could adapt to his particular aims” (151). This implies that Keats may have been well aware of the nature of the classics, but that he chose to adapt them freely, perhaps to appear original while simultaneously reflecting the zeitgeist. This ties in perfectly with the theory outlined by Watkins (91) who states approximately the same point.

II

“Sad Spaces of Oblivion”

The first book of *Hyperion* opens by describing the scene of Saturn sitting “[d]eep in the shady sadness of a vale” (line 1.1). Saturn is here described as “gray-hair’d” and “quiet as a stone” (1.4). His desolation becomes particularly evident from “his fallen divinity” (1.12). The reader is positioned to view Saturn as old and weak. The implication this has is that the epic appears to be set in the aftermath of the War of the Titans, during which Saturn was dethroned by his son Jupiter. This greatly corresponds with the description of Saturn in all three of the reference works examined here. Both Spence (182) and Tooke (118) describe Saturn as “decrepid” and “old”. Furthermore, Lemprière states that Saturn is “generally represented as an old man bent through age and infirmity” (610). Certainly, Lemprière mentions that this is the way Saturn is “generally represented” (610), however his target audience were likely also those who generally enjoyed the type of classical education which Keats did not. In other words, the influence of secondary sources on Keats’s writing already becomes apparent during the first lines of the epic.

Saturn rests in an “icy trance” (1.201) before being awakened by Hyperion’s spouse Thea, who like Saturn belongs to the “fallen house [of] the Titans” (1.150-61). Thea is described as extremely tall and strong, for “by her in stature the tall Amazon / [h]ad stood at a pigmy’s height” and the fact that she “would have [...] with a finger stay’d Ixion’s wheel” (1.27-28). Tooke notes that Ixion “was tied fast to a wheel which continually turns around” (225). Likewise, both Lemprière (328) and Spence (280) claim that Ixion was bound to a perpetually moving wheel. The fact that Thea was much taller than an Amazon, and strong enough to stop Ixion’s wheel, further emphasises her tremendous strength and height. This ties in closely with the description of the Titans by Lemprière as being “of a gigantic stature, and with proportionable strength” (692). Moreover, Thea appears distraught due to the

“listening fear in her regard / [a]s if calamity had but began” (1.37-38). This is fortified even more by the fact that “she felt cruel pain” (1.44). In lines 1.52-71, she pleads to Saturn to regain control of his “hoary majesty” (1.59). This causes Saturn to awake from his dazed state. He initially replies that he is not himself, for he has “left / [his] strong identity” (1.113-14), but Thea’s distress eventually leads him to realise that “Saturn must be King” (1.125). Thea, now hopeful (1.148), leads Saturn to their fellow Titans so he can provide them with the same passion he felt.

The epic moves to the palace of Hyperion, the only of the Titans who “still kept / [h]is sov’reignty” (1.165). The palace is portrayed in an Egyptian style, referring to “pyramids” (1.177) and “obelisks” (1.178). Earlier on in *Hyperion*, Keats also alludes to Egypt by mentioning the “Memphian Sphinx” (1.31). This has not been overlooked by Marjorie Levinson, who connects these references to a renewed interest in ancient Egypt after the brief supremacy of Napoleon in Egypt (102). She argues that “Egypt signified tyrannic, hieratic, and corrupt government” (102). This ties in closely with the theory outlined by Watkins, who claimed that Keats employed classical myth freely as a tool for cultural appropriation (91). The opening of the doors of Hyperion’s palace is accompanied by “solemn tubes / [b]lown by the serious Zephyrs” (1.206-7). Keats appears to have been inspired by Spence in this description, who depicts a Zephyr blowing on a tube (see fig. 1).



Fig 1. *Relievo, in the Capitoline Gallery*. In Joseph Spence. London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1755. Plate 28. Print.

