Christoph Bode (Ed.)

Romanticism and the Forms of Discontent

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Timothy Michael

Keats and Uneasiness

Lamia, regal dressed
Silently paced about, and as she went,
In pale contented sort of discontent,
Missioned her viewless servants to enrich
The fretted splendor of each nook and niche.
Keats, *Lamia* (II, 133-37)[1]

"Psychoanalysis, unfortunately, has scarcely anything to say about beauty either."
Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (33)[2]

In his introductory lecture on the English poets, "On Poetry in General" (1818), William Hazlitt defines the 'poetical impression' as something not altogether pleasant:

> The poetical impression of any object is that uneasy, exquisite sense of beauty or power that cannot be contained within itself; that is impatient of all limit; that (as flame bends to flame) strives to link itself to some other image of kindred beauty or grandeur; to enshrine itself, as it were, in the highest forms of fancy, and to relieve the aching sense of pleasure by expressing it in the boldest manner, and by the most striking examples of the same quality in other instances. (2: 167)

Keats, who attended and reported on these lectures of early 1818, would, in his poetry of the following year, pursue precisely this sort of uneasiness and aching pleasure. Poems such as the "Ode on Melancholy", *Lamia*, *Hyperion*, *The Fall of Hyperion*, and *The Eve of St. Agnes* revolve around the point at which pleasure becomes pain, pain becomes pleasure, or the point at which the two states dissolve and a third, synthetic state arises. Throughout these poems, Keats develops a conception of pleasure-pain, marked predominantly by the sense of uneasiness Hazlitt associates with the aesthetic experience. This feeling of uneasiness is distinct from the sense of embarrassment Christopher Ricks masterfully traced in *Keats and Embarrassment* (1974) insofar as there is little that is awkward about it, but much that Keats would find bold and emboldening.

A little over a century after Hazlitt's lectures, Freud offered a grand theory of uneasiness in *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* (1930). The work was immediately translated into English as *Civilization and Its Discontents*. *Unbehagen*, though, is closer to uneasiness, discomfort, malaise. Writing to Eitingon in 1930, Freud remarks that "My work could perhaps be called, if it needs a title at all: Unhappiness in Culture [*Das*

1 All quotations of poems by John Keats are from the following edition: John Keats, *The Poems of John Keats*, ed. Miriam Allott, London: Longman, 1970.

2 The original German quotations are given in the footnote throughout: "Leider weiß die Psychoanalyse über die Schönheit am wenigsten zu sagen" (49).

Unglück in der Kultur]" (to Eitingon, 8 July 1929; Gay 544). Its premise, already a psychological and philosophical truism by the time Freud writes his late work, is that human beings do not feel entirely comfortable in society: by entering into civil society we gain a number of advantages, but we also suppress basic drives and urges that re-appear – destructively, at times – elsewhere. The internalization of paternal authority (and behind the father, the state), casting a watchful eye on our thoughts and actions, makes us fundamentally uneasy. I shall focus here on the kind of Romantic uneasiness theorized by Hazlitt and perfected by Keats. This kind of uneasiness is bound up with aesthetic pleasure, about which, Freud confesses in *Civilization and its Discontents*, psychoanalysis has little to say: "psychoanalysis, unfortunately, has scarcely anything to say about beauty" (33).[3] "All that seems certain", Freud says with characteristic inevitability, "is its derivation from the field of sexual feeling" (*ibid*.).[4] The young poet of *Endymion* would have agreed.

The most well-known representation of the kind of uneasiness with which I am concerned is Keats's "Ode on Melancholy" (written May 1819), which insists on remaining uneasy so that the pleasure of the uneasiness may be fully felt. In Empson's inimitable paraphrase of the poem,

> Do not abandon yourself to melancholy, delightful as that would be, or you will lose the sensations of incipient melancholia. Do not think always about forgetting, or you will forget its pain. Do not achieve death, or you can no longer live in its shadow. Taste rather at their most sharp the full sensations of death, of melancholy, and of oblivion. (215)

The poem is, for Empson, representative of the seventh type of ambiguity, in which "the two opposite meanings of the word, the two values of the ambiguity, are the two opposite meanings defined by the context, so that the total effect is to show a fundamental division in the writer's mind" (192).

It is to Freud that Empson turns when discussing this particular type of ambiguity, as a "Freudian opposite at least marks dissatisfaction; the notion of what you want involves the idea that you have not got it, and this again involves 'the opposite defined by your context', which is what you have and cannot avoid" (193). In the context of the "Ode on Melancholy", true melancholy is the object of desire, and the speaker comes to the recognition that this kind of melancholy is dangerously close to a certain kind of

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3 "Leider weiß die Psychoanalyse über die Schönheit am wenigsten zu sagen" (49).

4 "Einzig die Ableitung aus dem Gebiet des Sexualempfindens scheint gesichert" (49). Compare with Wordsworth's account of the causes upon which the pleasure received from metrical language depends in the 1800 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*: "Among the chief of these causes is to be reckoned a principle which must be well known to those who have made any of the Arts the object of natural reflection; I mean the pleasure which the mind derives from the perception of similitude in dissimilitude. This principle is the great spring of the activity of our minds and their chief feeder. From this principle the direction of the sexual appetite, and all the passions connected with it take their origin […]" (1: 148).

pleasure. I say 'a certain kind of pleasure' because this is not a poem that is concerned with melancholy as such, nor with pleasure as such. It is concerned with a precise aesthetic feeling, with which Keats was fascinated throughout 1819. It is the kind of uneasiness present in the renowned final section of the poem:

> She dwells with Beauty – Beauty that must die;
> And Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips
> Bidding adieu; and aching Pleasure nigh,
> Turning to poison while the bee-mouth sips.
> Aye, in the very temple of Delight
> Veiled Melancholy has her sovran shrine,
> Though seen of none save him whose strenuous tongue
> Can Burst Joy's grape against his palate fine;
> His soul shall taste the sadness of her might,
> And be among her cloudy trophies hung. (ll. 20-30)

