

5 Fragments of an Interrupted Life Keats, Blanchot, and the Gift of Death

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When we speak, we are leaning on a tomb, and the void of that tomb
is what makes language true . . .

Maurice Blanchot, "Literature and the Right to Die"

The question of life in Romanticism is a double question. First, there is the understanding of life expressed within the works belonging to this period. Second, there is the life of Romanticism itself, its ability to survive its own historical moment, its ability to secure a significance for and in historical contexts at times radically different from its own. Our own contemporary critical context is one in which the latter question takes on a special urgency if the significance of Romanticism is to be more than what it may or may not have been for itself. Recognizing this context is to ask whether we can speak of a life for Romanticism that is not restricted to the expression of a concept of life specific to its time? Or, more pointedly, to what extent can we speak of a life for Romanticism that takes into account the question of its afterlife, its engagement with our modernity?

Of late, such questions have had little currency as the study of Romanticism turned towards an ever greater recovery of the historical specificity of the romantic period both with respect to its material existence and with respect to a more extensively detailed account of its social and cultural formation. This historical particularization of the past runs a risk already noted by Jan Patočka in an essay that first appeared in 1975: "Today the danger is that knowing so many particulars we are losing the ability to see the questions and their foundation." Given this orientation towards questions and their foundation, it is not surprising that Patočka sees history as a problem that may not be resolved; rather, he states, "it must be preserved as a problem."¹ Patočka's argument suggests that if history is not preserved as a problem, then history has no claim in the future, in short, it will have no life to live. To set these remarks within the frame of Romanticism is to argue for a sense of life that cannot be restricted to

the historical particularity of Romanticism. Does this then mean that the life of Romanticism is simply an effect of our time?

Alongside the tendency towards specificity and particularity, critical currents that have flowed through other literary periods have also made their presence felt within Romanticism as it receives the gift of renewed significance in the form of the pressing concerns of our modernity. That the significance of Romanticism, and other periods too, are in need of this gift should at least pose the question of whose life and whose history is in play when our modernity can be rediscovered across the past in such a consistent manner. Lost in this pursuit is the question of whether the past is willing to accept the gift of our modernity. But this is not a question the past is able to answer. Nor should it. Only the present has any say in this matter and no ideological criticism can escape this condition just as no attempt to recover the past according to the way it was can ever have meaning for anyone other than ourselves. Despite all assertions to the contrary, history is the foundation of a present displaced into the past even in its most material moments.

Where then is the life of Romanticism to be encountered when what appears to be ultimately at stake in our historical encounter with this period is our life? Posed in this way, the question seems to condemn us to an endless reiteration of our own significance as our modernity becomes the touchstone for how the past should look or at least be interpreted. But, if, as Walter Benjamin observed in a phrase first used in 1937 in his essay on Eduard Fuchs, "there is no document of civilization that is not also a document of barbarism",² we should be careful that our modernity, in short, our civilization, does not betray the barbarism it would redress through its increasingly hypercritical vocation. History offers no guarantee that what is past will possess the significance perceived by its own time. To expect as much is to expect that history is simply there for the grasping—as if it were an outstretched hand greeting us and welcoming us into a significance we can no longer experience. The promise offered by such a hand is that the living will be left holding precisely what they have brought to the encounter.

Keats's short poem, "This living hand now warm and capable", offers a reflection on this exchange in a way that addresses life within Romanticism not as something to be recovered or returned to the way it was but as a question of its afterlife:

This living hand now warm and capable
Of earnest grasping, would, if it were
In the icy silence of the tomb,
So haunt thy days and chill thy dreaming nights
That thou would wish thine own heart dry of blood,
So in my veins red life might stream again,
And thou be conscience-calm'd. See, here it is—
I hold it towards you.³

The poet's gift to the living dramatically offered at the end of these lines is not a gift we are allowed to accept or even grasp. The hand offered from the icy silence of the tomb seems far easier to accept if only in order to assuage a conscience disturbed by the prospect of the poet's death. To accept this hand in lieu of the hand held towards us at the end of the poem is to accept willingly that what this poem offers is an exchange. Unfortunately, this exchange requires a death from which the reader is not likely to recover if enacted according to the terms of this poem: our life-blood for the poet's icy silence. But why does Keats think that a reader would even wish such a thing never mind suffer the effect of such an unsettled conscience? Is the prospect of the poet's death capable of generating such guilt that a bad conscience must be the outcome? And must this guilt be so great that those who come after the poet would willingly give up their blood so that the poet may live again?

In these preliminary questions, the place of life within this poem already poses issues that touch on the significance of his poetry as well as the after-life of that significance. If death denies the living hand its most essential function—its earnest grasping—then the hand has itself been grasped by death. It is in this frozen form that the poet's hand affects our conscience. To give back life to this hand so that it may grasp again is a way to dispel its effect on us. But is it simply the poet's death that causes the reader to want to sacrifice a life so that the poet survives death?

What is first offered the reader of this poem is a hand denied the power to grasp once in the "icy silence of the tomb". So placed, the hand can no longer offer that equal exchange in which the living greet one another and confirm that they are indeed alive as the icy hand now lacks the ability to return the sensation we bring to it. The icy hand is, in effect, a refusal of reciprocity between the poet and the addressee of the poem.⁴ Is this the refusal that will have such an effect on the addressee of the poem? If so, it can only be a refusal originating in the expectation that the poet's hand will always return the warmth and sensation of the hand that seeks to grasp it. The sense of aura Benjamin describes in his essay "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" reflects the relation at the centre of this expectation: "The person we look at, or who feels he is being looked at, looks at us in turn. To experience the aura of an object we look at means to invest it with the ability to look back at us."⁵ What Benjamin examines in terms of looking underwrites the reciprocity anticipated in the grasping of hands: What is grasped is invested with the ability to grasp in return. But, when Benjamin explains further how this reciprocity occurs, an important difference arises between the experience of aura and the experience presented in this poem. Benjamin writes that the "experience of the aura thus depends on the transfer of a response characteristic of human relationships to the relation between humans and inanimate or natural objects" ("Motifs", 338). In Keats's poem, an assumed relationship between humans (the grasping of hands) has been interrupted by the prospect of death as the hand that was

living becomes an inanimate object. For the auratic experience to occur, the relation present in the grasping of hands must be transferred again to the poet's dead hand. It is at this point that Keats's poem provides a different account of the reciprocity at the center of Benjamin's notion of the aura. The human may provide the basis for such reciprocity, however, in "This living hand", it is precisely this basis that cannot be affirmed even if the addressee would wish it so. Not only does the icy hand of the dead poet refuse to reciprocate, but the price to be paid for infusing life into this hand also denies the reciprocity it promises to restore. The reader can only make the hand live again with the gift of their heart's blood. Reciprocity demands the death of the figure whose conscience prompts this gift. Before acquiescing to such a demand, we should at least pose the question: Why would we give our heart's blood for an exchange so unequal? Is it given under the illusion of a reciprocity? But what could affect us so much that we would willingly submit to this illusion?