Hyperion is encouraged by Coelus who calls “from the universal space” (1.307) and promises to “keep watch on [Hyperion’s] bright sun” (1.347) while Hyperion descends to earth to help “old Saturn take his throne again” (1.250). In his address to Hyperion, Coelus mentions that Saturn was his “first-born” (1.323), however Tooke ascribes this attribute to “Saturn’s eldest brother [...] Titanus” (225). Several explanations could be given for this discrepancy. Firstly, it could be argued that this is another instance of Keats “adapt[ing] to his particular aims” (Motion 151). By naming Saturn as the eldest of the Titans, Keats effectively draws a comparison between Saturn and Jupiter, Saturn’s eldest son. On the other hand, it could also be argued that this is an instance of Keats’s shortcoming of classical knowledge. Besides, neither Spence nor Lemprière mention who is older. An answer to this discrepancy follows a few lines later, as Keats describes Saturn as having “thunders round his head” (1.325). The relevance of this is that thunder is commonly used as a characteristic of Jupiter, and that it is thus plausible that Keats “altered mythology freely” (Bush 118) so as to create a comparison between Jupiter and Saturn.

The second book of *Hyperion* opens with an account of “that sad place / where [...] the bruised Titans mourn’d” (2.3-4). Keats does not provide a name of this particular place. It is merely described as “a den where no insulting light / [c]ould glimmer on their tears” (2.5-6), with the Titans sitting on “hard flint” (2.15). Keats provides a long list of the Titans who are present, among whom Mnemosyne (2.29), Asia (2.53), Enceladus (2.66), Oceanus, (2.75), Clymene (2.76), and Ops (113). Only a few of those mentioned are described by Keats. The most elaborate account is that of Asia, who “was prophesying of her glory; / [a]nd in her wide imagination stood / [p]alm-shaded temples, and high-rival fanes / [b]y Oxus or in Ganges’ sacred isles” (2.55-59). This suggests that Asia was imagining a future oriental cult. Lemprière’s influence appears evident here, since he describes Asia as “[having] given birth to many of the greatest monarchies of the universe” (97). Moreover, Asia is described as

“[leaning] upon a tusk / [s]hed from the broadest of her elephants” (2.61-62). No mention is made of elephants in Tooke, Lemprière or Spence. However, Keats might have derived inspiration for Asia’s description from two medals in Spence’s *Polymetis*. The medal on the left in figure 2 represents the personified Asia. Similarly, the medal on the right depicts a personification of Africa, who appears to have the trunk of an elephant on her head and to be leaning on multiple tusks strung together. Taken together, these two medals correspond to the description of Asia in *Hyperion*.



Fig. 2. *Medal, of Adrian*. In Joseph Spence. London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1755. Plate 32. Print.

After Saturn and Thea arrive at “that sad place” (2.3), Saturn urges the other Titans to “engine [their] great wrath” (2.161). The first to respond is Oceanus, who is described as having “locks not oozy” (2.170). Only Lemprière provides a somewhat detailed account of Oceanus, noting that “he is generally represented as an old man with a long flowing beard” (451). The significance here is the ambiguity of the word “flowing” (451), since this could also refer to the flowing of the water over which Oceanus presides. Given that Oceanus has been replaced by Neptune, his locks would certainly be “not oozy” (Keats 2.170). Besides, this line is a clear allusion to Milton’s *Lycidas*: “with Nectar pure his oozy locks he laves” (175), which is an example of the Miltonic influence that will be discussed in more detail later in this study. Oceanus proceeds to give an account of his successor. The essence of the

Keats's aestheticism is perfectly encapsulated by these lines. This is best illustrated by the reason Oceanus provides for his acceptance of being removed from power, as he claims that "[those] who do tower / [a]bove us in their beauty, [...] must reign / [i]n right thereof; for 'tis the eternal law / [t]hat first in beauty should be first in might" (2.226-29). Moreover, he claims that "a glow of beauty in [Neptune's] eyes [...] enforc'd [Oceanus] to bid sad farewell / [t]o all [his] empire" (2.237-39). This appears to be a reflection of Keats's aestheticism, which is perfectly summarised by Keats himself in the "Ode on a Grecian Urn": "[b]eauty is truth, truth beauty" (Keats 2012: 931). This is fortified even more by the plea of Clymene, who was replaced by "young Apollo" (2.293). According to Clymene, her singing was "like timorous brook" (2.300) in comparison to that of Apollo, whose tunes were "[f]ull of calm joy [...] / and soft delicious warmth" (2.265-66). Like Oceanus, she appears to have accepted her removal from power due to Apollo's superior beauty.

