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1820: Poetics "In the Spirit of Outlawry"

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ABSTRACT
Far from simply a miscellany of what are now canonical poems, Keats's 1820 volume (*1820*) puts forward a consistent program of radical poetics. "We hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us." I argue that *1820* unfolds a theory and practice that experiment with what poetry refusing a "palpable design" might look like. The romances in *1820* are read thematically as dramas of successful or unsuccessful attempts at controlling the desires of the other. In all the poems the poet seeks to disclose *in form and language* something acting beyond the reach of the poet's knowledge and management. He formulates lyric poetry as ephemeral and performative, poetic language as independent of its maker's orchestration as "venturing syllables" and as "Chattertonian" (native English) and not "Miltonic" ("artful" and imposed), stanzas as occasions for expansive, that is, paratactic, syntax, and furthermore as deformances of the monumental sonnet form. This project, the article concludes, explains Keats's displeasure at his editors' inclusion of *Hyperion*, a poem whose "march" is "undeviating" and written with a "god's" foreknowledge, in a book that experiments with the idea of a poet only as facilitator of an independent artistic life.

> I is the other. If brass wakes up a trumpet, it isn't to blame. To me this is evident: I give a stroke of the bow: the symphony begins to stir in the depths or comes bursting onto the stage. (Rimbaud 917)

In this paper, I will argue that a radical utopian poetics intimated in Keats's Negative Capability letter (27 December 1817) and, less than two months later, in two letters to his sympathetic Cockney poet friend John Hamilton Reynolds (3, 19 February 1818) drives each of the poems gathered in his 1820 volume; the whole book coalesces as a poetic experiment challenging more conventional Romantic poetics and poetic practice. New Historicist positions have either considered the book "reactionary" in contrast to his earlier poetry and to those of Byron and Shelley in its aim "to dissolve social and political conflicts in the mediations of art and beauty" (McGann 53),[1] or make claims for its progressive politics as an indirect response to political and social events (Nicholas Roe and Richard Marggraf Turley).[2] While I have no disagreement with this latter position, I will argue herein that Keats's last book locates the primary site

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of his dissident politics in formal and linguistic, as well as thematic, decisions; in this respect he heralds avant-garde traditions in English, American, and European poetry up to our own time.

"We hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us," Keats said in a 3 February 1818 letter to Reynolds (*Letters* 61). I am arguing here that *1820* unfolds a consistent theory and practice that experiment with what poetry refusing a "palpable design" might look like. Writing against an idea of lyric poetry in which the poet exerts over and exhibits in the poem a dominance evident from beginning to end, a closed report of subjective experience, Keats imagines poetry in which the ego disperses or dissipates before the poet's interest in disclosing something living beyond the reach of the poet's knowledge and management—in the language of his "Negative Capability" letter (27 December 1817), the poet would disclose something to "feel intense upon," something one feels "mad to kiss" (42). He imagines poetry that opens out to otherness. In this essay I will first present salient characteristics of such poetry: (1) the poet is not a maker but a facilitator who aids in an activity beyond or at least not directly under the poet's conscious control; (2) a facilitating poet allows for an object acting independent of the speaker or narrator—an object which can include "subjects" such as lovers (in the romances) struggling for full expression of desire in the midst of social repression; (3) just as the object within the poem can move and act of its own accord, so the poem itself has the power of self-assembly (Levinson 261); and (4) underlying these three characteristics, there stands a politics of resistance both to the social repression of mind-in-its-freedom and also to the dominance of a market-economy culture of acquisition.

Keats's poetry thus described falls in with the attitude of democracy which, I will also show, led Keats to value particularly the poetry of the anonymous British poets of pre-capitalist communities, poetry that Hazlitt promoted in his lecture "On Burns, and the Old English Ballads" (5: 123–43). Poetry was autochthonous: "The archers [of Robin Hood and his clan] green glimmer under the waving branches; the print of the grass remains where they have just finished their noon-tide meal under the green-wood tree" (Hazlitt 5: 143). In language, Keats throughout his writing life and most articulately stated in September 1819 after almost all of his best poetry was written, cultivated the "native English" of the precocious poet Thomas Chatterton, as another grounding of poetry in the flowing medium of the people, undistorted by the language, syntax, and associations of the Greco-Roman *imperium*.

I will consider the poems in *1820* as fundamentally an articulation and fulfillment of Keats's poetics as sketched above; the immediate response to its publication reveals that poetics captured the minds of reviewers and readers. After highlighting several letters that reflect Keats's preoccupation with the proper dispositions for poetry without palpable design, and after laying out the structure of the volume, I will proceed to my subsequent presentation of the poems, by poetic genre, themselves; a discussion is reserved for an important genre absent from *1820*, the sonnet. I then consider a feature of culture and language—the pre-capitalist world of Robin Hood, "old poets" as Hazlitt calls them, and Chatterton—that perfuse the book, destabilizing and dislodging from its apparent pride of place in Keats's poetry, the Greco-Roman tradition. I conclude by proposing that *Hyperion*, published by his editors against the poet's will, was initially rejected aggressively by Keats on the grounds that it embodied a poetics contradicting that which the rest of the poems and the volume as a whole championed.[3]

A poetics emerging from the letters

At the heart of these letters lies a clear principle of thinking and writing culled by Keats largely from Hazlitt's critique of enlightenment reason. Both poet and essayist judged "reason" to have dominated early-nineteenth-century British society to its detriment: the desire to know, to know everything, is a desire of the ego—of the individual as well as a member of the collective—to control and to possess; by contrast, to remain content with "half-knowledge" ("Negative Capability") subdues the ego's rage for determinacy, allowing the acknowledgment of other sources of life and agency.[4]

