John Keats's Response to Chaucerian Dream Poems in

The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream

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For out of olde feldes, as men seyth,
Cometh al this newe corn from yer to yere,
And out of olde bokes, in good feyth,
Cometh al this newe science that men lere.

- *Geoffrey Chaucer,* The Parliament of Fowls

But let a portion of ethereal dew
Fall on my head, and presently unmew
My soul; that I may dare, in wayfaring,
To stammer where old Chaucer us'd to sing.

- *John Keats,* Endymion

Whoever aspires to a lasting name among the English poets must go to the writings of Chaucer, and drink at the well-head.

- *Robert Southey,* Select Works of the British Poets

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Table of Contents

Introduction

Helen Phillips concludes her 'General Introduction' to *Chaucer's Dream Poetry* by reminding us that the dream vision genre is not confined to the poetry of the Middle Ages. The form never became entirely extinct, she writes,

> but it was Romantic and Victorian writers who returned to the genre with the same inventiveness and aesthetic and philosophical intensity we find in the medieval period. *Kubla Khan*, Keats's *Fall of Hyperion*, the *Belle Dame sans Merci*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *The Orchard Pit* and William Morris's *News From Nowhere* are not particularly like medieval dream visions, either in subject or narrative techniques, but their differences, as well as their imaginative power, and the strands of reminiscence and allusion which connect them to their predecessors, bear witness to the extraordinary resources of the genre.[1]

Phillips does not claim that the works of Geoffrey Chaucer directly influenced these nineteenth-century examples, but only that the genre is a versatile one that holds possibilities and appeal for writers of diverse eras. Nevertheless, her comment about 'strands of reminiscence and allusion' is a tantalizing one. An allusion may be relatively easy to identify, and would seem to imply that some manner of literary influence is in play. Allusions we can work with. But what, precisely, is a strand of reminiscence? The phrase is vague, doubtless intentionally so, and yet it feels appropriate. Keats's *The Fall of Hyperion*, as Phillips writes, seems 'not particularly like medieval dream visions,' and yet it is reminiscent of medieval dream visions in a number of ways; in enough ways, in fact, to warrant close investigation. A substantial part of this project is to untangle some of these 'strands of reminiscence and allusion', these aspects of *The Fall of Hyperion* that seem similar or analogous to medieval dream poems, and discover whether and how any of them lead to Geoffrey Chaucer.

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[1] Helen Phillips, 'General Introduction' to *Chaucer's Dream Poetry*, ed. by Helen Phillips and Nick Havely (London: Longman, 1997), pp. 3-18, (p. 18).

In large part because of Keats's own comment that he ceased work on *The Fall* because 'there were too many Miltonic inversions in it',[2] and also because it is well known that Keats studied Milton's *Paradise Lost* in preparation for *Hyperion*, critics have often looked for Miltonic influence in *The Fall*.[3] And more importantly when one is studying *The Fall* as an example of the genre of dream poetry, ever since the 1936 publication of a one-page letter in the *Times Literary Supplement*,[4] most critics have accepted the idea that *The Fall* is heavily influenced by Dante Alighieri's *Purgatorio*. These claims of literary influence have become deeply embedded in our criticism, so much so that they are footnoted in major editions of Keats's poetry[5] and, in extended discussions of *The Fall*, are as often merely asserted as evidenced.[6] I am very far from denying that Milton and Dante were important influences on Keats as he wrote *The Fall*. On the contrary, I agree that traces of both *Paradise Lost* and the *Divine Comedy* can clearly be found in the work in question. I believe, however, that Dantean influence, and Dantean influence on structure in particular, is sometimes exaggerated. I have therefore, when occasion demands, questioned the claims various critics have made about *The Fall*'s relationship to Dante, in order to demonstrate either that a certain element of *The Fall* might just as easily have been influenced by Chaucer as by Dante, or even that Chaucerian influence is the more likely case.

This is not to say that no critics have claimed there is a relationship between Chaucer's dream poems and Keats's *The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream*. In working one's way through the great body of Keats criticism, one occasionally finds a remark equally vague and intriguing as

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[2] John Keats, *The Letters of John Keats, 1814-1821*, ed. by Hyder Edward Rollins, 2 vols., *vol. II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), p. 167 (To J.H. Reynolds, 21 September 1819).

[3] See especially Stuart M. Sperry, *Keats the Poet* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), pp. 314-35.

[4] John Livingston Lowes, '*Hyperion* and the *Purgatorio*', *Times Literary Supplement*, 11 January 1936, p.35.

[5] John Barnard, in the Penguin edition of *John Keats: The Complete Poems* (Harmondsworth, 1988), notes, 'Keats's attempted reconstruction of the earlier *Hyperion*…is influenced by his reading of Milton and Dante' (p. 435n.).

[6] A very typical example of an asserted rather than evidenced claim of Dante's influence on *The Fall* is found in Barry Gradman, *Metamorphosis in Keats* (New York: New York University Press, 1980), p. 120: 'Under the influence of Dante's *Purgatorio*, epic is transformed into vision in order to reflect…Keats's most insightful view of the individual human life and of collective human experience'. Gradman cites only Lowes's letter in support of this claim.

Phillips's idea about 'strands of reminiscence' quoted above. Elizabeth Cook, for example, notes in her edition of Keats's poetry that 'Keats casts the narrative [of *The Fall*] in the form of a dream vision (a genre with medieval precedents, such as Chaucer's *The Book of the Duchess*)',[7] thus suggesting, without ever asserting, that Keats may have been to some extent influenced or inspired by Chaucer's works. Judy Little claims that 'structure…in the two Hyperion fragments, is the result of Keats's imaginative experimentation with several forms: the bardic trance, epic, and a dream-vision structure which he probably borrowed from Chaucer.' Though Little does clearly demonstrate that Keats knew and admired at least some Chaucerian dream poems, and points out a number of ways in which *The Fall* utilizes several conventions of the dream poetry genre, she refrains from making solid claims about any direct Chaucerian influence on the *Hyperion* poems.[8] Irene Chayes, too, in an insightful and much-cited article, observes that *The Fall* is written in the tradition of, and is in many ways similar to, Chaucerian dream poems. Though the entire article strongly suggests the possibility of literary influence, Chayes focuses on Keats's use of generic conventions and uses Chaucer's work as typical examples of those conventions, and resists making definite claims about whether Keats, in writing *The Fall*, may have been responding to Chaucer in particular.[9] This thesis builds on the work of such critics as Little and Chayes, and attempts to use their strong suggestions to move closer to a definite answer to the question of Chaucerian influence on *The Fall*.

Literary influence is always difficult, perhaps impossible, to prove absolutely, and it is my suspicion that the difficulty may even be compounded when the poet in question is John Keats. Throughout his literary career, Keats demonstrates in both his verse and his letters a very noticeable openness to the influence of the poets he admires most. The very first poem

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[7] Elizabeth Cook, ed., *John Keats: The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 606n.
[8] See Judy Little, *Keats as a Narrative Poet: A Test of Invention* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1975), pp. 120-148.
[9] See Irene H. Chayes, 'Dreamer, Poet and Poem in *The Fall of Hyperion*', *Philological Quarterly* 46 (1967), 499-515, esp. pp. 500-506.

we have from him, in fact, is titled 'Imitation of Spenser,' and in 'How many bards gild the lapses of time', he writes of how the 'bards' he admires crowd his mind in a pleasant way when he writes his own verse:

> And often, when I sit me down to rhyme,
>   These will in throngs before my mind intrude:
>   But no confusion, no disturbance rude
> Do they occasion: 'tis a pleasing chime. (5-8)

His verses and letters are well stocked with allusions and echoes not only from myriad poets, but from novelists and essayists as well. Keats was so open – one might venture to say susceptible – to influence from other writers that Marjorie Levinson has suggested that in his case, it is reasonable to discuss a different kind of poetic progression than the classical pastoral-georgic-epic program:

> Keats's ascent of the poetical ladder has become mythical; one watches him station himself where a great precursor had rested, discover the limitations of that position, step up the next rung, and finally kick away the ladder altogether. It is difficult not to read into Keats's development a variation on the traditional poetic curriculum…
> In Keats's case, poet-heroes and poetic styles take the place of the classical forms; Keats advances from Matthew to Hunt, from Chaucer and Spenser to Milton and Wordsworth, Dante and Shakespeare. And yet, Keats's most advanced works include elements found in his earliest, crudest pieces. Moreover, these features, far from vestigial, contribute to the greatness of Keats's masterpieces.[10]

The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream is one of Keats's last works. Therefore, if Levinson is correct – and I believe she is – we should expect to find influence from many poets in *The Fall*. Chaucer, Milton and Dante all betray a presence, and yet we should certainly not expect to find traces of their influence all pieced together, as though *The Fall* were some manner of literary patchwork. Furthermore, the task of identifying what aspects of Keats's work might have been written in response to these particular poets is further complicated in this case by the fact that Chaucer was deeply influenced by Dante. It may be that if we pick up a 'strand of reminiscence' at a particular line, image or structural element of *The Fall*, as we follow it we

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[10] Marjorie Levinson, *The Romantic Fragment Poem: A Critique of a Form* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), p. 174.

find that the yarn unravels, and its several plies lead to Chaucer, Dante, and even Wordsworth and Coleridge simultaneously.

For this reason, the conclusions of this thesis may seem something less than spectacular. I make no earth-shattering claims about the necessity of understanding Chaucer to understand Keats, nor do I offer a radical new interpretation of *The Fall*. It is my hope, though, that this study may prove enlightening for a number of reasons. First, Chaucer's reception in the Romantic period has received surprisingly little critical attention, and the reception of his dream poems is a subject that has scarcely been broached. In exploring the possible response of one of the Romantic period's most important poets to Chaucer's dream poems, I hope to contribute some ideas, perhaps even some facts, that can help to fill this gap in our understanding of the continual importance of the Father of English Poetry.

Also, *The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream* is, despite Moneta's insistence that true poets do not vex the world, rather a vexing poem. Countless critics have tried to make sense of the 'poet' versus 'dreamer' debate that takes place between Moneta and the dreamer with what Keats may have called 'an irritable reaching after…reason';[11] by using a sort of linear reasoning to work out just what the poem concludes, or fails to conclude, about who is a poet and who a mere dreamer. Such attempts often lead to the most remarkably ingenious arguments, but seldom to satisfactory readings of the poem. Critics, too, have often had trouble deciding just what Moneta is meant to represent, and even more trouble in deciding how the two parts that make up the larger part of the poem, the part in Saturn's temple and the part in which the dreamer is granted a vision of the Titans, relate to each other. It is my belief that reading *The Fall* with Chaucerian dream poems in mind helps us to approach these problematic aspects of the work with rather different expectations than we might otherwise have. If we accept the idea, even if only as an experiment in thought, that Keats was indeed

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[11] *Letters I.*92-93.

writing consciously in the Chaucerian tradition, we may find that the poem becomes less difficult, less vexing, and that it even, by becoming somewhat liberated from the strictly sensical, makes more sense.

Because it is imperative to remember that the Chaucer Keats knew and loved was not the same Chaucer we know and love today – and by that I mean not only that apocryphal works were attributed to Chaucer in Keats's time, but also that the Romantic understanding of Chaucer's character, era, and even language differed from ours – I have begun this thesis with what I hope is a fairly comprehensive summary of Chaucer's reception in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, with particular emphasis on the reception of the dream poems. We cannot see Chaucer in Keats if we do not have some idea of how Keats saw Chaucer.

After analyzing Chaucer's reception in the Romantic period in some detail, I proceed to a discussion of the *Hyperion* project. I begin this section with a brief discussion of Keats's troubles in composing *Hyperion*, because his reasons for abandoning the first version of the narrative help to shed light on the changes he made in the second version. I then give a short review of some of the most common interpretations of *The Fall*, and continue by giving my own interpretation of the primary work in question.

Though my initial interpretation scarcely mentions Chaucer, its importance to the main topic of this thesis becomes evident in the third section, in which I draw heavily on my own interpretation of *The Fall* in order to decide whether and how Keats drew on Chaucer in his work. In this final section, I compare and contrast a number of aspects of *The Fall* with aspects of Chaucerian dream poems that appear to me to be similar or analogous to Keats's work. Though in many cases I do indeed find what I believe to be evidence of literary influence, I have placed special emphasis on how Keats uses Chaucerian tropes, images and characters in a new way, and thus used 'olde bokes' in the creation of his 'newe science.' I then end the final section with a brief discussion of how the way in which Keats uses the

dream as a metaphor for poetic imagination finds precedent in Chaucerian dream poetry, and thus enables us to approach the poem with a certain amount of negative capability.

It is my hope that by exploring how Keats may have been influenced by Chaucer's dream poems in his composition of *The Fall*, I may offer some facts, ideas, and insights that enable readers to experience the poem in a new way, and to more fully understand and appreciate the work in the broader context of English literature, as well as gain a greater understanding of Keats's fascination with Chaucer and the medieval period in general. But most of all, I hope that by contributing some new ideas and insights about *The Fall*, this thesis may enable admirers of Keats to even more thoroughly enjoy one of the last works of the man who was, in my personal opinion, the most gifted English poet of the Romantic period.

I.   Chaucer in the Romantic Period

The General Character of Geoffrey Chaucer, 1774-1830

I have headed this subsection as I have because 'the nineteenth century was comparatively uninterested in discussing the intricacies of Chaucer's texts, more concerned with Chaucer the man and the time in which he lived'.[12] Though there was much appreciation of and enthusiasm for Chaucer, serious 'scholarly and critical work' is usually considered to have

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[12] Carolyn Collette, 'Afterlife', in *A Companion to Chaucer*, ed. by Peter Brown, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 8-22, (p. 13). For lack of interest in or perception of Chaucer's 'thoughtful, intellectual cultivation', see also: Derek Brewer, 'Images of Chaucer 1386-1900', in *Chaucer and Chaucerians: Critical Studies in Middle English Literature*, ed. by D.S. Brewer (London: Nelson, 1966), pp. 240-270 (p. 262).

begun with Furnivall's foundation of the Chaucer Society in 1868.[13] Certainly we should not take such a statement to mean that readers of Keats's day never read Chaucer carefully and critically though, as I shall discuss shortly, there were several problems that made a very detailed and sophisticated study of Chaucer quite difficult for all but the most dedicated and persistent readers. But even if we put these difficulties aside for the present, an examination of criticism of and allusions to Chaucer in the Romantic period makes it immediately apparent that much of the enthusiasm for him had its roots in the perceived personality and genius of the historical figure and the access he seemed to provide to an age long past.

Joseph Berington, for example, writes in *A Literary History of the Middle Ages* (1814), 'Our Chaucer is read, not as a poet – who delights by the richness of his imagery, or the harmony of his numbers – but as a writer who has pourtrayed [*sic*] with truth, the manners, customs, and habits of the age.'[14] Similarly Thomas Warton, in his 1774 *History of English Poetry*, combines interests in Chaucer's era, character, and poetic prowess in one all-encompassing paragraph:

> Enough has been said to prove…that his genius was universal, and adapted to themes of unbounded variety: that his merit was not less in painting familiar manners with humour and propriety, than in moving the passions, and in representing the beautiful or the grand objects of nature with grace and sublimity. In a word, that he appeared with all the lustre and dignity of a true poet, in an age which compelled him to struggle with a barbarous language, and a national want of taste; and when to write verses at all, was regarded as a singular qualification. (CCH 229-30)[15]

This enthusiastic view of Chaucer – as a man of extraordinary genius, integrity, and creative scope, almost miraculously emerging from a barbaric age – is quite typical in the Romantic period. Though Warton praises Chaucer's humor, pathos, invention, portrayal of manners

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[13] See, for example, Caroline Spurgeon's 'Introduction' to *Five Hundred Years of Chaucer Criticism and Allusion, 1357-1900,* 3 vols., vol. 1 (New York: Russel & Russel, 1960), pp. ix-cxliv (pp.lxviii-lxix).

[14] Caroline F.E. Spurgeon., *Five Hundred Years of Chaucer Criticism and Allusion, 1357-1900*, 3 vols., vol. 2 (New York: Russell & Russell, 1960), p. 61.

[15] Derek Brewer, ed., *Chaucer: The Critical Heritage*; *Volume I: 1385-1837* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978).

and powers of natural description – all general attributes that continue to be admired through the early nineteenth century - throughout the work he enters relatively little into critical examination or explication.

The idea that the Middle Ages, despite a growing interest in them, were barbaric, is one that remains common throughout Keats's time, though Keats himself does not seem to have shared it. It should be noted, however, that there is some indication that the idea that Chaucer was a medieval anomaly was beginning to change. For example, an unknown reviewer in *Blackwood's* writes in 1819,

> The existence of the works of Chaucer changes, it may be said, to our apprehension, the whole character of the age – raising up to our mind an image of thoughtful, intellectual cultivation, and of natural and tender happiness in the simplicity of life.[16]

Here Chaucer is still the poetic flower of the English Middle Ages, but one growing out of fertile ground, rather than somehow managing to take root among stones. He is still used as a measure of his age, though in this view, which grew more common throughout the nineteenth century,[17] he forms a basis for the idealization of the Middle Ages that found its fullest expression later in the nineteenth century by such medievalist writers as William Morris.[18] Nevertheless, the idea that the medieval period and its poetry were for the most part crude was the more prominent one among writers on Chaucer in the early part of the century.

William Godwin's 1803 *Life of Chaucer*, 'almost universally condemned for its speculativeness', does include a number of critical passages, and in these 'He touches on a characteristically Romantic notion of poetry as expression of the poet's disposition'.[19] In fact, in the 'Preface' to the biography, Godwin writes,

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[16] Brewer, 'Images', p. 261.
[17] Brewer, 'Images',. p. 262.
[18] Spurgeon sees Keats as an essential link in a chain of literary influence leading from Chaucer to Morris. Keats, she writes, was inspired by Leigh Hunt to a close study of Chaucer, and demonstrates Chaucerian influence in *The Eve of St. Mark* and *La Belle Dams sans Merci*. These poems, in turn, were 'the poems which kindled the enthusiasm of the Pre-Raphaelite group'. See *CCA I*, p. lxvii.
[19] Brewer, *CCH.,* p. 237.

> The first and direct object of this work, is…to produce an interesting
> and amusing book in modern English, enabling the reader, who might
> shrink from the labour of mastering the phraseology of Chaucer, to do
> justice to his illustrious countryman. (CCH 238)

Godwin's ultimate stated goal is not to enable readers 'to do justice to' the works of Chaucer, we notice, but to their 'illustrious countryman', Geoffrey Chaucer himself. Of course Godwin is prefacing a biography, a '*Life*' and not specifically a work of literary criticism. Nevertheless, Godwin's biography is interesting for a number of reasons; first, simply because, as a biography, it attests to the strong Romantic interest in Chaucer's character and era. In fact, although he was in some cases criticized for his approach, Godwin's work focuses as much on Chaucer's era as on the man himself, which is indicative of the way in which Chaucer was used as a point of access to medieval history, customs and manners.[20] Second, Godwin's *Life* is notable because it exhibits the 'Romantic notion' that Chaucer's verse is a form of self-expression, or is at the very least a strong indicator of Chaucer the man's disposition; and third, because Godwin appreciates that readers might feel intimidated by the difficulties of Chaucer's Middle English.

That poetry is a sincere expression of the poet's own important thoughts and feelings is one of the defining 'notions' of the Romantic period, and here it is worthwhile to mention Brewer's suggestion that Romantics who did not admire Chaucer may have denied him this honor because his works did not seem to fit comfortably into this view of poetry, though Brewer goes on to suggest that dissatisfaction with the expressiveness of Chaucer's poetry led to the important recognition of two other aspects of his verse: 'the plainness of his style, and the rationality of his poetry.'[21] Richard Wharton, though he modernized some of Chaucer's poems, Anna Seward and Lord Byron all found Chaucer dry, trivial or contemptible, and Brewer suggests that this dislike 'spring[s] from the expressive view of

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[20] For a brief discussion of Godwin's *Life* from a largely New Critical point of view, see Brewer, 'Images', p. 261. For a severe condemnation of it as 'worthless' as a biography, see Spurgeon, *CCA I*, pp. cx-cxi.
[21] Brewer, 'Images', p. 264.

poetry'.[22] Chaucer's dryness or tediousness is sometimes admitted by even his most ardent admirers,[23] and though humor is one of his attributes most often praised it is also one of the attributes most often disapproved of, and the common eighteenth-century 'view of Chaucer as a coarse and comic poet unfit for study by serious people also persists' (*CCA I,* p. lx).

Despite such criticisms, nearly all the greatest men of letters of the early nineteenth century read and delighted in Chaucer. Wordsworth read Chaucer constantly, modernized some of his tales, and emphasized Chaucer's reason.[24] Coleridge professed a desire to compose an essay 'on the Genius and Writings of Chaucer' (*CCA II*, p. 15), though this intention was never realized. Blake engraved the Canterbury pilgrims and wrote a fascinating piece in which he explains the pilgrims as 'physiognomies or lineaments of universal human life, beyond which Nature never steps'.[25] Scott not only read and admired Chaucer but also quotes him in several of his novels (*CCA I*, p. lxii). Southey drank 'daily at that pure well of English undefiled, to get historical manners and to learn English and poetry' (*CCA II*, p. 12). Hazlitt lectured on him specifically and refers to or quotes him in numerous other essays, and Leigh Hunt called him 'my great master in the art of poetry; that is to say . . . the great master of English narrative in verse'.[26] Shelley seems to have read Chaucer very little, if we can judge by his lack of comment.[27]

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[22] Brewer, 'Images', p. 263.

[23] William Hazlitt, for example, lectures that Chaucer 'is sometimes tedious from the fidelity with which he adheres to his subject'. See Hazlitt, 'On Chaucer and Spenser' in *Hazlitt's Lectures on the English Poets & Spirit of the Age*, ed. by Ernest Rhys (London: J.M. Dent, 1910), pp. 19-44 (p. 21); and Leigh Hunt writes that Chaucer's 'faults are, coarseness, which was that of his age, - and in some of his poems, tediousness, which is to be attributed to the same cause'. See Hunt, 'Chaucer' in *Essays by Leigh Hunt*, ed. by Arthur Symons (London: Walter Scott, 1887), pp. 80-81 (p. 81).

[24] Brewer, 'Images', p. 266.

[25] Blake's 'Number III', reprinted in *CCH I*, pp. 250-60, is perhaps the greatest Romantic testament to Chaucer's genius, and is highly recommended.

[26] Leigh Hunt, 'Preface' [to *Stories in Verse*]*,* in *Leigh Hunt's Literary Criticism*, ed. by Lawrence Huston Houtchens and Carolyn Washburn Houtchens (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956), pp. 585-604 (p. 585).

[27] On the question of Shelley reading Chaucer, I am in agreement with Percy Van Dyke Shelley. See his *The Living Chaucer* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1940), p. 6.

Of the canonical male poets,[28] only Byron, as has been mentioned, evinces a dislike

for Chaucer. He writes,

> Chaucer, notwithstanding the praises bestowed on him, I think obscene
> and contemptible: - he owes his celebrity merely to his antiquity,
> which he does not deserve half so well as Pierce Plowman, or Thomas
> of Ercildoune. (1807, *CCA II* 29)

Here Byron, perhaps somewhat surprisingly, seems to be one of those who objects to the kind

of humor found in *The Miller's Tale* and *The Wife of Bath's Prologue*. Nevertheless, we

appreciate this brief comment of his because it confirms, first, that Chaucer regularly had

'praises bestowed' on him; and second, because it emphasizes that Romantic interest in

Chaucer had much to do with his 'antiquity,' enough so that such interest was prone to

criticism. Byron was the most famous, but not the only, person to criticize the reading of

Chaucer in an attempt to satisfy curiosity about the past. For example, an unknown essayist, in

an 1823 review of editions of Chaucer from Thynne to Tyrwhitt for *The Retrospective Review*,

commented, 'By those who are infected by a mere rage for the obsolete, neither the language

nor the ideas of succeeding generations are likely to be benefitted' (*CCH*, p. 293).

But Byron and the unknown reviewer probably overstated the case somewhat.