Next to respond to Saturn is Enceladus, described by Lemprière as "the most powerful of all the giants who conspired against Jupiter" (242). Certainly, Enceladus does not appear to accept his defeat. Keats mentions that Enceladus was "once tame and mild / [a]s grazing ox unworried in the meads" (2.65-66) but is "[n]ow tiger-passion'd, lion-thoughted" (2.67) in his pursuit of "[scarring] the younger Gods" (2.71). The fact that he is seemingly the only of the Titans willing to revolt, appears to agree with the description by Lemprière. Besides, Spence briefly mentions that Enceladus "attempted for the sovereignty of heaven" (278), which appears in line with his rebellious depiction *Hyperion*. In his proclamation, Enceladus also refers to "the winged thing, / Victory" (2.341-42). The relevance of this is that the deity signifying Victory makes an appearance in Lemprière and Spence. According to Lemprière, "she was represented with wings" (719), and in Spence we find her as the "winged deity" (149) as well as in figure 3, where she is also depicted with wings. The

speech made by Enceladus appears to impassion all the Titans, but they are fully raised to their feet by the arrival of Hyperion (2.345).



Fig. 3. *Medal, of Galba*. In Joseph Spence. London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1755. Plate 22. Print.

Upon arriving at the Titans' hiding place, Hyperion not only causes the Titans to rise, but also eradicates "all the sad spaces of oblivion" (2.359) by shining his light on them. Keats described Hyperion as having "golden [...] short Numidian curl[s]" (2.371). This is significant because his adversary Apollo is traditionally portrayed with long, waving hair (Lemprière 70; Spence 84; Tooke 39). In other words, Keats picturing Hyperion with the exact opposite hairstyle of Apollo appears to be an instance of "[adapting] to his particular aims" (Motion 151). In the final lines of the second book, another similarity is made between Hyperion and Egypt, as Keats describes him as being "in midst of his own brightness, like the bulk / [o]f Memnon's image at the set of sun" (2.373-74). This again serves as evidence for the concept that Keats altered mythology in order to gain cultural prestige (Watkins 91).

Apollo is mentioned in the second book, but only makes appearance in person in the third book of *Hyperion*. As Keats mentioned in his letter to Haydon on the 23rd of January 1818, Apollo was meant to be the protagonist of *Hyperion* (Keats 2005: 73). Certainly, the third book offers a detailed description of the Olympian. Keats entitles Apollo as "the Father

of all verse” (3.13), which is greatly in line with Lemprière’s description of Apollo as “the god of [...] poetry [...] of which he was deemed the inventor” (69). Moreover, both Lemprière (70) and Spence (93) state that Apollo was generally represented holding a lyre. This is contradicted by Tooke, who claims it not to be a lyre, but a harp (39). This is a key feature of Tooke’s influence on the writing of *Hyperion*, since Keats mentions a “Delphic harp” (3.10) in relation to Apollo. “Delphic” (3.10) here refers to the city of Delphi, in which stood Apollo’s “most splendid temple” (Lemprière 70). Apollo’s location is named as “Delos [...] chief isle of the embowered Cyclades” (3.23-24). Both Lemprière (69; 214) and Tooke (113) also mention that Apollo was born on the island of Delos, to which Tooke adds that Apollo was given birth to “under a palm or olive tree” (113). Lemprière also mentions that “the olive, the laurel, the palm tree, &c. were sacred to [Apollo]” (70). Certainly, Keats makes use of this fact by ascribing to Delos “thine olives green, [...] / and lawn-shading palms” (3.24-25). The evidence presented in this section shows that Keats was heavily influenced by Tooke, Spence and Lemprière when writing about Apollo.