His critique of the controlling aspects of the ego results in poems that shift attention and emphasis away from the subject to the world beyond and independent of it. The poet must dismiss that "irritable reaching after fact and reason" (in his discussion of "negative capability," 27 December 1817) blocking the poet's access to the very qualities Keats most values in art, intensity and beauty—as he says in the same letter, women one feels made to kiss, a face swelling into reality (*Letters* 42–43). In the 3 February 1818 letter to J. H. Reynolds he specifies the effect of that ego-interference on the actual poems produced and in a sinister register: bad poetry not only screens us from being amazed with its chosen subject but manipulates us, having "a palpable design upon us." "Modern poets" (poets under the sway of palpable design) are like an "Elector of Hanover govern[ing] his petty state, & know[ing] how many straws are swept daily from the Causeways in all his dominions & ha[ving] a continual itching that all the Housewives should have their coppers well scoured" (61). Modern poets are micromanagers of events under their control. Good poets, on the other hand, would resemble ancient "Emperors of vast Provinces, [who] had only heard of the remote ones and scarcely cared to visit them"; in other words, the "remote" provinces could carry out life on their own terms (61). The "rash intermeddling" of bad poets, as Wordsworth put it, not only taints the materials with the focus upon the poet's ego and de-intensifies the vividness of the object, but also closes down the poem formally and thematically. As an example, Keats caricatures Wordsworth's "Matthew" poem in this letter, proclaiming an egotism in Wordsworth's assumption about what constitutes poetic interest:

> Old Matthew spoke to him some years ago on some nothing, & because he happens in an Evening Walk to imagine the figure of the old man – he must stamp it down in black & white, and it is henceforth sacred. (61)

By contrast, "poetry should be great & unobtrusive, a thing which enters into one's soul, and does not startle it or amaze it with itself but with its subject" (61).

Moving away from the identification of ego with the making of poems leads Keats in this letter to describe a type of poem that shifts the center of gravity from the self to life as uncontainable, half-knowable but intense. His primary exhibits of such poetry return to the occasion of the letter itself: Reynolds's gift of his two original "Robin Hood" sonnets, which "gave me more pleasure than will the 4th Book of Childe Harold & the whole of any body's life & opinions" (61). This formal recentering represents a swerve in an alignment with traditions in poetry, from the aristocratic and classical to, in Keats's word, the "native" English poetry of anonymous authorship written in "pure" (not French or Latinate) English language, a process reflective of Keats's marginal and critical relationship to the dominant market economy of his own world.

In *Unfettering Poetry*, I discovered in some Romantic poems what might be called a syntax of the predicate: a poem begins by acknowledging the first-person speaking subject (e.g. "I love to … ") which then unceremoniously vanishes before a much larger predicate: an *asymmetrical* syntax that accentuates the poem's preference for the "life of things" more than the drama of the lyric subject. In the second letter to Reynolds of 19 February 1818, Keats imagines this asymmetry as a comprehensive vision of human outreach. An intense but intellectually free encounter with "a certain Page of full Poesy or distilled Prose" may eventually lead to "Humanity" as a "grand democracy of Forest Trees" (66). Again, there is an asymmetrical weight given to the relatively slight origin in reading and thinking versus that of the global outcome.

The entire process has only a secondary place for the reasoning, controlling ego just as it doesn't insist upon the poet as maker. The ego is replaced by a radical cast of mind only obliquely conscious and devoid of personality, of identity, "delicious diligent indolence"; the *im*personality of indolence avails itself to all persons, no matter how "different" and "diverse," who then "whisper the results" of their own reveries to others in a growing set of webs and crossroads of human trust and consciousness (66). As the event, in the world or in the poem, grows, it requires someone who *facilitates* rather than micromanages it.

The contents and structure of *1820*

In *1820* structure and content reveal the poetics summarized above, and Keats's book significantly joins with the structural intention of two contemporary gatherings from "Cockney" poets with which he would be politically and poetically sympathetic: Leigh Hunt's *Foliage* (1818) and John Hamilton Reynolds's *The Fancy* (1820). Very simply, each of these collections, manifestoes in their own right that go against the grain of the monumental collections of Wordsworth (1815) and Coleridge (1817), begins with long narrative poems and ends with short, mostly lyric ones. The lyric section in each gathering functions first as a miscellany but second accumulates a poetics for the "Cockney School."[5] *1820*, minus *Hyperion*, has the same structure and, I suggest, for the same reasons.

Although gathered in 1820, Keats's new volume, as is of course true with many collections of a poet's work, includes earlier as well as more recent poetry; in order to shape the volume around a coherent poetics, he chooses to discard chronology as an organizing principle and mixes early with more recent: poems from early 1818 stand side to side with those from late 1818-early 1819, late spring 1819 and summer and early fall 1819. *Lamia* (summer 1819) is followed by *Isabella* (spring 1818) and then by *The Eve of St. Agnes* (early 1819); short poems—a mixture of Odes and seven-syllable rhyming couplet lyrics—follow: "Ode to a Nightingale," "Ode on a Grecian Urn," and "Ode to Psyche" (spring 1819) precede "Fancy" and "Bards of Passion" (late 1818) followed by "Lines on the Mermaid Tavern" and "Robin Hood" (early 1818) and then "To Autumn" (fall 1819) and "Ode on Melancholy" (spring 1819). Keats's (and his publishers') dismissal of chronology allows for a concentration upon poetics, most of which stems from the late 1817 and early 1818 letters often influenced by Hazlitt's early 1818 lectures on the English poets.

Odes

In an experiment with the ode genre, each of Keats's major *1820* Odes enacts the independence or agency of the object, in form and in theme. Anticipating Rimbaud, the "Ode to Psyche" moreover epitomizes the poet as facilitator—first a waking-dreaming wanderer into a chance encounter ("circumstance") with the lovers Cupid and Psyche presented as something one "feels intense upon," and then as a maker not of a controlled event but of a structure (a "fane" built "in some untrodden region of my mind" [50–51][6]) that allows the events of intensity—love between Cupid and Psyche—to take place on their own. In the "Ode to a Nightingale", the end of the address to the nightingale and consequently the poem occurs when the nightingale on its own flies away carrying off its song into a future. In the "Ode on a Grecian Urn", the urn obviously cannot move on its own, but in every stanza its resistance to the speaker's irritable reaching after answers to its questionings and confirmations of its imaginings is total; finally, in a negatively capable conclusion, it teases us out of thought. In "To Autumn", only the questions opening the final stanza—"Where are the songs of spring? Ay, where are they?"—channel the person anxious and discontent with half-knowledge; when the true voice of the poem dismisses them ("Think not of them, thou hast thy music too"), the independent living movement of the seasons is allowed its efflorescence (23, 24). The "Ode on Melancholy," the final poem in the *1820* volume (minus *Hyperion*), raises to a pitch the passional consequences of acknowledging the independence of the other; denial must be resisted and, in an urged reversal, acceptance must be proven on the pulses to the point that, tasting the immediacy of changes as they occur ("aching Pleasure …/ Turning to poison while the bee-mouth sips" [23–24]), one sacrifices agency and life itself altogether.