We are given the satisfaction of the assured proposition that melancholy dwells with beauty, only to be told, without ceremony, that this beauty must die; we are told that melancholy also dwells with joy, only to be immediately informed that there is no moment in which joy is not saying goodbye; we are then told that melancholy, ever more promiscuous, also dwells with "aching Pleasure nigh" (recalling, again, Hazlitt's formulation of uneasiness from a year earlier), though the coordinates of "nigh" are not certain: to what, exactly, is "aching Pleasure nigh"? The next line seems to begin with a transitive verb that lacks an object: either "aching Pleasure" is awkwardly turning an unspecified object (nectar) into poison or, more likely, it is "aching Pleasure" itself that turns to poison. "[B]ee-mouth" is a nice Keatsian compound, but still an awkward one. The first ambiguous sentence of the stanza is followed by an affirmation ("Aye") that melancholy's "sovran" (Milton's spelling of 'sovereign') shrine is in "the very temple of Delight", an uneasy relationship of priority whichever sense of 'sovereign' one chooses. The Empsonian ambiguities continue through the rest of the stanza. Almost every relation in "His soul shall taste the sadness of her might" is strained: *souls* do not *taste*, *sadness* is *felt* not *tasted*, and it is unusual to conceive of *sadness* as an attribute of *might*. All this is enough to make one very uneasy, which, of course, is the point. This is not to suggest that the sort of uneasiness created *by* the poem is exactly the same in kind as the uneasiness represented *in* the poem: the former is the product of verbal ambiguity and paradox; the latter an intense experience in which the distinction between joy and suffering dissolves. But they are related and congruous, which is why the poem is successful. They are related as varieties of aesthetic experience, and they are congruous insofar as one kind of uneasiness (verbal) is a precondition of the other (metaphysical).

Begun the month following the composition of "Ode on Melancholy", *Lamia* continues to explore the kind of uneasiness that preoccupied Keats in 1819: an uneasiness, occasioned by the contiguity – bordering on identity – of pleasure and pain, which constitutes an important part of aesthetic experience. The first reference to such a state in the poem occurs when Hermes rests momentarily in his search for the

nymph: "There as he stood, he heard a mournful voice, / Such as, once heard, in gentle heart destroys / All pain but pity" (I, 35-37). Pity here is the pain that remains, but, when isolated from other sorts of pain, seems to lose some of its harshness in a "gentle heart" (a process that would soon be mirrored in Lamia's transformation, when, for a moment, "Nothing but pain and ugliness were left" [I, 164]). Immediately following her transformation and on her way to Lycius, Keats presents us with his most involved meditation on the interchange between pleasure and pain:

> Ah, happy Lycius! – for she was a maid
> More beautiful than ever twisted braid,
> Or sighed, or blushed, or on spring-flowered lea
> Spread a green kirtle to the minstrelsy;
> A virgin purest lipped, yet in the lore
> Of love deep learnèd to the red heart's core;
> Not one hour old, yet of sciental brain
> To unperplex bliss from its neighbor pain,
> Define their pettish limits, and estrange
> Their points of contact and swift counterchange;
> Intrigue with the specious chaos, and dispart
> Its most ambiguous atoms with sure art;
> As though in Cupid's college she had spent
> Sweet days a lovely graduate, still unshent,
> And kept his rosy terms in idle languishment. (I, 185-99)

The language here is particularly knotty – itself a twisted braid of words and images worth disentangling. There are the archaic or otherwise unusual words of which Keats was so fond: *lea* (a tract of open ground), *kirtle* (a man's tunic), *sciental* (endowed with wisdom, as used by Milton in a passage marked by Keats [*Paradise Lost* IX, 837-38]), *unperplex* (disentangle), *pettish* (petulant), *dispart* (to part asunder, from Spenser [*The Faerie Queene* I: x.53]), *unshent* (unspoiled). "[A]mbiguous atoms" is strange, given that atoms are, by definition, among the least ambiguous things in the universe. Lines 192-96, glossed in the Longman edition simply as expressing the idea that "The close relationship of joy and sorrow is bewildering to ordinary mortals" (*The Poems of John Keats* 625n.), pose a particular problem because of the equivocal value placed on Lamia's "sciental brain". Lamia in her new form has been in existence for less than an hour, but already has enough scientific understanding to distinguish pleasure and pain. Given Keats's emphasis in this poem and elsewhere on the *in*distinguishability of pleasure and pain, we may see here a comment on the "sciental brain" itself, a persistent preoccupation of Keats and his circle. In Hazlitt's famous remark, from the lecture "On Poetry in General", with which we began: "It cannot be conceded, however, that the progress of knowledge and refinement has a tendency to circumscribe the limits of the imagination, and to clip the wings of poetry" (2: 172).[5] In her awareness of how to

5 Cf. the letter to the George Keatses of 19 March 1819: "Though a quarrel in the streets is a thing to be hated, the energies displayed in it are fine; the commonest Man shows a grace in his quarrel—By a superior being our reasoning[s] may take the same tone—

"unperplex" bliss and pain – to keep them apart like two young and overzealous lovers ("Define their pettish limits, and estrange / Their points of contact and swift counter-change") – Lamia demonstrates a scientific, but not a poetic, understanding. And it is this scientific, disentangling understanding of pleasure and pain that, in the larger context of the poem, leads not to truth but to deception and error. Lamia's "sciental brain" is the inverted image of the mind of the dreamer represented in *The Fall of Hyperion*, to which we shall return:

> The poet and the dreamer are distinct,
> Diverse, sheer opposite, antipodes.
> The one pours out a balm upon the world,
> The other vexes it. (I, 199-202)

The poet, then, occupies a middle position between the scientist (who can merely "unperplex" the world) and the dreamer (who merely "vexes" it). There is value in consecutive reasoning – it is, after all, partially vindicated in the figure of Apollonius – but it is limited insofar as it can only split pleasure and pain asunder. There is less value in the mere dream, which in the end brings frustration because removed from truth. It is only the uneasy, precarious position of the poet – possessing the faculty that, in Coleridge's words, "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create" (1: 304) – that allows one to "intrigue with the specious chaos" (*Lamia* I, 195) without dismantling it.