Apollo is visited by Mnemosyne, who is described by Lemprière as “mother of the nine muses” (421). This is relevant since Keats mentions that Apollo is not yet a god. This becomes apparent from the fact that Apollo remains “in aching ignorance” (3.107). The suggestion here is that Mnemosyne possesses the power to provide Apollo with this quality. This becomes particularly evident from line 2.118, in which Apollo asks Mnemosyne to “deify [him]”. It appears that Mnemosyne grants Apollo this request as “wild commotions shook him and made flush / [a]ll the immortal fairness of his limbs” (3.124). The last lines of this book suggest that Apollo has then become a god: “from all his limbs / Celestial...”, however due to the incompleteness of the line, this remains up for debate. The copy of Keats’s publisher Richard Woodhouse offers an ending to this line: “from all his limbs / Celestial

glory dawn'd, he was a god” (Caldwell 1082). The suggestion this has is that Apollo was indeed deified by Mnemosyne.

Overall, it appears that Keats relied heavily on Lemprière, Tooke and Spence for the descriptions and background information of the characters in *Hyperion*. Furthermore, it appears that Keats frequently adapted classical mythology in order to fit better to the purposes of his writing.

III

“In the Shady Sadness of a Vale”

Hyperion bears considerable resemblance to Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, which was first published in 1667. Besides many stylistic similarities, there appears to some similarity concerning content. Both epics are written entirely in blank verse, iambic pentameter, and revolve around the alleged antagonist falling from grace, specifically Satan in *Paradise Lost* and Hyperion in *Hyperion*. Keats’s copy of *Paradise Lost* contains annotations in his own hand, providing valuable insight into the connection between Keats’s work and Milton’s influence. Keats appears to have marked passages that he found striking. Beth Lau states that “vertical lines identify passages Keats found significant for their content [...] underscoring highlights more detailed effects such as striking language” (n.p.).

One passage in which the stylistic influence of Milton becomes particularly evident is “reluctant flames” (6.58). Keats notes about this in the margins that “[r]eluctant’ with its original and modern meaning combined and woven together, with all its shades of signification has a powerful effect” (Johnson 4). Keats appears to have included this into *Hyperion* in line 61, about which Lau notes that “Keats uses the modern meaning of the word in *Hyperion*” (n.p.). Along these lines, one of the passages that Keats underlined can be found in “[t]o slumber here, as in the vales of Heaven?” (1.321). As figure 4 shows, he wrote in the margins that “[t]here is a cool pleasure in the very sound of ‘vale’. The English word is of the happiest chance” (Johnson 12). Keats then goes on to praise Milton’s use of this word by stating that “Milton has put vales in heaven and hell with the very utter affection and yearning of a great Poet” (Johnson 12).