What the tomb brings to this poem is not simply an inability to sense or grasp. The tomb also surrounds the hand with an icy silence from which there appears to be no escape because it will haunt our days and chill our dreaming nights. When paired with the pathos of Keats's own untimely silencing in 1821, it could be attractive to read this poem in terms of a career cut short. But can such a pathos unsettle a conscience so much that we, who are still living, would willingly give what sustains our life so that the poet's hand could still write more? Even supposing that such a desire is conceivable, there remains the question of whose significance is at stake in this transfer. Is it our sacrifice rather than an afterlife for the poet? And, if the latter, what hope would this afterlife entertain if not the hope that the poet's life is more than this fragmentary hand in which the poet has now been entombed? If so, our death will not be in vain. We will live through the poet as we die for a poetic life we will never read. Is that really what Keats extends to us in these lines? A refusal of reciprocity that can be overcome? A life that can survive its own death through the sacrifice of ours?

The questions posed by this hand have had an afterlife that Keats could only have anticipated. In *The Step Not Beyond*, itself a sustained reflection on death, Maurice Blanchot speaks of "a hand that extends itself, that refuses itself, that we would not in any way be able to grasp".⁶ The significance of these words for Keats's "This living hand" is only too obvious if we take the lines of this poem at their word. But does Keats, as Blanchot suggests, entertain a refusal so complete that we would not be able to grasp this hand *in any way*?

As much as we might like to reach out to the poet either with our heart's blood or with our hand, Keats allows no such moment to occur within the poem. Not even in the last line, when the poet holds a hand towards us, is there a clear sense that this hand should be grasped rather than simply looked upon. We are commanded to look, not to grasp: "See, here it is—/ I hold it towards you." The hand is held towards us so that it may be seen.

Furthermore, the only grasping present here is restricted to the spectacle of a poet holding a hand towards us in a way that stops short of letting us grasp it. By refusing any scene in which we are allowed to grasp the hand held towards us, this poem does not affirm the poet's part in any exchange with its addressee. Neither reciprocal grasping nor the gift of life in the form of our heart's blood occurs. Within the poem, the former is simply not possible within the "icy silence of the tomb", and the latter does not progress beyond something to be wished for. This refusal to affirm any reciprocity shifts attention away from whatever pathos is generated by the death of the poet and, instead, focuses attention on the role this wish plays within the poem.

The desire to exchange one's blood in order to bring the poet back to life arises as a result of the poet's hand being placed in the tomb. In this case, it is a desire derived from the literal reading of what the poet extends. The poet offers a hand that is only conditionally dead: "if it were cold / And in the icy silence of the tomb" (emphasis added). Only on the condition of this "if" can the exchange of the addressee's blood for the life of the poet be entertained. Thus, the reciprocity of hands grasping one another, the haunting of one's days and nights, and the desired transfer of the heart's blood are all effects of reading this "if" as if no condition had been stated. Only by erasing this "if" and literalizing the scene it introduces can the poet's hand be given the kind of haunting role associated with the dead. Is it from such an erasure and this consequent literalization that the disturbed conscience of the reader arises? A disturbed conscience certainly indicates a sense of having committed some wrong. But if such a sense springs from the death of the poet, how can it be said that there is any wrong here if this death is only hypothetically presented? Is a calm conscience only possible as a result of this misreading? Can the poet only then be given life as a consequence of this misreading?

Literalizing the hypothesis makes it easy to miss where the life of the poet remains invested in this poem. That it is not the poet's death that is at issue is clear as soon as it is recognized that there is no corresponding event for this death either inside or outside the poem. Instead of occurring as an event, death is presented as a dramatization located in a tomb for which there is, as yet, no occupant. The poet still lives. The framing lines of the scene in the tomb confirm this especially if the lines beginning with "if it were . . ." are bracketed so that this frame can be seen uninterrupted by an unsettled conscience: "This living hand now warm and capable / Of earnest grasping. . . . See, here it is—/ I hold it towards you".⁷ In distinction to the hypothesis of the poet's "death", what is extended at the end is the living hand of the poet. Freed from the haunting that stimulates a bad conscience, this hand emerges untouched by either a demand for reciprocity or even a sacrificial gift. The hand of the poet survives any desire on the part of the addressee or reader to view life as something to be given in order to attain significance. As a result, the "it" of these last two lines should not be

confused for the cold hand that interrupts the grasping of the “warm and capable” hand in the second line (“would, if it were”). To confuse these two hands is to entertain the possibility that the hand extended towards us in the last line is also the hand from the icy silence of the tomb. In this case, the poem would end with a hand that is simply dead, a hand certainly in need of resuscitation by our blood. It would also have literalized one more time the hypothetical scene that fails to fill the void of the tomb precisely because it remains hypothetical.

The extended hand of the poet is by no means dead. This recognition does not, however, determine in what way it is living. To this point, the only knowledge we have comes from the opening line when we are told that a living hand is capable of earnest grasping. In what way then does the hand extended in this final line remain capable of grasping? Keats draws no attention to this aspect except to say that a hand is held. The poet’s grasping is restricted to this “holding”, but what is held is neither the hand of another nor the hand of the addressee. “*I hold it towards you*” says no more. But when the poet grasps this hand, what the poet holds *in his hand* is nothing less than the hand by which the poet would be known as a poet. This helps explain why the poet’s grasping is not met by a reciprocal movement on the part of another as well as why the poem ends at this point. Since what the poet extends is already a held hand, it refuses what the normal extending of the hand may be expected to anticipate: an act of social greeting if not agreement between the poet and an addressee, the reader. In the place of such a greeting, the poet offers a hand that is already held.

