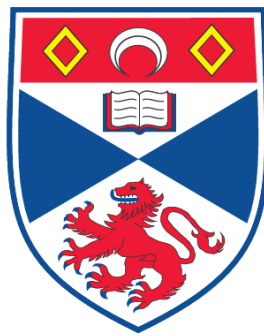


**PARADOXICAL SOLITUDE IN THE LIFE, LETTERS, AND
POETRY OF JOHN KEATS, 1814-1818**

John Theobald

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St. Andrews**



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**Paradoxical Solitude in the Life, Letters, and
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John Theobald

*A thesis presented for the degree of
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University of St Andrews
School of English

April 2009

ABSTRACT

This thesis proposes two distinct but connected ideas: that John Keats's idiom of friendship was haunted by "sequestered" longings and that he ultimately valued specific, one-on-one partnerships as a basis for his poetical character. The Introduction places the thesis within its critical context and outlines "paradoxical solitude," a concept the poet expressed by joining a "kindred spirit" in a wilderness retreat in "O, Solitude."

I begin by examining the evolving role of solitude in Keats's literary predecessors (Chapter I). I then trace the development of ideas of creativity and solitude from his 1814-1815 verse, including his first association with a coterie and the influence of Wordsworth (Chapter II). Building on these findings, I explore the poet's introduction to the Hunt circle in 1816, assessing his relationships with its members and their overstated roles in the production of *Poems* (Chapter III). I then discuss how Keats regarded the composition of *Endymion* in 1817 as a poetic "test," specifically tailored to reinforce his identity as a solitary poet (Chapter IV).

I contend that Keats engaged in a dialogue of independence with Reynolds, adapted the theories of Hazlitt, and restlessly travelled throughout England as a means of rejecting the highly social periods of 1818 (Chapter V). I then consider the creative gains of his northern expedition with Brown in the summer of 1818. I argue that Keats exaggerated his development into a "post-Wordsworthian" poet, positioning himself outside both the coterie's sphere and the reach of *Blackwood's* criticism, and inspiring the theme of *Hyperion* (Chapter VI).

In closing, I analyze Keats's advice to Shelley to be a selfish creator of his poetic identity. Only through paradoxical solitude, I argue, was Keats able to construct the poetic identity that led him to compose the poems on which his fame rests in the 1820 volume.

Declarations

I, John Owen Theobald, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 75, 000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

I was admitted as a research student in September 2005 and as a candidate for the degree of PhD in September 2006; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between 2005 and 2009.

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Abbreviations

Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations of Keats's poetry are from *The Poems of John Keats*. Miriam Allott (ed.). London, 1970.

Within the text, quotations from Keats's letters are referenced by the volume and page number; in the footnotes, however, they are abbreviated as *L* to avoid confusion with other references.

| | |
|------------------|---|
| Barnard | John Barnard, <i>John Keats</i> . Cambridge, 1987, repr. 1993. |
| Bate | Walter Jackson Bate, <i>John Keats</i> . Cambridge, Mass. 1963, repr. 1992. |
| <i>CH</i> | <i>John Keats: The Critical Heritage</i> . G.M. Mathews (ed.). London, 1971. |
| Chatterjee | Bhabatosh Chatterjee, <i>John Keats: His Mind and Work</i> . Calcutta, 1971, repr. 2001. |
| Cox | Jeffrey Cox, <i>Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School: Keats, Shelley, Hunt and their Circle</i> . Cambridge, 1998, repr. 2004. |
| <i>FH</i> | Nicholas Roe, <i>Fiery Heart: The First Life of Leigh Hunt</i> . London, 2005. |
| Gittings | Robert Gittings, <i>John Keats</i> . London, 1968, repr. 1979. |
| <i>JK&CD</i> | Nicholas Roe, <i>John Keats and the Culture of Dissent</i> . Oxford, 1998. |
| <i>K-SJ</i> | <i>Keats-Shelley Journal</i> . |
| <i>K&H</i> | <i>Keats and History</i> . Nicholas Roe (ed.). Cambridge, 1995. |
| <i>KC</i> | <i>The Keats Circle: Letters and Papers 1816-1878</i> . Hyder Edward Rollins (ed.). 2 vols. Cambridge, Mass., 1948. |
| <i>L</i> | <i>The Letters of John Keats 1814-1821</i> . Hyder Edward Rollins (ed.). 2 vols. Cambridge, Mass., 1958. |
| <i>LH: LPP</i> | <i>Leigh Hunt: Life, Poetics, Politics</i> . Nicholas Roe (ed.). London, 2003. |
| Motion | Andrew Motion, <i>Keats</i> . London, 1997. |
| <i>OED</i> | <i>Oxford English Dictionary</i> . |