Seven-syllable rhyming couplet poems

There are four such specimens in *1820* following the "Ode to Psyche"—"Fancy," "Bards of Passion," "Lines on the Mermaid Tavern," and "Robin Hood," all written between February and December 1818. In the "Ode to Psyche," the Fancy is the faculty that the poet facilitates, or "lets loose": the "gardener Fancy, who breeding flowers, will never breed the same," operates independently of the poet (63). Susan J. Wolfson suggestively observes in her article in this volume that Fancy "liberates words into wordplay."[7] "Fancy," the first short-line poem, follows with both exhortation and definition for a poet who facilitates the life beyond him:

> let winged Fancy wander
> Through the thought still spread beyond her:
> Open wide the mind's cage-door,
> She'll dart forth, and cloudward soar. (5–8)

After copying out the poem to his brother and sister-in-law, Keats remarks with surprise: "I did not think this had been so long a Poem." *It is as if something other than poetic control took over* and the poem began to make itself. "Fancy" enacts the onward, wayward movement, with its quick seven-syllable rhymed couplets hurtling down the page. "Fancy" and the next poem "Bards of Passion and of Mirth" call up for Keats questions of poetic genre in relation to dispersed or attenuated orchestration: "These are

specimens of a sort of rondeau which I think I shall become partial to – because you have one idea amplified with greater ease and more delight and freedom than in the sonnet" (*Letters* 194). In "Bards of Passion and of Mirth," for example, short, rhyming couplets move quickly down the page with ease, delight, and freedom, driven by the tumble of rhymes and verbal echoes, "sounds" that clearly lead the "sense" and descend by their own accord:

> … those [souls] of heaven commune
> With the spheres of sun and moon;
> With the noise of fountains wond'rous,
> And the parle of voices thund'rous;
> With the whisper of heaven's trees
> And one another, in soft ease
> Seated on Elysian lawns
> Brows'd by none but Dian's fawns;
> Underneath large blue-bells tented,
> Where the daisies are rose-scented,
> And the rose herself has got
> Perfume which on earth is not. (5–16)

The couplets continue with transformations, reawakenings, and defamiliarizations particularly available to the vertically weighted short-line poetry:

> Where the nightingale doth sing
> Not a senseless, tranced thing,
> But divine melodious truth;
> Philosophic numbers smooth. (17–20)

Romances

My reading of Keats's romances in *1820* only addresses the societal challenges to the freedom, abundance, and independence of love and desire.[8] "Romance" as it appears here, in other words, does not differ from the romance archetype. I am arguing that in all three poems, early and late—*Lamia*, *Isabella*, and *The Eve of St. Agnes*—negatively capable poetics are dramatized, even allegorized, to be challenged and then either defeated or overcome; the romances display in vivid narrative a political drama of the expression of love and desire, as the life of the other, and its repression, rehearsed in the other poems on the lyric scale. In *Isabella* harsh capitalism embodied in Isabella's brothers, for whom "many a weary hand did swelt / In torched mines and noisy factories" (st. 14, 107–08), and unlike the poet-priest in "Ode to Psyche" who lets the warm love in, cruelly disposes of her love with Lorenzo. *Lamia*, no matter how different from *Isabella*, opposes rich dream- and fantasy-laden love to both acquisitive market economy drives and also to "cold philosophy" that defeats it (2.230). *Liberty is liberty only for others*: the plots of these two poems refuse and defeat that principle; liberty, moreover, thrives on the full expression of non-rational and non-quotidian states of being, a basic Romantic insight.

From the perspective of this essay, Keats's experiment with romance in *The Eve of St. Agnes* imagines the possible triumph of the life of the other in love amidst the rule of acquisition and control ("These lovers fled away into the storm" [st. 42, 371]). On

the level of image, that independent life unfolds, unnoticed except by the eye (the "wakeful bloodhound"'s "sagacious eye" [st. 41, 366]) watching from the social margins:

> By one, and one, the bolts full easy slide:–
> The chains lie silent on the footworn stones;–
> The key turns, and the door upon its hinges groans. (67–69)

A revision in the following stanza from *St. Agnes* underscores the point of Keats's conscious choice to intensify the agency of objects:

> Anon his heart revives: her vespers done,
> Of all its wreathed pearls her hair she frees;
> Unclasps her warmed jewels one by one;
> Loosens her fragrant bodice; by degrees
> Her rich attire creeps rustling to her knees. (226–30)

Originally settling to present mere gravitational pull, "And down slips rich attire," Keats revised this line to produce agency in the powerfully erotic line, "Her rich attire creeps rustling" (*Poems* 310).[9]

Focus on the life of the other produces in Keats the "irregularities" that some reviewers criticized, but which, in John Clare's approving view (see below), constantly "deviate" from the "regular plod" of the conventionality of romance "plot," itself received, predictable, and enclosed; Keats's unmoored poetic sensibility creates a freeing disruption—enrichment and estrangement. At the end of her life, Isabella's tale of woe enters the earshot of the collective: erupting from her "cry" to "passing pilgrims" "the ditty of the story passed from mouth to mouth / Through all the country" and all the way to the present: "Still is the burden sung" (st. 63, 501–03).[10] In the final stanzas of *The Eve of St. Agnes*, plot is released from the immediacy of the report by troubling shifts from human to non-human agency and consciousness, and from the present into the distant past; the slow vanishing of the lovers from the hostile presences in the castle is marked first by an attention to detail below the radar of the hierarchy: the "sagacious eye" of the hound that switches allegiance to the eloping Madeline (here stripped of her aristocratic name in exchange, in one manuscript, for the impersonal "mistress" and finally for the even more distanced "inmate"). Door-hinges, again with the agents of royalty disappeared, opening of their own accord, is what the reader—any reader of sensation—encounters.[11] At the same time that reader becomes aware of strange distortions of parts of speech—"long be-nightmar'd," " palsy-twitched," "meager face deform," and the "imperfect fit" of the slightly archaic and awkward "*For* aye unsought *for*" (st. 42, 378). The blanketing, the narrowing, of the castle's inhabitants with silence and death is reversed through the porosity of democratic possibility in image and language.