The sense of “holding” with which this poem ends has both literal and figurative consequences. If we were to act upon this gesture and view it as something we should grasp, we will turn away from what this poem offers because we will have submitted the poem to a sense of grasping inimical to the one it offers. Recognizing what the poet offers, a hand that refuses itself as it extends itself, is to recognize the consequence that Blanchot remarks upon: It is a hand that “*we would not in any way be able to grasp*”. What makes this hand so difficult to grasp is not because it is in “the icy silence of the tomb”. The reason is quite the contrary. What the poem offers us is not so much the poet but the relation within which the poet always works, the relation in which the poet retains life against their own imagined death. In Keats’s poem, this life occurs in a withholding—and in the double sense suggested by this word. First, it occurs in a gesture of refusal—the hand is not offered for grasping but to be seen. A second withholding occurs as the poet offers the “living hand” of the poem’s opening line: This hand is held forth *with* the hand of the poet. The relation that informs this second sense of withholding (the poet holding a hand: “*I hold it towards you*”) indicates that what is offered in this poem is not the poet’s hand. Rather, the hand offered has a different relation to the reader than the dead hand from the icy tomb. The dead hand becomes an object

to be revived by the sacrificial gift of the reader’s blood. The hand which is held neither invites nor does it need such a gift and precisely because, in this poem, it is—and has always been—alive. Only a hand from the icy silence of the tomb, that is, a hand the poet can no longer hold, invites the sacrifice of the reader in a mistaken attempt to revive the poet so that poetry will flow once again from that hand. Keats’s dramatization of this misreading of his hand across seven lines of the poem indicates the extent to which what he is concerned with is less the poet’s death than the survival of the poet’s ability to hold, as his own, the hand with which the poet grasps. It is this hand that the reader is asked to look upon in the end and not the hand of the tomb’s icy silence. This final gesture withholds what is dramatized as desiring when in the tomb. The held hand is not given to be grasped by another. What Keats finally holds out is a hand that refuses both our life and our death as the condition of its significance and as the condition of its survival.

“This living hand” is not an isolated example of this refusal nor is it an isolated example of Keats’s reflection on the survival of life within his poetry. “Hyperion”, which Keats began to write just over a year before, also reveals in its mythical narrative the situation that occasions the refusal of the later poem. Defeated by the Olympian gods, Saturn, ruler of the Titans, is discovered in circumstances that parallel the icy silence of the tomb from the later poem. We are told that Saturn sat “quiet as a stone / still as the silence round about his lair” (I, l. 5). In addition, there was “not so much life as on a summer’s day” (I, l. 8), “a stream went voiceless by, still deadened more / By reason of his fallen divinity” (I, ll. 11–12), and, finally, “no force could wake him from his place” (I, l. 22). In another sense, Saturn’s state recalls “This living hand”. His death is not actual but imagined. However, the fear that such an imagined state is actual provides, in both cases, a central if misleading question in each poem. In Saturn’s case, this fear surfaces in the line “It seem’d no force could wake him from his place” (I, l. 22). For such a fear to take hold, the death-like depiction of Saturn must be read as more than an appearance—there must be no force that can wake him. But when these lines present the fear that there is indeed no such force, such a literalization is revealed as an appearance (“It seem’d no force . . .”). Saturn’s initial description through similes and the reflective aspects of the surrounding scene confirms such appearances as the imaginary character of his present state is kept within view.

This mode of description persists as Keats’s introductory description becomes more direct in the second stanza of the poem: “Upon the sodden ground / His old right hand lay nerveless, listless, dead, / Unscptred” (I, ll. 17–19). In these lines, it is not a matter of what the hand is like or how the surrounding scene reflects the hand. Rather, the description has become direct. On the sodden ground where it lies, the hand is “nerveless, listless, dead, / Unscptred”. But is the hand dead? In the context of “nerveless” and “listless”, it is evident that Saturn is not dead but unmoving. But, if “dead”

can come to mean still alive in these lines, what is the significance of this state within the poem? Is it just a figurative moment accidentally present in this setting? This question also affects how “unscptred” is to be read in these same lines? Does this adjective contain, secretly, the sense of a sceptre not yet recognized just as the word “dead” does not mean dead? Or does “unscptred” irrevocably define the current state of Saturn’s power? What unfolds in Book I of “Hyperion” is a question about which of these readings is definitive.

The initial focus on the status of the hand is not an isolated moment in “Hyperion”. Thea’s introduction and first approach to Saturn also occurs by means of the hand: “But there came one, who with a kindred hand / Touch’d his wide shoulders” (I, ll. 23–34). And immediately prior to addressing Saturn, her hands are again focused on:

One hand she press’d upon that aching spot
Where beats the human heart, as if just there,
Though an immortal, she felt cruel pain:
The other upon Saturn’s bended neck
She laid, and to the level of his ear
Leaning with parted lips, some words she spake. (I, ll. 42–48)

In mimicry of a human gesture, Thea places one hand upon her “heart” and the other on Saturn’s neck as if the beating of one could be transferred to the lifelessness of the other. This description of Thea already anticipates the transfer of the “heart’s blood” imagined by Keats in “This living hand”. In this case too, it is important to remember that this transfer is only possible as an effect of the poet’s figuration. Here, the “if it were” of the later poem is found in the “as if just there” of “Hyperion”. Both hold out the promise of what they figure but in both cases no transfer occurs. With Thea, the promise of such a transfer is displaced by words that come to recognize the impossibility of reversing Saturn’s fate. In the end, when Thea twice states “Saturn, sleep on” (I, ll. 68 and 712), it is clear that Saturn is to be left in his “dead” state. Thea not only pulls back from violating his “slumbrous solitude” (I, l. 69) but will not even extend her hand to open his “melancholy eye” (I, l. 70). To do so would be to provide a deceptive image of life resulting from the action of another.

Thea’s address to Saturn insists that life should also shine through the image, that life should grasp the image in which its meaning is invested. Here, the inability to secure such a grasping perpetuates the state in which Saturn is first found—a state Keats now calls “frozen” (I, l. 87). Even when Saturn finally stirs from this state and “lifts up his faded eyes” (unaided by Thea), Keats presents him as unable to grasp who he is. Instead, Saturn lets out a series of questions that all aim to define the life he now has but do so only by reference to a life no longer possessed:

O tender spouse of gold Hyperion,
Thea, I feel thee ere I see thy face;
Look up, and let me see our doom in it;
Look up, and tell me if this feeble shape
Is Saturn’s; tell me, if thou hear’st the voice
Of Saturn; tell me, if this wrinkling brow,
Naked and bare of its great diadem
Peers like the front of Saturn. (I, ll. 95–102)