- SiR* *Studies in Romanticism.*
- Severn *Joseph Severn: Letters and Memoirs.* Grant F. Scott (ed.). Aldershot, 2005.
- Sperry Stuart M. Sperry, *Keats the Poet.* Princeton, 1973, repr. 1994.
- Stillinger *The Poems of John Keats.* Jack Stillinger (ed.). London, 1978.
- Walker Carol Kyros Walker, *Walking North with Keats.* London, 1992.
- Ward Aileen Ward, *John Keats: The Making of a Poet.* Toronto, 1963, rev. 1986.

INTRODUCTION

Grouping Keats:

Recent scholarship

Keats's concept of friendship pervades both his life and his writings. Although Ronald A. Sharp, in his essay "Keats and Friendship," argues that "no one has studied the place of friendship in Keats's life and work as a whole," Nicholas Roe's *John Keats and the Culture of Dissent* (1997) and Jeffrey Cox's *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School* (1998) address this vital point of intersection.¹ Both scholars explore the political connotations of poetic bonds of friendship, focussing on Keats's engagement with the larger outside world through the circle led by Leigh Hunt. These studies locate the poet within the Cockney School, proposing that Keats's creative nature was charged by his membership of, and interaction with, this coterie.

I challenge this interpretation by arguing that Keats's poetic efforts were in fact stultified, interrupted, and distorted by his interaction with groups.² He sought instead to establish a poetic character that would grant him the necessary authenticity to achieve his ambitious goals. Keats defined himself as a poet by contrasting his independence against a group identity. This distinction, which he maintained

¹ Ronald A. Sharp, "Keats and Friendship," *The Persistence of Poetry: Bicentennial Essays on Keats*, ed. Robert M. Ryan and Ronald A. Sharp (Cambridge, Mass., 1998). 67-8. He adds: "To an extent virtually unparalleled, the story of his life and work is indeed a story of friendship." 66.

² I adopt Cox's definition of a group, an "intersubjective collectivity always in the process of being imagined," to which membership requires "an act of willed identification." 6. He clarifies that "[p]airs do not comprise groups." 5.

throughout his career, is exemplified in his 23 August 1819 letter to his publisher, John Taylor:

You will observe at the end of this if you put down the Letter ‘How a solitary life engenders pride and egotism!’ True: I know it does but this Pride and egotism will enable me to write finer things than any thing else could – so I will indulge it – Just so much as I am hu[m]bled by the genius above my grasp, am I exalted and look with hate and contempt upon the literary world [...] Who would wish to be among the commonplace crowd of the little-famous – who are each individually lost in a throng made up of themselves (II, 144).

I refine the theory of Keats as a coterie poet by exploring the frequent travel and varied, individual partnerships exhibited in both his life and his poetry. “Paradoxical solitude” refers to the complex but coherent theory of interaction that Keats followed in order to achieve a sense of poetic legitimacy and autonomy.

Paradoxical solitude:

“O, Solitude” and the Wordsworthian guide

Keats found expression for this concept in his first published poem, “O, Solitude.” In this sonnet, he depicts the “highest bliss of human-kind” as “two kindred spirits” retreating into the wilderness (ll. 13, 14). This celebration of solitude involves both a journey and the “sweet converse of an innocent mind” (l. 10). More than a poetic experiment with a conventional literary idea, this poem represents the combination of an encouraging friend, an inspiring landscape, and an escape from the suburban all under the guise of the trope of solitude.