Undoubtedly the vivid and memorable portrayal of life in the medieval period constituted (and

still constitutes) much of Chaucer's attraction, but there was deeper interest in the 'intricacies

of Chaucer's texts' as well, and some of these more critical views of Chaucer's work are

discussed below. Yet it is important to mention that many Romantic readers found some slight,

and not-so-slight, obstacles to a more complex understanding of Chaucer's works. The first

was a lack of a satisfactorily edited 'Complete Works'. Robert Southey complained, 'Is it not

disgraceful, that of all Chaucer's works, only the Canterbury Tales have been well edited?'

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[28] In the few works which treat Chaucer's reception in the Romantic period in a general way, female poets who have in the last few decades enjoyed renewed interest and appreciation, such as Mary Robinson, Letitia Elizabeth Landon, Felicia Hemans and Mary Tighe, are not mentioned. Whether this is because these poets never wrote about or alluded to Chaucer, or because works such as Spurgeon's and Brewer's are outdated, deserves investigation.

(*CCA II*, p. 28). Nathan Drake, though he commends Tyrwhitt's[29] edition of *The Canterbury Tales*, agrees with Southey that 'there still remains the greater portion of his [Chaucer's] works untouched by any skilful editor; for neither Speght[30] nor Urry[31] can be deemed at all competent to the task which they undertook' (1809, *CCA II*, p. 47). That Romantic readers indeed had some cause for lament seems plausible, for both Spurgeon and Brewer agree that Tyrwhitt's great 1775 edition of *CT* was the first edition of the *Tales* that was suitable for an in-depth, and what we would today agree was a scholarly, study of Chaucer's works.[32] Such comments about dissatisfaction with available editions of Chaucer suggest not only a desire to investigate textual intricacies more closely, but also a wish to make all of Chaucer's works – including the dream poems – more accessible.

For most readers, what was probably a greater obstacle to a more complete understanding of 'the intricacies of Chaucer's texts' was one noted by Godwin and by many other writers as well: language. Notwithstanding the fact that 'most of the great writers of the Romantic and Victorian periods read him with enthusiasm and with few or no complaints of the difficulty or antiquity of the language',[33] most readers are not 'great writers', and the unfamiliar vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation of Chaucer's Middle English was often perceived as a hindrance to the thorough understanding of his works. The term 'Middle English', in its current sense, was not used with any kind of regularity until 1868,[34] and the

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[29] Thomas Tyrwhitt produced his edition of *CT* in four volumes in 1775, with a fifth volume containing a glossary in 1778. According to many critics he 'deserves to be considered the founder of modern Chaucer editing'. See B.A. Windeatt, 'Thomas Tyrwhitt', in *Editing Chaucer: The Great Tradition*, ed. by Paul G. Ruggiers (Norman, OK: Pilgrim, 1984), pp. 117-144.

[30] Thomas Speght provided an edition of Chaucer in 1598, and a revised edition in 1602. See Derek Pearsall, 'Thomas Speght', in *Editing Chaucer: The Great Tradition*, ed. by Paul G. Ruggiers (Norman, OK: Pilgrim, 1984)*,* pp. 71-92.

[31] John Urry's folio edition of Chaucer was published in 1721. See William L. Alderson, 'John Urry', in *Editing Chaucer: The Great Tradition*, ed. by Paul G. Ruggiers (Norman, OK: Pilgrim, 1984), pp pp. 93-115.

[32] Spurgeon writes that 'it is entirely owing to this great. . .scholar that the sane and rational study of the poet's work was, for the first time since the early sixteenth century, made possible for Englishmen' (*CCA I* liv); Brewer agrees to the extent that 'modern scholarship dates from Tyrwhitt's edition of *The Canterbury Tales*' ('Images', p. 241).

[33] Van Dyke Shelley, p. 6.

[34] See David Matthews, *The Making of Middle English, 1765-1910* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. xxvi.

study of the language was not instituted in universities until the 1890s.[35] It seems that many, if not most readers, read Chaucer's English as though it were outdated or even primitive Modern English, an approach which is supported by the fact that Modern English versions of the *Canterbury Tales* were referred to as 'modernizations' and not 'translations.' Other than the slow, methodical, and genuinely enlightening work of serious scholarship, there were two major approaches to confronting the difficulties of Chaucer's language: reading him anyway and understanding as best you could, and the aforementioned modernizations.

Unsurprisingly, Chaucer's admirers often expressed a wish to share their delight, and urged potential readers not to be intimidated by the unfamiliarity of Chaucer's language. Leigh Hunt, for example, wrote in 1823 in a note to 'The Book of Beginnings', 'Readers of taste, who have suffered themselves to be dismayed by the imaginary difficulties of Chaucer's language, are astonished when they come to find how melodious, as well as easy to read, is this "rude old poet" as some have called him' (*CCA II,* p.144). Despite his insistence that the difficulties of Chaucer's language were 'imaginary,' Hunt did come to modernize a number of Chaucer's works,[36] though in 1855 he said he did so only so that 'they may act as incitements towards acquaintance with the great original' (*CCA II*.2, p.22), and he still believes that 'a little study would soon make them [potential readers] understand it as easily as that of most provincial dialects.'[37] William Godwin, in the preface to his *Life of Chaucer*, expressed the hope that his book might induce readers 'to study the language of our ancestors, and the elements and history of our vernacular speech; a study at least as improving as that of he language of Greece and Rome' (*CCH I*, p. 239). And Hazlitt, in an attempt to assist readers in discovering the 'strength and harmony' of Chaucer's versification, merely remarks that 'the best general rule for reading him is to pronounce the final *e*, as in reading Italian.'[38]

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[35] Matthews, p. xxxiv.
[36] ***Find out just which works and list them here, or perhaps list in an appendix if there prove to be too many***
[37] Hunt, 'Preface', p. 587.
[38] Hazlitt, 'On Chaucer', p. 33.

Modernizations of Chaucer's works were a second common way of bringing Chaucer to a wider audience. Pope's and Dryden's modernizations of Chaucer were familiar to readers, and in some cases even preferred to the originals, and Wordsworth, Hunt, and Richard Wharton completed a number of modernizations as well.

According to Spurgeon, however, Romantic modernizations of Chaucer demonstrate above all the insufficient understanding of Middle English possessed by even the most eminent nineteenth-century poets. She takes as her primary example an 1841 work called *The Poems of Chaucer Modernized*, edited by Richard Hengist Horne and with contributions by 'Wordsworth…Leigh Hunt, Miss Barrett, Robert Bell, Monckton Milnes, Leonard Schmitz and Horne himself' (*CCA I*, p. lviii).[39] A second volume was also planned, and though it never appeared, such writers as Tennyson, Browning, Bulwer, and Mr. And Mrs. Cowden Clarke had agreed to contribute (*CCA I*, p. lviii). Though this project was undertaken some twenty years after Keats's death, it is worth noting here because some of the poets involved were personally important to Keats himself. Wordsworth, Hunt and Clarke are well known to have been particular influences on Keats, and Milnes, though he never knew Keats personally, was a great admirer of his work and wrote his first biography. That these personalities were involved in Horne's edition at the very least attests to the fact that Chaucer was well known among the members of Keats's extended circle, and furthermore suggests that it was generally accepted that these acquaintances of Keats's not only knew Chaucer, but were known for knowing Chaucer and were trusted to provide commendable modernizations.

Despite the reputations of many of the writers involved in Horne's edition, Spurgeon, in a decidedly uncharitable tone, calls *The Poems of Chaucer Modernized* at best a 'curiosity of literature', and notes that it is full of 'flagrant mistakes and blunders' (*CCA I*, p. lix), or in

other words, mistranslations.[40] Spurgeon implies that the 'mistakes and blunders' are due mostly to the fact that the contributors did not understand Middle English as well as they ought. I am willing to accept Spurgeon's assertion that the Romantic and Victorian writers probably did not understand Chaucer's English as thoroughly as a modern scholar may, and that this could certainly have resulted in what amounts to mistranslation. I am far from blaming the contributors, however, for their 'mistakes and blunders', and find it far more interesting, and pertinent to the purposes of this thesis, that the intense interest in, even adoration of, Chaucer that we find in the early nineteenth century was in a sense ahead of scholarship on him, and even some of the greatest poets of the era did not seem to have what we would today consider a solid grasp of Chaucer's language.

Before the conclusion of this section we must pay some particular attention to two Romantic writers, not only because they were especially enthusiastic about Chaucer, but also because they typify and synthesize many of the ideas about Chaucer found scattered throughout other writers' work and, above all, because they were profound influences on John Keats. These two are William Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt.

Keats did not attend Hazlitt's lecture 'On Chaucer and Spenser'; unfortunately he arrived at the lecture hall an hour late, and met the crowd coming out. Hazlitt himself, however, was among those Keats met emerging, and his intimacy with the great essayist and, as we shall see throughout this thesis, the use Keats seems to have made of the ideas presented in the lecture, make it extremely probable that Keats read the manuscript.[41] Though Hazlitt's interesting lecture is not particularly long, and half of it is devoted to Spenser, and it is well padded with extensive quotes, the remaining portion on Chaucer is still too dense with opinions

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[40] Spurgeon's *Five Hundred Years of Chaucer Criticism and Allusion, 1357-1900*, with its long and exhaustive introduction, is an impressive and extremely useful work of scholarship, and has been a primary resource for more recent writing on Chaucer's reception in the nineteenth century, such as Van Dyke Shelley's, Brewer's, Collette's, and this thesis. Her introduction, however, written in 1925, has in some ways become outdated, a fact that becomes painfully apparent in her condemnation of, rather than interest in, Horne's edition.
[41] See F.E.L. Priestly, 'Keats and Chaucer', in *Modern Language Quarterly* 5 (1944), 439-47 (p. 440n.).

about, observations on and characterizations of Chaucer even to summarize here. Several of

Hazlitt's points prove to be of special interest in light of possible Chaucerian influence on *The*

Fall of Hyperion, however, and these I wish to mention.

Hazlitt, like many other Romantic writers, groups Chaucer with Spenser, Shakespeare

and Milton as one of the four greatest English poets. He characterizes Chaucer above all as a

man who, both in his life and his poetry, was firmly grounded in the real world and its real

people. This characterization is in contrast to Spenser's, whom Hazlitt sees as 'the most

romantic and visionary' of poets,[42] and may prove to be of importance in *The Fall*, which is a

poem very much concerned with the relationship of poetry to the problems of the real,

practical, everyday world. For example, Hazlitt writes that 'Chaucer's intercourse with the

busy world, and collision with the actual passions and conflicting interests of others, seemed to

brace the sinews of his understanding,' and that 'Chaucer was the most practical of all the great

poets, the most a man of business and the world…Every thing has a downright reality; at least

in the relator's mind.'[43]

This kind of 'downright reality' applies not only to the creation of vivid and believable

characters, but also to Chaucer's very use of language, especially as employed in description:

> His words point as an index to the objects, like the eye or finger. There
> were none of the common-places of poetic diction in our author's
> time…he was obliged to inspect things for himself, to look narrowly,
> and almost to handle the object, as in the obscurity of morning we
> partly see and partly grope our way; so that his descriptions have a sort
> of tangible character belonging to them, and produce the effect of
> sculpture on the mind.[44]

Though a description that can 'produce the effect of sculpture on the mind' is an intriguing

idea in light of the sculpture-like fallen Titans in *Hyperion* and *The Fall*, what is more

important about this passage in relation to Keats is the way in which it describes Chaucer's

supposed way of relating words to his own perception. Chaucer, writing in the dim dawn of

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[42] 'On Chaucer', p. 20.
[43] Hazlitt, 'on Chaucer', p.20.
[44] Hazlitt, 'On Chaucer ', p. 22.

great English poetry, was obliged to perceive objects as though they were unknown mysteries and then, without the aid of 'common-places of poetic diction' he might have gleaned from other writers of his own language, indicate or 'point' to what he had perceived, to what the object, 'in reality', *was*. In other words, Chaucer, without admirable verse in his mother tongue to aid him, had to first perceive 'objects', or the realities of human existence, as though these 'objects' were detached from the words used to signify them. He then had to 'grope' toward a new poetry that could, through the medium of words, accurately and precisely describe these realities of human existence in a language in which these realities had never before been expressed. Perhaps in the end this is the task of every poet, but in Chaucer's case the result, according to Hazlitt, is a brilliantly successful 'tangible', or multi-sensory, and multi-dimensional (sculptural) description. Keats is well known for his marvelous use of synæsthesia, evident in many places in his work but especially effective in the opening lines of *The Eve of St. Agnes*, which may be the coldest lines ever written, and the opening lines of *Hyperion*, which are perhaps the stillest lines ever written. It is interesting to speculate whether Keats's use of this device may have been inspired in part by this lecture of Hazlitt's on Chaucer.

But in the case of *The Fall,* what is perhaps more pertinent is the manner in which Hazlitt distinguishes between Chaucer's perception and his words. As Hazlitt describes it, Chaucer was obliged to experience his poetic subject in a very direct way, without 'the common-places of poetic diction' to aid or shape his understanding of the subject, and then find or create language that could express that subject. In this description, language itself is not a mode of perception and understanding; it is a tool that one uses to communicate one's understanding to other individuals. Perception and communication are completely separate and distinct acts. This dichotomy allows for the possibility that humans, even poets, may understand a subject or an idea, or perceive a truth, even though they cannot express it in

words, which in turn allows for the possibility that some subjects, ideas, or truths *cannot* be expressed in words, or at least that no poet has yet been able to express them, even if he can understand them. *The Fall* is concerned throughout and in various ways with the problems of relating words to perceptions, even, in some cases, seeming to suggest that perception and understanding occur entirely beyond the reach of language, and can only be translated, and thus communicated, imperfectly. If Keats agreed with Hazlitt about Chaucer's ability to perceive and communicate perception in entirely new ways, he may have found inspiration to articulate his own similar concerns, or even found the concerns themselves, in part in the works of Chaucer.

Hazlitt, in his lecture, praises Chaucer's pathos, his adherence to his subject, his selective and appropriate use of metaphor, his picturesqueness, versification, narrative method, and true and evocative natural description. He notes, though he does not quite praise, Chaucer's humor, and he distinguishes Chaucer as having a markedly 'stern and masculine' poetical temperament, in specific contrast to Spenser's 'effeminate' one. It would have been quite difficult, I think, for a listener to leave the lecture hall with any doubt that Chaucer thoroughly deserved the title of the Father of English Poetry.

It is not Hazlitt, however, who had the honor of introducing Keats to Chaucer. That role was reserved for Leigh Hunt. At the very least, if Keats was reading Chaucer before he met Hunt, Hunt would undoubtedly have encouraged Keats to read him even more intensely. Spurgeon writes of Keats's close friend,

> Perhaps…the most constant and enthusiastic lover of Chaucer in the
> early nineteenth century was Leigh Hunt…Hunt genuinely loves
> Chaucer, he reads him constantly and carefully, and…his praise is
> discriminating as well as enthusiastic. […] He considers Chaucer has
> the strongest imagination of real life, beyond any writers but Homer,
> Dante and Shakespeare. […] Hunt proves his admiration in the most
> practical way, by making every effort to get Chaucer better known, to
> bring his work to the notice of the ordinary reader and to induce him to
> go to the original for himself. He writes about him and quotes him
> constantly. (*CCA I*, pp. *lxv-lxvi*)

There can be no doubt that Hunt would have enthusiastically urged Keats in his reading of Chaucer. It is particularly interesting that Hunt 'considers Chaucer has the strongest imagination of real life'; we remember that Hazlitt also found him to be above all a poet of the real world and real people. Between these two powerful opinions, Keats would certainly have been strongly encouraged to view Chaucer, in particular contrast to Spenser, as a poet firmly grounded in reality.

Van Dyke Shelley believes that 'Hunt seems to have been one of the few great men of letters in the nineteenth century who knew pretty much *all* of Chaucer' (5), agrees that Hunt probably led Keats to Chaucer, and writes that Keats was thereafter 'influenced by [Chaucer] in diction, metre, and narrative method, especially in the *Eve of St. Mark*' (14). Hunt's allusions to and discussions of his 'master in the art of poetry' are far too numerous to list, but even one substantial quote can be enlightening as to Hunt's very great appreciation of Chaucer:

> His poetry rises in the land like a clear morning, in which you see everything with a rare and crystal distinctness, from the mountain to the minutest flower […] His nature is the greatest poet's nature, omitting nothing in its sympathy (in which respect he is nearer to Shakespeare than either of his two illustrious brethren); and he combines an epic power of grand, comprehensive and primitive imagery, with that of being contented with the smallest matter of fact near him, and of luxuriating in pure, vague, animal spirits, like a dozer in a field.[45]

Here some similarities to Hazlitt are immediately apparent. Like Hazlitt, Hunt envisions Chaucer, or rather Chaucer's poetry, in terms of the morning, a simile appropriate to the figure that constituted the dawn of English poetry. Hunt, again similar to Hazlitt, commends Chaucer's powers of description, his ability to make the reader 'see everything with a rare and crystal distinctness.' And of course, the student of *Hyperion* and *The Fall of Hyperion* can scarcely fail to notice that Hunt finds in Chaucer 'an epic power of grand, comprehensive and primitive imagery.' We are not to understand that Chaucer wrote epics, of course, but rather

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[45] Hunt, 'Chaucer', pp. 80-81.

that Chaucer's imagery is of epic scale or importance: large, all-encompassing, and powerful. *The Fall* is in large part composed of powerful images; in fact, some critics have suggested that Keats may have rewritten *Hyperion* as 'A Dream' partly because the genre of dream poetry was one that would allow him to develop the massive, entrancing, and suggestive images he had created in his epic fragment to their full potential.[46]

It is clear, then, that Chaucer was greatly admired during the Romantic period. Nearly all the greatest male writers of the age revered Chaucer as one of the greatest literary figures England had yet seen, and they read, discussed and wrote about him with regularity and enthusiasm. It is particularly interesting that Hazlitt and Hunt, two men well known to have been some of Keats's most powerful and influential mentors, were especially fond of Chaucer. Even though there does indeed seem to have been some general difficulty in understanding the intricacies of his Middle English, and though many men of letters were equally, if not more, interested in the man than in his work, it is absolutely certain that Keats was reading and writing in a literary setting in which Chaucer was a major contributor.

Chaucerian Dream Poems in the Romantic Period

There can be no doubt that *The Canterbury Tales* was by far the most widely read, and the most admired, of Chaucer's works. A distant second, but still familiar and admired, was *Troilus and Criseyde*. The dream poems, however, though they were all available in several editions such as Speght's and more especially Urry's, are generally mentioned only by the most avid readers of Chaucer, and even among these aficionados, with a few exceptions they do not seem to have been particularly admired. Indeed, several sources strongly suggest that even the most sophisticated readers found them particularly difficult to understand.

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[46] See, for example, Little, pp. 132-33.

Before discussing Romantic reception of the dream poems, though, it is necessary to note that Chaucer's dream poems in the Romantic period were not the same ones we have today. While *The Book of the Duchess*, *The House of Fame*, *The Parliament of Fowls* and *The Legend of Good Women* were all known to be Chaucer's, *The Complaint of the Black Knight*, *The Court of Love*, *The Cuckoo and the Nightingale*, *The Isle of Ladies* (also sometimes referred to as *Chaucer's Dream*, as was *The Book of the Duchess*) and, most importantly, *The Flower and the Leaf*[47] were all attributed to Chaucer as well. In addition, and perhaps of some significance where Keats is concerned, *La Belle Dame sans Merci*, a French dream poem by Alain Chartier, was in Keats's time believed to have been translated by Chaucer.[48]

There seems to have been no formal generic term for the poems we now call 'dream poems' or 'dream visions.' In 1819 Thomas Campbell calls them works of a 'new and allegorical species of romance' (*CCH I*, p. 290). We know that many of the most eminent literary figures of the Romantic period were familiar with at least some of the dream poems, whether apocryphal or genuine. Wordsworth mentions *The Flower and the Leaf* and *The Assembly of Ladies* and quotes *The Legend of Good Women* in a letter (*CCA II*, p. 29); Hazlitt notes his delight in Chaucer's powers of natural description in *The Flower and the Leaf* in an article;[49] Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley records in her journal that 'Shelley reads Chaucer's "Flower and the Leaf," and then Chaucer's "Dream" to me' (*CCA II*, p. 134). As even these few examples suggest, *The Flower and the Leaf* was the clear favorite among all the Chaucerian dream poems, and is very often mentioned, even if briefly, with a comment on how delightful it is. Byron, though he does not mention Chaucer's dream poems specifically, was familiar and apparently on good terms with medieval dream poetry through Langland, as

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[47] *The Flower and the Leaf* was the most popular of all the Chaucerian dream poems. It was expelled from the Chaucerian canon on the basis of rhyme-tests in 1868, but its author remains unidentified. See Derek Pearsall, 'Introduction' to *The Floure and the Leafe*, in *The Floure and the Leafe; The Assembly of Ladies; The Isle of Ladies* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1990), p.3.

[48] J. Caitlin Finlayson, 'Medieval Sources for Keatsian Creation in *La Belle Dame sans Merci*', *Philological Quarterly*, 79 (Spring 2000), 225-247, (p. 225).

[49] See Hazlitt, 'Fragments on Art. Why the Arts are not Progressive?', in *Selected Works*, ed. by Jon Cook (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 257-61, (p. 261).

the passage quoted above demonstrates, and this same passage admits the possibility that he was familiar with Chaucer's dream poems, since he specifically chose *Piers Plowman* to compare with Chaucer's work. All of the other dream poems not just mentioned are alluded to and commented on, usually very briefly, by less famous figures in essays, reviews, or letters, so we can be certain that Chaucer's dream poems were generally available and were, in fact, read. And yet, perhaps curiously for an era which was so clearly interested in dreams and dreaming, the only figures who display a marked enthusiasm for any Chaucerian dream poem besides *The Flower and the Leaf* are Thomas Warton and Leigh Hunt.

Thomas Warton, perhaps in response to his brother Joseph Warton's opinion that Pope's rewriting of *The House of Fame* was an improvement on the original (*CCH I*, p. 212), defends Chaucer's use of the fantastic:

> Extravagancies are essential to a poem of such a structure, and even
> constitute its beauties. An attempt to unite order and exactness of
> imagery with a subject formed on principles so professedly romantic
> and anomalous, is like giving Corinthian pillars to a Gothic palace.
> (*CCH I,* p. 228)

We may commend Thomas Warton for recognizing that *The House of Fame* has an integrity peculiar to its own structure, and for understanding that it does its work in a way far different from neoclassical poetry. We may even admire his open-minded ability to enjoy a poem in which he does not find unity, order, or exactness, and yet it is difficult not to question his understanding of the poem. This is not to suggest that understanding *HF* is a simple matter; readers and critics today still find the work mysterious and perplexing. What is troublesome is that Warton seems a bit too ready to accept that its elements simply are not united, ordered, or exact. One suspects that the poem may in fact have a more careful and deliberate design than Warton gives it credit for.

Thomas Campbell, writing forty-five years after Warton, does not seem to have made much headway in understanding the intricacies of Chaucer's dream poetry. He writes that

Chaucer's 'long and continued predilection' with 'the new and allegorical style of romance' was

> A gymnasium of rather too light and playful exercise for so strong a
> genius; and it must be owned, that his allegorical poetry is often
> puerile and prolix. Yet, even in this walk of fiction, we never entirely
> lose sight of that peculiar grace and gaiety which distinguish the Muse
> of Chaucer; and no one who remembers his productions of the House
> of Fame, and the Flower and the Leaf, will regret that he sported for a
> season in the field of allegory. Even his pieces of this description, the
> most fantastic in design, and tedious in execution, are generally
> interspersed with fresh and joyous descriptions of external nature.
> (*CCH*, p. 290)

What is most surprising about this passage is that Campbell feels the dream poems are a 'light and playful exercise'. Chaucer's dream poems, particularly *The House of Fame*, though they do contain elements of humor and play, are for most of us anything but light reading. They are fascinating but difficult poems. And yet Campbell's idea about the dream poems being light and playful exercises is not so distant from Warton's thought that they should be enjoyed because they are extravagant rather than sensical. It seems that both these men found enjoyment in these poems, though neither of them perceived them as fully coherent, integrated works. Both Warton and Campbell imply that Chaucer's dream poems are somehow not entirely serious, but rather a type of poetic play.