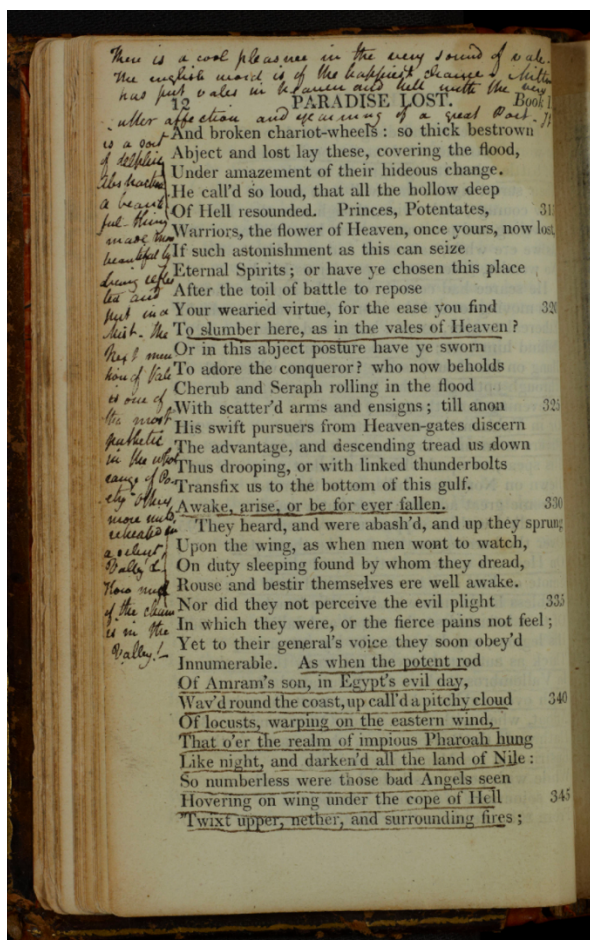


Fig. 4. Keats on the word 'vale'. In Daniel Johnson. London: Keats Library, 2020. Print.

The word 'vale' thus has very clear Miltonic associations (Wilkie 165). Keats appears to have incorporated the word 'vale' in *Hyperion*, as the first book of Keats's epic opens with Saturn sitting "in the shady sadness of a vale" (line 1). Besides, Keats uses this word two more times in the third book of *Hyperion*, in lines 35 and 52. Brian Wilkie notes about Keats's usage of the word 'vale' that it "[expresses] the transition from a world of innocence [...] to a world of suffering" (165). This is one of the instances in which the stylistic influence of Milton on Keats's writing becomes particularly evident.

One of the foremost passages that marks Keats's effort to break loose from Milton's influence is the way in which Keats reworked the *Hyperion* lines "Hyperion, leaving twilight in the rear / [c]ame slope upon the threshold of the west" (1.204-5) into *The Fall* as "Hyperion, leaving twilight in the rear / [i]s sloping to the threshold of the West" (2.47-48).

Like the word 'vale', 'slope' bears Miltonic associations due to its appearance in *Paradise Lost*: "[d]own the slope hills" (4.261). In his edition of *Paradise Lost*, Keats marked this passage using horizontal lines, thus indicating language he found stylistically striking (Lau). The relevance of this stylistic difference between *Hyperion* and *The Fall* is that Keats altered the phrase "came slope" (1.204) both grammatically and syntactically so as to dispose of the "Miltonic inversions" (2005: 345). Along these lines, one of Keats's attempts to remove Miltonic influences from *Hyperion* becomes apparent from "[t]he frozen God still couchant upon the earth" (1.87), which Keats reworked in *The Fall* as "[t]he frozen God still bending to the earth" (1.386). In other words, Keats altered the word "couchant" (1973: 1.87), a word which Keats also marks in the fourth book of *Paradise Lost*: "his couchant watch" (4.406). Overall, the notes and markings with which Keats provided his copy of *Paradise Lost* provide great insight into the stylistic influence Milton had on Keats.

However, Vincent Newey argues that merely the imitation of Milton was of secondary importance to the abandonment of *Hyperion*, as Newey states that it "screens a deeper anxiety" of Keats (83). Newey refers to the Anxiety of Influence, which according to Harold Bloom can be seen "the immense anxieties of indebtedness" that follow from "the realization that [the author] has failed to create himself" (5). As Bloom implies early in his study, he believes that there can be no such thing as an original poem since "every disciple takes away something from his master" (qtd in Bloom 6). In other words, the Anxiety of Influence concerns the poet's desire to break free from their predecessor's influence. Bloom states that "if one examines the dozen or so major poetic influences before this century, one discovers quickly who among them ranks as the great Inhibitor [...]: Milton" (32). Milton can thus be regarded as the foremost influence on the Romantic poets. Keats's letter to Hessey on the 8th of October 1818 expressed the former's desire to "write independently" (2005: 193), from which his Anxiety of Influence becomes evident. Keats might have felt his originality