The absent sonnet in ode, short-line poem, and romance

In a letter about *1820* to his publishers Taylor and Hessey, Clare makes a seemingly casual reference to the absence of sonnets in the volume; and yet "sonnet" is present throughout as apparition. His conflicts and experiments with the sonnet speak directly to Keats's drive to write what I have been elaborating as a poetry rejecting "palpable design." In the poems of *1820* the sonnet leaves its mark in what the British experimental

poet and painter Allen Fisher approvingly calls "imperfect fit."[12] When poems "fit" the received form perfectly, they deaden the mind; when they edge away from it, fit it imperfectly but keep it obliquely in view, they stimulate the mind towards critical consciousness. As is well known, the ode stanzas derive from the sonnet and from Keats's intense explorations in spring 1819 of the sonnet's form. The stanzas in *Isabella* and *The Eve of St. Agnes* (ottava rima and Spenserian respectively) also allude to sonnet rhyming, so that many of the stanzas throughout *1820* have sonnet disposition, albeit lighter and more mobile: as Charles Lamb said of the stanzas in *Isabella*, "never cloying" (Matthews 157). The short-line poems in *1820*—"Robin Hood," "Lines written on the Mermaid Tavern," "Bards of Passion," and "Fancy"—all with seven- or eight-syllable rhyming lines, have in Keats's mind reference to the sonnet form, which I have already mentioned: here, he says, "you have one idea amplified with greater ease and more delight and freedom than in the sonnet" (*Letters* 194). As with the Ode stanzas to come five months later, lightness and mobility, "delight and freedom" become valued features of lyric writing, found in poems that swing wide of the sonnet, seen here as the point of reference.[13] Keats's rejection of fame as a primary goal for a poet on 9 April 1818 ("I never wrote one single Line of Poetry with the least Shadow of public thought" [85]) becomes part of his poetics as a rejection, in a poem itself, of ego control (the hunger for fame), the subject of three poems *not* included in *1820*—his two sonnets on fame, and in turn the sonnet on experimentation with the strict, inherited sonnet form.

In one of his "fame" sonnets, Keats, in conversation with Hazlitt and Reynolds on fame, invited poets to adopt the stance of Negative Capability, not to seek after Fame but to "Make your best bow to her and bid adieu; / Then, if she likes it, she will follow you" ("Fame, like a wayward girl" 14). Here the correct response to fame, the desires of the ego, is to "be content with" or have faith in the animate independence of the object. It's simply not enough for the poet as person to humble themselves before fame: the attitude must happen in the poem itself, the site where the othering of imagination has actually taken place. Fame is depicted as a "gipsey" and a "jilt," that works off her own idiosyncracies, independent of the wishes of "love-sick bards" (11). Let us call the "best bow" the Keatsian vision of Craft as facilitating the freedom of the work; to "bid adieu" is to release the work from passionately anxious controls (13–14). Perhaps all of Keats's "adieus" are of this cast, not so much simply saying "farewell," but saying farewell to control over the other—for Keats the object and also the instruments of poeisis—that now turns to its own freedom.

Applying the preferred state of poetic temperament that bids adieu to forms of control offered in his "Fame" sonnets, "If by dull rhymes our English must be chain'd" becomes the manifesto of sonnet-possibility, a search for a form facilitated by the poet yet somehow displaying its independence from them:

> Let us find out, if we must be constrain'd,
> Sandals more interwoven and complete
> To fit the naked foot of Poesy. (4–6)

How do we facilitate the recovery of the independent life of the sonnet, allow it to self-generate? "if we may not let the muse be free, / She will be bound with garlands of her own" (13–14). (In another sonnet based on a dream of Dante's Paolo and Francesca episode, "As Hermes once took to his feathers light," Keats observes a kind of

self-assembly of the sonnet: "I tried a Sonnet upon it – there are fourteen lines but nothing of what I felt in it" [*Letters* 239]. Again, the writing moves independent of control and intention.) Simultaneously, he may have been experimenting with a variant of these questions and assertions as he began to write the Odes, first the "Ode to Psyche." If the sonnet stands for the most difficult problem of letting go of craft and of the "fame" or aristocracy of form and of the ego that drives those impulses, the Ode stanzas of Keats become its "imperfect fit," and formally disrupt the sonnet while making reference to it. Looking back to the sonnet form, the stanzas are "lighter," stripped down sonnets, erasing the sonnets' middle. Typically, these ten-line stanzas begin with a sonnet quatrain, erase the second quatrain, and conclude with a somewhat scrambled sonnet sestet—a sonnet lightened of the sonnet's heavy ego: still full and steadfast, yet now more capable of proliferation, more mobile and freer, and strangely "indifferent." They move from one to the next "like figures on a marble urn, / When shifted round to see the other side" ("Ode on Indolence" 6). They create pauses between themselves and shifts, and do not seamlessly carry the drama of the subject forward to its conclusion although they are often read this way.