If we were to give recognition to Romantic figures for promotion of Chaucer's dream poems, we must save the last word, once again, for Leigh Hunt. He is particularly remarkable for discussing *The Book of the Duchess*, a work seldom mentioned by other writers. He praises Chaucer's use of natural description in it (*CCA II*, p. 124), and on another occasion remarks that it 'is full of the deepest imagination and sentiment' (*CCA II*, p. 144).

With the exception of *The Fall of Hyperion*, I am unaware of any Romantic period poem that is clearly a member of the dream vision genre. Unlike the sonnet, the ballad and the irregular ode, and despite the Romantics' clear interest in dreams and dreaming and in Chaucer as well, it was not a form that enjoyed a renaissance. Keats, I believe, is unique in his

use of the genre in the Romantic period. One possible exception to this statement is the poem cited by Phillips as a dream poem, Coleridge's *Kubla Khan*. This is potentially an important exception, for it is certain that Keats knew the work. In fact it has been suggested that *Kubla Khan* 'could have shown Keats quite early how a conventional dream-vision frame might be combined with a modern account of the creative process.'[50] We must therefore admit the possibility at least that Keats's *The Fall* was in some way inspired by Coleridge's strange and wonderful poem. Even if this is so, however, as Chayes notes, *Kubla Khan* would have been important in suggesting how 'a conventional dream-vision frame' could be used in a new way. In order for Keats to have been inspired by Coleridge's work in this way, he must first have been familiar with those 'conventional' frames as they are used in the old way; that is, in Chaucer's way.

Keats Reading Chaucer

'What say you to a black Letter Chaucer printed in 1596: aye I've got one huzza! I shall have it bounden gothique a nice sombre binding – it will go a little way to unmodernize,' Keats wrote to his friend Joshua Hamilton Reynolds on May 8th, 1818. This was almost certainly Speght's 1598 edition, for which Keats mistakenly wrote 1596, and in which the text was printed in black-letter and the apparatus in roman.[51] Keats's excited intention to have his new acquisition bound in such a way as to make it appear 'unmodern' reveals that he, like many other readers of his era, found Chaucer's aura of antiquity part of his attraction. We notice too that Keats indulges in a playful pseudo-Middle English ('bounden gothique'), an early suggestion that Keats found Chaucer's 'unmodern' language itself inviting and intriguing. But

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[50] Chayes, p. 502.
[51] See Pearsall, 'Speght', p. 75.

of course Keats did not judge his new book by its proverbial (if absent) cover; he was

intimately acquainted with its contents, and fascinated and inspired by them as well.

Keats was reading Chaucer at least as early as February 1817 when, after reading *The*

Floure and the Leafe in Charles Cowden Clarke's 1782 edition,[52] he wrote his appreciative

sonnet 'This pleasant Tale is like a little Copse' in the blank space at the end of what he

thought was Chaucer's dream poem. It is probable that he had encountered *FL* before, as he

quotes it as an epigraph to *Sleep and Poetry*, which he composed sometime between October

and December in 1816.[53] It is also possible, though I think quite unlikely, that he added the

epigraph when the poem was published in his 1817 volume. Keats quotes lines 17-21 of *FL*,

which read as follows:

> As I lay in my bed slepe full unmete
> Was unto me, but why that I ne might
> Rest I ne wist, for there n'as erthly wight
> [As I suppose] had more of hertis ese
> Than I, for I n'ad sicknesse nor disease.

Keats chooses lines that indicate an inability to sleep, even though their speaker is so

fortunate as to have 'hertis ese'. She[54] rises from her bed, wanders out into a spring morning,

and experiences her vision in a waking state.[55] Though 'Sleep and Poetry' as a whole does not

particularly recall *FL*, its last section does have some significant similarities to the medieval

poem. Lines 354-394 describe a series of images that, according to Clarke, are 'an inventory

of the art garniture of the room' at Hunt's house where Keats was staying when he composed

much of the poem,[56] and after describing these images, Keats writes that 'The very sense of

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[52] This edition was *The Poetical Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* (Edinburgh: At the Apollo Press, by the Martins, 1782), 14 volumes, bound as 7. See Finlayson, p. 226n.

[53] Unless otherwise noted, all dates for the composition and publication of Keats's poems are taken from Jack Stillinger's *John Keats: Complete Poems*.

[54] *FL* has the unusual, though not unprecedented, distinction of being an allegorical love-vision with a female narrator. See Pearsall, p. 2.

[55] *FL* is 'highly unconventional' in that it is 'a "dream poem" in which the narrator fails to fall asleep' (Pearsall p. 2). Such a 'failure' is in fact so unconventional that one wonders whether we may call *FL* a dream poem at all. Indeed, Pearsall classifies it as an 'allegorical love-vision', and only a 'dream poem' in quotation marks.

[56] See Stillinger, *Complete Poems*, p. 37n.

where I was might well / Keep sleep aloof' (396-97). Like the narrator of *FL*, Keats reports

being unable to sleep, though in his waking state he has viewed (though we perhaps cannot

say he has had a vision of) such inspiring objects as 'The glorious features of the bards who

sung / In other ages – cold and sacred busts' (356-57). The 'morning light' surprises him from

his 'sleepless night' (399, 400), and he concludes,

> And up I rose refresh'd, and glad, and gay,
> Resolving to begin that very day
> These lines; and howsoever they be done,
> I leave them as a father does his son. (401-04)

This conclusion may well be said to recall the conclusion of *FL*:

> And I drow homeward, for it was nigh night,
>
> And put all that I had seen in writing,
> Under support of them that lust it to rede.
> O little booke, thou art so unconning,
> How darst thou put thy self in prees for drede?
> It is wonder that thou wexest not rede,
> Sith that thou wost ful lite who shall behold
> Thou rude language, full boisterously unfold. (588-95)

Keats, like the *FL* poet, employs the dream poem convention of 'resolving' to record in verse

the experience he has had. In addition, Keats recalls *FL* in suggesting that his verse may not

be of the highest calibre. The *FL* narrator is far more self-deprecatory that Keats is, even

wondering that her book does not blush, whereas Keats merely acknowledges that his 'lines'

may be less than top-quality, though he feels love and pride for them in any case. These

similarities, together with the epigraph, suggest that it is entirely possible that Keats was

reading Chaucer, or rather a poet that he believed was Chaucer, as early as October 1816.

Keats's openness to Chaucerian influence, whenever it began, continued throughout

his poetic career. In May of 1817, for example, he was at Margate as he worked on *Endymion*,

and from there he wrote to his publishers Taylor and Hessey, 'This Evening I go to

Canterbury…At Cant^y I hope the Remembrance of Chaucer will set me forward like a

Billiard-Ball'.[57] This was evidently more than a passing statement, for in *Endymion* he compares himself to Chaucer in his invocation to the muse:

> But let a portion of ethereal dew
> Fall on my head, and presently unmew
> My soul; that I may dare, in wayfaring,
> To stammer where old Chaucer used to sing. (I. 131-34)

Chaucer's name is not used casually here. We immediately recognize that Keats has referred to one of the four greatest English poets. In this capacity Chaucer's name serves as a cipher for Great Poet, as in 'To stammer where Great Poets used to sing', and indeed Keats was very much concerned with being among the great English poets, not only with Chaucer. But his choice of Chaucer's name, rather than that of another great poet's that would have fit the meter, such as 'Spencer,' 'Shakespeare' or 'Milton,' is indeed appropriate to *Endymion* for, in this poem Keats seems to have drawn on what he, coached by Hazlitt, perceived as Chaucer's 'evocations of psychic interiority and deep pathos'.[58] He even alludes to the pathos found in one of Chaucer's works: 'In our very souls, we feel amain / The close of Troilus and Cressid sweet' (*Endymion* 2.12-13). Of course Keats was familiar with the tale of Troilus and Cressida through Shakespeare as well. But a brief comparison of *Endymion* to 'This pleasant Tale' reveals that though Keats may well have had all the great poets of the past in mind when he dared to wayfare in their territory, he was also thinking of Chaucer more specifically.

In 'This pleasant Tale', Keats writes,

> The honied lines do freshly interlace,
> To keep the reader in so sweet a place,
> So that he here and there full hearted stops;
> And oftentimes he feels the dewy drops
> Come cool and suddenly against his face,
> And by the wandering melody may trace
> Which way the tender-legged linnet hops. (2-8)

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[57] 16 May 1817; Gittings, *Letters*, p. 17.
[58] Greg Kucich, 'Keats and English Poetry', in *The Cambridge Companion to Keats*. ed. by Susan Wolfson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 186-202 (p. 188).

In *Endymion*, Keats recalls this earlier poem about his delight in Chaucer's *The Floure and the Leafe*. He had expressed his enjoyment of *FL* in terms of vicarious experience, especially when 'he feels the dewy drops / Come cool and suddenly against his face'. These lines create an image particularly appropriate to an appreciation of *FL*, a central event of which is a sudden storm that drenches the adherents of the flower.[59] More generally, they praise Chaucer's poetry for appealing vividly to the senses, just as Hazlitt and Hunt had. In *Endymion* Keats connects Chaucer and precipitation once again, but in this case he requests that 'ethereal dew / fall on my head', like a kind of blessing or even a baptism, and so give him the courage and ability to write in the wake of the poetic titan. It may be that Keats was particularly interested in developing powers of description, especially natural description, that were as immediate and vivid as he found Chaucer's to be. Also, the 'wandering melody' of 'This pleasant Tale' has become a 'Chaucer' who 'used to sing' in *Endymion*. In both cases Keats associates Chaucer with musicality, a fact that suggests that he either did not find Chaucer's language particularly difficult, or found its interest to outweigh its difficulty.

I would like to suggest, however, that the most relevant connection between 'This pleasant Tale' and *Endymion* is one which is not made apparent by the specific lines I have quoted from *Endymion* above, but only by that poem as a whole. Keats wrote in 'This pleasant Tale' that 'The honied lines do freshly interlace, / To keep the reader in so sweet a place, / So that he here and there full hearted stops'. Six months after writing these lines, while he was still in the process of composing *Endymion*, he wrote to his friend Benjamin Bailey and quoted a letter, now lost, that he had written to his brother George in the spring:

> Do not the Lovers of Poetry like to have a little Region to wander in
> where they may pick and choose, and in which the images are so
> numerous that many are forgotten and found new in a second Reading:
> which may be food for a Week's stroll in the summer? […] Did our

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[59] And after that there came a storm of haile
   And raine in feare, so that, withouten faile,
   The ladies ne the knights nade o threed
   Dry on them, so dropping was her weed. (*FL* 368-71)

> great Poets ever write short Pieces? I mean in the shape of Tales – This
> same invention seems i‹n›deed of late Years to have been forgotten as
> a Poetical excellence. (8 October 1817; Gittings, p. 27)

In both 'This pleasant Tale' and the letter to Bailey, Keats demonstrates that in the case of

narrative poetry or 'Tales', it is not action, plot, or characterization he finds most enjoyable,

but rich and suggestive imagery. He is so interested in such imagery, in fact, that he praises a

'full hearted stop' rather than a continually developing action. This is an idea he articulates

first in 'This pleasant Tale,' a poem composed specifically in praise of Chaucer, and puts into

practice in the whole of *Endymion*, a very long tale indeed crammed full of lush imagery but

rather lacking, most readers of Keats would agree, in action. Thus we can see that from the

earliest stages of his career, Keats was not only reading Chaucer carefully and critically, but

was consciously open to Chaucerian influence, and very possibly attempting to put into

practice the elements of Chaucer's works that he found interesting and admirable.

Thankfully, Keats did not stop reading Chaucer after *Endymion* was at last completed.

There is abundant evidence, most of it in the letters but some in allusions in the poetry, that

Keats was reading Chaucer on a regular basis from 1817 to late 1819.[60] We can therefore be

reasonably certain of a number of Chaucerian works that Keats knew. It is of course also

reasonable to assume that Keats did not quote or allude to every Chaucerian work he read, and

some critics have indeed worked under the assumption, based on parallel ideas, themes or

settings, that Keats was familiar with a whole range of Chaucerian works to which he never

specifically refers.[61] Though I freely admit that it is very likely, indeed extremely probable,

that Keats read and knew Chaucerian works other than the ones he clearly quotes, alludes to or

models certain elements of his poetry on, at this point I shall confine the discussion to the

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[60] See Priestley, p. 439.
[61] Alexander H. Sackton, for example, bases a suggestion that Keats was influenced 'by Chaucer's handling of myths and legends' on an interesting but ultimately unconvincing comparison of the openings of *Lamia* and the *Wife of Bath's Tale*. See his 'A Note on Keats and Chaucer' in *Modern Language Quarterly* 13 (March 1952), pp. 37-40 (pp. 37-39).

works which solid scholarship has shown he was familiar with, and mention only one work that is not among those it is generally accepted that Keats knew.

Keats, beyond any doubt, knew the Chaucerian *The Floure and the Leafe*.[62] Of the other Chaucerian dream poems, we can be certain that he knew *The Legend of Good Women*, as he slightly misquotes it in a letter to Benjamin Robert Haydon, writing '"ye hear no more of me," as Chaucer says', instead of Chaucer's 'Ye gete no more of me'.[63] What use he made of his reading of *LGW* is an issue that will be addressed later. Here, though, I would like to suggest that we might have some evidence that Keats also knew the fragmentary Middle English translation of *The Romaunt of the Rose*, which he would have believed was translated entirely by Chaucer.[64]

This evidence comes in the form of language. In the pseudo-Middle English section of the fragment *The Eve of St Mark*, lines which Keats himself describes as 'an imitation of the Authors in Chaucer's time – 't is more ancient than Chaucer himself and perhaps betwe[e]n him and Gower',[65] Keats employs a number of words that, among the works of Chaucer, appear primarily or exclusively in the *Romaunt*. Priestley writes,

> The whole passage…contains thirty-two lines, and in these thirty-two lines only ten non-Chaucerian words are used. What is perhaps more interesting still is that many of the forms occur predominantly or solely in Chaucer's short-couplet poems: *bounde, devoute, dolorous,* and *shroude* are exclusive to, or common only in, the *Romaunt of the Rose*; the modern form *must* is found in the latter part of the *Romaunt* only. *Verilie* and *croce* are unusual forms, but are both to be found in the *Romaunt*. *Amyddes of* and *approchen* occur in the *Hous of Fame*. The curious cockney rhyme of *force* and *croce* in Keats is to be found in the *Romaunt*. While Keats confuses the singular and plural of the second person pronoun, he uses the third person plural in correct Chaucerian fashion – *they, hir, hem.* (p. 446)

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[62] Keats was familiar with this work through Dryden's modernization as well. See Robert Gittings, *John Keats* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1968), p. 317.

[63] To Haydon, 17 June 1819; Gittings, p. 243. See Little, p. 121.

[64] The translation of *RR* was most likely the work of two or even three different authors. Most scholars agree that the first part of the poem (ll. 1-1705) was translated by Chaucer. See Larry D. Benson, Introductory matter to *The Romaunt of the Rose*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edn., ed. by Larry D. Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 686.

[65] Letter to the George Keatses, 17-27 September 18||19; Gittings, *Letters*, pp. 295-96.

Both *A Glossorial Concordance to the Riverside Chaucer* and *A Concordance to the Complete Works of Chaucer and to the Romaunt of the Rose* generally support Priestly's observations, although it should be noted that Chaucer does use variant spellings of several of these words, particularly of 'bounde', 'must' and 'amyddes', in many other works. And of course we cannot discount the possibility that Keats found these words in other Middle English works. Nevertheless, the high incidence of words, spelled as Keats spells them, peculiar to *RR*, suggest the possibility that Keats not only read it, but also that he either retained its language remarkably well, or re-read it as he composed *St. Mark* in order to make use of its vocabulary. Of course, the fact that the fragmentary *St. Mark* appears to be the frame of a dream poem is not insignificant. Judy Little notes that *St Mark* seems to make use of several conventions typical of dream poetry:

> Bertha, like the poet-dreamer, is reading an old book…she has been reading all day, and the dusk has 'left her dark / Upon the legend of St. Mark' (51-52) just as the evening 'berafte' the poet of his book in *The Parliament of Fowls*. The book tells of 'swevenis' (99) as Macrobius's Cicero had told of the dream of Scipio, and Bertha like the poet of *The House of Fame* has been reading till she is 'dazed' (56). She is called a 'poor cheated soul' (69); something not fully explained is troubling her[…]The reader's malaise is a characteristic trait which she shares with the narrators of the dream-visions.[66]

All these parallels to Chaucerian dream poems seem quite suggestive, and the hints that Keats may have read *PF* and *HF* are tantalizing indeed. Still, we cannot discount the important fact that Bertha never falls asleep or dreams, so we can never be certain that Keats did intend to write a dream poem. Nevertheless, when we consider that *St Mark*, like Chaucer's *Romaunt* (and, we should not forget, *The Book of the Duchess* and *The House of Fame*), is written in tetrameter couplets, we must admit the possibility at least that Keats may well have been influenced by Chaucer's dream poems in writing the fragmentary *St Mark*.[67] *St. Mark*,

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[66] Little, p. 124.

[67] *St. Mark* is Keats's 'first attempt to use the four-foot couplet for narration.' See Little, p. 125.

unfinished as it is, represents an experiment with Chaucerian language and meter, and very possibly genre.

That Keats's pseudo-Middle English is only partly grammatically correct supports the theory that Romantic poets, however brilliant they were as poets and however much they admired Chaucer, did not commonly have a complete grasp of Chaucer's English. It has even been suggested that 'Keats could have had no accurate knowledge of Chaucer's language',[68] but such accusations are too bold. True, he did not imitate it with perfect accuracy. He imitates it with enough accuracy, however, to indicate a close study of Chaucer,[69] and to demonstrate that he read Chaucer's English more than well enough to allow for a sophisticated play of poetic influence. He even criticizes Chaucer's English as compared to Chatterton's in his Rowley poems: 'The purest English I think – or what ought to be the purest – is Chatterton's – The Language had existed long enough to be entirely uncorrupted of Chaucer's gallicisms and still the old words are used'.[70] This statement shows that Keats was perfectly able to detect the differences between Chaucer's authentic Middle English and Chatterton's forgery of the language. Just as importantly, it strongly suggests that Keats, in his attempt to write 'Middle English' poetry of his own, was not first and foremost concerned with reproducing the language with perfect accuracy; he was more interested in creating an atmosphere reminiscent of 'Chaucer's time'.

No scholar of which I am aware has produced solid evidence that Keats read any more of Chaucer's dream poems. And yet is also important to mention here that, with one notable exception, no scholar of which I am aware has produced solid evidence that Keats read dream poems *other* than Chaucer's and Dante's, if we choose to categorize the *Divine Comedy* as a dream poem. There are no references or allusions to *Piers Plowman*, or any other well-known

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[68] Sackton, p. 40.
[69] Priestley, pp. 439-40
[70] Letter to the George Keatses, 17-27 September 1819; Gittings, *Letters*, pp. 302-03. This is the same letter in which Keats included his draft of *The Eve of St. Mark*.

dream poem either in Keats's letters or his verse. In fact, Keats would have been unable to read several of the dream poems we regularly study today, as the texts were unavailable to him: *Pearl* was not edited or printed until 1864,[71] and *The Dream of the Rood* (which is in Anglo-Saxon in any case) was not known in its entirety until the discovery of the tenth-century Vercelli book in northern Italy in 1822,[72] a year after Keats's death. It is tempting to say that Keats was influenced by Chaucer simply because he wrote a dream poem, and Chaucer may have been his only source for poetry of this genre.

The 'one notable exception' I mentioned above is J. Caitlin Finlayson's article 'Medieval sources for Keatsian Creation in *La Belle Dame sans Merci'*. Finlayson reminds readers that in Keats's time, the Middle English translation of Alain Chartier's poem of the same name was believed to be by Chaucer, and that this translation was certainly available to Keats.[73] Finlayson argues that this poem, along with *The Book of the Duchess*, 'supplied, or initiated, an organizational structure, an emotional ambience and, thus, a catalyst for Keats's creative energies; that they provided analogues of inspiration, rather than matter for direct imitation.'[74] She confines her discussion to the possible influence of the Middle English poems on Keats's haunting ballad, and does not speculate on whether they may have been 'catalysts' for *The Fall*, a poem with more obvious affinities with the genre of dream poetry. She is not able, in fact, to supply any totally convincing, objective evidence that Keats read the ME *La Belle Dame* or *BD* at all. Nevertheless, I note her work here because the many parallels she finds between Keats's *La Belle Dame* and the Chaucerian works suggest strongly - even though they do not prove - that Keats did indeed have a more than passing familiarity with the medieval poems.

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[71] Stanbury, Sarah, ed. *Pearl: Introduction*, "Notes on This Edition", para. 1. Retrieved February 28, 2007, from Teams Middle English Texts: http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/pearlint.htm. Orig. pub. in *Pearl,* ed. by Sarah Stansbury (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2001).

[72] Dream of the Rood, The. (2007). In *Encyclopædia Britannica.* Retrieved February 28, 2007, from Encyclopædia Britannica Online: http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9031167

[73] Finlayson, p. 225.

[74] Finlayson, p. 226.

In addition to the dream poems noted, Keats was deeply affected by a number of other works by Chaucer. Kucich notes that he was drawn to 'Chaucer's deep sympathy for broken-hearted love', and particularly 'identified with Chaucer's Troilus in his passion for Fanny Brawne,"[75] though, as I have mentioned before, Shakespeare's version of the character affected him as well. Also, it is worth noting that Keats seems to have been deeply influenced by Chaucer's 'aura of medieval chivalry' and 'Gothic splendors'.[76] A number of Keats's poems, most notably *St Mark, La Belle Dame*, *Isabella; or, The Pot of Basil* and *The Eve of St Agnes*, have medieval settings, and it is extremely likely that Keats, who was like many people of his time attracted to the 'medieval atmosphere' of Chaucer's works, drew on those works to help create his own version of such an atmosphere. And Keats borrowed not only an atmosphere or tone from Chaucer's *Troilus* and *CT*, but also various narrative devices. For example, though *Isabella* is a retelling of a tale from Boccaccio's *Decameron*, 'narrative devices such as the dream vision[77] and descriptive elements (Isabella's collapse in grief) derive from passages in Chaucer's *The Prioress's Tale* and *The Knight's Tale'*.[78]

Generally speaking, then, we can say that Keats was influenced by Chaucer in a number of different ways in a number of different poems, over the span of most of his poetic career. As Keats matured as a poet, however, he was less attracted to the 'poetry of enchantment', which he associated first and foremost with Spencer, and more strongly drawn to 'the poetry of the human heart'.[79] If we were to oversimplify this maturation, we might say that Keats became less interested in creating a kind of dream world in verse into which either the poet himself or his reader might escape and find 'a little Region to wander in', and more

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[75] P. 187.
[76] Kucich, p. 187.
[77] In my opinion, the 'vision' (l. 273) in which Isabella receives a visit from the murdered Lorenzo (ll. 273-321) should not be called a 'dream vision' at all, but rather a 'dream as narrative event', or even more properly a 'vision as narrative event'. This because it is important to distinguish the vision as a specific episode which functions to move the narrative forward toward further events, rather than a genre of poetry with recognizable and quite specific conventions. *Isabella* contains a vision as a narrative event, but it is not a 'dream vision'.
[78] Kucich, p. 188.
[79] See Kucich, p. 187.

interested in exploring both the sweet dreams and nightmares which could already be found in the human heart. From his first introduction to Chaucer through Hazlitt and Hunt, Keats had been led to view Chaucer as a poet of 'the real world and real people,' and of having the 'strongest imagination of real life', and thus as a poet who was very much in touch with the troubled human heart. Keats evidently agreed with this characterization, for late in 1819 he was able to state decisively, 'Wonders are no wonders to me. I am more at home amongst Men and women. I would rather read Chaucer than Ariosto.'[80]

The Fall of Hyperion, or indeed any dream poem including those of Chaucer, might seem to exist at a far remove from the real lives of men and women, particularly when compared to the vivid, lifelike characters of *The Canterbury Tales*, for instance. But a poet of the 'real world' need not be a poet who writes in a way that portrays the real world in a realistic, representational manner. He need only be a poet who confronts the real problems of the real world, even if that confrontation takes the form of a rather fantastic dream. Therefore, I believe that *The Fall of Hyperion*, though it is peopled with mythological divinities and has settings that can shift as quickly and unrealistically as the most surreal dream, is very much a poem of the real world and real people. For its central concern is about the function of poetry in the real world: whether and how poetry can alleviate the suffering of humankind, and the role of the poet himself in this poetic cure. This kind of practical concern in itself might constitute a 'strand of reminiscence' running from Keats, through Hazlitt and Hunt, to Geoffrey Chaucer.