The understanding of life implicit in these lines depends first on a life that is felt before it is seen. Acting upon this sense of life, Saturn twice commands Thea to look up. The first command is made in order to confirm what Saturn already knows: that the Titans are doomed. His insistence on seeing this doom would make him a spectator of his own downfall if only he were able to know who, in fact, Saturn is. The demands made by Saturn after he utters his second command to Thea reflect this issue. Thea is to tell him whether his shape, voice, and brow are those of Saturn. The uncertainty that prompts these questions is a consequence of the state Saturn now occupies. Saturn’s inability to understand this state is expressed as he questions how it occurred. He asks after its origin, after who brought it about and after how it was carried out. His inability to know the latter is framed as a matter of grasping. Saturn asks: “How was it nurtur’d to such bursting forth, / While Fate seem’d strangled in my nervous grasp?” (I, ll. 104–05). For Saturn to know who Saturn is, to know his shape, his voice, and so on, relies upon a grasp. However, Keats undercuts the grasping that assures who Saturn is by the assertion of “seem’d” and “nervous”. Saturn’s grasp only appeared to strangle fate. Moreover, that grasp is nervous, uncertain of itself. Since the grasping of Fate turns out to be a grasping more apparent than real, Saturn is now left to recognize not only his alienation from “all godlike exercise” (I, l. 107), but also from his ability to grasp himself: “I am gone / Away from my own bosom: I have left / My strong identity, my real self, / Somewhere between the throne, and where I sit” (I, ll. 112–15).

The sense of loss Saturn expresses—reinforced by his repeated command “search, Thea, search!” (I, ll. 116 and 121)—reveals how much he now understands his situation as if it were something that could be corrected when what has been lost is found. The past is here conceived as if the downfall of the Titans can be reversed, as if the present can offer hope of an exchange that will rectify the effect of an irreversible event. The similarity of this situation to the imagined sacrifice of the reader in “This living hand” emerges when the situation of Saturn is thought in terms of a past whose life must be revived. Saturn forcefully expresses the necessity at work here by his repeated use of “must” in the following lines: “Saturn must be King. / Yes, there must be a golden victory; / There must be gods thrown down” (I, ll. 125–27). The necessity in which Saturn believes is,

however, again undercut when Keats ends his speech with the uncertainty that this necessity attempted to redress.

The revival Saturn entertains finally focuses on his power of command. He asserts, "I will give command" but no sooner are these words given than he returns to the uncertainty that caused his prior commands to Thea. In order to give command there must be a Saturn to command. But such a Saturn is precisely what remains unknown in the last words of this speech: "Thea! Thea! Thea! where is Saturn?" (I, l. 134). At the moment when Saturn appears to have something to grasp (the ability to command), he has to command another to confirm that power. This issue, however, remains unrecognized by Saturn, who sees no difficulty in ceding his name to another and with it his ability to grasp the power of command. Is this why Keats subsequently makes Saturn's hands "to struggle in the air"? (I, l.136). Rather than holding to the illusion of possessing fate, these hands now only have air in which to exercise their power of grasping. Yet still the lure of illusion lives on. From the struggle of his hands in the air, Saturn pulls out the hope that his creative power still survives. He asks:

"But cannot I create?

Cannot I form? Cannot I fashion forth

Another world, another universe,

To overbear and crumble this to nought?

Where is another Chaos? Where?" (I, ll. 141-45)

Saturn's possession of these powers depends on the effect of rhetorical questions. As such questions take the place of an affirmative assertion, their effect relies upon the dismissal of the negative element they carry within themselves. But when Saturn is forced twice to ask after where he may find a chaos from which to form another world and universe, Keats again makes clear through this repetition that his hands alone are not enough to ensure the revival of the Titans.

Saturn's dependency on Thea in order to revive himself under the name of Saturn, as well as his reliance on the existence of another chaos, indicate the risk to which he is exposed if his past significance is to survive. The hope he gives depends on responses that Thea does not provide. The only sign that such hope may not be unfounded is given by Keats, who observes that Saturn's question about another chaos "found way unto Olympus, and made quake / The rebel three" (I, ll. 146-47). But what causes the "rebel three" to worry is precisely what allows the Titans to see hope in Saturn's words: the impossibility of knowing whether there is or is not another chaos. What Saturn offers the Titans is a hope whose power resides in a question that remains unanswered, a question whose meaning remains as ungraspable as the air in which Saturn's hands struggle.

Saturn's questions point to the difficult task of securing the survival of his significance in a world he can no longer grasp. The hope he offers is a hand extended to the Titans. But before any of the fallen Titans responds to this offer, the poem shifts focus to the Titan who has not yet lost his sovereignty: Hyperion, the Titan in whom Saturn's hope is embodied even though this sovereignty is far from secure.

Unlike Saturn who has experienced its loss, Hyperion is placed between possession and loss. In this state he gives voice to a series of apostrophes in which he describes himself as tormented by images he recognizes but without knowing why:

"O dreams of day and night!

O monstrous forms! O effigies of pain!

O spectres busy in a cold, cold gloom!

O lank-eared Phantoms of black-weeded pools!

Why do I know ye? why have I seen ye? why

Is my eternal essence thus distraught

To see and behold these horrors new?

Saturn is fallen, am I too to fall?" (I, ll. 227-34)

Just as Saturn gives to the Titans the hope of another world, Hyperion is afflicted by dreams of day and night that recall how "This living hand" presents its reader with an imagined cold hand to "so haunt thy days and chill thy dreaming nights". Hyperion is also so haunted but recognizes that what he is haunted by are forms, effigies, spectres, and phantoms. Though the line "spectres busy in a cold, cold gloom" evokes the hand "in the icy silence of the tomb", it also recalls both Saturn's reversal and the focus of Keats's expression of that reversal: Saturn's "unsceptred" hand. Hyperion and Saturn are only separated by the least of reversals as two letters, c and p, change place to herald the transformation of the last of the Titans. The *sceptre*, sign of Saturn's command now denied by his "unsceptred" hand, lives on only in the form of the *spectre* that affects Hyperion. While these spectres are known to Hyperion, he lacks all knowledge of why they are known. To know why is for Hyperion to know his relation to these images and therefore interpret whether his subsequent significance is already decided by Saturn's fall. Then, like Saturn before him, Hyperion will be "unsceptred" into a spectre of his former, real, self.