Robin Hood and Chatterton: object, community, source, and the English word

Animating Keats's 3 February 1818 letter about poetry produced without palpable design —poetry of aperture and focus on the independent life of the object—lies Reynolds's gift of two "Robin Hood" sonnets that recall a tradition of anonymous English poetry alluding to a community of mutual support rather than one of rapacious capitalism inciting envy, deception, hierarchies, and suppression. Here Keats brings into focus the democratic and anti-capitalist stance informing *1820*, in which the spirit of "Robin Hood" pervades poems of all genres in the book.[14] Both Reynolds and Keats certainly have Hazlitt's recent lecture in mind and indeed may have contributed to it in conversation. In "On Burns and the Old English Ballads," Hazlitt writes:

> We seem to feel that those who wrote and sung them (the early minstrels singing the old English Ballads) lived in the open air, wandering on from place to place with restless feet and thoughts, and lending an ever-open ear to the fearful accidents of war or love, floating on the breath of old tradition or common fame, and moving the strings of their harp with sounds that sank into a nation's heart. (5: 140)

Writing to Reynolds that he composed "Lines on the Mermaid Tavern" and "Robin Hood" "in the spirit of outlawry," Keats identifies these poems with the pre-capitalist hero Robin Hood and the Sherwood clan. Poetry and song come from the earth and from lyric domains beyond the quotidian, a heady mix of constellation and drink: an "astrologer's old quill" and the souls of poets dead and gone who

> Underneath a new old sign
> Sipping beverage divine,
> And pledging with contented smack
> The Mermaid in the Zodiac. ("Lines on the Mermaid Tavern" 16, 19–21)

The phrase "new old sign" captures an intention for an 1818 poet recalling a Robin Hood past: it cannot be merely nostalgia for a period before capitalism (a time when

"men knew nor rent nor leases" [10], when honey could "be got without hard money" [28]), egotism and acquisition but must rework the old vision, giving it a new reality in the present day, allowing it to "occupy" the poetry of the present, to remake the vitality of the past as new-old. How do you re-purpose into modern song the past's "sounded tempests," the "forest's whispering fleeces," a "mid-forest laugh," a "Thrumming on an empty can / Some old hunting ditty," "the merry morris din" (8, 9, 15, 26–27, 33)? The final stanza of "Robin Hood" itself becomes a din of pub-inspired anaphora:

> Honour to the old bow-string!
> Honour to the bugle-horn!
> Honour to the woods unshorn!
> Honour to the Lincoln green!
> Honour to the archer keen!
> Honour to tight little John,
> And the horse he rode upon!
> Honour to bold Robin Hood,
> Sleeping in the underwood!
> Honour to maid Marian,
> And to all the Sherwood-clan!
> Though their days have hurried by
> Let us two a burden try. (50–62)

The poem ends as an experiment (Let us try), not a rehearsal of a received form, in collective (Reynolds and Keats) not solitary singing, and in archaic song-making (burden).

The juxtaposition in *1820* of the four heptasyllabic rhyming couplet poems of "delight and freedom," "deviant" minimalist exercises that move quickly down the page with heaven and earth, origins and contemporary urgency mixing, with the rich garners of full ripened grain of "To Autumn," its longer, weighted decasyllabics that load and bless and keep steady the full horizon of the line, is, from the perspective of monumental poetry, outrageous. Yet, in the context of the poetics in the *1820* collection, autumnal fullness belongs not to monumentality but to the Fancy that can bring together the "Ode to Psyche" ("all the buds and bells of May") and "To Autumn" ("All the heaped Autumn's wealth")—in other words, to the proliferative faculty that only acts when it is allowed to roam, let loose to act independently from the subject and when consequently it presents an equally independent motion. Suddenly "To Autumn," linked even to its apparent opposite in reference and form "Robin Hood," reinforces the entire book's motivation for acknowledging the principle of "native" life in the object: even in Autumn's indolence (st. 2), she watches seemingly never ending "last oozings hours by hours" (22). No poem is so rich with its own motion, announced line after line, but the subject, like Rimbaud's concert master raising his bow, makes queries only to set budding more, and still more, the activities of the season on its own terms. While reading the Odes in *1820*, think of the thrush singing near the end of the 19 February 1818 meditation on how reading of distilled writings can lead to a democratic community of whisperers: "My song comes native with the warmth" ("O thou whose face hath felt the winter's wind" 10).

Chatterton, "To Autumn," and the "Ode on Melancholy"

Invoking in Keats's modern poetry the energies of native song, not as a gesture of nostalgia but as an act of renewal and resistance, is to write "a counterpart – or series of

counterparts – somewhere in the traditional worlds the West was savaging" (Rothenberg and Robinson 396), to let poetry of the present be "bound in the garlands of" the *poetry of the source* or of the perceived vital origins of a people, at the least, a continent-wide movement in which Keats, knowingly or unknowingly, participated ("If by dull rhymes" 14). For Keats, Thomas Chatterton was the poet of the source, first of "purest English" (*Letters* 325) and second, with his fashioning on an epic scale an entire civic life and culture of the past ("medieval" Bristol), an instance of *othering the imagination*: the South, representing the Western *imperium* socially and culturally, gives way to the North (England, the north of England), and the recovery of an English free of its aristocratic, classical ("artful" [292]) trappings. In the Romantic period, Chatterton becomes famously "the sleepless soul who perished in his pride" (Wordsworth's "Resolution and Independence", quoted as authoritative by Hazlitt [5:122]). But it is Keats who, identifying Chatterton as poet of "native English," links his complete commitment to a dissident poetry of the sources of life in the midst of his own poverty to his suicide, his sacrifice. As the "northern" twentieth-century English poet Barry MacSweeney wrote in "Brother Wolf", modeling himself on Chatterton;

> Chatterton knew
> you may not return to the source
> when you're
> it and
> died. (25)

In September 1819 Keats associates composing "To Autumn" with Chatterton ("the most English of poets except Shakespeare" [*Poems* 738]) who reminds him that "English ought to be kept up" (*Letters* 292) and that he wishes to give himself up to "sensations" other than those of Miltonic, classical epic language and inverted syntax: as such he must give up the Hyperion project. In this letter the "To Autumn" / Chatterton / *Hyperion* interconnections are clear. Leaving the "art" of the latter, in which he alludes to the measuring impositions of a tailor, for the "native music" of the former, he declares: "I prefer the native music of it to Milton's cut by feet" (325). "To Autumn" throughout, along with its allusions to Spenser, seems intentionally to have followed not only the imagery but also the native English of Chatterton's *Aella*; lines that describe autumn get woven into the first stanza of "To Autumn": "Whann the fayre apple, rudde as even skie, / Do bend the tree unto the fructyle grounde" (219). Keats is turning to a language of origins, native and northern, uncorrupted, and as such a political use of language, what Gilles Deleuze and Feliz Guattari call the language of a minor literature that challenges hegemonies on thematic and linguistic levels. In *Isabella*, over a year before his September 1819 comments on Chatterton, he had "performed" Chatterton, asking Boccaccio's pardon for replacing his Italian "southern" eloquence with the "venturing syllables" of "a verse in English tongue, / An echo of thee in the north-wind sung" (*Isabella* st. 19–20).