A Note on Dante

I have mentioned that Keats was familiar with Dante's work, and that the great Italian poet is one we must consider for a source for Keats's knowledge of the dream poem genre. Many

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[80] Letter to Taylor, 17 November, 1819; Gittings, *Selected*, p. 316.

critics have noted, almost in passing, that both *Hyperion* and *The Fall* show Dantean influence, and though in many cases they do not provide evidence for such a claim, when they do cite a source, Robert Gittings is usually mentioned. Gittings is certainly not the only scholar to study the relationship between Keats's work and Dante's. But I choose his work to demonstrate my disagreement with the claim that Dante, as a writer of dream poetry, was a major influence on *The Fall* because Gittings seems to have been especially influential among later critics.

Robert Gittings has shown beyond any reasonable doubt that Keats was reading Dante's *Inferno* during his walking tour of the north of England and Scotland and in the time immediately following, during which he was nursing his dying brother Tom and beginning the composition of *Hyperion*.[81] Keats, Gittings explains, read a blank-verse translation by the Reverend H. F. Cary, each volume of which was a mere 4 ½ by 2 ¾ inches, which made it the perfect work to carry on a long and physically demanding adventure. In his discussion of the influence of the *Inferno* on the *Hyperion* poems, Gittings primarily shows how the first fragment seems to echo phrases and images from Dante's work. Gittings is very likely correct in this aspect of his study. His assertions about the influence of the great Italian poem on *The Fall of Hyperion*, however, are both broader and less well grounded. I should like to quote from Gittings at some length here, because his study has proven to be one of the most enduring mid-twentieth-century works on Keats, cited in virtually every general bibliography. I believe, however, that he has greatly exaggerated the influence of the *Inferno* on this particular poem. Gittings writes that Keats modelled the 'construction' of *The Fall of Hyperion*

> On that of the *Inferno* itself. It was to be 'A Dream', just as the *Divine Comedy* was 'A Vision'. Instead of the story being seen objectively, it was to be a subjective experience of Keats himself, and thus to become, as with Dante, far more of a personal allegory. Keats was to

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[81] Robert Gittings, *The Mask of Keats: A Study of Problems* (London: William Heinemann, 1956), Ch. 2, 'Keats's Debt to Dante', pp. 5-44.

> relate it in his own person, and, like Dante, to have a guide, not indeed a fellow-poet such as Virgil, but a mysterious female figure, the priestess Moneta [. . .] Like Dante too, he engages in philosophic argument with the priestess who is henceforth to be his guide.
>
> Since Keats was copying so closely the scheme of allegory adopted by Dante, he was naturally at pains to make the vision or dream specially his own, and not to import into it any direct incident or expression from the *Inferno*. It is therefore only in broad and impressive images and outlines that he owes any direct debt to his reading.[82]

First and foremost, it is essential to recognise that a dream is not 'just' the same 'as' a vision. Certainly dreams and visions are both experiences markedly different from our usual, everyday state of consciousness, and both dreams and visions may be understood as communicating largely by way of symbolism or allegory. Yet dreams and visions differ in at least one extremely important respect: a dream is experienced while sleeping; a vision is experienced in a waking state. That Keats himself made a distinction between visions and dreams is suggested by the penultimate line of *Ode to a Nightingale*: 'Was it a vision, or a waking dream?' (79). Indeed, *The Fall* itself is concerned throughout with distinguishing between different dreaming and visionary states, constantly meditating on 'the distinction posed at the very outset of the poem's induction: that between dream and vision. The poem turns upon Keats's desire, indeed his vital need, to discriminate between the two'.[83] Even in cases of visions within dreams, such as we find in *The Fall*, the dreamer is dreaming that he is awake when he is granted a vision. Dante's Pilgrim never falls asleep, and thus never dreams. His experience is a different kind of revelation. In fact, several translators of Dante, such as John Ciardi and Mark Musa (though not Cary), have elected to translate the second line of the Inferno as 'I *woke* to find myself…' [*italics mine*].[84] In a discussion of *The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream*, whether the narrator is in a sleeping or waking state is a crucial

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[82] Gittings, Mask, pp. 38-39.

[83] Sperry, p. 334.

[84] See: Dante Alighieri, *The Inferno*, trans. John Ciardi, Historical Introduction by Archibald T. MacAllister (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), I.2. See also: *Inferno,* in *The Portable Dante*, Translated, Edited and with an Introduction and Notes by Mark Musa (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995), I.2.

distinction, for Keats treats the phenomenon, or rather phenomena, of sleep very carefully; sleep is an essential part of the entire rewriting of the *Hyperion* story. For now, let it suffice to say that making *The Fall of Hyperion* 'A Dream' rather than 'A Vision' differentiates it from Dante's masterwork rather than equating it to the same. Chaucer's narrators, however, with the exception of the narrator of *The Floure and the Leafe,* who is in fact not really Chaucer's at all, do sleep.

Gittings is of course correct in noting that revising the poem in question 'to be a subjective experience of Keats himself . . . far more of a personal allegory', Keats might have been inspired, at least partly, by Dante. Nevertheless, in light of the problems under consideration in this thesis, it should be mentioned that all four of Chaucer's dream poems are presented as subjective experiences of the poet as well. The point of view, vastly important as it is, in itself need not suggest the influence of any particular poet or poem.

More suggestive is the presence of a guiding figure. Dante, of course, has Virgil as his guide through Hell and Purgatory, and Beatrice in Paradise, though as Gittings himself allows, there is little evidence that Keats ever read the *Purgatorio* or *Paradiso*.[85] Yet we should remember that philosophic guides exist in Chaucer's dream poems as well. Gittings offers no particulars as to how Moneta herself may be like Dante's Virgil or Beatrice. Part of this project, however, is to discover whether she may have Chaucer's Eagle, god of Love or other guiding figures in her literary ancestry.

Most troubling, though, is Gittings's idea that Keats 'was copying' Dante, and yet specifically trying not to use any particular element of Dante's in his own 'vision or dream' (note the lax terminology here). As I have noted, I agree that it is likely that some of the powerful images of the *Inferno* had an effect on Keats's writing, but the 'outline' of *The Fall* is extremely different from that of any part of the *Divine Comedy*. Even leaving aside the

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[85] Gittings, *Mask*, p. 43.

extremely precise and meaningful numerological structure of Dante's trilogy,[86] the 'broad . . .

outline' of the *Inferno* is thirty-four quite short Cantos that progress in a logical, practical,

indeed divinely *ordered* manner. *The Fall*, on the other hand, certainly possesses a logic of

its own, but it is a kind of dream logic, and we make great leaps in location, in time, and in

thought. It is divided into cantos, but what gives the fragment its real shape is the frame-

within-frame structure. In this way it is much more similar to Chaucer's dream poems than to

Dante's work.

      I do not wish to press the issue too far; I do not suggest that Keats was in no way

influenced by Dante as he was writing *The Fall*. And yet, it is perhaps most important to

recognise that whether or not we in the twenty-first century classify the *Divine Comedy* as a

dream vision proper,[87] Keats himself studied Dante specifically as an *epic* poet, in

preparation for his own epic poem, *Hyperion*. In fact, he acquired his edition of Dante as a

gift from his friend Benjamin Bailey, a curate 'who regarded himself as an authority on epic

poetry' and who also introduced him to Milton.[88] *Hyperion* is an epic fragment. But its

revised form, *The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream*, is not. Its structure, thematic concerns, tone,

use of symbolism and allegory, and characters all have much more in common with a

separate genre entirely: the medieval dream vision.

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[86] See MacAllister's 'Introduction' to *The Inferno* for a brief explanation of the numerical significance of the
structure of the *Divine Comedy*.
[87] For a discussion of the argument as to whether Dante's work is classifiable as a dream vision, see Stephen J.
Russell, *The English Dream Vision: Anatomy of a Form* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1988), pp.
16-18.
[88] Gittings, *Mask,* p. 13.

II. The *Hyperion* Project

Hyperion to *The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream*

Keats dreamt of writing an epic poem. In *Sleep and Poetry*, an early poem written in 1816, he outlined for himself a poetic itinerary in which he would ultimately move past 'the realm…/ Of Flora, and old Pan' (ll. 101-02) and continue to 'a nobler life, / Where I may find the agonies, the strife / Of human hearts' (ll. 123-25). Richard Woodhouse, a close friend of Keats' as well as an editor and collector of his manuscripts, interpreted this 'nobler' poetic 'life' as one of the epic poet,[89] and indeed we recognize the Classical progression from pastoral to epic, though Keats seems to have planned to skip the usual middle stage of georgic. He seems to have viewed the genre of epic in particular as the poetic form most appropriate to dealing with what he would later, in *The Fall*, articulate as 'the miseries of the world' (I. 148), though it is well to remember that, through the influence of Hazlitt especially, he had learned to identify Chaucer as a poet particularly in touch with the real people of the real world, and by extension, perhaps, with their real 'miseries.' Yet it was not Chaucer Keats devoured in preparation for *Hyperion*, but Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Dante's *Inferno*. When in the autumn of 1818 he returned from his walking tour of Scotland and the north of England to nurse his dying brother Tom, he began to write *Hyperion*.

Despite preparation for the project he did not feel that he was quite ready to write his epic. He had only a general idea of his subject and had not completely decided on an appropriate 'idiom and verse form.'[90] And yet the emotional strain of caring for Tom, who was enduring a long and painful tubercular decline, essentially caused Keats to escape into his epic for relief:

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[89] See Vincent Newey, '*Hyperion, The Fall of Hyperion*, and Keats's Epic Ambitions' in *The Cambridge Companion to Keats*, ed. by Susan Wolfson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 69-85 (p. 69).
[90] See Walter Jackson Bate, *John Keats* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 389.

> I wish I could say Tom was any better. His identity presses upon me so
> all day that I am obliged to go out – and although I intended to have
> given some time to study alone I am obliged to write, and plunge into
> abstract images to ease myself of his countenance his voice and
> feebleness […] – if I think of fame of poetry it seems a crime to me,
> and yet I must do so or suffer.[91]

Tom died on the first of December 1818,[92] and after this devastating event Keats was unable

to make any appreciable progress on *Hyperion*. He did make sporadic attempts to continue

the poem but for the most part his letters comment on his *not* writing it. For example, in

December he wrote to the George Keatses that 'I went on with it a little last night – but it will

take some time to get into the vein again';[93] the following March he wrote, 'I am mostly at

Hampstead, and about nothing; being in a sort of qui bono temper, not exactly on the road to

an epic poem';[94] and later he admitted, 'I have not gone on with Hyperion – for to tell the

truth I have not been in a great cue for writing lately[95] – I must wait for the sp[r]ing to rouse

me up a little'.[96] He seems to have completely abandoned the first Hyperion poem, however,

in the spring of 1819. His precise reasons for discontinuing work on the epic fragment have

been the cause of much speculation and are beyond the scope of this thesis, but it will prove

important to make several points about the poem and its composition before progressing to a

discussion of its revised form.

First, though Keats was persuaded to publish *Hyperion* in its fragmentary state in his

1820 volume,[97] he was averse to this, and the 'Advertisement' to *1820* states, 'If any apology

be thought necessary for the appearance of the unfinished poem of *Hyperion*, the publishers

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[91] Letter to Charles Wentworth Dilke, 20-21 September 1818; Gittings, *Selected*, pp. 143-44.
[92] Bate, p. 402.
[93] 16 December 1818-4 January 1819; Gittings, *Letters*, p. 170.
[94] To Benjamin Robert Haydon, 8 March 1819; Gittings, *Letters*, p. 188.
[95] Walter Evert draws attention to the fact that Keats *was* in a cue for writing, as in the same letter he informs the George Keatses that he has just finished *The Eve of St. Agnes*. Apparently it was *Hyperion* in particular, and not writing in general, that Keats found difficult. See *Aesthetic and Myth in the Poetry of Keats* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), p. 238.
[96] To the George Keatses, 14 February-3 May 1819; Gittings, *Letters*, pp. 199-200.
[97] Interestingly, Keats published *H* rather than *FH* in *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St Agnes and Other Poems*. He probably wrote *FH* between July and September of 1819, but his book was assembled for publication as well as published in 1820.

beg to state that they alone are responsible, as it was printed at their particular request, and contrary to the wish of the author.'[98] Nevertheless, *Hyperion* 'drew more praise from Keats's own contemporaries than anything else he ever wrote.'[99] Even Byron, who often expressed contempt for Keats's work,[100] wrote that 'His fragment on *Hyperion* seems actually inspired by the Titans and is as sublime as Aeschylus'.[101] Keats himself, though, was dissatisfied with both *Hyperion* and *The Fall*. Second, though Keats seems to have been literally unable to write *Hyperion*, he never lost interest in the project, as his intermittent comments about it and its ultimate revision demonstrate.

But what is most pertinent to the themes I wish to explore in this thesis is that the composition of *Hyperion*, as Keats himself suggests in the letter to the George Keatses quoted above, was in part an escape from the terrible reality of his brother's death. Nor was Tom's final decline the first time Keats had used his writing as an escape from the suffering of those he loved. In March of 1818, when Tom was ill but not yet in the final stage of his illness, Keats wrote in his extempore verse epistle 'Dear Reynolds, as last night I lay in bed', 'Do you get health – and Tom the same – I'll dance, / And from detested moods in new romance / Take refuge' (110-12).[102] Keats has sometimes been accused of escapism, and indeed poems such as the magnificent *Ode to a Nightingale* and *Ode on a Grecian Urn* are deeply concerned with questions about the unpleasantness of everyday reality and various possible methods of transcending it. Keats began *Hyperion* before he felt he was ready in order to 'ease' himself 'out' of watching Tom suffer, and yet the revised version of that very poem is unique among Keats's works in its strong, even harsh, insistence on the poet's intimate involvement with 'the miseries of the world'.

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[98] John Keats, *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St Agnes and Other Poems*, with a Note on the Text by Michael Schmidt; Poetry First Editions (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1999), p. unnumbered.
[99] Bate, p. 392.
[100] See especially William C. Keach, 'Byron Reads Keats' in *The Cambridge Companion to Keats*, ed. by Susan Wolfson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 203-213.
[101] Elizabeth Cook, ed., *John Keats: The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 225n.
[102] The 'new romance' most likely refers to 'Isabella; or, The Pot of Basil', which Keats composed between February and April 1818. See Stillinger, *Collected Poems*, p. 181n. and p. 184n.

In 'Sleep and Poetry', Keats had written that 'the great end / Of poesy…should be a friend / To sooth the cares, and lift the thoughts of man' (245-47). But as Andrew Motion writes, 'His own circumstances kept undermining his conviction that poetry could alleviate suffering',[103] and he had therefore to realize that 'he had not finally decided what he thought about the relationship between poetry and suffering'.[104] It seems that, more than one hundred years before Auden wrote his famous line, Keats was struggling with the idea that 'poetry makes nothing happen.'[105] It has, in fact, been observed that Keats was 'the first great poet to exhibit that peculiarly modern malady – a conscious and persistent conflict between the requirements of social responsibility and of aesthetic detachment.'[106] These issues of the desire to personally escape from painful reality into poetry, and the desire to offer a poetic cure or at least painkiller to others experiencing suffering, were foremost in his mind in the summer of 1819 as he began revising *Hyperion* into *The Fall of Hyperion*.

A. C. Spearing writes that 'Chaucer comes more and more to use the dream-poem as a means of meditating on his own situation as a courtly poet of love.'[107] Indeed the very structure of a dream poem – a dreamer-poet falls asleep, receives material for a poem in his dream, then wakes and resolves to write that poem – practically demands that on one level, the dream poem must be 'about' the creative process of writing poetry. There is abundant evidence that between the composition of *Hyperion* and its revision into *The Fall*, Keats was deeply concerned with his own situation and function as a poet. Perhaps Keats, being a perceptive reader of Chaucer, recognized the potential of dream poetry to function as a sort of scaffolding on which he might build a meditation about his literary vocation, and was thus inspired or encouraged to revise his epic into a dream poem.

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[103] Andrew Motion, *Keats* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 446.
[104] Motion, p. 444.
[105] W.H. Auden, 'In Memory of W.B. Yeats' (1939), in *Collected Poems*, ed. by Edward Mendelson (New York: Vintage 1991), p. 248.
[106] Abrams, M.H., *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953) p. 328.
[107] Spearing, A.C., *Medieval Dream Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1976), p. 6.

A Brief Summary of Critical Interpretations

Some critics have assessed *The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream* as an artistic failure. While I cheerfully recognize that even great poets write bad poems, and usually more mediocre poems than great or even good ones, I feel that calling *The Fall* a failure is an unfair judgement, especially considering the poem's fragmentary state. It is also tempting, when such bold assertions are made, to ask whether it is the poet or the critic who has failed; for when *The Fall* is judged a failure, it is nearly always because the accusing critic is unable to use close reading to integrate the various parts of the poem into an interpretation that satisfies him. For example, Harold Bloom concludes that Keats 'began with his own dying into the life of tragic poetry, and next had to externalize this theme into its affinities with the story of the Titans. But the affinities are strained, and the Titanic myth is irrelevant to Keats's more intense concerns.'[108] Another critic is even more critical:

> Even if he is determined to sunder, as I have said, idea [the aim and object of the poet] and narrative [the story of the Titans], the exposition of the idea on the one hand, and the narrative on the other, must be formally related to each other […] Mnemosyne will be a figure in his dream; and the story, shown in a vision by Mnemosyne, will be a vision within a dream. This scheme is pretty complicated and does not augur well for the success of the poem.[109]

That James, a professional critic, finds a clearly delineated frame narrative 'pretty complicated' is somewhat surprising. Nevertheless, both James and Bloom make an important point: *The Fall* is a poem which consists of parts that are rather different from one another. We find a lyric introduction, a narrative in which the dreamer-poet relates his own actions in a dream, and a narrative in which he relates what he, as an unobserved observer, witnesses. One of the challenges in reading *The Fall* is discovering how these various parts

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[108] Bloom, Harold, *The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry* (New York: Anchor Books, 1963), p. 451.
[109] James, D.G., 'A Discussion of the Two *Hyperions*', in *Critics on Keats: Readings in Literary Criticism*, ed. by Judith O'Neill (Coral Gables, FL: University of Miami Press, 1968), pp. 103-112 (p.106).

work with one another. In the third chapter of this thesis I shall demonstrate that whether or not we can satisfactorily integrate these parts of the poem in a traditional close reading, the structure of lyric introduction-first person narrator-unobserved observer is in fact quite standard in dream poetry.

Most critics who offer complete explications of *The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream* agree, more or less, on its main theme. It is ultimately a poem about poetry.[110] Unless, that is, it is ultimately a poem about the poet.[111]Which of these possibilities is the case is difficult to determine, because though the work clearly explores various aspects of both the nature and function of poetry and the nature and function of the poet himself, it never quite decides just what makes a poem a poem, rather than a 'bad verse' (I.208), or a poet a poet instead of a dreamer. Yet though the fragment never reaches a conclusion about whether it, itself, is in fact a poem or its author a true poet, its main character does seem to progress, quite steadily, toward a possible answer to these questions. In fact most exegeses of the fragment interpret it as being, in one way or another, the record of a poet's struggle toward maturity as an artist.

The Fall of Hyperion is in large part the story of a dreamer's philosophical poetic progression. I say 'philosophical' because the progression we witness, though it is presumably a progression toward true poethood, does not include lessons in the most obvious requirement for achieving that exalted state; namely, writing poetry. The only reference to the actual task of writing comes in the induction which, being retrospective, is actually last in the sequence of events narrated in the poem. The dreamer's experiences in the dream itself are geared toward the development of personal characteristics, of a greater understanding of what his ultimate goal should be in writing verse, and of what kind of imaginative stance he must take in order to attain that goal. The eighteen-line induction makes clear that simply

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[110] See Vincent Newey, '*Hyperion, The Fall of Hyperion*, and Keats's epic ambitions', in *The Cambridge Companion to Keats*, ed. by Susan Wolfson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 69-85: '*The Fall of Hyperion* becomes a psychomachia, or mind-debate, about the function and value of poetry' (p. 78).
[111] See Garrett Stewart, 'Keats and language', in *The Cambridge Companion to Keats* (pp. 135-151): '*The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream* sets out a parable…of a poet's own coming-of-age' (p. 149).

writing down a dream in metered speech does not a poet make, since the narrator writes that 'Whether the dream now purposed to rehearse / Be poet's of fanatic's will be known / When this warm scribe my hand is in the grave' (I.16-18). And though the induction is very much concerned with the task of writing, once we enter the kaleidoscopic series of dream frames, the work is much more concerned with what kind of imaginative approach to humanity makes a versifier capable of writing true poetry.

Though the details of their interpretations vary greatly, many critics agree that 'in *The Fall* Keats…tests the basic principles of his "poetical Character"[112] by submitting the authorial self to a series of challenges to his claim to identity as a poet'[113], and by so doing, the 'authorial self' undergoes some manner of progression toward what the poem claims is true poethood. Just what these 'challenges' are, though, and what kind of progress the dreamer makes, have been understood in a number of different ways. One of the most common ways of viewing this poetic progression is to compare it to ideas that Keats himself expressed in earlier poems and letters,[114] especially to *Sleep and Poetry* and to a letter to Reynolds in which he articulated the idea of 'human life [as] a large Mansion of Many Apartments.'[115]

We remember that in *Sleep and Poetry* Keats articulated a desire to first write pastoral verse, in which he would 'sleep in the grass, / Feed upon apples red, and strawberries, / And choose each pleasure that my fancy sees' (102-04), and then move on to a 'nobler' kind of poetry, which most critics have understood to be epic poetry, that would treat more directly with real human suffering. The bower in which the dreamer of *The Fall* eats 'deliciously' (I.

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[112] This phrase is from a letter to Richard Woodhouse, 27 October 1818: 'As to the poetical Character itself…it is not itself – it has no self – it is every thing and nothing – It has no character – […] it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair […] the camelion Poet. […] has no Identity – he is continually in for – and filling some other Body.' (*Letters I,* pp. 386-87).

[113] Susan J. Wolfson, *The Questioning Presence: Wordsworth, Keats, and the Interrogative Mode in Romantic Poetry* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), p. 344.

[114]See Muir, p. 113, for how *The Fall* corresponds to both the ideas about poetic progression in *Sleep and Poetry* and the chambers in the 'Mansion of Many Apartments'.

[115] 3 May 1818, (*Letters I*, p. 280).

40), then drinks a mysterious beverage and falls asleep 'upon the grass' (I. 53), is often interpreted as a brief stay in the realm of pastoral, though perhaps it is better to use a term Keats himself employs in *Sleep and Poetry*: the realm of 'fancy.' When he wakes and finds himself in the temple, he is symbolically in the realm of epic, complete with classical architecture, where only 'those to whom the miseries of the world / Are misery, and will not let them rest' (I. 148-49), can survive. It would be difficult to argue against the idea that these two poems are indeed expressing the same notion: a serious poet must, at some point, abandon poetry of pleasure for poetry that deals with human suffering. *The Fall* differs from the earlier work in that the narrator is not merely planning to do so, or imagining what it will be like when he does so. The narrator actually has a dream that teaches him about the process he needs to undergo in order to graduate to the next stage of his career.

Comparing *The Fall* with *Sleep and Poetry*, then, might compel us to read the vision of the Titans as material for an epic poem. This reading is of course further encouraged by the fact that *Hyperion*, the poem from which many of the lines dealing with the Titans are taken verbatim, was most certainly conceived as an epic. Thus we are faced with what might be an epic poem embedded in a dream vision, and we are challenged to discover just how the genres of dream-vision and epic are, or were to be if the poem had been completed, integrated.