The "Ode on Melancholy" and *Lamia* present more polished and mature versions of the idea expressed in the earlier poem, "Welcome joy and welcome sorrow" (written October 1818), which is a fine, though less ambitious, poem. Here a similar confluence of pleasure and pain is present, though without the exquisite uneasiness that informs the form and substance of the "Ode on Melancholy" or the verbal control and agility that characterize *Lamia*. The opening lines of this poem embrace the confluence that Lamia's scientific brain would later resist:

> Welcome joy and welcome sorrow,
>   Lethe's weed and Hermes' feather;
> Come today and come tomorrow,
>   I do love you both together!
>   I love to mark sad faces in fair weather,
> And hear a merry laugh amid the thunder.
>   Fair and foul I love together […]. (ll. 1-7)

Whereas *Lamia* would find a new density of expression with Keats's exploration of Dryden's couplets, the trochaic tetrameter and alternating rhymes of this poem render the same subject – the welcome and inevitable contiguity of pleasure and pain – in much easier terms. The paradoxical images that dominate the poem – sweet meadows

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though erroneous they may be fine—This is the very thing in which consists poetry; and if it is not so fine a thing as philosophy—For the same reason that an eagle is not so fine a thing as a truth—Give me this credit—Do you not think I strive—to know myself?" (*Letters* II: 80-81).

covering burning flames, comic responses to serious things and serious responses to comic things, both "Funeral and steeple-chime", etc.[6] – are themselves condensed, but the sentiment expressed is a single one, elaborated through a number of examples. Structurally and tonally, the poem resists uneasiness, even as it represents a necessarily uneasy relationship. This discrepancy constitutes, in large part, the charm of the poem, but unlike Keats's poems of the following year, this is a poem that can only be charming (it is, as Walter Jackson Bate calls it, Keats's "little song of opposites" [294n.]). There is here only a dalliance with an idea that, the following year, would be pursued with greater urgency and consequence.

Keats's pleasure in opposites in this poem contrasts, as Miriam Allott notes, with his verse letter to Reynolds of March 1818, "To J.H. Reynolds, Esq.", a poem in which the violent yoking together of heterogeneous ideas seems less welcome.

> Dear Reynolds, as last night I lay in my bed,
> There came before my eyes that wonted thread
> Of shapes, and shadows, and remembrances,
> That every other minute vex and please.
> Things all disjointed come from north and south,
> Two witch's eyes above a cherub's mouth,
> Voltaire with casque and shield and habergeon,
> And Alexander with his night-cap on,
> Old Socrates a-tying his cravat,
> And Hazlitt, playing with Miss Edgeworth's cat,
> And Junius Brutus pretty well so so,
> Making the best of his way towards Soho. (ll. 1-12)

Tonally, this is an odd poem. As the end of the above passage (and the end of the poem) makes clear, this is not a poem to be taken too seriously. It is, in Keats's own words, a piece of "careless verse" meant to cheer an ill friend "through a Minute or two" (*Letters* 1: 259). But it is, at the same time, a more serious poem about the mind's inability to control the images that flow through it. It is strange, we may acknowledge, for lines such as "But I saw too distinct into the core / Of an eternal fierce destruction" (ll. 96-97) to appear in an off-the-cuff poem meant to cheer a sick friend. As Coleridge

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6 Compare the lines

> Meadows sweet where flames burn under
> And a giggle at a wonder;
> Visage sage at pantomime;
> Funeral and steeple-chime; (ll. 8-11)

with what Keats later found wanting in Byron's poetry. Reading *Don Juan* on a ship to Italy near the end of his life, Keats, according to Severn, threw down the book and remarked: "[…] the tendency of Byron's poetry is based on a paltry originality, that of being new by making solemn things gay & gay things solemn" (*The Keats Circle* 2: 134). In his more light-hearted moods, Keats could embrace such incongruity as a welcome manifestation of uneasiness; in his more serious moods, or when he finds the incongruity to be excessive, it demeans the high purpose and seriousness of poetry.

would in the seventh section of the 'Dejection' ode, Keats presents here a certain kind of fear of the imagination – or, as in the passage above, a fear of an out-of-control fancy that floods the mind with unwanted and discordant images. Because the imagination has not yet learned to control the material provided to it, there is no pleasure in discordance: uneasiness has not been controlled and distilled into aesthetic experience. There is, at best, a comic parade of grotesque images or, at worst, a frightening glimpse of a mind unable to shape its own conceptions according to the beautiful and the true. In the remarkable terms of the poem:

> Oh, that our dreamings all of sleep or wake
> Would all their colours from the sunset take,
> From something of material sublime,
> Rather than shadow of our soul's daytime
> In the dark void of night. (ll. 67-71)

There is an echo of the "sense sublime / Of something far more deeply interfused" of "Tintern Abbey" in these lines (*The Cornell Wordsworth* ll. 95-96), but Keats is, at this point, less willing to commit unreservedly to the sublime sense than Wordsworth: "and to philosophize / I dare not yet" (ll. 73-74). Keats is closer in this poem to the sort of epistemic and ethical modesty advocated in poetry by the Augustans and in philosophy by Hume: in Keats's terms, "It is a flaw / In happiness to see beyond our bourn – " (ll. 82-83).