The threat faced by Hyperion is the threat the rest of the Titans have already experienced: to have fallen without the means to reverse their fall as well as without knowing why this fall took place. Hyperion's immediate response to the spectres he sees is to rush to the gate from which he emerges at dawn—as if he could escape the images whose meaning he is unable to interpret with certainty. His purpose is to advance and "bid old Saturn take

his throne again", in effect, a reversal of historical time. But this advance is not within his command. Keats writes:

Fain would he have commanded, fain took throne
And bid the day begin, if but for change.
He might not:—No, though a primeval God:
The sacred seasons might not be disturb'd.
Therefore the operations of the dawn
Stay'd in their birth. (I, ll. 289–95)

Unable to dictate dawn's appointed hour with his command, Hyperion remains caught within an ordering of time that may not be changed. The time in which history unfolds now becomes the barrier that prevents the sole Titan who has not yet been deposed from using his current state to reverse the fate of the other Titans. As what this reversal aims at is nothing less than a return of life to the Titans so that they may no longer lie listless and dead, then, it is time itself that Hyperion must displace if the Titans are to recover their former life. But, as the lines just cited indicate, time is precisely what Hyperion cannot displace. Instead, what occurs in Keats's narrative is a displacement of Hyperion. This occurs with the arrival of Coelus (in Greek, Ouranos, the forefather of the Titans) who commands Hyperion to travel to the earth where Saturn is now to be found. While Hyperion is there, Coelus will keep watch over the sun and the passage of time ("Meantime, I will keep watch over thy bright sun, / And of thy seasons be a careful nurse" [I, ll. 347–48]). Here, Hyperion, unable to displace time in order to fulfill his purpose, accepts Coelus' offer to take his place while he travels to where Saturn and the other Titans are gathered. With this substitution, time remains unchanged; however, for Coelus, it opens the possibility of a change that will reverse the fate of the Titans. Keats's presentation of this possibility reveals two conditions. First, such a change is only conceivable if Hyperion leaves his palace but not in the role assigned to him as a Titan god or at the time assigned to him for this role. The possibility of reversal thus requires a transgression of how he is known as a god. Second, if Coelus' opening question about how the Titans were deposed is recalled ("I, Coelus, wonder, how they came and whence" [I, l. 314]), then the desired reversal is the attempt to overcome an origin that permits neither itself nor its subsequent events to be explained. What Hyperion holds towards us is then an unexplainable event upon whose reversal hangs the continuing life of the Titans.

Why Hyperion's intervention must take place this way is explained by Coelus in the following words:

Now I behold in you fear, hope and wrath;
Actions of rage and passion: even as
I see them on the mortal world beneath,
In men who die.—This is the grief, O Son!

Sad sign of ruin, sudden dismay, and fall!
Yet do thou strive; as thou art capable,
As thou canst move about, an evident God;
And canst oppose to each malignant hour
Ethereal presence:—I am but a voice;
My life is but the life of winds and tides,
No more than winds and tides can I avail:—
But thou canst. (I, ll. 332–43)

As the savior of gods whose existence now takes on the image of death ("nerveless, listless, dead"), Coelus offers an Hyperion who has taken on aspects of the "mortal world beneath". In order to reverse their fate and regain the existence they had, the Titans must adopt the same actions and emotions that define those who inhabit the world in which they are now found. Coelus is emphatic on this point: "This is the grief." Above all else, the grief is that immortal life is subject to a change that imposes a finitude upon its continuance. The Titans do not actually die, but what is worse is that their life cannot be distinguished from the image of death. By being unscathed they have also become the shapes or spectres that cause Hyperion to try and escape his palace. As Coelus is powerless to rescue the Titans from their fate (he is "but a voice", he lacks even a shape or sensible form in which life can be figured), it therefore falls to Hyperion, who still possesses such a shape, to be the one who goes to the Titans as the example of the life they used to possess rather than the life that is no more than the image of death.

The example embodied by Hyperion underlines the extent that there are only two solutions to the fate now endured by the Titans. First, there is actual death which would release the Titans from their fate. However, this remains an impossibility. Immortals do not die. The narrative of Keats's poem also makes clear that such a release is not an option—and, indeed, can never be attained as the initial figurative descriptions of Saturn reveal. Failing such a release, there remains the hope of a reversal that affirms life as the form in which death, finitude, or change is concealed from its victims. With such a reversal, the Titans would survive their own "deaths". In the terms of the poem "Hyperion", this means, in effect, asserting a state of life in which death is continually denied. Hyperion offers the possibility of such a denial but, as Coelus remarks, this possibility takes the form of actions seen "in men who die". Here, the dilemma facing the Titans comes into focus. The hope of reversing the figurative death they now experience originates in actions that belong to those ("the men who die") for whom hope is directly related to their mortality. Hope arises in the face of an uncertain death, of a future cause about which one must wonder "how it comes and whence". With such uncertainty, mortals can always have hope despite the knowledge that death does not fail to come. What is only thinkable in mortal terms (and thus is properly mortal) becomes the Titans' only recourse if they are to regain the "scathed" life that forms their past.

Coelus' speech and Hyperion's departure not only bring Book I to an end but they also define why Hyperion's appearance to the assembled Titans at the end of Book II does not have its anticipated effect. The description of the Titans as "scarce images of life" (II, l. 33) at the beginning of this book reiterates its central problem: the recovery of a relation between life and image in which Saturn may find again what he calls "my strong identity, my real self". As the four speeches which precede Hyperion's appearance make clear, the Titans, like Coelus, cannot explain the cause of their present state. The first speech by Saturn is explicit in this regard. Oceanus, in response, offers an explanation that becomes no explanation at all. He asserts, "we fall by course of Nature's law" (II, l. 181) and then goes on to provide a narrative that proceeds from chaos to the emergence of light and the appearance of life. Within this narrative, no god has precedence; instead the law that organizes life is beauty: "'tis the eternal law / That first in beauty should be first in might" (II, ll. 28-29). The new gods reign because of their beauty. The truth of the law presented by Oceanus is followed by a silence that Keats allows to be broken by the least "regarded" of the Titans, Clymene. Against Oceanus's law, Clymene simply asserts "all my knowledge is that joy is gone" (II, l. 253) and then proceeds to recount the story of how she heard "a blissful golden melody" whose sounds contained for her "a living death" (II, ll. 280-81). This melody is subsequently replaced by a voice "sweeter than all tune" that cried the name of Apollo, yet despite its sweetness the voice and the name cause only pain. Against Clymene's simple knowledge and narrative, Keats makes the "overwhelming voice" (II, l. 303) of Enceladus rise. Enceladus immediately dismisses both Oceanus and Clymene as "over-wise" and "over-foolish" respectively (II, ll. 309-10). This dismissal leads to a speech defined by its anger and desire for "scathing war". Enceladus not only speaks in terms of the actions of "men who die", as Coelus noted previously of Hyperion, but this speech serves as the introduction to Hyperion's arrival before the Titans. Hyperion thus arrives in a setting that has offered two conflicting forms of knowledge that offer no change to the status quo for the Titans as well as a dismissal of knowledge through action that seeks to reverse that state. The ordering of these speeches gives precedence to the words of Enceladus and therefore to violence as a means of restoring the life the Titans previously knew. As a result, gone is the search for reason, gone is the sense of a law ordering history, and gone is Clymene's sense of golden melody as pain—all of which seek adaptation to the Titans' current state. In their place, Hyperion arrives as if to confirm what Enceladus argues for.