Keats's idea about the 'Mansion of Many Apartments' is similar to his ideas about how he wished to progress from a less to a more serious type of poetry, but it is articulated in a way that frees the poet from associating the importance of the poem to the actual 'miseries' of human existence from the confines of specific genres. Keats writes,

> I compare human life to a large Mansion of Many Apartments…The
> first we step into we call the infant or thoughtless Chamber, in which
> we remain as long as we do not think…we no sooner get into the
> second Chamber, which I shall call the Chamber of Maiden-Thought,
> than we become intoxicated with the light and the atmosphere, we see
> nothing but pleasant wonders, and think of delaying there for ever in

> delight: However among the effects this breathing is father of is that
> tremendous one of sharpening one's vision into the heart and nature of
> Man – of convincing one's nerves that the World is full of Misery and
> Heartbreak, Pain, Sickness and oppression – whereby this Chamber of
> Maiden Thought becomes gradually darken'd and at the same time on
> all sides of it many doors are set open – but all dark – all leading to
> dark passages – We see not the ballance of good and evil. We are in a
> Mist – We are now in that state - We feel the 'burden of the Mystery.'
> To this point was Wordsworth come, as far as I can conceive when he
> wrote 'Tintern Abbey'.[116]

Here Keats expresses an idea about 'human 'life' in general, and not necessarily about a

poet's life in particular, but it is important to remember that *The Fall* is very much concerned

with the personal, or 'human', characteristics that make a writer a poet. The people who are

in the 'thoughtless Chamber' might be compared to those in *The Fall* 'who find a haven in

the world, / Where they may thoughtless sleep away their days' (I. 150-51). The dreamer

clearly is not one of these 'thoughtless' sleepers. The 'Chamber of Maiden-Thought,' in

which one sees 'nothing but pleasant wonders,' may be compared to the bower in which the

dreamer first finds himself. Just as when one is in the 'Chamber of Maiden-Thought' one has

experiences which are 'father of' an increased insight into 'the heart and nature of man', the

dreamer of *The Fall*, while in the bower, quaffs a 'draught' which 'is parent of' his 'theme'

(I. 46). The temple in which the dreamer encounters Moneta may thus be seen as the

'gradually darken'd' Chamber of Maiden-Thought, for it is there that he must learn to face

the implications of the fact that to him, 'the miseries of the world / Are miseries, and [he]

will not let them rest' (I. 148-49). The dreamer, then, is at the point where he is facing 'the

burden of the Mystery', and in the remainder of the poem, if we continue to apply Keats's

ideas about the Mansion of Many Apartments to our reading of it, he must learn how to

progress to the next, unknown, Chamber.

These ideas about the Mansion of Many Apartments may be understood as a more

detailed exploration of the mental process undergone by a poet graduating from pastoral to

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[116] *Letters I*, pp. 280-81

epic. Yet Keats specifically mentions Wordsworth's 'Tintern Abbey', which is certainly not an epic poem. That he thinks of this poem in particular as one that explores the 'dark passages' that lead on from the Chamber of Maiden-Thought suggests that he no longer, necessarily, equated the most serious kind of poetry with epic. For this reason, and because the first part of *The Fall*, as I demonstrate in the next section, is so clearly a dream vision, I believe we should be very careful about assuming that the material that so many critics have treated as though it was merely transplanted from *Hyperion* into *The Fall* is, in fact, the beginning of an embedded epic. Keats undeniably felt a strong desire to write an epic poem throughout most of his poetic career, and he obviously used material from his epic fragment in *The Fall*. But if he began to reconsider his early assumption that epic was the noblest kind of poetry – and we remember that he did not know where the 'dark Passages' would lead – we cannot assume that the Titan material in *The Fall* was indeed intended to be an epic, and the dream-vision material leading up to it merely an introduction. Speculations about how Keats may have intended to continue *The Fall* are always interesting, though seldom useful in helping us to understand the poem. I would like to submit the idea, though, that the dream-vision genre would have allowed Keats to treat the *Hyperion* material, the material that he seemed completely unable to continue with in its original epic form, in an entirely different manner. We should definitely not lock ourselves into a reading in which we assume that the dreamer, in his vision, receives material for an epic poem. As Irene Chayes reminds us, 'The reminders of Keats's abandoned epic…surely do not mean what some commentators seem to have believed – that thenceforth the story of the Titans should have been the main subject of *The Fall*, with everything preceding it reduced to an elaborate but extraneous prologue.'[117]

The dreamer of *The Fall*, then, seems to be in the process of progressing from writing one kind of poetry, associated with pleasure, fancy, and perhaps escapism, to another kind of

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[117] Chayes, p. 505.

poetry that can deal intimately and unflinchingly with the most serious miseries of the world and the people who live in it. He is on his way, he hopes, to becoming a full-fledged poet, one who 'pours out a balm upon the world' (I. 201). The manner in which he takes the steps of this progression has been understood in various ways. Chayes interprets the dreamer's experience as 'a series of tests that become increasingly challenging as he advances and increasingly profound in their effects on him personally.'[118] The first test, according to Chayes, takes place in the bower and is 'a test of pleasure'. The second test is the ascent of the staircase leading to the altar. And the dreamer 'must pass the third test of his initiation by somehow reanimating the three still figures before him' in lines I. 384-92.[119] De Selincourt, on the other hand, has suggested that the bower, the temple, and the altar correspond to the three stages of life – 'childhood, the awakening to knowledge, and the mature responsibility toward suffering'.[120] And Little finds three 'symbolic rebirths' in the poem, occurring in the bower, the altar steps, and the dreamer's willingness to die with all the false poets, 'the narrator achieving each time a clearer understanding of himself as a poet and each time moving closer to a visual apprehension of the large legendary figures, the story of whose fall was evidently intended to confirm and explain his own new knowledge.'[121]

Thus, though critics differ in their interpretations about a great many details of the poem, amongst those who do not consider *The Fall* an artistic failure a general consensus emerges. Whether the dreamer-poet moves through the classic stages of poetry or the allegorical chambers of the Mansion of life, whether he undergoes symbolic tests or rebirths, he is moving, in one way or another, toward a more mature state of poethood.

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[118]Chayes, p. 508.
[119] Chayes, p. 512.
[120] As paraphrased in Little, p. 141.
[121] p. 142

***The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream* as Progress Toward Chameleonhood**

All of the abovementioned interpretations of the dreamer's poetic progress are bases for

insightful readings of *The Fall*. I base my own interpretation of the poem on another aspect

of the dreamer's progress, however, one that has received little attention among the major

Keats critics. Each phase of the dreamer's poetic progression, regardless of whether we

understand these phases as tests, symbolic deaths or rebirths, or stages of life, enables the

dreamer to move closer to an imaginative state in which he is able to temporarily forget his

personal concerns, even his own sense of self, and completely identify with his subject and

his subject's 'miseries.' It is this kind of identification that leads the reader to believe that the

dreamer may indeed become capable of writing verse that will pour 'a balm upon the world'.

On 26 October 1818, Keats wrote one of his most famous letters to Richard

Woodhouse:

> As to the poetical Character itself…it is not itself – it has no self – it is
> every thing and nothing – It has no character…What shocks the
> virtuous philosop[h]er, delights the camelion Poet […] A Poet is the
> most unpoetical of any thing in existence; because he has no Identity –
> he is continually in for – and filling some other Body – The Sun, the
> Moon, the Sea and Men and Women who are creatures of impulse are
> poetical and have about them an unchangeable attribute – the poet has
> none; no identity – he is certainly the most unpoetical of all God's
> Creatures. […]
>   I will speak of my views, and of the life I purpose to myself – I am
> ambitious of doing the world some good…All I hope is that I may not
> lose all interest in human affairs – that the solitary indifference I feel
> for applause even from the finest Spirits, will not blunt any acuteness
> of vision I may have.[122]

Keats uses the word 'poetical' primarily to describe people or things that have something

definite about them, and so are fit subjects for poetry. That the 'camelion Poet' does not have

such a fixed character implies that he is not a fit subject for poetry. That Keats held this idea

may make *The Fall* seem rather an odd work, since so much of it is clearly about a dreamer-

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[122] *Letters I*. pp. 386-88.

poet very similar to Keats himself.[123] But what is so important about this apparent oddity is that as the poem progresses, it becomes less about the poet himself, and more about what he begins to recognize as a more important subject.

The theory of chameleon poetics seems relatively simple. In essence, the poet forgets about himself, or rather his illusion of having a self, and identifies with someone else. In his letter to Woodhouse Keats writes as though this is easy, something the poet does as a matter of course. In practice, though, chameleonhood is no simple matter, and it is this fact that the dreamer-poet in *The Fall* comes to understand. Many a mystic in more than one religion has struggled for years, perhaps in vain, to transcend the self or the illusion of self. And though one common Romantic understanding of imagination 'emphasizes the imagination's capacity for sympathetic identification' so that 'imagination takes consciousness beyond the limits of the personal self and enables the poet to experience an identification with' something outside the self,[124] understanding is not doing. There is a great difference between pretending to be or fantasizing about what it would be like to be someone else, and truly identifying with one's subject so that the poet apprehends the subject's truth, and not the poet's idea of truth projected on the subject. Just as mastering the intricacies of meter, rhyme, and metaphor requires years of study and practice, so does the dissolution of the self into the poetic essence of another. Furthermore, it has been observed that though Keats's letters often demonstrate a keen perception of human nature, the characters in his narrative poems seldom seem like 'real' human beings with real troubles; character is frequently subordinated to the 'abstract' ideas in which the poet is primarily interested.[125] In *The Fall of Hyperion*, though, Keats

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[123]Leon Waldoff goes so far as to assert, 'More than any other poem that Keats wrote, "The Fall of Hyperion" is concerned with the problem of identity.' See Leon Waldoff, *Keats and the Silent Work of Imagination* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1985), p. 178.

[124]Waldoff, p. *x*.

[125] Edward E. Bostetter, *The Romantic Ventriloquists: Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, Byron* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1963), p. 175.

recognizes the challenging nature of chameleon poetics, and explores its relationship to the writing of poetry that can ease or cure the suffering of humankind.

The chameleon poet is able to identify with an inanimate object, such as the 'Sun', the 'Moon', or perhaps a nightingale, as well as with a person. In the case of *The Fall*, however, where one of the most explicit concerns of the poem is how the poet and his poetry might ease *human* suffering, the ability of a poet to identify with a human subject, or a humanlike subject such as a mythological figure, takes precedence. When the dreamer first enters the dream state and finds himself in the bower, he is entirely alone. Thus the task of identifying with human suffering is not an immediately apparent issue, and he is able to enjoy the multitude of sensory pleasures of the place.

And the first focus is, very clearly, on sensory, rather than cognitive, pleasures. The dream report begins as follows:

> Methought I stood where trees of every clime,
> Palm, myrtle, oak, and sycamore, and beech,
> With plantane, and spice blossoms, made a screen;
> In neighbourhood of fountains, by the noise
> Soft showering in mine ears, and, by the touch
> Of scent, not far from roses. Turning round,
> I saw an arbour with a drooping roof
> Of trellis vines, and bells, and larger blooms,
> Like floral-censers swinging light in air. (I. 19-27)

Though I wish to reserve most of my comparisons and contrasts between Keats and other dream-poets for the next section, a short comparison here will help to illustrate just how Keats creates an arbour that is primarily a realm of pleasure. Keats describes his arbor complete with a Chaucerian catalogue of plants reminiscent of the list of trees in *PF* 176-82, and even more like the description of flora in *LGW*:

> Fayr was this medewe, as thoughte me, overall;
> With floures sote enbrouded was it al.
> As for to speke of gomme, or herbe, or tre,
> Comparisoun may non ymaked be;
> For it surmountede pleynly alle odoures,

And of ryche beaute alle floures. (107-112)[126]

But, as in *LGW*, Keats's natural description appeals not only to the sense of sight, but also to olfactory capabilities: both poets make a point of mentioning the 'odoures' of the many flowers. Keats was very likely directly inspired by this passage from *LGW*; we remember that it is certain that he read the work, and also that both Hazlitt and Hunt had high praise for Chaucer's powers of natural description. Keats, however, takes this multisensory description even further than Chaucer does. He attends to our auditory sense both by describing the noise of the nearby fountains and by the alliteration and assonance of 'noise / soft showering', and even synæsthetically appeals to the sense of touch, by describing the scent of roses as touching him. Without doubt, the dreamer-poet is in a realm of sensual delight.

It is worth mentioning here that in his heroic couplet translation of *FL*, John Dryden emphasizes the unadulterated pleasure of the dream arbour even more strongly than the original unknown poet does. For example, he writes of the arbour, 'this sweet place could only pleasure know' (101),[127] a line that has no equivalent in the original.[128] Dryden also relates that 'My sight, and smell, and hearing, were employed, / And all three senses in full gust enjoyed' (138-39), another strong emphasis on the senses with no clear parallel in the original.[129] In Dryden, this focus on sensory pleasure functions to place his dreamer-poet more clearly in league with the adherents of the flower than the leaf, at least initially, and thus strengthens the ultimate lesson of the greater importance of the more cerebral, yet more lasting, pleasures of the 'leaf.' Keats's theme is entirely different, and yet his poem is very much like Dryden's – I venture to say influenced by Dryden's – in that his arbour is, above all, a place in which the dreamer-poet need consider nothing but his own sensory pleasure, though it is a realm he must ultimately abandon.

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[126] All quotes from *LGW* are taken from the 'G' text in *The Riverside Chaucer*.

[127] Dryden, John, *The Flower and the Leaf*, in *John Dryden: The Major Works*, ed. by Keith Walker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 751-66.

[128] See Pearsall, ed., *FL*, ll. 78-84.

[129] See *FL* ll. 113-19.

When he finds the 'cool vessel of transparent juice' (I. 42), Keats's dreamer-poet precedes his drinking of it by 'pledging all the mortals of the world / And all the dead whose names are on our lips' (I. 44-45). It is noteworthy that he thinks to make a pledge to humanity when he is in a place where he evidently need only concern himself with his own satisfaction. It is with this pledge, along with the 'juice', that the dreamer swoons, and wakes to find himself in the second dream frame, the temple.

In the temple, much like in the arbor, the dreamer is alone at first and encounters an array of images. In the arbor, though, the imagery was almost entirely natural and caused the dreamer to think of deeply archetypal religious or mythological figures such as Eve and Prosperine. The imagery of the 'old sanctuary' (I.62), in contrast, seems artificially constructed. The dreamer finds not only the temple itself, which he compares to manmade structures such as 'grey cathedrals, buttress'd walls, rent towers, / The superannuations of sunk realms' (I.67-68), but also items such as 'vessels, and large draperies' (I.73), 'Robes, golden tongs, censer, and chafing dish, / Girdles, and chains, and holy jewelries' (I.79-80). These objects are clearly human creations, though in their beauty they surpass anything the dreamer has seen in his waking life. These last items are evidently intended for religious purposes, perhaps as offerings or ritual implements. In moving from arbor to temple, the dreamer has progressed from the realm of nature to the realm of art and ritual practice; in short, to a realm where human, and by extension societal, concerns are evident. He is no longer driven by such basic, self-centered urges as pleasure, hunger, and thirst, but rather by curiosity, reverence and 'awe' (I.82). His concerns are mental instead of physical or sensory, and are inspired by the fact that he finds himself placed in relation to others, though he does not yet know just what the nature of that relationship is.

After a brief look around the temple, the dreamer is met with a challenge in which he must ascend a staircase or die. Having overcome this challenge, he immediately asks, '"What

am I that should so be sav'd from death"' (I.138)? He does not ask about who has challenged him, or why. Rather, he asks about his own identity: 'What am I?' With this question begins the *debat*, the main topic of which is the dreamer's identity, and especially the question of whether he is a poet or a mere dreamer. And though it is Moneta who seems to be making the important pronouncements, it is actually the dreamer who steers the conversation. The dreamer asks and implies questions, and Moneta responds, though it cannot always be said that she actually *answers* the dreamer's questions. The dreamer's questions are, naturally, indicative of his interests and concerns, and though he asks about a variety of subjects, his own personal relationship to each subject is always at the heart of his concern. He wonders, for example, why he is in the temple alone, since there are certainly many others 'Who feel the giant agony of the world' (I.157). He suggests that a poet does practical good, is 'A humanist, physician to all men' (I.190), recognizes that he himself is not such a one, and then again asks about his own identity: '"What am I then?"' (I.193).

Moneta answers this last question with one of her own: '"Art thou not of the dreamer tribe?"' (I.198), and proceeds to draw a sharp distinction between poets and dreamers. This inspires the dreamer's outburst against '"all mock lyrists, large self worshippers, / And careless hectorers in proud bad verse"' (I.207-08).[130] And after this tirade against poets who lack high seriousness, are self-absorbed, or simply write badly, 'Keats directs his protagonist's questions away from the task of self-definition and toward a reading of the mysteries immediately before him':[131]

> "Majestic shadow, tell me where I am:
> Whose altar this; for whom this incense curls:
> Whose image this, whose face I cannot see,
> For the broad marble knees; and who thou art,

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[130] These lines are amongst the 'disputed lines' (187-210). According to Woodhouse, Keats probably intended to delete them (see Stillinger, *Complete Poems*, p. 478n.). There is disagreement among critics about whether Woodhouse was correct in this assumption. However, because the main purpose of this thesis is to explore possible Chaucerian influence on *The Fall*, including on its disputed lines, I include them in all aspects of the discussion.

[131] Wolfson, *Questioning*, p. 352.

Of accent feminine, so courteous." (I.211-15)

These lines are the turning point of the entire poem. It is at this point, when the dreamer stops asking questions about himself and his place in the world, and becomes more interested in his companion and his surroundings than he is in his personal affairs or even in poetry, that the focus of the poem begins to change dramatically. When the dreamer is granted a 'vision', his vision is directed outward, rather than inward.

First, the dreamer's mysterious interlocutor answers his last questions more directly than she has responded to any of his previous inquiries about himself: she reveals in a simple, straightforward manner that the temple is the fallen Saturn's and that she is his sole priestess, Moneta (I. 227-28). Upon hearing this sad fact the dreamer seems moved to make some kind of offering or sacrifice:

> I looked upon the altar and its horns
> Whiten'd with ashes, and its lang'rous flame,
> And then upon the offerings again;
> And so by turns – till sad Moneta cried,
> '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 globed brain
> With an electral changing misery
> Thou shalt with those dull mortal eyes behold.' (I.237-47)

The dreamer is then granted a view of Moneta's countenance, and he is so moved by her obvious sorrow that he 'ached to see what things the hollow brain / Behind enwombed: what high tragedy' could be the source of 'such a sorrow' (I.276-77, 281). Now he is clearly far more interested in his companion and her suffering than in his own 'task of self-definition', and he is immediately whisked into a vision. This passage makes it very clear that the dreamer-poet is granted the vision as a reward for his "good will"; it is his concern for others, rather than for himself, that makes him worthy of true poetic vision.

It is from this point on, as he shares the contents of Moneta's 'globed brain', that the dreamer might be considered truly a chameleon poet. The idea of an imaginative identification is, in this poem, presented in a very literalized manner, as 'mental space is translated into a physical, theatrical space. The poet seems to conceive of the goddess's vision as something that literally fills the area enclosed by her skull.'[132] And yet the dreamer reports that

> …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. (I.302-06)

While he seems to be literally physically present in the theater of Moneta's brain, he finds that he is able not only to see the characters that play there, that in fact now exist only there in Moneta's mind, but he can also see into their depths. This does not mean that he becomes an omniscient narrator; he does not have direct access to Saturn's or Thea's thoughts. In other words, though he is granted the kind of *vision*, to use what I think is a very apt term, that a god possesses, he is not granted godlike knowledge or power. This is a major departure from a comparable passage in *Hyperion*.

In Hyperion, When Apollo, by gazing upon Mnemosyne's (Memory's) face, 'die[s] into life' and receives his poetic gift, he says,

> Knowledge enormous makes a God of me.
> Names, deeds, gray legends, dire events, rebellions,
> Majesties, sovran voices, agonies,
> Creations and destroyings, all at once
> Pour into the wide hollows of my brain. (III. 113-17)

Here Apollo becomes 'a God', and it is specifically 'knowledge enormous' that deifies him. In *The Fall* the dreamer does not actually become a god, but only becomes comparable to a god in one respect. The dreamer in *The Fall* seems to have gained not so much 'knowledge' as

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[132] Charles J. Rzepka, *The Self as Mind: Vision and Identity in Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Keats* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986) p. 234.

perception; he is able to thoroughly understand the 'depth' of what he sees before his eyes, though we should remember that what he sees is, in fact, an event of the distant past to which he would not ordinarily have access. He experiences something akin to mystical experience, in that he is granted direct knowledge of a divine truth. Because these are mythical, or literary, gods we might call this experience a kind of 'secular mysticism.' Like a religious mystic, a poet, when he is at last able to fully identify with the object of his reverence, may gain dreamlike access to a realm of knowledge and/or understanding that is not available to a layperson. Or, as we are reminded in the prologue, such an apparently mystical experience may merely be the sign of a 'fanatic' (note the religious connotations of this word). Like the religious mystic, the versifying dreamer can only record what he has learned or perceived. The evaluation of the scribal material is ultimately the responsibility of the reader.

Remembering that Moneta is a Goddess, we may understand that the dreamer has not learned to 'see as a God sees' once and for all, but that in his imaginative identification with Moneta, he is able to 'see as *Moneta* sees.' He is, after all, in her mind, and we are never allowed to forget that he is experiencing something he would never have been able to experience without being so placed. Much of the content of the Titan lines, especially from I.354, is spoken by the gods themselves, whether Saturn, Thea or Moneta. The dreamer comments on their language, noting that their words 'in our feeble tongue / Would come in this-like accenting; how frail / To that large utterance of the early Gods!' (I.351-53). And yet he is only able to understand the language of 'the early Gods' because Moneta translates for him. That Moneta in effect translates is a crucial point, and the point is emphasized by its placement at the opening of the second Canto: 'Mortal, that thou may'st understand aright, / I humanize my sayings to thine ear, / Making comparisons of earthly things' (I.1-3). The dreamer has made a true identification with his subject of interest, so much so that he gathers

understanding from her that he could have gained nowhere else. He receives only Moneta's interpretation of the events he witnesses.

This presentation of Moneta as a figure who translates or 'humanizes' unearthly things in a way that mortals such as the dreamer-poet can understand, is analogous to the way in which the poet translates into Standard English the new, perhaps dreamlike, perceptions he has gained in his imaginative identifications. Hazlitt suggested that Chaucer, as the first real poet of the English language, had to invent an entirely new mode of poetic expression in order to communicate his new perceptions. Keats evidently felt he had a similar task, as he wrote, 'A Poet can seldom have justice done to his imagination – for men are as distinct in their conceptions of material shadowings as they are in matters of spiritual understanding.'[133] Just as Moneta had to 'humanize' the language of the gods so that mere mortals might understand it, so must a poet translate his perception and understanding, which may seem to occur beyond the reach of human language, into words that readers will understand. We might say that it is not unlike trying to describe an especially surreal dream.

Even though the dreamer-poet of *The Fall* is very different from *Hyperion's* Apollo in that he is not himself a god but only godlike in his imaginative identification with a goddess, it should be mentioned that he is very like Apollo in one respect. In *Hyperion*, 'It is noteworthy that Saturn and the other Gods of the old dispensation possess identities. Saturn speaks of 'strong identity', his 'real self'; but Apollo has no identity. He possesses to a supreme degree the negative capability that Keats had laid down as the prime essential of a poet'.[134] We do not see Apollo merging with any character or object in the same way that the dreamer-poet in *The Fall* merges with Moneta. Nevertheless, he says to Mnemosyne,

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[133] Keats's note to Book I of *Paradise Lost*, in *John Keats: The Complete Poems*, ed. by John Barnard (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973), p. 518.
[134] Muir, p. 108. Here Muir seems to have equated the idea of 'negative capability' to the idea of the 'cameleon poet', an extremely common misidentification. 'Negative capability,' in Keats's own words, refers to 'when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason'

> Point me out the way
> To any one particular beauteous star,
> And I will flit into it with my lyre,
> And make its silvery splendour pant with bliss.
> (III. 99-102)

As the dreamer-poet does with Moneta, Apollo intends to 'flit into', or somehow poetically merge or identify with, an external object.