The uneasiness of "To J.H. Reynolds, Esq.", then, is tonal (it is a serio-comic poem) and cognitive (the poet is unsure about his ability to control the contents of his own mind). Just half a year after the composition of "To J.H. Reynolds, Esq.", Keats is able to adopt a new attitude to the unbidden images and ideas that flood the mind. In the concluding climax of the *Hyperion* fragment (begun autumn 1818 and abandoned April 1819), Apollo, in the midst of deification, experiences not the fanciful train of images the poet had in the verse letter to Reynolds, but gains, rather, immediate and intuitive knowledge:

> "[…] Yet I can read
> A wondrous lesson in thy silent face:
> Knowledge enormous makes a God of me.
> Names, deeds, grey legends, dire events, rebellions,
> Majesties, sovran voices, agonies,
> Creations and destroyings, all at once
> Pour into the wide hollows of my brain,
> And deify me, as if some blithe wine
> Or bright elixir peerless I had drunk
> And so become immortal." (III, 111-20)

The verse letter to Reynolds had represented the uneasiness that results from an overactive fancy and the "Things all disjointed" it produces; here, in the *Hyperion* fragment, images and ideas "Pour into the wide hollows" of Apollo's brain, producing more than mere discomfort. The result here is anguish:

Thus the God,
While his enkindled eyes, with level glance
Beneath his white soft temples, steadfast kept
Trembling with light upon Mnemosyne.
Soon wild contortions shook him, and made flush
All the immortal fairness of his limbs –
Most like the struggle at the gate of death;
Or liker still to one who should take leave
Of pale immortal death, and with a pang
As hot as death's is chill, with fierce convulse
Die into life. So young Apollo anguished […]. (III, 120-30)

In his review of *Hyperion* in *The Indicator* of 2 and 9 August 1820, Leigh Hunt objects to the softness and humanity with which Keats handles Apollo's deification: "It strikes us that there is something too effeminate and human in the way in which Apollo receives the exaltation which his wisdom is giving him. He weeps and wonders somewhat too fondly" (*Keats: The Critical Heritage* 175). One might answer that Apollo is either still in the process of becoming a god or has not been a god for very long, so some discomfort in his situation is forgivable (and Keats's interest in this discomfort is forgivable, because it represents an extreme form of the right kind of uneasiness). In many respects, these final lines of the poem demonstrate the control of a mature poet. The inversion in the above passage is not the kind of 'Milton inversion' in syntax that Keats would later attempt to correct in the revised version of the poem the next year, but an inversion of sense and image that shows a poet patient enough to sacrifice one unsatisfactory image for another, less unsatisfactory image and to let the process of this sacrifice remain in the finished poem (the quality Helen Vendler is so adept at tracing in Keats): in this instance, Apollo convulses not like a dying man but like a man recalled to life.

In "To J.H. Reynolds, Esq.", the uneasiness produced by an overactive fancy leads the poet to abstain from philosophy altogether ("and to philosophize / I dare not yet"). The *Hyperion* fragment, in contrast, concludes with a passage which sheds this epistemic modesty in its depiction of a man becoming a god, as uneasiness is pushed to its limit ("Knowledge enormous makes a God of me"). As Keats says in a letter to Reynolds of May 1818, displaying the same mixture of seriousness and levity his verse letter had two months earlier, "Until we are sick, we understand not; – in fine, as Byron says, 'Knowledge is Sorrow'; and I go on to say that 'Sorrow is Wisdom' – and further for aught we can know for certainty! 'Wisdom is folly' – So you see how I have run away from Wordsworth, and Milton" (3 May 1818; *Letters* 1: 279).

Before Apollo's climactic deification, which is an epistemic maturation, *Hyperion* had explored the boundaries between beauty, sorrow, joy, knowledge, and wisdom. The poem opens with Keats's memorable depiction of sullen Saturn, the overthrown Titan who will need to be roused to uneasiness. The agent of this rousing is Thea, who is herself a representation of the proximity of beauty and sorrow:

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

The lines are difficult; any attempt at paraphrase falls short. It is hard to see how "sorrow" beautifies itself or, for that matter, how anything is able to out-beauty beauty. But Keats aims here, as he would in the "Ode on Melancholy" and elsewhere, for the interpenetration of things distant or opposed. The idea reappears as Hyperion is himself roused to action:

> Why
> Is my eternal essence thus distraught
> To see and to behold these horrors new?
> Saturn is fallen, am I too to fall?
> Am I to leave this haven of my rest,
> This cradle of my glory, this soft clime,
> This calm luxuriance of blissful light,
> These crystalline pavilions and pure fanes
> Of all my lucent empire? It is left
> Deserted, void, nor any haunt of mine.
> The blaze, the splendor and the symmetry
> I cannot see – but darkness, death and darkness,
> Even here, into my centre of repose,
> The shady visions come to domineer,
> Insult and blind, and stifle up my pomp. (I, 231-45)

Keats's newfound interest in Milton in the months preceding the composition of the poem finds expression here in the representation of inward deliberation as conducted by a noble spirit. The thoughts, sentiments, and language of the passage are all Miltonic (as in "lucent empire", recalling the sun's "lucent Orbe" in *Paradise Lost* [III, 589]), though the final four lines of the passage anticipate the characteristically Keatsian interest in "embalmèd darkness" that persisted into 1819, most famously in the "Ode to a Nightingale" (where it is again conjoined to the phrase "I cannot see" [ll. 41, 43 respectively], to different effect). The lavish brightness of the first half of the passage ("glory", "luxuriance", "blissful light", "crystalline pavilions", "lucent empire", "blaze", "splendor") is eclipsed by the morbid darkness of the second half ("darkness, death and darkness", "shady visions", "blind"). It is because his brightness has been obscured by unbidden "shady visions" that Hyperion is roused to action. But it is not only because his pomp has been stifled that Hyperion decides to enter the fight against Jupiter. The darkness reaches the innermost chamber of that which appears fundamentally opposed to it ("into my centre of repose"), just as veiled melancholy would have her shrine in the very temple of delight. "I have seen my sons most unlike Gods" (I, 328), Coelus says to Hyperion near the end of the first book. Those who should have been "divine in sad demeanor / solemn, undisturbed" (I, 329-30) are now in states of "fear, hope, and wrath" (I, 332). The Titans, that is, wage war against the Olympians in order to disentangle light and darkness, to restore them to their separate and apparently natural spheres. This, Keats knew, would be an unsuccessful war.