threatened should the reader associate *Hyperion* with Milton rather than himself. On the 22th of September 1819 Keats wrote to his brother George that he “stood on [his] guard against Milton” (2005: 379). He describes this feeling of artistic oppression in much detail in his letter to Woodhouse on the 27th of October 1818, undoubtedly corresponding to his inability to break loose from Milton’s influence when writing *Hyperion*: “[w]hen I am in a room with People, [...] the identity of everyone in the room begins to press upon me that I am in a very little time annihilated” (2005: 195). This implies that Keats feared that everyone in his surroundings threatened the originality of his identity, and more specifically of his writing style. However, Keats wrote to George and Georgiana Keats on the 22th of September 1819 that “the first political duty a Man ought to have a Mind to is the happiness of his friends” (2005: 380). This shows that Keats attempted to sympathise with the difficulties of his friends, and consequently his readers, by means of his poetry. Besides, this evidences the emotional conflict which was on Keats’s mind when writing *Hyperion*.

Keats also wrote to Woodhouse on the 27th of October 1818 that he “had been cogitating on the Characters of saturn [sic] and Ops” (2005:195). In this same letter he expresses his feeling of oppression to Woodhouse, through which the connection between his emotional conflict and *Hyperion* becomes undoubtable (Bate 392). Bate states that Keats “[identified himself] with their defeat and futility” (392) by referring to these particular characters from *Hyperion*. The relevance of this is that a connection is effectively made between the way in which Keats encapsulated his emotions in his writing. This suggests that Keats conveyed his personal state of mind through *Hyperion*, and that his inability to balance “the happiness of his friends” (2005; 380) on the one hand and his feeling of oppression on the other, must be considered as one of the principal reasons for the abandonment of *Hyperion*.

Caldwell states that one of the reasons for the abandoning of the epic manuscript is that Keats possibly “came to feel inadequate to his subject” (1081). There appear to be several undoubtable discrepancies between what is considered “the traditional story” (Caldwell 1086) and the mythology that Keats, as it were, reinvents in *Hyperion*. Keats aimed to work in his muse Apollo as the opposition to the Titans, whom he had already introduced as being “wise and beautiful” (Caldwell 1081). It is not unlikely that Keats, having realised this apparent paradox, felt that it was less complicated to rewrite *Hyperion* into what would be *The Fall*, published posthumously in 1865, than to attempt to repair this inconsistency in a later *Hyperion* book. This concept is strongly supported by the fact that *Hyperion* ends at the description of Apollo’s changing into the Olympian counterpart of Hyperion, in which Keats most likely attempted to portray Apollo in the same benign and wise manner he already portrayed the Titans in. Keats might thus have decided to abandon *Hyperion* after realising that he depicted the Titans and their challenger Apollo in a similar way.

While critics have argued a variety of reasons for the abandonment of *Hyperion*, one aspect that is generally overlooked is the link between the political turmoil at the time of the composition of *Hyperion* and its subsequent desertion. For instance, Watkins links the content of *Hyperion* to the aftermath of the French revolution (91), but subsequently fails to elaborate on the relation between the desertion of the manuscript and the political controversy surrounding Keats. He was greatly excited by the idea of political progress (Levinson 103), which becomes apparent in *Hyperion* from the defeat of the Titans and their replacement by the Olympians. Moreover, Keats’s odes often seem to symbolise a shift, or the desire thereof, from what Robert Fowler calls “logos to mythos” (45), which can be understood as the challenging of the established order. Watkins aptly asserts that Keats employed classical mythology to “[provide] a means of formulating an idyllic past of human possibility” (91), which adds to the suggestion that through *Hyperion*, Keats aimed at criticising the impending

restoration of monarchies across the continent. Initially, poets such as Wordsworth and Coleridge also advocated for the Revolution, about which Wordsworth notably wrote in 1799 “Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive / But to be young was very heaven” (line 691-92). However, a series of events among which Robespierre’s Reign of Terror led to a steep decline of British support for the cause of the Revolution (Dickinson 10-11). Nonetheless, Keats’s desire for political reform was persistent. This becomes particularly evident from a poem Keats wrote upon the release of Leigh Hunt from prison. Hunt had been incarcerated for defaming George IV, which Keats described as “showing truth to flatter’d state” (Keats 1973: 50).

