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Synopsis

This paper is an attempt to analyze some characteristics of Keats’s aesthetics through reading his “Ode on a Grecian Urn”, and point out their similarities with the linguistic theory by Hazlitt. Keats’s aesthetics contains two major points: one is what beauty should be, and the other is how to express it. They are closely related to his view on language and communication.

Conventionally, linguistic theories had been polarized by their emphasis on grammatical rules or practical usage. They are called prescriptive and descriptive grammar respectively. It was the former that flourished in the Romantic Era. Most of the dictionaries and grammars insisted that the usage of only the most polite sections of society should serve as a model of common usage. Language had to guard itself against the corrupting usage by the emerging middle and lower classes by formulating strict grammatical rules.

Hazlitt’s opinion on language is inconsistent with these dictionaries and grammars. It was common to suppose that the parts of speech related to different sorts of things or ideas. But in his A New and Improved Grammar of the English Tongue (1809), Hazlitt argues that the grammatical distinctions of words relate to our manner of speaking of them. What a word refers to can change in our actual discourse. His grammar is descriptive rather than prescriptive.

Keats’s view on language is similar to that of Hazlitt in thinking that there is no harmonious one-to-one set of correspondences between words and its referents. The meaning of poetical words is not tied firmly to the words themselves but yielded in the act of interpreting. Since words are of their very nature unspecific and ambiguous, there is no definitive interpretation. For Keats, who says, “What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth”, how to appeal to the reader’s imagination is far more important than any other poetical techniques. The words in his poetry encourage readers to imagine what they refer to. It is the crux of his aesthetics and differentiates him from other contemporary poets.
Synopsis

‘The Fall of Hyperion’ (1820) was written between July and September 1819, a fruitful year for John Keats. At the end of the year, when he had completed the odes, he still cherished the idea that he would make a second try at the Hyperion poem. In *Endymion* (1818) as well as ‘The Fall of Hyperion’, Keats manifests a strong affinity for Greek mythology; one consistent fascination of his is the problem of the encounter between gods and human beings, and the border between them. Neither in ‘The Fall of Hyperion’ nor in *Endymion* does he present any scenes where gods and men appear at the same time. It is only in his dream that Endymion can meet the goddess, Cynthia. In ‘The Fall of Hyperion’, however, Keats does write of a direct encounter between the poet-narrator and the goddess and priestess Moneta. After waking up from a sleep brought by drinking a mysterious juice, he finds himself in an old sanctuary, which is the temple of Saturn. This sanctuary is the only place where gods and men can encounter one another, and becomes the final mythological stage Keats had ever produced. I will follow three images of sanctuary, in ‘Sleep and Poetry’ (1817) and ‘Ode to Psyche’ (1820), as well as ‘The Fall of Hyperion’ to illuminate the changing relationship between Keats and his concept of Poesy.

In ‘The Fall of Hyperion’, Keats presents two different images of sanctuary. The sanctuary where the poet meets Moneta owes much to John Potter’s *Antiquities of Greece* (1697–99), which serves not only as a detailed description of Saturn’s ancient temple itself, but also as a statement of the central theme of ‘The Fall of Hyperion’. When Keats uses the image of sanctuary, it is always together with Poesy. Moneta, who shows the poet-narrator what a true poet is through her magnificent speech and by her own example, is the important figure for an exploration of Keats’s Poesy idea. To be a true poet, the poet is required to pass this old sanctuary, and go into another sanctuary. The aim of this paper is to investigate Keats’s different images of sanctuary and his ideal of Poesy.