That the war would be unsuccessful is signaled, perhaps, by Saturn's inauspicious question near the middle of the second book: "How we can war, how engine our great wrath?" (II, 161) Oceanus's magnificent response, the justly celebrated center-piece of the fragment, begins:

> "O ye, whom wrath consumes, who passion-stung,
> Writhe at defeat, and nurse your agonies!
> Shut up your senses, stifle up your ears,
> My voice is not a bellows unto ire.
> Yet listen, ye who will, whilst I bring proof
> How ye, perforce, must be content to stoop;
> And in the proof much comfort will I give,
> If ye will take that comfort in its truth.
> We fall by course of Nature's law, not force
> Of thunder, or of Jove. Great Saturn, thou
> Hast sifted well the atom-universe;
> But for this reason, thou art the King,
> And only blind from sheer supremacy,
> One avenue was shaded from thine eyes,
> Through which I wandered to eternal truth. […]." (II, 173-87)

Saturn owes his preeminence to the fact that he has "sifted well the atom-universe", recalling Lamia's dubious ability to "Intrigue with the specious chaos, and dispart / Its most ambiguous atoms with sure art" (I, 195). Disentangling atoms is a real, but lower-order, form of art; working with what seems to be chaos, with opposites which have thoroughly penetrated each other, a higher. It is the subjugation of chaos that was the achievement of the Titans, even as Oceanus in his wisdom recognizes that to cede sovereignty willingly to a superior being is not to be conquered:

> So on our heels a fresh perfection treads,
> A power more strong in beauty, born of us
> And fated to excel us, as we pass
> In glory that old darkness; nor are we
> Thereby more conquered than by us the rule
> Of shapeless chaos. (II, 212-15)

To say that Oceanus is the voice of the "oceanic feeling" (8-9)[7] discussed by Freud at the beginning of *Civilization and its Discontents* might seem to be an unforgivable play on words, but he does here represent the perspective of eternity, conscious of a grander scheme in which it is just and right for the Olympians to overturn the Titans. Just as the soil does not quarrel with the forest it feeds and the tree is not envious of the dove that is free to fly to and from it, so should the Titans accept the rule of the Olympians: "For 'tis the eternal law / That first in beauty should be first in might" (II, 228-30). Not all are convinced, and Clymene, "With hectic lips, and eyes up-looking mild" (II, 250), is particularly uneasy. She tells her fellow Titans of an episode in which she, standing upon a pleasant shore, could not fight off her anxiety about the

7 "'ozeanische[s]' Gefühl" (32).

Titans' impending fall. Part of her uneasiness has to do with the discrepancy between her internal state and the beauty of the shore on which she stood:

> Full of calm joy it was, as I of grief;
> So that I felt a movement in my heart
> To chide, and to reproach that solitude
> With songs of misery, music of our woes […]. (II, 265-69)

These lines hinge, precariously, on the "[s]o" of line 266. The discrepancy between Clymene's state and her surroundings is itself sufficient cause for her to chide and reproach her surroundings. If the epistemic convulsions of Apollo's deification represent an extreme form of the right kind of uneasiness, then Clymene's fretful response, seeking to reduce the natural world to the state of misery she herself experiences, represents the wrong kind of uneasiness: it is based on the fear of loss of power and on a resentment that there should be "calm joy" outside a self that experiences only pain. Clymene then experiences a confusion of joy and grief so great that Keats seems to lose control temporarily over the poem. As Clymene sits down on the shore to express her songs of misery and woe into "a mouthèd shell" (II, 270), she hears a different sort of song from an opposing island:

> There came enchantment with the shifting wind,
> That did both drown and keep alive my ears.
> I threw my shell away upon the sand,
> And a wave filled it, as my sense was filled
> With that new blissful golden melody.
> A living death was in each gush of sounds,
> Each family of rapturous hurried notes,
> Like pearl beads dropping sudden from their string;
> And then another, then another strain,
> Each like a dove leaving its olive perch,
> With music winged instead of silent plumes,
> To hover round my head, and make me sick
> Of joy and grief at once. Grief overcame,
> And I was stopping up my frantic ears,
> When, past all hindrance of my trembling hands,
> A voice came sweeter, sweeter than all tune,
> And still it cried, "Apollo! Young Apollo! […]." (II, 276-93)

The progression of feeling in this passage is deliberately chaotic: from misery and woe we move to enchantment caused by blissful melody (expressing "living death") and rapturous notes, which causes Clymene to feel sick of "joy and grief at once", only to have grief temporarily overcome joy until she hears a voice still yet "sweeter than all tune" crying the name of Apollo. She concludes by telling Saturn that had he felt "Those pains of mine" (II, 297), he would forgive "this too indulgèd tongue / Presumptuous in thus venturing to be heard" (II, 298-99). It is difficult not to feel for Clymene, who, in her anxiety and uneasiness, seems in many ways the most human of the Titans. What is significant about her speech is that it expresses the wrong kind of inter-

mixture of grief and joy: they are embattled, with the result that she feels sick of both of them at once.

In the third and final book of the fragment, Keats represents the other side of Clymene's frantic response, its origin in Apollo's playing of the lyre. The "new blissful golden melody" that made Clymene sick of joy and grief at once is described by Mnemosyne, who has deserted the other Titans for Apollo:

> "Yes," said the supreme shape
> "Thou hast dreamed of me; and awaking up
> Didst find a lyre all golden by thy side,
> Whose strings touched by the fingers all the vast
> Unwearied ear of the whole universe
> Listened in pain and pleasure at the birth
> Of such new tuneful wonder. […]." (III, 61-67)

Keats's interest in the simultaneous experience of pain and pleasure – and their co-dependence – is present throughout the *Hyperion* fragment, but he is only beginning to feel his way toward a satisfactory model of their relationship. Such a model is not achieved in *Hyperion*, explaining perhaps why he felt the need to set it aside. It is not yet clear what, exactly, differentiates Clymene's confused response to Apollo's lyre, which consists merely in the violent vacillation of pleasure and pain, from the more refined uneasiness that would preoccupy the poet in 1819.