> I Believe both Macpherson & Chatterton, that what they say is Ancient, Is so. (Blake 665)

While the Bristol poet's use of pure English, his "mother tongue," as Chatterton's editor names it in the 1803 edition of his poems and to which Keats refers in the 1818 "Where's the Poet?" and the opening of *The Fall of Hyperion*, is more or less uniquely Keats's

observation of praise among poets, it is Wordsworth's line, "The sleepless soul who perished in his pride," that became the Romantic model for the sacrifice of life to poetry, "the marvelous boy." "How soon that voice, majestic and elate, / Melted in dying murmurs! Oh! how nigh / Was night to thy fair morning!" Keats wrote in 1815 ("Oh Chatterton" 5–7). While absorbing the standard Romantic view of the precocious poet, he gave it a crucial twist: Chatterton didn't simply die too young, but he defined a particularly severe type of poet whose personality *did not develop*, for whom time of life and artistic achievement collapsed into a moment and thus denied the possibility of, for example, a Wordsworthian poet filling out his work with memory and identity. More darkly, he seems to have internalized Chatterton's suicide by arsenic, reviving from the latter's "February: An Elegy" ("Come, brooding Melancholy, pow'r divine"): "O, Autumn! bid the grape with poison swell," which, collapsing Keats's Autumn with his April, becomes in the "Ode on Melancholy" " … aching Pleasure nigh / Turning to poison while the bee-mouth sips," and "Can burst Joy's grape against his palate fine" ("Ode on Melancholy" st. 3). In the "Ode," moreover, poison belongs to a process of change without apparent agency and beyond the self to which the self must now be committed. The 19 March 1819 letter associates the independence of this process with "circumstance":

> Circumstances are like Clouds continually gathering and bursting—While we are laughing the seed of some trouble is put into the wide arable land of events—while we are laughing it sprouts is [*for* it] grows and suddenly bears a poison fruit which we must pluck. (*Letters* 228)

The false deleted opening stanza to the "Ode on Melancholy"—"Though you should build a bark of dead men's bones"—warns against construction of a monument as a means of finding melancholy; then, the new opening stanza warns against casting ritual spells in an effort to deny it; the solution is to attach oneself to evanescent intensities of life, which turns out to facilitate the *disclosure* of Melancholy, the goddess, and her human trophy (*Poems* 374). The poem, where aching pleasure turns to poison while the bee-mouth sips, elaborates the principle of "Fancy": "At a touch sweet pleasure melteth" (3). The "Ode" actually pursues a typical Keatsian poetics, in which the subject orchestrates movement and agency elsewhere, here by means of the senses stretched far from their origin in ego-consciousness. In Keats's reading of Chatterton the poet of the margins, visionary disclosure in poetry occurs at the moment the subject, having given itself over to the object, is sacrificed to it. "Ode on Melancholy" ends "the book … written against the book that tries to destroy it."

Hyperion: The Editors' (bad) Choice

> "Where is the book found?—in the book"—"the book … written against the book that tries to destroy it." (Jabes 99)

The way to an understanding of *1820*'s expression of its poetics is to invoke the vexed case of *Hyperion*'s inclusion with its contrastive poetics. The publishers' "Advertisement" to *1820* immediately raised the problem of the book's contents and structure in terms of their conflict with the poet: "[*Hyperion*] was printed at [Taylor and Hessey's] particular request, and contrary to the wish of the author. The poem was intended to have been of equal length with ENDYMION, but the reception given to that work discouraged the

author from proceeding" (*Poems* 736–37). Of this final sentence, Keats said with angry assertiveness that it was a "lie." Taylor and Hessey misinterpret Keats's objection to the inclusion as emerging from his personal hurt at the negative review of Endymion —a kind of *ad hominem* sympathy presumably designed for sentimental appeal to a reading public—and what became the century-long myth of the poet's vulnerability to criticism. This is not Keats's concern in *1820*. I am arguing that the inclusion of *Hyperion* instead intruded upon basic principles of the book's poetics that otherwise embrace all the other poems, taken separately and together, in mutual reinforcements and in order: no wonder Keats was irritated.

In the midst of Keats's letters exploring a poetic answer to the problem of palpable design (December 1817–February 1818), Keats remarkably sets out a poetics for *Hyperion* precisely opposed to that which he has been practicing and which eighteen months later he will disavow (to B. R. Haydon, 23 January 1818):

> the nature of *Hyperion* [as opposed to that of the just completed romance *Endymion*] will lead me to treat it in a more naked and grecian Manner—and the march of passion and endeavour will be undeviating—and one great contrast between them will be—that the Hero of the written tale being mortal is led on, like Buonaparte, by circumstance; whereas the Apollo in Hyperion being a fore-seeing God will shape his actions like one. (*Letters* 51)

For the earlier poem, and we might add, for the vast majority of 1818–1819 lyrics, circumstance, or the influx of events, experience, thoughts, fantasies, and the "sounds and syllables" of words, *lead on* the poet, from outside the borders of ego-consciousness and design. We feel in Keats the discomfort in his plan for epic poetry: a "march" that is "undeviating."