One passage in *The Fall* in particular may seem particularly problematic, though, if we accept the idea that the dreamer, in being granted the vision of the Titans, has indeed managed to forget, transcend or ignore himself and his own problems in favor of others and their problems. This is the brief passage we might call the 'waiting scene,' in which the dreamer does just that. Between Thea's apostrophe to the sleeping Saturn and Saturn's to his fallen 'brethren', the dreamer must wait 'a whole moon' in 'eternal quietude' and 'unchanging gloom' (I.392, 390, 391). This ordeal is so awful for him that he says,

> And every day by day methought I grew
> More gaunt and ghostly. Oftentimes I pray'd
> Intense, that death would take me from the vale
> And all its burthens. Gasping with despair
> Of change, hour after hour I cursed myself. (I.395-99)

It may seem that this scene emphasizes the dreamer's separateness from the objects of his attention. He does, after all, focus on his own emotions rather than overtly empathize with the fallen figures before him. And yet when we remember that he is sharing Moneta's vision and experience, it becomes quite evident that his suffering is drawn from hers. Back in the temple, he was able to read something of Moneta's suffering in her face:

> Then saw I a wan face,
> Not pin'd by human sorrows, but bright blanch'd
> By an immortal sickness which kills not;
> It works a constant change, which happy death
> Can put no end to…(I.256-60)

(*Letters I*, 192-93). The idea is closely related and essential to the chameleon capability, but it is not one and the same.

Just as Moneta is 'wan', the dreamer feels he grows 'gaunt and ghostly'. He detected in her an inability to attain the relief of death, and he now experiences the same feeling. And the dreamer's 'despair / Of change', though at this point caused only by his need to wait a whole month while nothing happens, is very reminiscent of Moneta's 'curse' (I.243), which is to forever suffer the unchanging fact of the Titans' fall. The dreamer, now,

> Is undeniably Keats's chameleon poet, who, in bearing the burden of the gods becoming mortal, experiences a near effacement of his own life…If chameleon poetics is a productive dissolution [of] the boundaries of the self…with what lies outside us – the condition of having no self now carries with it the threat of irrevocable self-cancellation.[135]

It is when the dreamer faces this 'threat of irrevocable self-cancellation' that the initial test he underwent on the altar stairs begins to make sense. His self was almost cancelled then, too, but through sheer force of will he was able to overcome the challenge. Moneta had explained that the dreamer felt 'What 'tis to die and live again before / Thy fated hour. That thou hadst power to do so / Is thy own safety' (I.142-44). The test, one might say, was a sort of training for what the chameleon poet must learn to do. He must learn to dissolve his identity almost to the point of a virtual death in order to identify as fully as possible with his subject. But he must learn, too, to resuscitate himself. A chameleon, of course, must be able to blend into a number of different surroundings. If he were to remain leaf-green, he would soon find himself in trouble if he decided to take a nap on a brown rock. Similarly, if a poet were unable to change back from Moneta-colored to Keats-colored, he would soon find himself in great difficulty if he were moved to write a poem about, say, autumn.

It is for this reason that the form of a dream poem for *The Fall* is so very fitting. Mario D'Avanzo has noted that 'sleep and dreams are appropriate metaphors for the spontaneous shaping spirit of imagination stirred to life and given full release once the restraints of

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[135] Wolfson, *Questioning*, p. 355.

consciousness are thrown off.'[136] Dreams are dimensions in which we seem to function without our usual streams of thought and concern, in which our constant inner monologues are switched off. In our dreams, our dream-selves accept settings, characters, images and perhaps even dialogue that exist at a far remove from what we experience in our waking lives, and yet they seem strange and perplexing only after we awake. Similarly, the chameleon poet, when in his dreamlike chameleon state, is able to accept and absorb elements of the object of interest that may be radically different from what he would perceive in his usual state of consciousness. It is later, when as a 'scribe' he must 'rehearse' his 'dream,' that he must communicate his new perception within the confines of language, and thus consider his material in a more cognitive manner.

'Only by sharing her [Moneta's] vision of the downcast Titans and comprehending its sorrow can Keats's dreamer…rise to the stature of a poet.'[137] And only by forgetting his own personal concerns for a time, and imaginatively identifying with Moneta, can the dreamer share the vision and thus comprehend its sorrow, and so become a poet. But even if visions, dreams, and true empathy may make poets, they do not make poems. Poems are made of words. They are built of metaphors and images, characters and action, similes and iambs, frame-within-frame structures, and these concerns require rather different thought processes than an initial perception of truth does. D'Avanzo expresses the necessity of reworking one's imaginative shadowings into communicable form very nicely:

> While the imagination is possessed of infinite freedom to shape forms in sleep, there is also within the poetic process a strongly limiting and ordering faculty. Just as dreams shape experience into meaningful (although apparently occult) metaphorical patterns, the protean imagination shapes into significant and recognizable form the abstract and chaotic feelings and ideas of the poet by means of meter, rhyme, rhetorical patterns, stanza forms, etc.[138]

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[136] Mario L. D'Avanzo, *Keats's Metaphors for the Poetic Imagination* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1967), p. 57.
[137] Sperry, p. 330.
[138] D'Avanzo, p. 65.

It by digging into these types of more formal elements that I, at last, begin my literary archaeology, and attempt to uncover traces of Geoffrey Chaucer in *The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream*.

III . Comparisons and Contrasts: *The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream* and Chaucerian Dream Poems

General Structure and Analysis of the 'Induction'

Thus far I have followed the critical tradition of referring to *The Fall of Hyperion* as a revision of *Hyperion*, and it is true that both poems draw on the same mythology and that a number of lines in *The Fall* are taken verbatim, or nearly verbatim, from *Hyperion*. But they are embedded in a structure that is so radically different from the earlier poem, in fact in a poem of a different genre entirely, that even lines that are exactly the same as lines in *Hyperion* take on a new and different significance. As Levinson writes, 'It requires an awkward critical apparatus to discuss "The Fall" as a revision, which typically reduces and intensifies a given discourse, when it is so much more diffuse and uncertain and promises so much wider a scope than "Hyperion."'[139] I am very much in agreement with the idea that 'we get nowhere at all in the examination of *The Fall of Hyperion*, and miss the greater part of its significance, if we persist in regarding it as a rather feeble recast of an earlier work.'[140] The *Fall of Hyperion* is more than a revision of *Hyperion*; it is a complete rewriting. Though it

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[139] p. 169.

[140] M.R. Ridley, *Keats' Craftsmanship: A Study in Poetic Development* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962), p. 267.

does retain recognizable epic conventions, such as epic similes,[141] it has as much or more in common with a dream poem. As Chayes points out,

> Whereas *Hyperion* is an imitation epic, with classical and Miltonic echoes, *The Fall* is equally an imitation of a very different genre - the dream-vision, whose tradition goes back not only to Dante's *Divine Commedia* (often associated with Keats's poem on other grounds) but also to the mediaeval courtly poems…such as Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess, The Parliament of Fowls,* and *The House of Fame*.[142]

The generic terms 'dream poem' and 'dream vision' are sometimes used interchangeably. In this thesis, however, except when a direct quotation demands, I have preferred to use 'dream poem,' as I feel it is the clearer and more accurately descriptive term. 'Dream vision' is ambiguous, perhaps even oxymoronic, in that a dream and a vision may be entirely different experiences. Sperry, in fact, has suggested that *The Fall* 'turns upon Keats's desire, indeed his vital need, to discriminate between [dreams and visions], while at the same time preserving the grounds of a common unity.'[143] And since clarity is key, I shall begin the discussion of the structural comparisons of *The Fall* and Chaucerian dream poems with a brief definition of the genre. J. Stephen Russell writes,

> At the simplest level, a dream vision is the first person account of a dream; the dream report is usually preceded by a prologue introducing the dreamer as a character and often followed by an epilogue describing the dreamer's reawakening and recording the dream report in verse. The *prologue*, though typically short and allusive, is by far the most conventionalized and formulaic part of the dream vision. Along with establishing the frame narrative, the purpose of the prologue seems to be to introduce the character of the dreamer-poet. It is here that the reader often learns that the dreamer was distressed or concerned about some unnamed problem or worry…
> Following this introductory frame narrative, the *dream report* begins. The dream is usually a record of a *debat* or less formal conversation with one or more characters, sometimes real, sometimes allegorical […] There seems to be no particular narrative shape to this, the heart of the dream vision […] the only constant seems to be the complex central figure of the dreamer-narrator-character: unlike most

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[141] See, for example, I.97-104 and I.372-78.

[142] Chayes, pp. 500-01. Why Chayes feels it necessary to refer to Keats's poems as 'imitations' of genres, rather than examples of them, is not explained in her article.

[143] Sperry, p. 334.

> absent, omniscient, impersonal medieval narrators, the dreamer is *always* a character in his dream narrative.
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> This dream report makes up the bulk the poem and, at its conclusion, there is often a brief framing *epilogue* describing the reawakening of the dreamer…This conclusion often reminds the reader of the identity of the poet and the dreamer.[144]

It is useful to remember that Russell's work is based on medieval dream poems only. He does not take later works into consideration, and thus his more detailed and complex discussion of the structure of dream poems, though helpful, may in some ways be as limited as if we confined discussion of sonnets to the Petracharan variety. We should remember, too, that in the Romantic period there does not seem to have been a clear understanding of what have come to be called dream poems or dream visions as a specific type of poem with familiar and recognizable conventions. That Campbell called *The House of Fame* a 'new and allegorical species of romance' suggests that Romantic period readers may well have looked for, and perhaps found, very different 'conventions' than those Russell lists as defining the genre. Nevertheless, Russell's sweeping description of the essentials of a dream poem seems to me quite solid, and generalized enough to be useful in analysing any poem that might conceivably be described as a member of the dream poem genre. It does indeed describe the basic structure of Chaucerian dream poems and, remembering that Keats's poem is fragmentary and thus does not contain the epilogue, describes *The Fall of Hyperion* as well. We can thus use it to attempt to describe the structure of *The Fall* in terms of the dream poem genre as it was most often used in the medieval period.

Like the Chaucerian dream poems, Keats's *The Fall* is a framed narrative. Clearly, the first eighteen lines of *The Fall* constitute what Russell refers to as the 'prologue.' It does indeed establish 'the frame narrative,' particularly in lines 16-18, 'Whether the dream now purposed to rehearse / be poet's or fanatic's will be known / When this warm scribe my hand is in the grave.' The narrator tells us that he is about to 'rehearse' or relate a dream, then there is

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[144]Russell, pp. 5-6.

a blank space, and then the succeeding section, or second frame, begins with 'Methought I stood where trees of every clime' (19), and we understand that this second frame is the beginning of the dream report. The dream, in which the dreamer experiences and describes what he sees (or hears, or smells), and the prologue, in which the waking dreamer ponders and questions issues which are of concern to him, are very clearly delineated.

This prologue is quite different, however, from what Russell describes as a 'formulaic' prologue, such as those found in *LGW*, *BD* and *PF*. In these three works, as well as in *The Floure and the Leafe*, we are introduced not only to the inner concerns of the narrators, but also to elements of what we might call their outer lives. In these poems we find, in addition to implied concerns about such matters as love, rather explicit information about the narrators' personalities, habits and stations in life. We are able to gain such insight because the dreamer-poets are not 'lyric I's,' but first-person narrators. For example, in *BD* the narrator reveals that he has a 'sicknesse / That I have suffered this eight yeer' (36-37), and though we are never told precisely what this 'sicknesse' is, most readers feel that it has something to do with unrequited love.[145] This kind of unnamed, but strongly implied, concern may perhaps remind us of the way in which Keats's dreamer-poet implies, but never clearly states, an entire complex of concerns in his prologue (and which I inspect below). Indeed, the entire first eighteen lines of *The Fall* may remind us of the first forty-three lines of *BD*, for in both prologues 'the mood of wondering, of indecision, of not-knowing, which pervades the whole opening passage, infects the reader; filled with curiosity, almost with bewilderment, he asks himself what the poet's intention can be.'[146]

Nevertheless, *BD*'s dreamer-poet is very different from that of *The Fall* in that we learn more about him than just that he is a person with a 'problem or worry'. We learn, for example, that he likes to read, for to make his melancholic insomnia more bearable he decides 'To rede

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[145] Wolfgang Clemen, *Chaucer's Early Poetry*, trans. By C.A.M. Sym (London: Methuen & Co., 1963), p. 29.
[146] Clemen, pp. 27-28.

and drive the night away; / For me thoughte it better play / Then playe either at ches or tables' (49-51). Our understanding of his character is further formed by his choice of book, 'A romaunce' (48), and we learn something of his social station by the casual way in which he informs us that he has servants, as he 'bad oon reche me a book' (47). As he summarizes the tale of Seys and Alcyone he occasionally comments on how it affects him (96-100) and why he has retold it in the first place (218-230). Before he finally falls asleep, he vows to give 'a fether-bed, / Rayed with gold and right wel cled / In fyn blak satyn doutremer' (251-53) to Morpheus or anyone else who can cause him to sleep, revealing that he is not only a desperate man, but also a wealthy one with a sense of humor. In short, he is not a 'lyric I' but a character, and as he reveals not only his thoughts but also his actions, surroundings, and reactions to his surroundings, we have many ways in which we may form an opinion of who he is, and therefore many ways in which we might attempt to understand what his dream means to him, and how it relates to his concerns and his life in general.

The narrator of *BD* is probably the most fully developed character in all the Chaucerian prologues, but the narrators of *LGW*, *PF* and *FL* give some details about their specific circumstances in life as well. We learn that the narrator of *LGW* loves to read, but loves daisies and the springtime landscape even more, and that he is of a station to have servants. *PF*'s narrator is a reader as well, and the book he finds interesting and relevant enough to summarize for his readers is the *Dream of Scipio*. The female narrator of *FL* gives only a little information about herself, but she does tell us that she takes particular delight in the spring, and that it is during this time of the year that she has the sleepless night that impels her to leave her bed and so experience her vision.

It should be mentioned here that one of the poems Phillips mentions as being a dream-poem, Coleridge's *Kubla Khan*, employs a comparable kind of prologue or induction. In the prose introductory section, Coleridge explains that he was reading a book about Kubla Khan

when he fell asleep and dreamed the dream that he later relates. Though we may be intended to understand his introduction as literally true, it does have clear similarities with the introductory frames I have just discussed. He was in a particular place ('a lonely farmhouse between Porlock and Linton'), he had imbibed 'an anodyne', and after waking he proceeded through a specific succession of narrative events: 'he was unfortunately called out by a person on business from Porlock, and detained by him above an hour.'[147] This is clearly a narrative type of introduction, and whether we read it as literally true or not, we can certainly read the dream that follows as specifically related to the specific circumstances given in the introduction. *Kubla Khan* does have some thematic similarity to *The Fall*; both poems are concerned with the working of the poetic imagination. But the introduction is very different from Keats's induction, and I must conclude that if the content of Keats's induction was inspired by any other dream poems, *Kubla Khan* was probably not one of them.

The prologues of all the Chaucerian poems I have just discussed, though, are vaguely similar to that of *The Fall* in some ways, particularly in that all of the narrators express that they have some 'unnamed problem,' and thus it is not impossible that Keats was inspired by one or all of them in the way he chose to begin his own dream poem: with a tone of blatant uncertainty. In addition, *PF* shows a concern with the significance of dreams, a concern that is also very apparent in the first eighteen lines of *The Fall*. But overall these narrative prologues in *BD*, *LGW*, *PF* and *FL* are quite different from the prologues we find in *The House of Fame*, *The Romaunt of the Rose* and, most importantly, *The Fall*.

Russell insists that though dream poems may seem like narrative poems, they are actually 'a species of the lyric mode' because they, like 'all lyrics', 'are finally about their singers and their subjects – their external topics and the internal responses of the lyric poets to

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[147] Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, *Kubla Khan*, in *The New Penguin Book of Romantic Poetry*, ed. by Jonathan and Jessica Wordsworth (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 2003), pp. 8-10.

these topics – in ways that frequently make subject and object indistinguishable.'[148] But because the narrators of the poems I discussed briefly above are characters who move through a narrative progression of events, even though in some cases the progression of events is brief indeed, the reader is able to interpret the dream, and the poem, as being about a character who may or may not be similar to the poet. The narrators of *HF*, *RR* and *The Fall*, however, introduce themselves in a mode that is more recognizably lyric, and thus we are more strongly encouraged to read the poem as finally about the 'singer,' and not a character who is being sung about. This more lyric type of prologue, then, is obviously the more appropriate induction to Keats's theme of the progress or maturation of the poet-dreamer himself.

What the lyric I of *The Fall* sings in his induction is a rather confusing, convoluted meditation on dreams: who has them, who writes them down, which dreams signify fanatics and which true poets. Stillinger has called this induction the 'principal interest' of the poem,[149] and indeed scores of critics have attempted to untangle the web of dreams, poets, fanatics and savages the narrator mentions. Despite the paper and ink devoted to this endeavor, however, no critic of which I am aware has satisfactorily explicated this induction. Nor shall I attempt to do so here. I shall, however, point out how the induction has some strong similarities to several Chaucerian dream poems.

Keats's induction is in large part a discussion of, or rather a query about, dreams and what they are. We may even venture to call it a *dubitatio*. He does not draw any clear conclusions about the subject, nor does he even state his questions in a manner that makes clear just what he is asking. He writes, for example,

> For Poesy alone can tell her dreams,
> With the fine spell of words alone can save
> Imagination from the sable charm
> And dumb enchantment. Who alive can say
> "Thou art no poet; may'st not tell thy dreams"?
> Since every man whose soul is not a clod

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[148] Russell, pp. 115-16.
[149] Stillinger, *Complete Poems*, p. 361n.

> Hath visions, and would speak, if he had lov'd
> And been well nurtured in his mother tongue. (I. 8-15)

'Poesy' is personified here; does this suggest that a mere human cannot hope to 'tell' his dreams unless he is in some sense passive, and possessed by the daemon Poesy? Does Poesy herself dream? 'Poesy', 'dreams' and 'Imagination' are connected within one sentence, so we may assume that Keats perceives them as being related to one another, but it is difficult to say just how. 'Every man' has 'visions', but are these the same as dreams? 'Fanatics have their dreams' (I. 1) in which they create 'A paradise' (I. 2), and 'the savage too' (I. 2) has dreams in which he 'Guesses at heaven' (I. 4). Are these different types, or genres, of dreams, and does the poet again dream in yet another genre? Which dreams are valid and important, and which are mere wishful phantasms? These implied questions are left unanswered. Keats does, however, end the induction with a rather specific statement: 'Whether the dream now purposed to rehearse / Be poet's or fanatic's will be known / When this warm scribe my hand is in the grave' (I. 16-18). In other words, he does not know the truth about what dreams are. He has had a dream and recorded it, but he leaves judgements about the worth or value of that dream to someone else: posterity.[150]

This induction is vaguely reminiscent of the opening of *RR*:

> Many men sayn that in sweveninges
> Ther nys but fables and lesynges;
> But men may some sweven[es] sen
> Whiche hardely that false ne ben,
> But afterward ben apparaunt. (A. 1-5)

Although the narrator of *RR* ultimately attempts to persuade his readers that many dreams may seem false, but afterwards are proven to be true,[151] what I wish to emphasize here is the fact

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[150] Andrew Bennett goes so far as to assert that 'Romanticism reinvents posterity as the very condition of the possibility of poetry itself: to be neglected in one's lifetime, and *not to care*, is the necessary (though not of course sufficient) condition of genius' (Bennett, Andrew, *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), p. 4. Of all of Keats's poems, *They Fall of Hyperion* most clearly exemplifies this attitude.

[151] For this trowe I, and say for me,
That dremes signifiaunce be
Of good and harm to many wightes

that he is a 'lyric I' who begins his poem with a discussion of the nature of dreams, and particularly points out that there is, in fact, a question about whether dreams can or cannot reveal truth. This is similar to the primary question of Keats's induction: does the dream the dreamer-poet rehearses contain anything of importance?

Of course we cannot discount the fact that though the narrator of *RR* admits that there is some doubt about the validity of dreams, his own personal opinion is that they are important because they eventually, after the dreamer has awoken, prove to be related to the events of waking life. But this idea too finds an analogue in Keats. Keats's induction insists that dreams are not necessarily insignificant; the problem is to decide *which* dreams are significant, or worthy of poetry. And whether the dream rehearsed in *The Fall* 'Be poet's or fanatic's will be known / When this warm scribe my hand is in the grave' (I. 17-18). In other words, like the dreams Machaut (supposedly via Chaucer) writes of in *RR*, Keats's dream will – and Keats seems sure about this, as he states quite emphatically that it 'will be known' - prove to be significant (or insignificant) only after the dream is over and its truth or falsity becomes apparent in the events of waking life. This is not to say that these significant dreams, whether Machaut's or Keats's, need prophesy specific events. In the context of dreams told in poetry, the test of significance lies in whether intelligent and knowledgeable readers are able to make meaning out of the recorded dream. *The Fall* makes explicit what *RR* implies; that true poets are distinguished by 'their ability to create things of lasting significance for passing generation: to *tell* what they dream, and to stand by what they tell. In this way they make their dreams a part of human history.'[152] Thus Keats's induction is similar to *RR*'s prologue both in that it recognizes that there exists doubt about the validity of dreams, and that it states that whether or

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That dremen in her slep a-nyghtes
Ful many thynges covertly
That fallen after al openly. (A. 15-20)
[152] Rzepka, p. 237.

not a dream is valid or important becomes apparent only when the dream can (or cannot) later

be related to waking life, whether that relation happens the next morning, or in 'posterity.'

The 'Proem' to Book I of *HF* is even more similar to the induction to *The Fall*. The

'lyric I' of this proem good-naturedly accepts his lack of understanding of the nature of dreams

for nearly the entire sixty-six lines of the introductory frame. He writes, for example,

> As yf folkys complexions
> Make hem dreme of reflexions,
> Or ellys thus, as other sayn,
> For to gret feblenesse of her brayn,
> By abstinence or by seknesse,
> Prison-stewe or gret distresse,
> Or ellys by disordynaunce
> Of naturel acustmaunce,
> That som man is to curious
> In studye, or melancolyous,
> Or thus so inly ful of drede
> That no man may hym bote bede;
> Or elles that devocion
> Of somme, and contemplacion
> Causeth suche dremes ofte… (I. 21-35)

> But why the cause is, noght wot I. (I. 52)

In this passage Chaucer conveys the idea that a person's dreams are related to their waking

concerns. A man who is too curious in study might have one type of dream, and a person of

great religious devotion might have another. Keats's poem begins on a similar note; 'fanatics'

dream of Paradise, and 'savages,' in their dreams, guess at heaven. His own dream, the dream

of an aspiring poet, is about how one can become a better poet. In addition, Chaucer in *HF*

briefly mentions a great many other types and causes of somatic dreams, such as 'avision',

'revelacion', 'drem' and 'sweven', 'fantome' and 'oracle' (I. 7-11), and even 'that spirites have

the myght / To make folk to dreme a-nyght' (I. 41-42). There is no parallel to this kind of

listing of various types of dreams in *The Fall*, an omission which makes all the more clear that

Keats is not writing about regular somatic dreams here; we are not literally to understand that

he dreamt this dream as he lay in his bed one night.[153]

There is, however, a similar attitude toward the poet's own ignorance about what

dreams in fact are. As mentioned, Keats declines to comment upon the worth of his own poetic

dream, and leaves the decision up to posterity. Chaucer in *HF*, too, leaves an important

decision to others. After listing many types and possible causes of dreams, he says,

> Wel worthe of this thing grete clerkys
> That trete of this and other werkes,
> For I of noon opinion
> Nyl as now make mensyon. (I. 53-55)

Like Keats in *The Fall*, Chaucer here admits that he is unworthy or unable to give expert

opinions on the nature of dreams. He will leave that task to someone who is 'Wel worthe of

this thing', namely 'grete clerkys', just as Keats leaves the task of judging his dream to the

worthy readers of posterity. The 'Proem' to Book II of *HF* is even more similar to the final

lines of *The Fall*'s induction:

> O Thought, that wrot al that I mette,
> And in the tresorye hyt shette
> Of my brayn, now shal men se
> Yf any vertu in the be
> To tellen al my drem aright.
> Now kythe theyn engyn and myght! (II. 523-28)

 The poet does not try to convince his audience that the dream he is about to record is virtuous,

or worthy or important. He is not even certain whether his 'Thought' is able 'to tellen al my

drem aright'; he calls his very ability to communicate his dream in English into question. He

leaves the task of evaluating both the dream and the poet's skill up to his intended readers.