The Fall of Hyperion, begun in July 1819 just three months after the *Hyperion* fragment was abandoned, gives, along with *Lamia* and the "Ode on Melancholy", some indication as to the direction Keats, had he lived longer, might have pursued. *The Fall of Hyperion* shares many features with *Hyperion*, but, in sacrificing the fragment for the vision, Keats feels less bound by the narrative constraints of the Titanomachy. His scope is narrower, and, in the revised version of the poem, the poet feels less constrained by Milton's influence, which had already begun to wane. Rather than begin with the Miltonic stationing of Saturn, which is now moved to the middle of the poem, Keats begins with a short "induction" (I, 1-18) depicting the poet as not far removed from the fanatic and the visionary savage – the major difference being that the poet has put into writing "the shadows of melodious utterance" (I, 6). What follows is a vision within a vision: the narrative itself begins with "Methought I stood […]" (I, 19), which is followed by a vision brought on by drinking "a cool vessel of transparent juice" (I, 42). The decisive moment of this embedded vision is the poet's first step on the staircase presided over by Moneta, who informs him that only those who are moved into action by the miseries of the world are able to ascend:

> "None can usurp this height," returned that shade,
> "But those to whom the miseries of the world
> Are misery, and will not let them rest.
> All else who find a haven in the world,
> Where they may thoughtless sleep away their days,
> If by a chance into this fane they come,
> Rot on the pavement where thou rotted'st half." (I, 147-53)

The dialogue that follows expresses Keats's fullest and most mature conception of the duties of the poet. It is informed by his own rapid development over the preceding year, but also in the background are Wordsworth – both his own retreat from politics (in poetry, at least) and the dilemma of the Solitary in *The Excursion*, published five years earlier – and Shelley, whose preface to *Alastor* (1816), A.C. Bradley has noted, pursues similar questions in similar terms (cf. 242). The poet is the person for whom the miseries of the world constitute personal misery. The final line of the above passage – declaring that those who do not share in the misery of the world "Rot on the pavement where thou rotted'st half" – is a remarkable moment of poetic self-rebuke. The entire exchange gives us perhaps the clearest indication of the kind of poet Keats would have become, or would have liked to become: an engaged, public poet, sympathetic to the suffering around him and mindful of his duties to improve present circumstances, not to escape them. This is, in a sense, a return to Keats's early conception of the poet, in which, as in the verse epistle "To my Brother George" (written August 1816), the "patriot" (l. 73) feels the poet's "stern alarum" (l. 74) and shall "in the senate thunder out my numbers / To startle princes from their easy slumbers" (ll. 75-76).

The exchange between the poet, who does not yet recognize himself to be a poet, and Moneta centres on the divisions between ordinary men, dreamers/visionaries, and true poets. The differences between these roles, Moneta says, consist in the different kinds of relationship to pleasure and pain:

> What benefit canst thou do, or all thy tribe,
> To the great world? Thou art a dreaming thing,
> A fever of thyself. Think of the earth;
> What bliss even in hope is there for thee?
> What haven? Every creature hath its home;
> Every sole man hath days of joy and pain,
> Whether his labours be sublime or low –
> The pain alone; the joy alone: distinct:
> Only the dreamer venoms all his days,
> Bearing more woe than all his sins deserve.
> Therefore, that happiness be somewhat shared,
> Such things as thou art are admitted oft
> Into like gardens thou didst pass erewhile,
> And suffered in these temples […]. (I, 167-80)

Moneta's abasement of the poet is a rite of passage (and the entire episode Keats's own self-abasement as he figures out what kind of poet he is). All men, Moneta says, experience joy and pain, but these are, for most, distinct experiences ("The pain alone; the joy alone: distinct"). Good days are followed by bad; joyful hours followed by painful hours. Pleasure and pain are disentangled and pure; men, on the whole, seek pleasure and avoid pain. The dreamer, or visionary, has progressed one step further. Pleasure and pain are indistinct: "the dreamer venoms all his days". Like the poet in "Tintern Abbey" who has learned to hear the "still, sad music of humanity" (*The Cornell Wordsworth* l. 91), which has the power to chasten and subdue, the dreamer feels that even pleasurable experiences are suffused with pain, precisely because he is not a

fully atomized individual. This, though, is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the true poet, who does not merely feel joy and sorrow to be indistinct, but finds a way to increase the store of one, and decrease the store of the other, in the world. This is the premise of the poet's famous declaration that the poet is "A humanist, physician to all men" (I, 190) and Moneta's distinction, discussed above, between the poet, who "pours out a balm upon the world" (I, 201), and the dreamer, who merely "vexes" (I, 202) it.

The inaugurating question of Moneta's derision is the poet's call for self-knowledge:

> What am I that I should so be saved from death?
> What am I that another death come not
> To choke my utterance sacrilegious here? (I, 138-40)

Moneta's disparaging response borders on abuse: "Rot on the pavement where thou rotted'st half" (I, 153), "for thou art less than they / […] Thou art a dreaming thing, / A fever of thyself" (I, 166-69), "Such things as thou art" (I, 178), "Art thou not of the dreamer tribe?" (I, 198). Keats, for reasons aesthetic and perhaps psychological, deems it necessary in this poem to imagine the poet's own ritual humiliation, which makes Moneta's eventual kindness an act of even greater divine charity. Just as "Such things as thou art" are admitted to the temple only so that "happiness be somewhat shared" (the "somewhat" is especially cutting), so does she offer a blessing, the excess of her own power, that droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven:

> "The sacrifice is done, but not the less,
> Will I be kind to thee for thy good will.
> My power, which to me is still a curse,
> Shall be to thee a wonder; for the scenes
> Still swooning vivid through my globèd brain,
> With an electral changing misery,
> Thou shalt with these dull mortal eyes behold,
> Free from all pain, if wonder pain thee not." (I, 241-48)

There is an echo here of Apollo's deification in the *Hyperion* fragment – where the felt knowledge of history "Pour[s] into the wide hollows of my brain" (III, 117) – and of the "shapes, and shadows, and remembrances" (l. 3) that come unbidden before the poet's eyes in "To J.H. Reynolds, Esq.". There is also a variation of the all-pain-but-one formulation of *Lamia* ("Such as, once heard, in gentle heart destroys / All pain but pity" [I, 36-37]): "Free from all pain, if wonder pain thee not". Keats's interest in impure pleasure and pain – the inevitable residue of one within the other – is, *The Fall of Hyperion* makes clear, bound up with his conception of the rights and duties of the poet, whose knowledge of their "points of contact and swift counterchange" (I, 194), to borrow the terms of *Lamia*, enables him to promote pleasure and decrease pain in real and tangible ways for those around him. This might seem a fanciful wish, the dream of poets and their critics only, but it seems less fanciful if one adopts the capacious sense of 'poet' common in the period, not least in Hazlitt's lectures on the English poets. Physicians, too, may count among the "physician[s] to all men".