By contrast, almost all of his *1820* poems "deviate" in that they discover and then disclose their direction and momentum as they progress. In *Hyperion* the poet-god is all knowing and all shaping, with the outcome planned ahead of time and then executed; the outcome is the "art" of Milton, the imposition of "Grecian" or classically derived words, and inverted syntax. How utterly this differs from the Negative Capability formulation of just two weeks prior or the 3 and 19 February 1818 letters coming up a few weeks later!—Apollo's "Knowledge enormous makes a god of me" translates into an "irritable reaching after fact and reason" and stands at odds with the dispersive fecundity of a "delicious, diligent indolence" that wanders, dozes, whispers, spins and weaves into a democracy (*Hyperion* 3.113; *Letters* 43, 65). In this latter case a poet doesn't shape the making of a poem like a god but rather participates in poetic events, encouraging or facilitating events that may have their own momentum and direction and identity.

Following from the argument of this essay, Keats's resistance to his editors' decision to publish *Hyperion* stems from a consistent and powerful articulation of a poetics that the poet's try at an epic in the Grecian manner simply doesn't adhere to. The two September 1819 letters in which Milton is given up for Chatterton and "other sensations" has serious implications for the poem's inclusion in *1820*; its abandonment is a major decision of poetics (*Letters* 291–92). In the same letter announcing to Reynolds his composition of "To Autumn," that Chattertonian poem, he adds:

> I always somehow associate Chatterton with autumn. He is the purest writer in the English Language. He has no French idiom, or particles like Chaucer—'tis genuine English Idiom in

> English words. I have given up Hyperion—there were too many Miltonic inversions in it—Miltonic verse cannot be written but in an artful or rather artist's humour. I wish to give myself up to other sensations. English ought to be kept up. It may be interesting to you to pick out some lines from Hyperion and put a mark x to the false beauty proceeding from art, and one || to the true voice of feeling. (292)

The construction of *1820*, embracing "English" poems from "Robin Hood" to "To Autumn," and resisting the presence of *Hyperion* in the book clearly reflects his latest "Chattertonian" thinking in terms of both native English and the self-assembling character of the poetry. An "artist's humour," the intrusion of the artist-as-ego, he suggests, dissipates the primary intention of his poetry to invite the motions of the universe to enter by means of disclosures unmediated and un-discriminating, contacted by a true voice of feeling.

As scholars have noticed, *Hyperion* in fact contradicts or at the very least complicates its pretensions to an epic of undeviating march. The presence of Keatsian lyric poetics is one major indication of that contradiction which suggests a modern rethinking of epic requiring lyric at its core.[15] At several points lyric as intensity and evanescence erupts. Clymene describes with wonder and envy the poetic music of the new dispensation:

> … from a bowery strand
> Just opposite, an island of the sea,
> There came enchantment with the shifting wind,
> That did both drown and keep alive my ears.
> I threw my shell away upon the sand,
> And a wave fill'd it, as my sense was fill'd
> With that new blissful golden melody.
> A living death was in each gush of sounds,
> Each family of rapturous hurried notes,
> That fell, one after one, yet all at once,
> Like pearl beads dropping sudden from their string:
> And then another, then another strain,
> Each like a dove leaving its olive perch,
> With music wing'd instead of silent plumes,
> To hover round my head, … (2.274–88)

And later the young Apollo calls to Memnosyne:

> 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. (3.99–102)

These effusive, convincing formulations of poetic success look beyond the defeat of the Titans, but also past any Olympian hierarchy to the triumph of a new kind of lyric, at once facilitated and then assembling itself on its own, cutting-edge and fundamental to a world without hierarchy. The poet-god facilitates poetic events that live spectacularly beyond his making. Yet Keats's epic as an event of structure has no coherent means of incorporating such anti-monumental lyric, and it registers authentically its incoherence: Apollo dies not into godlike Olympian disinterestedness but with bodily convulsions and a shriek that enunciates at best an inexpressible authenticity in human, collective

possibility, perhaps more terrifying than but also more in keeping with Clare's characterization of the *1820* poet: "he launches on the sea without compass—& mounts pegassus [*sic*] without saddle or bridle as usual" (Matthews 153).

Of course, Keats may have initially chafed at *Hyperion*'s inclusion in *1820* because it was a fragment, because he had already revised it into *The Fall of Hyperion*, or because he reacted out of illness. But I have argued that something deeper was at stake for this poet who said that he couldn't exist without poetry. *Hyperion*, no matter its own success, its "grandeur" as some of its proponents called it, represented a poetics of monumentality that he had rejected and that the summation of the other poems in the book disavowed. *1820* we can read as an essay in poetics, an exploration from the trials of romance all the way to the triumphs of lyric as at once describing and performing self-organizing, and in that sense utopian, events. The book (minus *Hyperion*) that he perceives and admires dwells in possibility, in formal experiment, in the risk of the immediacy of sensation and half-knowledge that leads not inward to a privileged account of self but outward to a view of the world replicated in poetry that, to the extent available and independent of its facilitating consciousness, "deviates," generates, and discloses—in a word, radical Romanticism.

Coda: reception from early reviews and John Clare

I want to note briefly some early responses to Keats's book because they fit with the thesis here; the fact that the first reviewers and readers agree, despite their different convictions, that a poetics from the margin is this poet's primary interest, helps us appreciate that poetics itself is the organizing principle of the book. In his rebuttal to the *Quarterly Review*'s infamous attack on *Endymion* in 1818, J. H. Reynolds anticipates the nature of the critical battle over the *1820* volume to come: "the very passages which the *Quarterly Review* quotes as ridiculous, have in them the beauty that sent us to the Poem itself" (120). In *1820* Keats wrote works at once criticized and praised for being full of neologisms, with reviewers highlighting "irregularities," incommunicable "obscurities," "strange intricacies of thought" and "peculiarities of expression." One reviewer wishes that "he will only have the good sense to take advice, making Spenser and Milton his model of poetic diction instead of Mr Leigh Hunt" (229). Another reviewer criticizes Keats's language for the opposite: instead of coining new words or recovering old ones, Keats should write in the language of exchange in the nineteenth century. Or,

> It seems as if the author had … taken the first word that presented itself to make up a rhyme, and then made that word the germ of a new cluster of images—a hint for a new excursion of the fancy—and so wandered on, equally forgetful whence he came, and heedless whither he was going, till he had covered his pages with an interminable arabesque of connected and incongruous figures, that multiplied as they extended, and were only harmonized by the brightness of their tints, and the grace of their forms. (203)

But these instances of turbulence at the very site of the poem indicate the destabilization of poetic expectation that follow from the vision of the object's independence and the poem's self-assembly.