Hyperion's presence is marked by reflected light as "a pallid gleam" falls on Enceladus' "features" (II, l. 349). The gleam is repeated across the faces of all the Titans. Yet, the effect of Hyperion's light, despite the more splendid gleam it finds reflected in Saturn, is not to affirm the words of Enceladus or even the purpose that brought Hyperion to the fallen Titans. From his position above the Titans, Keats tells us that what Hyperion views is "the

miserable his brilliance had betray'd / To the most hateful seeing of itself" (II, ll. 369-70). The "scarce images of life" that defines the state of the Titans at the beginning of Book II is not revived by the light of Hyperion who is himself dejected at the "hateful seeing" his light reveals. Hyperion stands in silence. He makes no bid to Saturn to take his throne again. At this point, Keats tells us "Despondency seiz'd again the fallen Gods / At sight of the dejected King of Day / And many hid their faces from the light" (II, ll. 379-81). The Titans are seized as the light of Hyperion fails to bring them back to their former life. This is also why, in the last lines of Book II, when Enceladus and three other Titans call out the name of Saturn, and Hyperion answers by repeating the name, there is no joy in Saturn's face—not even when all the Titans call his name. This name, Keats reminds us, issues from a hollow throat. Saturn is a spectre named by spectres, by images that scarcely possess life but at the same time are not dead.

As images the Titans endure a death that is not what it names—what Clymene calls a "living death". Like the name Saturn, death also rings hollow for the Titans. At the same time, they are grasped by a death which, as indicated by the scene at the end of Book II, resists revival even when exposed to a life such as Hyperion's, a life that has not yet succumbed to their "living death". His life, in effect, their former life, is not enough to revive what is now past. The light Hyperion gives in order to revive this past and, in so doing, uncouple their present mode of living from death, only affirms the separation they have undergone from a life in which death had no direct meaning. As the one who would revive the Titans from their present state, Hyperion takes on the role offered to the addressee of "This living hand". In both instances, the possibility of revival depends on the denial of a death that is not a death—like Saturn's, Keats's hand is only imaginably dead ("This living hand . . . if it were cold / And in the icy silence of the tomb"). In the later poem, this denial occurs when the addressee, haunted by a hand mistakenly understood as being in the grasp of death, responds with the offer of life as a means of erasing this mistake so that the poet's hand may continue to write without the impediment of death. In the poem "Hyperion", this denial takes the form of overcoming a life that looks like death so that the Titans may be returned to their former immortality. In both cases, what is at stake is a life unaffected by the appearance of death. Both the addressee of "This living hand" and Hyperion would promise life as a denial of death so that death and life remain exclusive of each other (this is why the addressee's heart will be dry of blood; by dying the addressee insists upon this exclusivity). With this promise, the past would be rescued from its fate through the assertion of life over death.

Keats's interruption of his address in "This living hand" as well as the ending he gives to Book II of "Hyperion" unsettles the conscience that would insist upon any such cliché. Although the promise of life as something that can be given back so that death can be reclaimed in a meaningful way for those who survive has a strong presence in both poems, this promise is

refused in each case. This refusal prevents the denial of the only death that life knows: the death that is not a death but rather is grasped on every occasion by the hand that lives . . . this living hand.

To understand what death is grasped by such a hand, it is again instructive to turn to Maurice Blanchot and, in particular, the following passage from his essay, "Literature and the Right to Die":

My speech is a warning that at this very moment death is loose in the world, that it has suddenly appeared between me, as I speak, and the being I address: it is there between us as the distance that separates us, but this distance is also what prevents us from being separated, because it contains the condition for all understanding. Death alone allows me to grasp what I want to attain; it exists in words as the only way they can have meaning. Without death, everything would sink into absurdity and nothingness.⁸

Blanchot speaks of death as not just a distance that separates but a distance necessary to all understanding. It is therefore not a simple end or negation whose lifelessness haunts the living with absurdity and nothingness. Such an understanding of death will always lead to another Hyperion. But, as the end of Book II underlines, what Hyperion brings as promise is what causes separation to be recognized—Hyperion's light "betrays" the Titans' misery to the "most hateful seeing of itself". The "life" Hyperion promises is reflected back as what separates the Titans from themselves and gives them this separation as understanding, in particular, the understanding that the death that separates cannot be separated from their life, no matter how immortal. Here, Keats's choice of the fall of the Titans for this projected poem takes on special significance: As immortals, the Titans cannot die, but at the same time this immortality, like life, is incapable of understanding its significance without death. Such understanding is what the living hand of Keats's poem is capable of giving. This hand does not need to die in order to attain the significant life conferred by the reader. As the poem demonstrates, such a life is the product of an illusionary sacrifice. In contrast, its detached last sentence—which itself holds out a final detached phrase towards us—runs counter to such an illusion: "See, here it is—/ I hold it towards you." What is held at the end of this sentence is the poet's detached hand. Lest this seem too gruesome an ending for a poet such as Keats to have ever imagined (although having our hearts dried of blood has its own gruesome character), it should be remembered that in poetry no hands are actually severed (that would indeed be a misreading to haunt our days and nights) just as no heart is actually drained dry of all its blood. What is held in this image is a hand detached from the grasp of another. The poet's hand holds a hand defined only by its ability to grasp. The detachment of this hand, which cannot be wished away because it is there for us to see in the final lines of the poem, offers a living hand in its full significance. The hand

lives in a detachment that has little to do with death as the negation of life.⁹ Although grasping nothing, it still remains capable of an "eternal" grasping as the opening lines of "This living hand" state.