This paradoxically social solitude has its roots in Keats's poetic insecurities and self-consciousness. He sought the authenticity, legitimacy, and the independence of mind associated with the individual imagination and the poetic theory advocated by Wordsworth.³ To realize this, however, Keats required the stability and encouragement of a friend, which allowed him to approach the poetic authenticity connected to solitary composition without relinquishing the assistance.⁴ He continued to adhere to his perception of the Wordsworthian poet, in spite of the difficulties and contradictions, because of the resources of his partners in paradoxical solitude.

Although his idealization of Wordsworth guided his conception of the poetical character, Keats's opinions of the poet changed in concert with his own development. His ambition, shaped in Wordsworth's image, was to locate legitimacy and inspiration in solitary travel through wilderness; but when Wordsworth failed to live up to these perceptions, he shifted in Keats's mind from the poet of *Lyrical Ballads* and *The Excursion* to the man dressed in a stiff collar entertaining a fashionable crowd at Rydal Mount. At this stage, instead of questioning the model, Keats questioned the man. He began to contrast Wordsworth's lifestyle with his own travels, thereby imagining himself to be the more authentic poet. Keats recast Wordsworth as the poet of the "egotistical sublime" while defining himself as a poet of the antithetical disposition, "negative capability."

³ As Marjorie Levinson has shown, Keats was a self-conscious poet interested in his representations. *Keats's Life of Allegory: The Origins of a Style*. Oxford, 1988, repr. 1990, 3. She argues that the poet "could not begin to invent an original voice without first and throughout establishing his legitimacy." 10.

⁴ On 24 October 1818, Keats wrote, "[n]o sooner am I alone than shapes of epic greatness are stationed around me." *L*, I, 403.

Keats's concept of a Wordsworthian poet was impossible to realize.⁵ Marlon B. Ross argues that prophetic solitude is a myth: "All of the romantics communicate their strongest prophecies in a network of fellowship; whether that fellowship is the dreaded influence of fellow writers [...] or the influence of past male writers who are imagined to be present."⁶ Keats's inclusion of one other person attested to his need for a social element, but his casting of this dynamic as "solitude" demonstrates his attempt to legitimize his poetic powers and emphasize his independence.⁷

Kindred Spirits:

"The gentle anchor pull"

Keats's creative life required a companion of a specific personality. Paradoxical solitude was only achieved with a dependable, unobtrusive partner who not only provided guidance and encouragement, but who also took a decidedly subordinate role in the relationship. This dynamic helped him sustain the confidence he needed in order to follow Wordsworth's poetic path. Throughout his life these partners included his brothers George and Tom, Charles Cowden Clarke, Joseph Severn, John Hamilton Reynolds, Benjamin Robert Haydon, Benjamin Bailey, John Taylor, James Rice, Charles Wentworth Dilke, William Haslam, Richard Woodhouse,

⁵ Wordsworth's example served as more of a guide for Keats's journey than his destination. Elizabeth A. Fay uses the term "'Wordsworthian performance'" to explain his poetical presentations of himself. *Becoming Wordsworthian: A Performative Aesthetics* (Cambridge, Mass., 1995), 2.

⁶ Marlon Ross, *The Contours of Masculine Desire: Romanticism and the Rise of Women's Poetry* (Oxford, 1989), 91.

⁷ Although Wordsworth was a common example, the concept was widely-believed. In his 1833 biography of Byron, Thomas Moore stated: "from Homer down to Lord Byron, they have been, in their several degrees, restless and solitary spirits, with minds wrapped up, like silk-worms, in their own tasks." *Works of Lord Byron, with his Letters and Journals, and his Life*. 17 vols. (London, 1833), III, 128.

and Charles Brown.⁸ In their individual interactions with the poet, these men appeared as a combination of authentic, inspiring, stabilizing, direct, deferential, and unimposing companions who regularly copied and preserved his poetry.⁹ Additionally, in each of these relationships, even with the mentor figures Clarke, George, Bailey, and Haydon, Keats was regarded as the senior partner.