As a consequence, Keats became inexorably associated with Hunt’s political ideas. While they both longed for political reform, their relationship was severely damaged by Z’s 1819 review of *Endymion* in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*. This review was published a mere month before Keats declared to Reynolds that he had abandoned *Hyperion* (2005: 345). By having Hunt named as his “prototype” (qtd in Hebron), Keats undoubtedly felt his originality threatened, adding to the emotional conflict he already experienced. This suggests that the review of *Endymion* played a significant part in the abandonment of *Hyperion*. However, Roe points out that “for Z, Keats’s [...] travesty of classical myth paralleled his disorderly, disaffected political ambitions” (61). The implication this has is that Keats’s longing for political reformation caused him to be a target for conservative reviewers, such as Z, who opposed Keats’s political aspirations. A strong case could thus be made for the idea that Keats, possibly fearing that *Hyperion* would also be regarded as a political tool, decided to desert the manuscript so as not to be associated with Hunt’s political ideas, nor with Hunt in any manner. Overall, the evidence in this section suggests that Keats abandoned *Hyperion* to avoid negative reviews based on his ideas about political reformation, as well as to escape from the association with Leigh Hunt and John Milton.

Conclusion

Both the life and the works of John Keats were heavily influenced by the emotional conflict he continually experienced. On the one hand, he dealt with feelings of oppression in both his artistic and political ideas, while on the other he felt that it was his duty to provide his readers with a sense of happiness. Due to his scholarly background in medicine and his inability to read Greek, he depended heavily on secondary sources, among whom Lemprière, Tooke and Spence, to write about classical mythology. Keats attempted to feature classical mythology as much as possible in the writing of his manuscript *Hyperion*. With this, he aimed to reflect the spirit of the age, in which Neoclassicism was ubiquitous, as well as to convey his ideas about political reformation across Europe. His liberal adaptation of Greek mythology, as well as his reliance on mythographers and translators of classical myths, caused inconsistency in his writings about the subject, which was regarded with condescension by many of his contemporaries. Besides, Keats's knowledge about classicism was not the only feature of his writing to be influenced by other authors. His writing style clearly resembles that of Milton, a feature about which Keats was aware and quite insecure. Being associated with other authors fed into Keats's emotional conflict, since one way in which he felt oppressed was his inability to break free from the influence of other writers. He wanted to create art linked to none other than himself.

However, these factors were only of secondary importance for the abandonment of *Hyperion* in the autumn of 1819. As opposed to many of his compatriots, Keats longed for political reform and was an outspoken supporter of the cause of the French Revolution. He often demonstrated this through his poetry and implied in a letter on the 23rd of January 1818 to Benjamin Haydon that this would be one of the aims of *Hyperion* as well. Possibly feeling disheartened by a negative review of *Endymion*, afraid of having his political ideas

condemned, and having been accused of being influenced by others, Keats eventually decided to desert the manuscript.

Due to the limited scope of the present study, the influence that the translators of classical mythology might have exerted on Keats's writing has not been examined to its full extent. One of the elements left unexplored in the present study is to what extent the translators of classical mythology managed to cross the linguistic, cultural, and temporal boundaries while translating, so as to correctly portray the customs and traditions of ancient societies. Since Keats depended heavily on these sources, future research might examine the discrepancies and similarities between not only Keats and the translators, but also between the translators and the classics themselves. This way, future studies might explore inconsistencies between the classics and Keats's writing which have been caused by the mistakes that translators might have made.

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