Though the tone of *HF* is decidedly more jovial than the rather mystic key of *The Fall*, the

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[153] Many of Keats's other poems, however, are concerned with or include dreams that are very clearly somatic dreams of one type or another, whether as narrative events or the entire subject of a lyric poem, such as *Endymion*, 'Dear Reynolds, as last night I lay in bed', *The Eve of St. Agnes*, 'La Belle Dame sams Merci', and 'As Hermes once took to his feathers light'. These works demonstrate that he was also interested in somatic dreams, as opposed to dreamlike imaginative experiences in waking life. All possible kinds of somatic dreams, daydreams, and visions seem to have intrigued Keats, as we find them extremely frequently throughout the entire body of his work.

'lyric I's of both poems are humble, almost even to the point of self-effacement. And yet they have both had dreams that they felt the need to record, without venturing to say what the significance of those dreams might be; the dreamer-poets present themselves as witnesses, rather than interpreters.[154] Thus both poems suggest that the role of the poet is to work with wonders and mysteries, to record and share them, but not necessarily to explain them. As Keats himself wrote, 'We hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us'.[155]

The House of Fame is not one of the dream poems that we know for sure Keats knew. He never quotes it directly, nor does he discuss it, mention it or even allude to it in any letter. The similarities between the Proem in *HF* and the induction in *The Fall* do strongly suggest, however, that Keats not only knew it, but was inspired by it. The induction in *The Fall* is more like the Proem to *HF* than it is like any other dream poem prologue it seems likely Keats might have known. Add to this the fact that Keats wrote *St. Mark* partly in pseudo-Middle English tetrameter, which is the meter of *HF*, and we have even stronger suggestions that Keats was familiar with *HF*. It appears very likely indeed that we find at least one thread running from *The Fall* to *The House of Fame*.

If Keats was indeed consciously writing in the tradition of *RR* and especially *HF*, it may be a misdirection of critical energy to attempt to separate and analyze the different types of dreamers and writers mentioned in Keats's induction in a rational manner. The narrator of *HF* in particular is quite content to remain in some doubt about just what dreams are and what they mean. He has what Keats called 'negative capability'; he is able to dwell 'in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason.'[156] This was a capability that Keats very much admired in other poets, particularly Shakespeare, and if he did indeed find it in Chaucer's *HF*, as I do, he would certainly have been pleased, for it offers a precedent for his own very 'negatively capable' induction to *The Fall*. 'Chaucer chose the form of a

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[154] Rzepka, p. 235.
[155] *Letters* I. 224.
[156] *Letters* I. 218-19.

dream because it suits his questioning purposes so well […] Nothing in dreams can be proven

and they usually have a certain mysterious remoteness'.[157] It does not seem unlikely that Keats

recognized this choice in Chaucer, and was inspired by it. Thus in Chaucerian dream poems,

particularly in *HF*, Keats may have found a form and some thematic precedent perfectly suited

to several of his poetic ideals: not only the poet as chameleon, but also the ideas of negative

capability and poetry without a palpable design.

And now, to return to a broader structural comparison between *The Fall* and

Chaucerian dream poems. Keats's induction is clearly in accordance with Russell's

requirements for the first frame of a dream poem, and furthermore has some very suggestive

similarities to specific Chaucerian works. But in Russell's description, there must be at least

two more parts to a proper dream poem: a dream report, in which there is some type of *debat*,

and an epilogue, in which the outer frame is completed. As mentioned, Keats's poem is

fragmentary and thus contains no epilogue, but it does clearly contain elements that adhere to

the general structural requirements of dream poetry.

According to Russell's structural sketch, *The Fall* would be said to consist of two

frames: the prologue (I. 1-18), and the rest of the poem which comprises the dream report,

where the dreamer is a character in his own dream and participates in a *debat*. Obviously, the

largest part of *The Fall* is indeed the report of a dream, and the poet-dreamer's question-and-

answer conversation with Moneta is without doubt a kind of *debat*. Yet in order to study the

poem more closely, I prefer to read *The Fall* as consisting of four frames altogether. After the

first frame of the induction, we may say that the second frame takes place in the dream arbour

(I. 19-57). The dreaming dreamer-poet then falls asleep and 'awakes' in Saturn's temple, the

third frame of the poem (I. 58-293). The main content of this third frame is the *debat* between

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[157] Brewer, *New Introduction*, p. 90.

the dreamer-poet and Moneta. Finally, we have a fourth, innermost frame, in which the dreamer-poet enters Moneta's mind and, as an unobserved observer, witnesses the speech and actions of the fallen Titans (I. 294-II. 61).

This more detailed structural division of the poem has some similarities to Chaucerian works. There, too, we find, as a convention of dream poetry, different arenas of action which are more or less clearly delineated, as though the dream is composed of a succession of scenes. To give only a few examples, in *FL* the dreamer-poet first enters an arbour similar to that in *The Fall* (27-126); then, as an unobserved observer, observes the actions of the adherents of both the flower and the leaf (127-450); then finally converses with the 'faire lady' who explains the allegorical significance of what the dreamer-poet has witnessed (451-584). The structure of *HF* includes some important differences, as Books II and III each begin with a proem or invocation that interrupts the dream report. But the dream itself clearly consists of several scenes or episodes, such as the 'temple ymad of glas' decorated with images from the story of Troy and Aeneas (I. 120-490); the rather one-sided *debat* with the eagle (II. 529-1090); and the dreamer-poet's experience, largely as an unobserved observer, in the Temple of Fame itself (III. 1181-1915). In the 'Prologue' to *LGW*, the only truly Chaucerian dream poem it is absolutely certain Keats knew, the dreamer-poet first dreams himself into a beautiful meadow where he hears and understands the birds (104-143); then observes the God of Love and Alceste and their entourage (144-235); then enters into conversation with the authoritative figures, who both chastise him for his writing so far and suggest a new poetic topic and approach for him (236-543).

It should be mentioned that Dante's *Divine Comedy*, too, is clearly divided into scenes or episodes. In Dante, though, these arenas of action are far more clearly delineated than in any of the Chaucerian dream poems; the circles of the Inferno, for example, are very clearly separated according to the sins and corresponding punishments of the damned. Neither in

Chaucer nor in Keats do we find a structure anywhere near as logically organized, particulary when we take into consideration the numerological significance of the levels of Hell, Purgatory and Paradise. In addition, Dante's pilgrim does not alternate between being a participant and an unobserved observer in the same way that the dreamer-poets do; he is, to a greater or lesser extent, a participant in every Canto, always interacting and conversing with his guides and the other spirits of the deceased. Structurally, *The Fall* has much more in common with the Chaucerian dream poems than with Dante.

All Chaucerian dream poems, then, make use of different scenes or episodes that take place in different landscapes and in which the dreamer-poet has varying levels of involvement in the dream. One thing that differentiates *The Fall* from these medieval dream poems is the manner in which the poet handles, or explains, the transitions between these scenes. In the Chaucerian poems, the transitions are primarily made by moving through the geographical space of the dream. The dreamer-poet follows a puppy into the woods, for example, until he discovers a hidden bower, or he is picked up by an articulate eagle and transported through the air until he is dropped off just outside an allegorical temple. Keats, however, presents his transitions not in terms of geographical space, but mental experience. His entrance into the arbor is quite ordinary in terms of dream poetry: he dreams that he is there. But rather than walking or flying out of the arbor, he falls asleep yet again and wakes to find himself in the temple. He is then in a dream-within-a dream. And when he is at last granted the vision of the Titans, Moneta does not simply take him to the place where the Titans are; he must actually enter her mind and merge with her consciousness, so he is in a vision-within-a-dream-within-a-dream. A great deal of poetic space is devoted to the explanation of how and why this last vision is granted; we are under no circumstances to read the poem as though the dreamer-poet simply *went to* or suddenly *saw* Saturn and Thea.

The effect of this journey through mental space rather than physical space is striking. We do not get the sense that the dreamer-poet is moving *through* a dream; rather, we get a strong feeling that the dreamer-poet is in fact going deeper and deeper *into* the dream state. He is venturing further and further into the mysteries of the imagination, and thus is always at a greater remove from the conscious, logical realities of waking life. This scheme is perfectly appropriate to, is in fact the very structure that allows for, the imaginative journey of the dreamer-poet away from himself and his own personal concerns, and into the mind of another.

There are sections in all Chaucerian dream poems in which the dreamer-poet is a main character, either describing his experience of a natural setting such as an arbour or interacting with the characters that populate the dream, and other scenes in which he (or she) is an unobserved observer, simply watching and reporting an argument between birds, for example. As I have mentioned, critics have often had trouble integrating the several scenes of *The Fall*, particularly the innermost frame in which the dreamer-poet observes the fallen Titans and reports their words and actions. But a comparison to Chaucer shows that there is indeed formal precedence for such a structure, and allows for the possibility that Keats was writing in that tradition. I explained in Chapter II of this thesis how I feel that these apparently separate scenes of *The Fall* may be integrated in a reading. Keeping this reading in mind, I should now like to inspect the second, third and fourth frames of *The Fall* a bit more closely, with special attention to how these arenas of the dream contain elements that may be compared to Chaucerian dream poems. It is my hope that doing so will continue to demonstrate the likelihood that Keats's work was indeed inspired by Chaucer's, and so help to provide fresh ideas about what have always been difficult or problematic aspects of *The Fall*.

The Arbor, the Dreamer, and the Dreaming State

Keats's dreamer-poet begins his dream report for the most part in a very traditional way: 'Methought I stood where trees of every clime, / Palm, myrtle, oak, and sycamore, and beech, / With plantane, and spice blossoms, made a screen' (19-21). I have mentioned already how a catalogue of flora is an immediately recognizable convention of dream poetry, and so by beginning his dream with a list of trees that would normally never grow next to each other, he firmly places his poem in the tradition of medieval dream poetry, in addition to creating a wonderful setting that could only exist in a dream. We understand, through this convention and through the fact that the induction has just told us the poet will 'rehearse' a dream, that the dreamer-poet is indeed dreaming. But Keats diverges from most of the Chaucerian dream poems (*FL* is an exception here, for its dreamer suffers from insomnia) by not stating at this point that his dreamer falls asleep. *BD*'s narrator tells us outright, 'Y fil aslepe, and therwith even / Me mette so ynly swete a sweven' (275-76); the poet of *HF* says that 'But as I slepte, me mette I was / Withyn a temple ymad of glas' (I. 119-20); *PF*'s narrator records that 'And in my slep I mette, as that I lay, / How Affrican, ryght in the selve array /…/ Was come and stod right at my beddes syde' (95-98); and the dreamer-poet of *LGW* tells how 'I fel aslepe withinne an hour or two. / Me mette how I was in the medewe tho' (103-04).

All of the authentic Chaucerian narrators, then, are clearly reporting somatic dreams. Keats's dreamer-poet, though, merely rehearses that '*Methought* I stood where trees of every clime'. Whether or not the dreamer has in fact fallen asleep is left for the reader to infer. In the Chaucerian works we as readers must decide for ourselves whether the reported dream was an *oraculum*, *somnium*, or *visio*. In Keats's work, however, we are asked to try to decide between quite different dreaming states: is this arbour the product of a somatic dream of some kind, a daydream, or perhaps a trancelike state of poetic imagination? The use of the word

'methought', without the accompanying mention of falling asleep and dreaming, allows for – in fact demands – a different interpretation of just what kind of dream this is.

In a very interesting article entirely focused on the use of one word, Elizabeth Cook notes that in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the quotations for the past tense of 'methinks' demonstrate that 'methought' 'is strongly associated with visionary response, for most of the quotations are about dreams.'[158] She analyzes the use of the word in many poems by many poets, and the thread that runs through most of her analyses is the idea that '"Methought"…hovers finely between waking and sleeping responses',[159] and that it signals 'a pull between ordinary and heightened perception…a problem in interpreting true and false'.[160] If Cook is correct – and in my opinion she is - then 'methought' is a word that is firmly connected with dreams and visions, yet still indicates a kind of betweenness, or a measure of doubt. That the verb seems to have this connotation only in the past tense is appropriate to the special nature of recalling dreams. We remember our dreams knowing that they were dreams and therefore not 'real.' But while we were still in the dream, we did not know we were dreaming; it was as though the events of the dream were happening in reality. It is only after we awake that we realize that we were not really 'there,' and we can or must use the word 'methought' to indicate the uncertainty about where we have really been, and what we have really experienced.

'Methought' does occur, though not very frequently, in Chaucerian dream poems. *BD* begins the dream report proper with 'Me thoghte thus: that hyt was May,' (291). In addition, in Dryden's translation of *FL,* the dreamer-poet's approach to the arbor reads, 'Wandering I walked alone, for still methought / To some strange end so strange a path was wrought' (58-59). Thus we cannot say that the use of the word is peculiar to Keats in the context of generic

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[158] Cook, Elizabeth, '"Methought" as Dream Formula in Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, Keats and Others', *English Language Notes*, 32/4 (1995), pp.34-46 (p. 35).
[159] Cook, *Methought*, p. 36.
[160] Cook, *Methought*, p. 40.

dream poems. But the fact that he uses it to introduce his dream report, together with his omission of any mention (at this point) of falling asleep, does differentiate his work from that of Chaucer. Furthermore, Keats's use of 'methought', with its connotations of 'betweenness' and uncertainty, helps to establish the sense of progressively going deeper and deeper into a dream state as the poem progresses. At the beginning of the dream report there is some doubt as to whether the dreamer-poet is reporting a somatic dream, a vision, or a kind of imaginative experience, but then later he actually reports falling asleep, and finally entering into Moneta's mind. The uncertainty associated with 'methought' is slowly replaced by more complete and definitive involvement in the dream state. The ordinary state of 'thought' is left further and further behind.

Though Keats's entrance into the dream report is different from Chaucer's in terms of the kind of dream state in which the dreamer-poet first finds himself, the arbor in *The Fall* is possibly influenced by Chaucer's work in at least one other way. Though, as previously mentioned, Keats's arbour seems more like Dryden's than any of Chaucer's, particularly in its being a place in which the dreamer-poet need only concern himself with the satisfaction of his own senses, Keats does make use of one very specific trope that he may well have gleaned from Chaucer. In the prologue to *LGW*, Chaucer's dreamer-poet writes,

> Fayn wolde I preysen, if I coude aryght;
> But wo is me, it lyth nat in my might.
>
> For wel I wot that folk han here-beforn
> Of making ropen, and lad awey the corn;
> [And] I come after, glenynge here and there,
> And am ful glad if I may fynde an ere
> Of any goodly word that they han left.
> And if it happe me rehersen eft
> That they han in here freshe songes said,
> I hope that they wole nat ben evele apayd. (59-68)

In this case, the narrator uses the trope of gleaning 'corn' that has been left behind by earlier writers to express the knowledge that he is treading in a field that has been previously

traversed by other poets, and that he is attempting to find content, or 'any goodly word', that

they have not chosen to include in their works. In other words, Chaucer's dreamer-poet is

concerned with the originality of his work, though he does go on to suggest that derivation

from earlier texts may be a way of praising those texts and their authors. The use of the

gleaning trope, therefore, is a way of acknowledging literary debt to other writers, as well as

expressing the hope that he may have found some content that other poets have not included

previously.

Keats uses a similar trope, though in his case the dreamer-poet is not gleaning corn, but

rather the remnants of what appears to have been a magnificent meal. He reports that he finds

> A feast of summer fruits,
> Which, nearer seen, seem'd refuse of a meal
> By angel tasted, or our mother Eve;
> For empty shells were scattered on the grass,
> And grape stalks but half bare, and remnants more,
> Sweet smelling, whose pure kinds I could not know.
> Still was more plenty than the fabled horn
> Thrice emptied could pour forth, at banqueting
> For Propsperine returned to her own fields,
> Where the white heifers low. And appetite
> More yearning than on earth I ever felt
> Growing within, I ate deliciously. (I. 29-40)

In their editions of Keats's poems, both Elizabeth Cook and John Barnard note that this

leftover feast is an allusion to the feast prepared by Eve in *Paradise Lost*.[161] They are perhaps

correct in this, and almost certainly correct in that the meal is reminiscent of Milton. It is

crucial to remember that Keats struggled against the power of Miltonic influence as he wrote

both *Hyperion* and *The Fall*, so much so that when he finally gave up the entire Hyperion

project for good, he wrote that there 'were too many Miltonic inversions in it – Miltonic verse

cannot be written but in an artful or rather artist's humour. I wish to give myself up to other

sensations. English ought to be kept up.'[162] What is less often noted is that this is the very letter

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[161] The lines specifically alluded to are in Book V, ll. 303-07 and 326-28. See Cook, *The Major Works*, p. 292n., and John Barnard, ed., *John Keats: The Complete Poems*, 3rd ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988), p. 436n.
[162] *Letters* II, p.167.

(to J.H. Reynolds) in which he discusses Chatterton's language in comparison to Chaucer's. It is interesting to speculate whether he might have been more satisfied with his work if he felt it was more Chaucerian than Miltonic. But in any case, it is not difficult to draw a parallel between Keats's leftover 'feast of summer fruits' and Chaucer's 'glenynge here and there'. Chaucer makes it quite explicit that each 'ere' he finds symbolizes a 'goodly word' that earlier poets 'han left' for him to write; despite the poetic geniuses of the past, there are still new poems to be written. Keats's use of the trope of 'glenynge' may be read in a similar way. He had at times been very concerned by the idea that the great poets of the past had not left anything for their successors to write, and even wrote to Woodhouse that 'there was now nothing original to be written in poetry; that its riches were already exhausted, - & all its beauties forestalled.'[163] The gleaning trope is not exclusive to Keats and Chaucer, but the fact that something very similar to the metaphor Chaucer uses in the first frame of one of his dream poems is found in the second frame of Keats's dream poem, is suggestive of literary influence. One is even tempted, because a clear allusion to Milton is also present, to interpret this passage as meaning that *Milton* in particular had left some fruit untouched, so that Keats was free to write in his wake. It has in fact been suggested that 'The reference may be…to a meal Milton does not mention, the last eaten in Paradise by Adam and Eve before their expulsion into the fallen world'.[164] That Keats's dreamer-poet finds not just scattered grains but 'more plenty than the fabled horn / Thrice emptied could pour forth' further suggests that Keats may have decided that there was, indeed, great plenty for new poets to write about that previous poets had left untouched. Thus in both Keats and Chaucer, the gleaning trope is used to express concerns about literary originality.

The trope has an additional, and quite original, function in *The Fall*, however. One of the things that differentiates Keats's gleaning trope from Chaucer's is that Keats's dreamer-

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[163] *Letters I,* p.380. For a discussion of Keats's concern about this matter, see Bate, pp. 73-75.
[164] Bloom, p. 443.

poet actually consumes the remnants that he finds. It is therefore difficult to interpret the trope

as being limited to an expression of finding literary content that has been, in a manner of

speaking, left untouched by the great poets of the past. It is my belief that Keats has his

dreamer-poet actually eat and drink the wondrous sustenance he discovers in part because of an

understanding of the causes of dreams that was very common in the Romantic period.

Contemporary medical works by such eminent figures as Erasmus Darwin 'established the

cause of dreams in the workings of the arterial and glandular systems, and in the internal senses

of hunger, thirst and lust. Nightmares were caused by indigestion.'[165] Keats, having been

trained in medicine, would undoubtedly been aware of the supposed connection between the

demands and troubles of the digestive system and the experience of dreams. Furthermore, it is

possible that his readers would have easily recognized such a connection as well.

Approximately twenty years after Keats's death, Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*

appeared. In this work, when Scrooge first encounters Marley's ghost, he tells the specter,

'You may be an undigested bit of beef, a blot of mustard, a crumb of cheese, a fragment of

underdone potato',[166] thus suggesting that he is not actually seeing a ghost at all, but is only

having a kind of nightmare as a result of indigestion. It is possible that Keats was relying on his

readers' ability to recognize such a connection between dreams and food when he has his

dreamer-poet eat a substantial feast, then immediately fall asleep and have a vivid dream. In

this case, though, the food that Keats's dreamer-poet ingests is as far from an 'underdone

potato' as can be imagined; it is the fare of angels, Eve, and Prosperine, mana if you will. It is

divine sustenance, and thus the dream it induces is not a nightmare, but a wondrous experience

that conveys, perhaps, 'divine' truths that are not normally accessible to the poet in his waking

state. It is certainly evident that Keats, at this point in the poem, is concerned with what readers

feel might be the cause of the dream, as he writes that the 'elixer' he quaffs was 'No Asian

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[165] Jennifer Ford, *Coleridge on Dreaming: Romanticism, Dreams and the Medical Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 15.
[166] Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 2003) p. 45.

poppy' (I. 47); in other words he insists that this is not an opium dream such as we find in *Kubla Khan*. It is therefore my opinion that though Keats may well have been inspired by Chaucer in his use of the gleaning trope as an acknowledgement of both the pleasure and problem of literary influence, he also uses it in a way Chaucer never did: as an implied explanation as to what may have helped to cause the marvellous dream he has.

Overall, then, it seems that the second frame of *The Fall* was influenced, at least in a general way, by Chaucerian dream poems. That the dreamer-poet first enters an arbour is a clear dream-poetry convention, and the particulars of Keats's arbour seem especially reminiscent of Dryden's modernization of *FL*. Keats even uses a trope obviously similar to one Chaucer uses in the introduction to *LGW*. Despite its similarities to Chaucerian works. However, Keats makes this second frame of *The Fall* unique and refreshing by establishing his dreamer-poet as first being in a sort of between-state, or state of unsurety as to whether or not he is truly dreaming, in this foyer of his dream, and by ingeniously connecting a well-established trope about literary influence and originality to contemporary understanding about what may cause a dream.

The Temple and the Guiding Figure

The third frame of Keats's *The Fall*, as I choose to divide the poem, takes place in Saturn's temple, and it is natural to ask whether the temple itself may have been influenced by Chaucer's Temple of Fame. I do not believe that Keats's temple represents fame, however. Chayes asserts that 'Moneta's temple might almost be an impressionistic version of the one in *The Temple of Fame*,'[167] but it is important to remember that Saturn's temple is an abandoned and forgotten place, where only the fewest mortals stray. In this sense, it could not be more different from Chaucer's crowded Temple of Fame, practically overrun with hordes of hopeful

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[167]Chayes, p. 504.

and ambitious fame-seekers as well as more humble people. In terms of allegorical

significance, then, it seems that Keats's temple has little in common with Chaucer's.

Nevertheless, Keats's temple does have a few similarities to Chaucer's, and it is

therefore possible that Keats was to some extent influenced by Chaucer when he constructed it.