In this detachment, Keats's infamous negative capability can be discerned. Just as this negative aspect retains a capability despite being in "uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts", so too is this hand capable of a grasping despite having neither another hand nor object to grasp. The hand's negative capability is the eternal openness of its grasp. It is not that we are uncertain about what it grasps (that is simply negativity without capability). Rather, it is the detachment of this grasping from any other hand or object that Keats holds towards us. To recall the earlier passage cited from Blanchot's *The Step Not Beyond*, it is this detachment that "*we would not in any way be able to grasp*" because to grasp it is to deny its detachment. Moreover, to view this detachment *as if it were* capable of being isolated in something like the "icy silence of the tomb" is to literalize it in a way that keeps detachment separate from life (so that one may be exchanged for the other). Keats emphatically does not do this. The potential gift of life, the blood of the addressee given to assuage a conscience, is not just refused but is supplanted by a simple gesture in which the significance of the hand is extended. This hand—warm, living, capable of earnest grasping—establishes the distance between the poet and the reader and, in so doing, it establishes, as Blanchot points out, the condition for understanding. In the language of Blanchot, this separation is nothing less than death but not a death that is the opposite or negation of life. Rather, it is a death that belongs to life as the condition that preserves its ability to attain meaning while preventing it from sinking "into absurdity and nothingness". A life to which death belongs is a life capable of meaning. In contrast, a life that is merely immortal, such as the one the Titans seek to regain, negates this capability as it is a life without the uncertainty that belongs to death—the uncertainty of the event that the meanings we grasp at attempt to overcome, reverse, even exchange our life for. To recognize this uncertainty is not to recognize something that merely negates life (immortality does that too). It is to recognize that the death that separates can only be thought of without certainty even as one understands that it is certain. This is the life grasped by the detachment of Keats's hand. A remark from another work by Blanchot, from *The Space of Literature*, summarizes the death that articulates this life: "No one doubts death, but no one can think of certain death except doubtfully."¹⁰ What survives is the grasping of death's detachment as that which remains living, warm, and capable because it is only in life that this grasping is capable of being experienced.

Blanchot's articulation of death with literature provides another understanding of the "living death" Clymene recalls during her speech in Book II of "Hyperion". This "living death" is heard in what she describes as a "blissful golden melody". The sense that the poetic is at issue in this melody becomes stronger still when, despite her attempt to stop her ears and avoid

hearing a music that refuses to distinguish life and death, joy, and grief (II, l. 289), she hears a voice "sweeter, sweeter than all tune". The voice names the young god Apollo who will be the subject of the unfinished Book III of "Hyperion". Clymene is unable to escape this voice. She flees but it follows her. In this respect, Clymene typifies the Titans who are unable to escape separation from their previous "sceptred" state. Even Oceanus' acquiescence to a law of nature repeats this flight as such a law is nothing more than a cycle of histories in which the fall of the Titans will be forgotten so that it may occur again and again as each generation recalls its history as a life defined by its immortal denial of death. It is into this history that the name of Apollo is first introduced. That a Titan flees from a name given by a voice that is even sweeter than the melody in which a living death is heard should already indicate that Keats's Apollo is to be distinguished from the Titans' desire to assert life over the detachment of death.

"Hyperion" begins with the poet calling upon the Muse to leave the Titans in their "alternate uproar and sad peace" (III, l. 1). What follows is thus introduced as a song that will not tell of such alternation. Instead it tells of the meeting of Mnemosyne and Apollo, of the memory of the past and the figure who is described as "a new tuneful wonder" (III, l. 67). Apollo's new tunefulness is given through his attunement to Mnemosyne. Not only does he know her name without knowing her (III, l. 82) but he knows that what he knows is already known to her:

"Mnemosyne!

Thy name is on my tongue, I know not how;
Why should I tell thee what thou so well seest?
Why should I strive to show what from thy lips
Would come no mystery?" (III, ll. 82-86)

Apollo sees no distinction between his new tunefulness and the memory of Mnemosyne but this is not to say that tunefulness alone is sufficient. Apollo is afflicted by a melancholy that his tunefulness cannot assuage. For him, only Mnemosyne can offer release from this melancholy by "point[ing] forth some unknown thing" (III, l. 95). Apollo's question, "Are there not other regions other than this isle?" (III, l. 96), indicates that what is unknown is only unknown to him. With this question, Keats plainly makes Apollo's tunefulness dependent on memory if it is to ascend to its full significance—which is as much to say that the merely beautiful cannot attain this significance alone. To depend on Mnemosyne is to depend on memory and to depend on memory is to depend on a past that remains detached from the present. It is the knowledge of this past that Apollo recognizes as the sole element that determines his significance as a god. This recognition appears in the words that Apollo addresses to Mnemosyne:

Mute thou remainest—mute! yet I can read
A wondrous lesson in thy silent face:
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,
And deify me, as if some blithe wine I had drunk,
And so become immortal. (III, ll. 111-20)

When Keats describes the effect of this knowledge of the past on Apollo, it becomes clear, however, that what Apollo sees as deification and immortality is not exactly the assertion of life over death that the Titans were seeking to recover:

Soon wild commotions shook him, and made flush
All the immortal fairness of his limbs;
Most like the struggle at the gate of death;
Or liker still to one who should take leave
Of pale immortal death, and with a pang
As hot as death's is chill, with fierce convulse
Die into life. (III, ll. 124-30)

Two similes convey the effect of Mnemosyne's knowledge on Apollo. The struggle at the gate of death described in the first simile is presented as what this effect is "most like"—as if there could be no greater likeness. However, the second simile supersedes this; it is more like such an effect ("liker still") than what has just been described as "most like". The struggle against death gives way to a demand that one "should take leave / Of pale immortal death". The repetition of this word "immortal" in such close proximity to the line that reserved its use for what is most godlike does not leave this earlier sense preserved as something to be opposed to death. What first confers this sense of immortality now comes to demand a separation, a taking leave from a death that is immortally restricted to marking the end of life. Instead, and as an effect of the knowledge Mnemosyne offers, death becomes the means by which life occurs as the wild commotions occasioned by this knowledge "die into life". For such a dying into life to happen, death cannot simply be an event that marks the limit of life—as if it were only something beyond the experience of life, as if mortality and the separation it enforces were nothing more than an unforeseeable interruption to our immortality. The Titans define their life in terms of reversing this interruption, but Apollo is presented as one for whom such a separation is clearly placed within life. To "die into life" says as much. Dying is not separable from life but then, this also means that death, as separation,