There is also, in the scenes "Still swooning vivid through my globèd brain" in the passage just quoted, a prefiguration of Moneta's own mind. The set-piece on Moneta's wan face, "Not pined by human sorrows, but bright-blanched / By an immortal sickness which kills not" (I, 257-58), leads the poet to inquire into what lies behind it:

So at the view of sad Moneta's brow
I ached to see what things the hollow brain
Behind enwombed; what high tragedy
In the dark secret chambers of her skull
Was acting, that could give so dread a stress
To her cold lips, and fill with such a light
Her planetary eyes; and touch her voice
With such a sorrow. (I, 275-82)

There is a continued meditation on Byron's line in *Manfred* that "Knowledge is Sorrow", referred to in Keats's May 1818 letter to Reynolds. Whereas knowledge violently and painfully made a god of Apollo, filling his mind with direct and immediate knowledge of history and throwing him into convulsions in the process, the high tragedy of divine conflict playing out in the secret chambers of Moneta's skull has subtler, but no less powerful, effects on her lips, eyes, and voice. Keats's persistent interest in how the physical spaces of the head – the "wide hollows" of Apollo's brain, the "hollow brain" and "dark secret chambers" of Moneta's skull – come to be filled does a number of things: it adds a slightly gothic touch to the poems, it physicalizes mental phenomena even in deities, and it suggests an inescapable element of pain in the acquisition of knowledge. The discomfort of an overactive fancy represented in the verse letter to Reynolds, in which the mind is unable to control the images that flood it, has, then, a divine correlative, in which historical and mythic knowledge come with uneasiness and pain – a condition to which the poet aspires and partially attains. His request to access the contents of Moneta's brain – "Let me behold, according as thou said'st, / What in thy brain ferments to and fro" (I, 289-90) – places the diminutive poet and Moneta side-by-side (in one of the great lines of the poem, "Like a stunt bramble by a solemn pine" [I, 293]). It is at this moment that the *Hyperion* fragment intersects with *The Fall of Hyperion*, as the stationing of Saturn which opens the earlier poem is here introduced. The poet, on receiving this vision, experiences Apollo's transformation on a smaller scale:

Wheron there grew
A power within me of enormous ken
To see as a god sees, and take the depth
Of things as nimbly as the outward eye
Can size and shape pervade. The lofty theme
At those few words hung vast before my mind,
With half-unravelled web. I set myself
Upon an eagle's watch, that I might see,
And seeing ne'er forget. (I, 302-10)

To "take the depth / Of things" nimbly is a wonderful formulation of divine apprehension, and the sustained analogy between human and divine apprehension reflects the continued influence of Milton even in the revised version of the poem. "Ken" brings us back to an earlier poem of October 1816, "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer", in which the poet has this sort of experience for the first time: "Then felt I like some watcher of the skies / When a new planet swims into his ken" (ll. 9-10). The vision granted to the poet in *The Fall of Hyperion* is the fulfillment and culmination of the glimpse offered to the young poet of "Chapman's Homer". The poet's fortunate affinity with the 'eagle eyes' of stout Cortez in the earlier poem is now more willful and assertive: "I set myself / Upon an eagle's watch, that I might see".

As the poet rises, the gods fall. The poem, its new title never lets us forget, is the story of a fall, the denouement of the "high tragedy" acted out in the dark, secret chambers of Moneta's skull. Keats's Hyperion is in this way the mirror image of Shelley's unbound Prometheus of the same year, with an opposite trajectory. The poem concludes with a vision of Hyperion poised, uneasily, for the fall:

> But one of our whole eagle-brood still keeps
> His sovereignty, and rule, and majesty;
> Blazing Hyperion on his orbèd fire
> Still sits, still snuffs the incense teeming up
> From man to the Sun's God – yet unsecure.
> For as upon the earth dire prodigies
> Fright and perplex, so also shudders he –
> Nor at dog's howl or gloom-bird's even screech,
> Or the familiar visitings of one
> Upon the first toll of his passing-bell;
> But horrors, portioned to a giant nerve,
> Make great Hyperion ache. (II, 13-24)

These lines survive, with some small changes, from the *Hyperion* fragment: most notably, "mammoth-brood" (I, 164) has become "eagle-brood" and the past tense has become the present tense, suiting a poem less concerned with the history of divine conflict and more concerned with the vision of 'high tragedy' and one fall in particular. Hyperion's insecurity is pronounced here, and "horrors, portioned to a giant nerve," physicalizes, as the passage about Moneta's skull had done, the spiritual and imaginative anguish of the titan.