First of all, the very fact that Keats's dream poem *does* contain a temple could conceivably be

an echo of Chaucer, though the archetypal images of first a garden, then an architectural

edifice, are conventions common to many dream poems, including Coleridge's *Kubla Khan*.[168]

Still, Keats's temple, like Chaucer's, is described as being far more wonderful than anything

the dreamer-poet has seen in waking life. Chaucer's dreamer-poet, for example, reports,

> …al the men that ben on lyve
> Ne han the kunnynge to descrive
> The beaute of that ylke place,
> Ne coude casten no compace
> Swich another for to make,
> That myght of beaute ben hys make,
> Ne so wonderlych ywrought. (*HF* III. 1167-73)

The Temple of Fame, then, is a structure whose beauty far surpasses the skills of the architects

with which the dreamer-poet is familiar in his waking life. Comparably, Keats's dreamer poet

reports of Saturn's temple,

> So old the place was, I remembered none
> The like upon the earth; what I had seen
> Of grey cathedrals, buttress'd walls, rent towers,
> The superannuations of sunk realms,
> Of nature's rocks toil'd hard in waves and winds,
> Seem'd but the faulture of decrepit things
> To that eternal domed monument. (I. 65-71)

Chaucer's dreamer-poet focused on the inability of human artists to create a temple of the one

he sees in his dream; Keats's dreamer-poet, however, focuses not on artists but on works of art,

finding this building vastly superior to all the great buildings of the past he can remember

seeing, and even to the sculptural work of nature herself. The immediate effect of these two

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[168] Chayes, p. 503.

passages is similar: we understand that these two dreamer-poets are in buildings that are more wonderful than any buildings they could hope to find in waking life. What is especially intriguing about Keats's passage, though, is that he compares his temple to structures, whether natural or artificial, that are for the most part ancient and seem to be in a state of decay. His remembered 'towers' are 'rent', and not only are the 'realms' 'sunk', but are also described as being 'superannuations', a curious word that I take in this context to mean that the 'realms' are obsolete, for some reason no longer considered relevant to the modern world. That he is in a temple that must be far older than any cathedral or castle with 'buttress'd walls', and yet is better preserved than any of the buildings he mentions, establishes that this is indeed a place of wonders he has come to. Unlike the 'rocks toil'd hard in waves and wind', it seems a place untouched by the changes that nature works on all things in the waking world. It is virtually impossible to tell whether or not Keats was directly influenced by Chaucer in writing this passage. Clearly, though, the passages are comparable. Both establish the extraordinariness of the structures the respective dreamer-poets have just entered by way of comparing them to architectural work in the waking world. Chaucer, though, compares the skills of unnamed artists, specifically their abilities to create objects of beauty, and Keats compares the works of art themselves, specifically their ability to withstand the ravages of time.

Thus in both poems the initial descriptions of the temples introduce readers, in slightly different ways, to the possibility of perfect art, as it apparently can only exist in dreams, or, if we take dreams as metaphors for the artistic imagination, as art exists in the stage of conception, before the possibilities and challenges of technical execution. It seems possible that Keats may well have been inspired by Chaucer in describing his temple as a work of art finer than any than can exist in the waking world. But I believe that Keats was more influenced by Chaucer in his creation of the character of Moneta who, though different from Chaucer's

guiding figures in many ways, is also similar to several of the guides that we find in Chaucer's dream poems.

Moneta has most often been compared to Dante's Beatrice, and I fully agree that it is likely that Keats was inspired by that heavenly figure. Harold Bloom, for example, notes that 'Just as the Purgatorio climaxes at the end of the thirty-first canto, when Beatrice unveils herself to Dante, so The Fall of Hyperion attains its vision of truth when Keats gazes upon the revealed face of the surviving Titaness'.[169] And indeed some similarities between the two poems are immediately evident. Beatrice, like Moneta, is initially veiled, and her unveiling is a moment of revelation. Dante's pilgrim describes his first view of Beatrice's unveiled eyes as follows:

> A thousand yearning flames of my desire
>   held my eyes fixed upon those brilliant eyes
>   that held the griffin fixed within their range
>
> Like sunlight in a mirror, shining back,
>   I saw the twofold creature in her eyes,
>   reflecting its two natures, separately. (*Purgatorio*, XXXI. 118-23)

And when Keats's dreamer-poet first sees Moneta's countenance, he writes the most beautiful lines in the poem,

> Then saw I a wan face,
> Not pin'd by human sorrows, but bright blanch'd
> By an immortal sickness which kills not;
> It works a constant change, which happy death
> Can put no end to; deathwards progressing
> To no death was that visage; it had pass'd
> The lily and the snow; and beyond these
> I must not think now, though I saw that face –
> But for her eyes I should have fled away.
> They held me back, with a benignant light,
> Soft mitigated by divinest lids
> Half closed, and visionless entire they seem'd
> Of all external things – they saw me not,
> But in blank splendor beam'd like the mild moon
> Who comforts those she sees not, who knows not
> What eyes are upward cast. (I. 256-71)

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[169] Bloom, p. 451.

An obvious similarity between these two passages is that Keats, like Dante, focuses on the guiding figure's eyes. Beatrice's eyes are the first part of her face to be revealed, and thus the first to captivate Dante's pilgrim. In Keats, it is Moneta's eyes that attract the dreamer-poet to her; the rest of her face is overwhelming and terrifying to him. And like Beatrice's eyes, which reflect allegorical creatures, Moneta's eyes are not the usual organs of ordinary vision; they focus not on 'external things', but function with a more visionary type of vision, so to speak. That Keats, like Dante, places particular emphasis on the guiding figure's eyes is especially appropriate to his concern with the poet as an observer. Initially, the chameleon poet is one who observes the poetic subject so intensely and single-mindedly that he is able to forget his own problems and preconceived notions, and can ultimately merge with the subject and its concerns, and 'see' the truth. Visions, after all, are called 'visions', and not 'hearings' or 'smells'.

Also, like Beatrice, Moneta is described in terms of light. In the passage I have just quoted Beatrice's eyes are compared to 'sunlight in a mirror', but also on many other occasions throughout the work Beatrice is described in terms of brightness or illumination, for example when Dante's pilgrim is forced to look away from her: 'I was like one who had just strained his eyes / by looking straight into the sun too long; / indeed I was left blinded for a while.'[170] Moneta, in contrast, is compared to the softer light of the moon. Nevertheless, she is clearly radiant and seems, because of her paleness and her shining eyes, to glow.

But we must be very careful about declaring Moneta a literary ancestor of Beatrice on such superficial grounds. The two guiding figures fulfil quite different functions. Beatrice is a figure of perfection who offers great comfort and joy to Dante's pilgrim, whilst Moneta offers a wonderful but troubling vision to Keats's dreamer-poet. And as an interesting matter of fact, several of Chaucer's guiding figures 'glow' as well, or are at least described in terms of light.

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[170] *Purgatorio* XXXII, ll. 10-12.

This kind of luminescent description helps to quickly establish the figures' divine natures, and to set them apart from the other wonderful characters populating the dreamscapes. It also helps to associate these figures with special knowledge, for the metaphor of knowledge as light is firmly established in literary tradition. The goddess Nature in *PF*, for example, is described as follows:

> Tho was I war wher that ther sat a queene
> That, as of light the somer sonne shene
> Passeth the sterre, right so over mesure
> She fayrer was than any creature. (*PF* 298-301).

Though Nature here does not actually seem to shine, the comparison with the sun and stars clearly associates her with light and the heavens. Even more similar to Moneta, perhaps, is the God of Love in *LGW*:

> But of his face I can not seyn the hewe,
> For sikerly his face shon so bryghte
> That with the glem astoned was the syghte;
> A furlong-wey I myhte hym not beholde.
> …………………………………………..
> …sternely on me he gan beholde,
> So that his lokynge doth myn herte colde.
> (*LGW* 162-65, 171-72)

Here the focus is on the God of Love's face, and his face, like Moneta's, is nearly impossible for the dreamer-poet to look upon. Remembering that it is quite certain that Keats read *LGW*, we can say that his description of Moneta is clearly reminiscent of, and was very likely inspired by, Chaucer's God of Love.

Furthermore, in Chaucer's description of the God of Love, we find once again emphasis on the eyes, though unlike Moneta's, the God of Love's gaze is troubling to the dreamer poet, rather than comforting. Nevertheless, the eyes of both guiding figures seem to have a divine kind of vision indeed; Moneta sees something other than 'external things', and the God of Love, though he has presumably never met the poet-dreamer before, looks at him 'sternely', as though he knows something about the poet…which we discover later that he does. These

figures can truly 'see as a God sees, and take the depth / Of things as nimbly as the outward eye / Can size and shape pervade.' It is precisely this kind of vision that Keats's dreamer-poet is granted when he sees the fallen Titans, and that enables him to be, for a short time at least, a chameleon poet. The true poet, then, because he is granted a share in divine vision, is very nearly a divine figure himself, if only temporarily.

Yet perhaps it is more fitting to describe this kind of chameleon poet as a mystic, for his divine vision is not a permanent characteristic or ability. It is a gift in the first sense of the word; a present for the present. In *The Fall*, as I have mentioned, the dreamer-poet is granted this vision as a reward for being more concerned about and interested in others' affairs than his own. Before this gift, though, Moneta chastises him for *not* being a true poet:

> …"Art thou not of the dreamer tribe?
> 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. 198-202)

Keats's dreamer-poet has told Moneta nothing about his poetic efforts; nevertheless her divine vision seems to give her enough knowledge of his poetic efforts to judge them inadequate. He is, Moneta believes, a dreamer, which is the furthest thing possible from a poet. In this accusation she is again comparable to the God of Love in *LGW*. This divine guiding figure knows all about Chaucer's dreamer-poet, and scolds him soundly for being a bad poet of love:

> "For thow," quod he, "art therto nothing able.
> My servaunts ben alle wyse and honourable.
> Thow art my mortal fo and me werreyest,
> And of myne olde servauntes thow mysseyest,
> And hynderest hem with thy translacyoun." (*LGW* 246-10)

The 'translacyoun' the God of Love here refers to is Chaucer's translation of 'the Romauns of the Rose' (*LGW* 255), which is 'heresye ageyns' Love's law (*LGW* 256). He criticizes Chaucer's dreamer-poet too for having 'mad in Englysh ek the bok / How that Crisseyde Troylus forsok / In shewynge how that wemen han don mis?' (*LGW* 264-66). These two poems

involve unfaithful women, and thus they fail to serve the God of Love; Chaucer's dreamer-poet has therefore very little ability indeed as a poet of courtly love, or any kind of love for that matter. His choice of subject matter makes him a poor poet.

Chaucer's dreamer-poet's mistakes are, according to the God of Love, quite specific and concrete, and therefore it is a relatively simple matter to make reparations for the damage he has done. Alceste suggests that he write 'Of women trewe in lovynge al here lyve' (*LGW* 428), and thus make amends for having written of unfaithful women. Keats's dreamer-poet's mistakes are more difficult to pinpoint. Moneta makes no specific accusations other than that he is a 'dreamer', and though she does grant him a fantastic vision she never commands or suggests that he is to record that vision in verse. Remembering that Keats at this time was struggling with the *Hyperion* project as a whole, attempting to work his way toward a poetry of the human heart though he was not entirely certain just what that type of poetry would look like, it is not surprising that Moneta is not so clear-cut in her criticism and suggestions as the God of Love and Alceste are. I fully agree that ' what we are watching here is not the logical exposition of a train of thought to a foreseen conclusion which is by the exposition to be proved, but rather that process which Keats himself…earlier described as the "stepping of the Imagination towards a Truth."[171] In *LGW* we find a problem-and-solution scenario, but *The Fall* is an exploration of, and an inquiry into, a problem. After all, 'It is impossible to read *The Fall* through without realizing that the major issues it raises, and consequently its entire structure, are still in a process of evolution and that…its inner debate is never finally resolved.'[172] But simply by criticizing Keats's dreamer-poet, and by questioning whether he is a poet at all, Moneta very strongly implies that he needs to write in a new way. In this, her function is the same as the God of Love's and Alceste's: as a guide, she leads the dreamer-poet away from his old way of writing, and propels him toward a new.

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[171] D'Avanzo, pp. 272-73.
[172] Sperry, p. 326.

I can conclude this section, then, by asserting that there do indeed seem to be some 'strands of reminiscence' running from this third frame of Keats's *The Fall* to several of Chaucer's dream poems. Saturn's temple, though very different from Chaucer's Temple of Fame, reminds us of that strange allegorical place in that it is described as a perfect work of art, an accomplishment far beyond anything we can see in waking life. Both temples present us with an idea of art as it could be, if only artists were brilliant enough, and if only time had no effect; in short, as art exists in an artist's dreams. And Moneta has some clear similarities to several of Chaucer's guiding figures: she is a luminous figure with divine vision and therefore knowledge, who sees beyond physical reality and 'into the life of things'. As a guide, she leads the dreamer-poet away from his old way of writing and toward a new, much like the guiding figures in *LGW* do. I therefore feel it appropriate to claim that Moneta is a direct, though very distant, relation of the children of the Father of English Poetry.

The Unobserved Observer and Dream as Metaphor for the Poetic Imagination

I must begin this last section of this last chapter by stating that I find no specific passage in Chaucerian dream poems that seems directly comparable to the Titans in *The Fall*. As I discussed earlier, Keats's dreamer-poet is in this part of the poem an unobserved observer, and this fact in itself makes *The Fall* comparable to all of Chaucer's dream poems, for all his dreamer-poets are unobserved observers for part, but not all, of the dream. But Keats's Titans are vastly different from the revelling adherents of the flower and the leaf, for example, or the garrulous birds in *PF*. That the dreamer-poet witnesses the Titans as an unobserved observer certainly finds precedence in Chaucerian dream poems, but Keats does not seem to have drawn on Chaucerian characters, images or descriptive language in this innermost frame of the poem. This is completely unsurprising, as much of the Titan material is taken from *Hyperion*, in some

places even taken verbatim. *Hyperion* is notable for Miltonic and Dantean influence, but not for Chaucerian. Nevertheless, because we know that Keats was reading Chaucer all throughout the time he was attempting to continue *Hyperion* and before its revision into *The Fall*, it is entirely possible that Keats was inspired by Chaucer in the manner in which he *integrated* the Titan material into the dream report, namely, by having a conventional dream poem dreamer-poet view it as an unobserved observer.

The placement of Keats's 'unobserved observer' frame as the innermost frame is of the utmost thematic importance. The placement of such a section varies in Chaucerian dream reports. For example, in *LGW* the dreamer poet observes the guiding figures and their entourages before actually conversing with them. In *FL*, too, the dreamer-poet observes the adherents of the flower and the leaf first, and only afterward asks the guiding figure to explain their significance. In *HF*, on the other hand, the *debat* with the guiding figure of the eagle precedes the dreamer-poet's experience in the Temple, where he is primarily an unobserved observer. There therefore seem to be no specific structural requirements as to *where* the unobserved observer section be placed, so long as the dreamer-poet has the chance to view allegorical (in Chaucer) or mythological (in Keats) figures at some point in his dream. In *The Fall*, Keats follows Chaucer in *HF* in placing his unobserved observer frame after the *debat*. This placement works beautifully with the theme of the poetic progress of the chameleon poet, for what we see throughout the poem, as the poet goes deeper and deeper into the dream, is that he simultaneously moves farther and farther away from his conscious self. He began his poem as a 'lyric I', continued as a character alone in an arbour, then became one character among others, and finally places his character almost completely on the sidelines, and focus on someone besides himself. In this way, Keats uses the dream poem convention of the unobserved observer with great insight and skill.

I would like to return to the fact that many critics have found it difficult to integrate what I call the fourth and innermost frame of *The Fall*, in which the dreamer-poet observes the fallen Titans, with the rest of the poem. And I do agree that it is a challenge indeed to find thematic connections between the concerns of the Titans and the concerns of the dreamer-poet in the preceding frames of the poem. But it is precisely the difficulty of this challenge that leads me to believe that in this case, the shortcomings of close reading become apparent. For only when we step back from the poem and view it as a whole, or step even further back and view it in the greater context of the genre of dream poetry as a whole, that the fourth and final part of *The Fall* becomes less vexing.

In trying to make sense of the fourth frame of *The Fall*, it is crucial to remember that what we are reading is '*A Dream.*' Most readers will be familiar with the surreal way in which dreams can suddenly shift or switch setting, atmosphere, and theme, and in this sense *The Fall* exhibits a fair degree of verisimilitude. Because this is a dream, it is entirely realistic that the dreamer-poet finds himself in a situation vastly different from that he was in just seconds before. Because this is a dream, it is acceptable that the dreamer-poet's observation of the Titans seems to have little to do thematically with his feast in the arbour.

The assertion I have just made may seem like critical laziness, though I hope I shall now show that that is not the case. I have discussed *The Fall* as a poem that is about, first and foremost, the workings of the poetic imagination, and what kind of imaginative approach to one's subject one might take in order to become a 'true poet'. If that is the primary theme of the poem, and the primary content is the report of a poet's dream, it is only a small step to read the dream as a metaphor for the poetic imagination. This is not to say that the dream is *only* used as a metaphor for imagination, but there has long been a general consensus amongst many different kinds of critics that that is one way that dreams and dreaming are used in dream poems, whether they are written by Chaucer, Coleridge, or Keats.

Identification between dreams and poetic imagination is after all quite natural, for 'In the first place, dreams make new worlds, in which the imagination produces combinations and things previously unthought of. The imagination is sovereign, untrammelled and unquestioned.'[173] Keats's dreamer-poet, like Chaucer's dreamer-poets before him, is indeed in a 'new world', a world of perception before the need to translate that perception into words, a world where imagination runs free without the restrictions of logic and common sense. A dream is 'the realm of imagination, creativity, truth, and the ideal, in both Keats and Chaucer." [174] Dreams are comparable to what I might call raw imagination: the images, perceptions, and shadows of understanding that appear before the poet and inspire him to write. And whether these raw materials well up from the subconscious or are granted by benign spirits, they do not come with directions for assembly. After the dreamer is lucky enough to have a wonderful dream, or the poet fortunate enough to receive what seems like divine inspiration, it remains the task of both the dreamer and the poet to work with those materials, to shape them into the confines of language, and to work them into the logical expression that language demands.

"Late-medieval poets seem less interested in fictional dreams as mirrors of real-life… than as mirrors of the imagination, consciousness and literary composition".[175] It seems that Keats recognized this in Chaucer, and took advantage of it in his attempts to continue with the *Hyperion* project. He had, despite sincere attempts, been unable to continue with his epic, though he seems to have been satisfied with at least some of it, since he retained many lines from it in *The Fall*. What Chaucer's dream poems may have offered Keats was a precedent for a kind of poem – a genre in fact – that did not require that all its parts be linked by conventional logic. He seems to have recognized in Chaucerian dream poems a type of poem that offered new possibilities for delving deep into the workings of the poetic imagination,

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[173] J.R. Watson, *English Poetry of the Romantic Period, 1789-1830* (London: Longman, 1985), p. 60.
[174] Finlayson, p. 238.
[175] Phillips, p. 15.

and to write about the mysterious process of writing itself, the very process that was giving

him so much trouble, at least in the *Hyperion* project.

What we finally reach, in the innermost chamber of the dream, what we find in the

mind of the mother of the muses herself, is the first generation of the Classical gods. We find,

in short, a beginning. 'A beginning' is perhaps a strange word to describe what is clearly

existence after a fall, but we remember that Hyperion's fall allows for the ascent of that figure

Keats adored, wrote about, and wished to identify himself with throughout his poetic career:

the god of medicine and poetry, Apollo. *The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream* is a poem that reaches

deep into the mind of the poet and the sources of his poetic imagination, and deep into the

earliest myths of Western civilization that Keats is likely to have known. It is therefore

appropriate that Keats drew on Chaucer and on the poetic genre of dream poetry, which Keats

almost certainly would have only known via Chaucer. By drawing Chaucer, Keats was drawing

on what he would have recognized as the very source of English poetry. As Godwin wrote in

his biography of the Father of English Poetry,

> Chaucer fixed and naturalized the genuine art of poetry in our island.
> But what is most memorable in our eulogy, is that he is the father of our
> language, the idiom of which was by the Norman conquest banished
> from courts and civilized life, and which Chaucer was the first to restore
> to literature, and the muses.[176]

Thus *The Fall* reaches as deeply as a Romantic poem can into the mind and imagination,

Western myth, and the tradition of English poetry.

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[176] *CCH* II, p. 238. Of course a modern student of the English language cannot accept the idea that Chaucer restored to literature an idiom somehow separate from the language of the 'Norman conquest.' As Keats recognized, Chaucer's English is full of 'gallicisms'. The point is, of course, simply that Chaucer wrote his great works in English, rather than French.

Conclusion

The primary problem I wished to explore in this thesis is: Was Keats's *The Fall of Hyperion* influenced by Geoffrey Chaucer's dream poems? I hope I have shown that the answer to that question is 'yes.'

Chaucer was greatly admired and widely read during the Romantic period, not only by Keats but by virtually all the major and minor writers of the day. He seems to have been particularly popular in Keats's literary circle, and this, along with the fact that Keats himself mentions and alludes to Chaucer quite frequently in his letters and poems, makes it abundantly clear that Keats was open and willing to accept Chaucerian inspiration. Chaucer's Middle English seems to have been no hindrance to Keats's enjoyment of the medieval poet; on the contrary, it appears to have been part of what attracted Keats to Chaucer in the first place.

We know that Keats not only knew but also admired several of Chaucer's dream poems, as well as poems that he believed to be Chaucer's, such as *The Floure and the Leafe,* which he also read in Dryden's modernization. Dryden's version of *FL* seems to have been more influential than any other dream poem on *The Fall* in terms theme, and since the original *FL* was not composed by Chaucer at all, we must ultimately conclude that the dream poet that had the most pervasive influence on *The Fall* was, in fact, not Chaucer. Still, "there are many echoes of Chaucer" in *The Floure and the Leafe*,[177] so we may assert that a "strand of reminiscence" can be traced from Keats, through Dryden and the original *FL*-poet, back to Chaucer.

The only other Chaucerian dream poem we have concrete evidence, in the form of a direct quote, that Keats read is *The Legend of Good Women*. And indeed we find abundant

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[177] Pearsall, "*Floure*", p. 2.

evidence that Keats did draw on that work in his composition of *The Fall*, particularly in his creation of the figure of Moneta and her function as a guide. We have no direct evidence that Keats read either the *Romaunt of the Rose* or the *House of Fame*, and yet it seems very likely that both of these poems, but particularly *HF*, had some effect on the way Keats wrote *The Fall*. I feel confident, in fact, in saying that I am certain that *HF* was a quite important inspiration for *The Fall*, particularly for the induction, and I believe that my discussion above offers sufficient evidence for that claim.

But perhaps the greatest influence Chaucer had on *The Fall* is not detectable in particular passages or characters at all, but rather in Keats's very choice of the dream poem genre. I hope I have offered enough evidence to show that Keats was indeed consciously writing in the tradition of medieval dream poetry, and that other than Coleridge's *Kubla Khan*, it is not likely that Keats knew any medieval dream poems that were not Chaucerian. At the time he wrote *The Fall*, Keats was undergoing a kind of poetic crisis, struggling with the questions of whether poetry could do the world any good, whether it could ease the 'miseries of man' and if so, what kind of poet could write such poetry. The genre of dream poetry, which he knew only through poems he believed to be by Chaucer, offered him the perfect way in which to explore his current questions about poets and poetry, and to grope his way toward a more mature approach to poetic composition. For the use of dreaming as a metaphor for poetic imagination is as much a convention of dream poetry as a catalogue of flora is, and Keats, perceptive reader that he was, seems to have recognized this, even though his era had not yet learned to recognize dream poetry as a genre.

It is not necessary to know Chaucer in order to understand and appreciate *The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream*. I do feel, however, that recognizing that Keats was to some extent drawing on Chaucer when he composed his fragment does offer readers new interpretive possibilities, particularly when they wish to attempt to integrate, or to logically explain, the

relationship between the various frames of the poem. I by no means insist that the four frames are not integrated. I do, however, believe that by reading *The Fall* as a dream poem in the medieval tradition, and by accepting the idea that the dream is a metaphor for the mysteries of the poetic imagination, we find validation for *not* attempting to integrate all the frames of the poem in a close reading. We can allow ourselves, as Keats certainly would have appreciated, to enjoy being 'in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason.'

List of Abbreviations

CCA I   *Five Hundred Years of Chaucer Criticism and Allusion, 1357-1900*,
vol. 1, ed. Caroline Spurgeon, 3 vols. (New York: Russell & Russell, 1960)

CCH II   *Five Hundred Years of Chaucer Criticism and Allusion, 1357-1900*,
vol. 2, ed. Caroline Spurgeon, 3 vols. (New York: Russell & Russell, 1960)

BD   *The Book of the Duchess,* Geoffrey Chaucer

CT   *The Canterbury Tales,* Geoffrey Chaucer

The Fall   *The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream*, John Keats

FL   *The Floure and the Leaf*, Anonymous

HF   *The House of Fame*, Geoffrey Chaucer

LGW   *The Legend of Good Women*, Geoffrey Chaucer

Letters   *The Letters of John Keats*, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins, 2 vols., Cambridge,
Mass., 1958

PF   *The Parliament of Fowles*, Geoffrey Chaucer

RR   *The Romaunt of the Rose,* Geoffrey Chaucer and Anonymous

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