No early reader of *1820* captures in order to praise the experimental, exploratory nature of the work at the level of poetics, its formal resistances to a repressive cultural politics, than the radical poet Clare in a letter to their mutual publisher James Hessey (4 July 1820):

> The same fine flowers if I can express myself in the wilderness of poetry—for he launches on the sea without compass--& mounts pegassus [*sic*] without saddle or bridle as usual. & if those cursed critics could be shood out of the fashion with their rule and compass & cease from making readers believe a Sonnet cannot be a Sonnet unless it be precisely 14 lines & a long poem as such unless one first sit down to wire draw our regular argument & then plod after it in a regular manner the same as a Taylor cuts out a coat for the carcase—I say then he may push off first rate—but he is a child of nature warm and wild. (Matthews 153–54)

In the weave of this single heavily paratactic sentence the risk-taking explorations of poetic consciousness unfold into poems that do not conform to establishment and even artisanal rules of correctness and fit. And who, among the Romantic poets, is more endowed with compasslessness than Clare and thus more attuned to the same principle at work in another poet, Keats? Poetry featuring the independent movement and agency of objects and the other, poetry that self-assembles is poetry that "launches on the sea without compass." In this passage Clare echoes approvingly that principle from Keats's interpretation in *Sleep and Poetry* of the neoclassical heroic couplet as "musty laws lined out with wretched rule / And compass vile", and as a well-bridled and saddled "rocking horse" that the critics grossly misnamed Pegasus (*Sleep and Poetry* 195–96, 186). Clare intimates that in the later *1820* volume Keats's unmoored poems would rattle the cages of critics looking for the predictable and tamed, the "perfect fit," in poetry. In this sentence poetry and criticism have a necessarily implicated relationship. The critic wants the poet to be an artisan in full control of materials and design, not an explorer "straining at particles of light in the amidst of a great darkness" (*Letters* 230) and thus necessarily *using the materials at hand*. In a passage ventriloquizing Chatterton, Barry McSweeney echoing Clare sums up Keats's poetics and the poetic process for *1820*:

> I learned in Florence how to poison flowers
> & sheath this quill in absolute commitment
> to a language going north
> without maps. (70)

Notes

1. Fraistat's *The Poem and the Book: Interpreting Collections of Romantic Poetry* first brought Keats's *1820* volume to our attention.
2. Roe's *John Keats and the Culture of Dissent* and Marggraf Turley's, "Keats, 'To Autumn', and and the New Men of Winchester."
3. The essay opening this volume, by Michael Gamer and Deven Parker, argues convincingly that *1820*—its contents, ordering, and physical presentation—represents a successful authorial and editorial collaboration designed to enhance Keats's acceptability in the literary world, particularly following on the negative response of reviewers to *Endymion*. At the same time, I am arguing, there is another "book" in this book, one organized by poetics that clashes with the considerations driving its publication.

4. In an 1818 commentary on *Paradise Lost*, and in the way of Negative Capability, Keats wonders "What creates the intense pleasure of not knowing?" and brilliantly answers his startlingly intimate yet philosophical question: "A sense of independence, of power from the fancy's creating a world of its own by the sense of probabilities" (see *John Keats* 340).
5. I discuss the collections of Hunt and Reynolds in *Unfettering Poetry: The Fancy in British Romanticism*.
6. All quotations of Keats's poetry come from *The Poems of John Keats*.
7. Wolfson focuses beautifully at once on "Fancy" as a prominent "outlier" and "Ode on Indolence" as the striking absence in *1820*; both, I would add, are a powerful subliminal force in the poetics of the book.
8. "Together, *Lamia*, *Isabella*, and *The Eve of St. Agnes* combine a critique of society's mishandling of desire" (Cox 66).
9. A similar gesture of self-assembling disclosure occurs at the end of the short-line "Fancy":

   Let, then, winged Fancy find
   Thee a mistress to thy mind:
   Dulcet-eyed as Ceres' daughter,
   Ere the God of Torment taught her
   How to frown and how to chide;
   With a waist and with a side
   White as Hebe's, when her zone
   Slipt its golden clasp, and down
   Fell her kirtle to her feet,
   While she held the goblet sweet,
   And Jove grew languid.—Break the mesh
   Of the Fancy's silken leash;
   Quickly break her prison-string
   And such joys as these she'll bring.— (79–92)

10. *Isabella* at this point chimes with the upshot of "Robin Hood": "Let us two a burden try" (62).
11. As he says in an 8 October 1818 letter to J. A. Hessey: "That which is creative must create itself" (*Letters* 156.) Keats is committed to poems that self-assemble and move undirected by the ego as conscious instrument. In his playful "There was a naughty boy" written on and about the Scottish Tour, he describes a hero bewildered by what he finds on the journey: "He followed his nose to the north" (24–25). And of Claude's *Enchanted Castle* in "Epistle to Reynolds": "The doors all look as if they oped themselves" (49).
12. "What 'The poetics of decoherence and the imperfect fit' proposes is an aesthetics that is critical of the status quo" (Fisher 76).
13. "The concept of imperfect fit involves the relationship between consciousness and aesthetics. In this relationship a pattern of connectedness between an object and its image in the perceiver's perception can almost match, and where this near-match has the capacity to produce a more significant aesthetic effect than, for instance, a perfect match and identity, or a complete mismatch and distinction. That fit is part of the viewer or reader's production" (Fisher 79).
14. Curiously, a mid-nineteenth century publisher of cheap volumes of classic works, Milner and Sowerby, produced *Keats's Poetical Works* that featured engravings of Robin Hood and his clan, one as frontispiece and one on the title page, with captions from Keats's "Robin Hood." Aside from indicating that Milner and Sowerby were often taken with the Robin Hood tradition, their signaling Robin Hood as the frame of the volume suggests its perceived central importance for Keats's poetry.
15. See Leopardi's *Zibaldone* (4236) on the intimate connection between epic and lyric.

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