is how life avoids absurdity and nothingness. Life tells the history of this separation as is made clear by Keats's description of the knowledge Apollo receives from Mnemosyne. What she offers is memory, the past, a knowledge defined by its separation from us, a knowledge which, despite being separated in the past lives on *as* knowledge because of this separation. Yet it is not a knowledge that can take the place of the separation it requires—no more than the addressee of "This living hand" can take the place of the poet in the tomb or the Titans the place of the new gods on Olympus. To do so is to deny this separation, this detachment that is never in fact dead but is always, *as it were*, alive and within the poet's grasp. To misread this grasp is also an inevitable consequence as what Keats holds towards us can also be mistaken for a hand warm and capable of earnest grasping. But to grasp the detachment Keats holds towards us is another matter because it means preserving the moment at which not only Apollo dies into life but also the space with which both "This living hand" and "Hyperion" end. In the one, a silence more unsettling than the icy silence of tomb and, in the other, a shriek that interrupts the gesture of a silent Mnemosyne, her arms raised "as one who prophesied". Is this the prophesy of one whose knowledge of the past foretells what the future holds? Is that future the rise and fall of the Olympian gods? Or is it the rise and fall of immortality itself as it too dies into life? All that breaks the silence of this prophesy is Apollo's shriek—the sound that testifies to a life that affirms the silent separation from which it is at once apart and inseparable.

There is perhaps no other point at which Keats's "Hyperion" could have broken off without compromising itself. It has already foretold the history Keats does not return to elaborate, at least not in this version. When he does return to this subject, in "The Fall of Hyperion. A Dream", barely three months after abandoning Apollo at the moment he shrieks, Keats composes lines that have long been compared to "This living hand". At the end of the first stanza of Canto 1, Keats writes: "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" (16–18). Is it too much to ask whether the silence and separation prophesied by this rehearsal already performs the condition of understanding condensed in "This living hand"? For who is the fanatic if not the addressee willing to dry the heart of blood so that the poet may live, and who is the poet if not the one who holds on to the detachment that gives life even as it dies? In either case, is it not poetry that proleptically rehearses the separation from which both these possibilities arise in a death always experienced *avant la lettre*?

The articulation of Blanchot with Keats suggests an anachronism that is far from current tendencies to historicize Romanticism. Certainly, in such tendencies there is a desire to present the specific life pertaining to this period as if we could do more than lean on the tomb that is not only the past of Romanticism but also our past. To enter this tomb in the guise of restoring to Romanticism a life that was once its own suggests, at the very

least, a critical conscience ill suited to the present in which our experience and life has no choice but to exist. Does the past so haunt our days and chill our dreaming nights that we would fill the void it has created with our histories? Our historical recovery of Romanticism has no significance for Keats; it is an evasion of both the life of Romanticism and the life we share through our detachment to Keats. We may hold our histories out to Keats—see, here they are—in the hope that what survives Romanticism belongs to a life no longer warm and capable of a grasping that we would not be able to grasp in any way. If this is an anachronism then history has drained its own heart dry of blood while turning its back on those for whom history is alone significant not as an answer to what the past was but as the problem of what the past is, its life. The gift of death. "See, here it is—I hold it towards you."

NOTES

1. Jan Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, trans. Erazim Kohák (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1996), 118.
2. Walter Benjamin, "Eduard Fuchs: Collector and Historian", in *Selected Writings*, vol. 3, eds. Howard Eiland and Michael Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2002), 267. The same phrase is better known from its repetition in Benjamin's posthumously published theses on history (Thesis VII, "On the Concept of History", in *Selected Writings*, vol. 4, 392).
3. Keats's poetry is cited from *The Poems of John Keats*, ed. Jack Stillinger (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1978).
4. Jonathan Culler, in remarks on this poem in "Apostrophe" (*The Pursuit of Signs* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1981], 153) speaks of a "sinister reciprocity" at work in the figuration enacted in this poem. This reciprocity, which adheres to Paul de Man's claim of the symmetrical structure present in all tropes, derives its sinister effect to the extent such reciprocity is itself literalized—in effect making good on its threat so that it may always threaten. Culler's insistence on this poem as a work aware of how it performs a movement between mystification and demystification relies heavily on an empirical observation, "the poem baldly asserts what is false . . . we can see no hand" (154), for the source of the demystification it holds towards us. To know from the beginning that there is no real hand to grasp suggests that what is at stake in this poem may not be explainable by asserting the mystifications that underwrite the symmetry at work in critical demystification.
5. Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire", in *Selected Writings*, vol. 4, eds. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2003), 338.
6. Maurice Blanchot, *The Step Not Beyond*, trans. Lycette Nelson (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), 106.
7. William Waters has drawn attention to the importance of seeing this frame in *Poetry's Touch* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2003), 143. Yet, despite the recognition of what he calls "this skeletal version of the poem's syntax" Waters still emphasizes a haunting effect derived from the excised lines—he writes that the skeletal version "fails to show the skeleton in the poem . . . the chilling effect clearly depends on having what is omitted here . . . present" (146–47).

Waters dismisses as “logical and syntactic incoherence” the possibility that Keats is holding towards us “the merely hypothetical hand he has imagined would be (but is not) in the tomb”. Why the hand that is not in the tomb has to be “merely hypothetical” is not adequately accounted for. In place of such an account, Waters claims that the pronoun “it” in the final line occurs within “an anaphoric muddle” (147). For Waters, this muddle permits the poem to haunt because we cannot tell if the hand Keats holds towards us is living or dead. In what follows, this recourse to ambiguity of meaning with which Waters grasps Keats’s hand in this poem is read as being beside the point. It is not a question of whether the hand is living or dead or whether we cannot tell the difference but a question of how a death other than the one supposed to occupy the void of the tomb is alive in these lines.

8. Maurice Blanchot, “Literature and the Right to Die”, in *The Part of Fire*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1995), 323–24.
9. Hegel, in the Preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977), also describes death as possessing a tremendous power that is not to be negated by life. In a phrase that Slavoj Žižek has made famous, Hegel speaks of the necessity of “looking the negative in the face and tarrying with it” (19). Yet, when Hegel also speaks of converting the negative into being, he indicates the extent to which this tarrying with the negative submits death to mediation by the life of spirit. What Hegel refuses is the “abstract immediacy” of death, its utter difference to life, but what he also refuses is the kind of detachment that invites mediation even as it withholds itself from such mediation—precisely the detachment at work in both Keats and Blanchot. In contrast, Hegel seeks to exert “the greatest strength” in order that death may be “held fast” (19). Hegel’s tarrying is a form of grasping death rather than an acceptance of its capability for grasping.
10. Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln, NE: U of Nebraska P, 1982), 95.

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