If *The Fall of Hyperion* is a representation of high tragedy playing out in the recesses of Moneta's skull – and a poem in which the climactic moment of the fall is prefigured but never actualized, so that we are left only with Hyperion's state of profound uneasiness and insecurity – then *The Eve of St. Agnes*, written earlier that year (January to February 1819), is a narrative romance in which human uneasiness, insofar as it derives from the erotic feeling, is tinged simultaneously with pleasure and pain (recall Freud's conviction that aesthetic pleasure derives from the 'sexual feeling'). *The Eve of St. Agnes,* which seems to have taken Keats's attention away from the *Hyperion* fragment, develops a number of figures and formulations that would find their way into

The Fall of Hyperion. There is, again, the figure of the physical brain stuffed with conceptions in the opening depiction of the revelry:

> At length burst in the argent revelry,
> With plume, tiara, and all rich array,
> Numerous as shadows haunting fairily
> The brain, new stuffed in youth, with triumphs gay
> Of old romance. These let us wish away,
> And turn, sole-thoughted, to one Lady there,
> Whose heart had brooded, all that wintry day,
> On love, and winged St. Agnes' saintly care
> As she had heard old dames full many times declare. (ll. 37-45)

The phrasing, Allott notes, was probably suggested by *Romeo and Juliet* (II.iii.37-38) (marked by Keats in his Shakespeare folio): "where unbruised youth with unstuff'd brain / Doth couch his limbs, there golden sleep doth reign". The train of revelers and the newly stuffed youthful brain of *The Eve of St. Agnes* are, though, "wish[ed] away" in the poem, so that we might turn "sole-thoughted" to one in particular, who is herself "sole-thoughted" about the promised "visions of delight" (cf. ll. 41 and 42, respectively):

> Full of this whim was thoughtful Madeline.
> The music, yearning like a God in pain,
> She scarcely heard […]. (ll. 55-57)

The yearning of a god in pain was, of course, at the fore of Keats's mind in early 1819. The difficulty of writing the Hyperion story leads him to a different sort of yearning, one to which he could more easily accommodate his genius (just as the constraints of the Spenserian stanza may have offered him respite from the blank verse of *Hyperion*). Unlike the cosmic uneasiness of Hyperion, Madeline's uneasiness is more familiar: "She danced along with vague, regardless eyes / Anxious her lips, her breathing quick and short" (ll. 64-65). And, after helping her maid down the stairs:

> Out went the taper as she hurried in;
> Its little smoke, in pallid moonshine, died.
> She closed the door, she panted, all akin
> To spirits of the air, and visions wide –
> No uttered syllable, or woe betide!
> But to her heart, her heart was voluble,
> Paining with eloquence her balmy side,
> As though a tongueless nightingale should swell
> Her throat in vain, and die, heart-stifled, in her dell. (ll. 199-207)

This kind of panting, nervous uneasiness – neither entirely pleasurable nor entirely painful, almost always erotic – was a natural mode for Keats. The final image of the stanza is extraordinary: it depicts, after all, the fear that presided over Keats's adult life and that informed his own sustained, exquisite uneasiness, which led him, from his earliest days as a poet, to write poems about poetry or, as almost often, poems about the inability to write poetry.

That Keats found himself amenable to depicting this sort of uneasiness is reflected in how eagerly he returns to it, lingers and luxuriates in it:

> Soon, trembling in her soft and chilly nest,
> In sort of wakeful swoon, perplexed she lay,
> Until the poppied warmth of sleep oppressed
> Her soothèd limbs, and soul fatigued – away
> Flown, like a thought, until the morrow-day;
> Blissfully havened both from joy and pain;
> Clasped like a missal where smart Paynims pray;
> Blinded alike from sunshine and from rain,
> As though a rose should shut, and be a bud again. (ll. 235-43)

"Perplexed" is an important word for Keats, and he returns to it throughout his most productive year (as we have seen, in Lamia's ability to 'unperplex' bliss and pain and when describing Hyperion's uneasiness). Madeline's "wakeful swoon" is neither entirely pleasant nor entirely unpleasant and is, for imaginative and aesthetic reasons, preferable to the insensate state which follows, in which she is, paradoxically, "Blissfully havened both from joy and pain" – a condition Keats tends to view with both envy and suspicion.

Madeline's uneasy, panting state is mirrored in Porphyro's own confusion of pleasure and pain as he wakes her:

> "And now, my love, my seraph fair, awake!
> Thou art my heaven, and I thine eremite.
> Open thine eyes, for meek St. Agnes' sake,
> Or I shall drowse beside thee, so my soul doth ache." (ll. 276-79)

Allott, who glosses the final phrase as "with a delight that verges on pain", suggests a possible source in *Othello*: "Who art so lovely fair and smell'st so sweet / That the sense aches at thee" (IV.ii.67-68). There is, of course, something tactless in Porphyro's awakening of Madeline: it is a man's fantasy of what a woman might fantasize about. But it works in the poem because it is a reflection of Madeline's own uneasy desire.

From the autumn of 1818, when he began the *Hyperion* fragment, through the odes and *The Fall of Hyperion* the following year, Keats was preoccupied, then, with a particular kind of uneasiness, predicated on the intermixture, co-dependence, and, at times, identity of pleasure and pain. There had been hints of this interest before, in "To J.H. Reynolds, Esq." and "Welcome joy and welcome sorrow", but his persistence in returning to the topic again and again in his most productive year of writing suggests an itch that must be scratched (and, as with the scratching of an itch, this preoccupation may have been accompanied by its own acute and entangled feelings of pleasure and pain). Much of Keats's thinking on the matter would have been inspired by Hazlitt, who early in 1818 conceived of an "uneasy, exquisite sense of beauty or power" that seeks to "relieve the aching sense of pleasure" by finding the right words for it and placing them in the right order (2: 167). Keats would have been drawn to Hazlitt's capacious sense of poetry, his insistence that "It comes home to the bosoms and businesses of men", and his awareness of our attraction to the pleasures of pain (in the

context of tragedy, "Not that we like what we loathe; but we like to indulge our hatred and scorn of it; to dwell upon it […]" [2: 170]). But, in his representations of divine and human joy and sorrow – in the "Ode on Melancholy", *Lamia*, *Hyperion*, *The Fall of Hyperion*, and *The Eve of St. Agnes* – Keats gives full, imaginative expression to an uneasiness that Hazlitt had only theorized. The uneasiness in Keats is sometimes nervous and anxious, as in Lamia's silent pacing "In pale contented sort of discontent" (II, 135) or in the words that flow from Clymene's "hectic lips" (II, 250); it is sometimes anguished, as in Apollo's deification and Hyperion's insecurity before his fall; and it is sometimes confident and bold, as in the poet's meditation on melancholy. Throughout, there is the sense that pure pleasure and pure pain are neither possible nor desirable and that the uneasiness that accompanies the aching sense of beauty is that which allows one to recreate and extend that sense.

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