Keats was fortunate enough to have friends of various personalities and dispositions who matched this dynamic, and he was able to either correspond or travel with a particular partner based on his particular need. Despite the broad similarities, his relationship with each individual was unique; as he wrote of Reynolds and Haydon: “I have an affection for them both for reasons almost opposite – and to both must I of necessity cling” (I, 210). Keats gravitated toward the type of personalities that complemented his weaknesses, those whose strengths relieved his own vulnerabilities.¹⁰ In his moments of despondence and despair, occasionally brought about by the very solitude and sublimity he sought, his friends acted as the emotional anchor that kept him from mental extremes.¹¹ As he wrote on 9 April 1818: “I could not live without the love of my friends” (I, 267). These relationships did, however, cast his partners in the role of “Keats’s friends.” This had a powerful and enduring effect on their own identities, as exhibited by the inscription of “The Friend of Keats”

⁸ The roles of Dilke, Rice, and Haslam all fall largely outside the time scale of this thesis.

⁹ See *L*, I, 160, 377; II, 176, 243. These qualities were lost in a group, even one which was comprised of individuals with whom he could separately enjoy paradoxical solitude.

¹⁰ As Stillinger notes, Keats was “grateful for the help and indeed depended on it.” “Keats and Me,” *Textual Cultures: Texts, Contexts, Interpretation*, 3, 1 (Spring, 2008), 17.

¹¹ “Man feels the gentle anchor pull and gladdens in its strength.” “Lines Written in the Highlands,” l. 40. As George later noted, referring to a time of Keats’s sickness, but applicable through his life:

From the time we were Boys at school where we loved, jangled, and fought alternatively untill we separated in 1818 I in a great measure relieved him by continual sympathy, explanation, and inexhaustible spirits, and good humour, from many a bitter fit of hypochondriasm. *KC*, I, 284.

on the graves of both Brown and Reynolds; on Severn's tombstone is engraved:

"Devoted friend and death-bed companion/ of JOHN KEATS."¹²

When Keats sailed for Italy on 18 September 1820, Fanny Brawne wrote to his sister about the almost magical effect the poet had on his friends:

I cannot tell you how much every one have exerted themselves for him, nor how much he is liked [...] I am certain he has some spell that attaches them to him, or else he has fortunately met with a set of friends that I did not believe could exist in this world.¹³

Robert Gittings argues that Fanny Brawne knew that "the first part of this explanation was the real truth," and he refers to the "power" that Keats exhibited "to reflect everybody around him at their best."¹⁴ Keats certainly did attract dedicated friends, but the second part of Fanny's pronouncement is equally vital to understanding his poetic development.¹⁵ Keats's partners in paradoxical solitude also reflected the strengths of his poetic character, returning an ideal image of the poet, and this became a powerful resource in his quest for confidence.¹⁶ An understanding of these relationships helps explain Keats's rejection of coteries, and provides a unique understanding of how he sustained independence and ambition in the face of poor sales and worse reviews. These friendships in paradoxical solitude led Keats to become the authentic poet who he initially saw in Wordsworth. Although Keats

¹² Severn asked to be buried alongside Keats with a matching stone, despite the fact that he complained in 1836, "the present grave stone with its inscription is an eye sore to me." *Joseph Severn: Letters and Memoirs*, ed. Grant F. Scott (Aldershot, 2005), 338.

¹³ *Letters of Fanny Brawne to Fanny Keats, 1820-1824*, ed. Fred Edgcumbe (New York, 1937), 4.

¹⁴ Gittings, 594.

¹⁵ As Christopher Ricks puts it, "Keats as the best of friends, with the best of friends." *Keats and Embarrassment* (Oxford, 1974, repr. 1976), 217.

¹⁶ To use Virginia Woolf's metaphor, Keats's partners, like a magic mirror, were capable of "reflecting the figure [...] at twice its natural size." *A Room of One's Own* (San Diego, 1929, repr. 1981), 35.

thought solitude would inspire him, it was the partners he enlisted to help him cope with solitude that ultimately brought out his independent poetic voice.

Vital communication:

A receptive audience in his letters

These partnerships also facilitated communication for Keats in a way that groups could not. Keats never felt comfortable in a group. Henry Stephens, Keats's room-mate in 1816, remembered the poet as a socially awkward young man. Early that year, Stephens took him out with his friends and later noted that the poet "did not generally make the most favorable impression upon people where he visited" (*KC*, II, 212). He observed the poet's need for an appreciative atmosphere: "He could not well unbend himself & was rather of an unsocial disposition, unless he was among those who were of his own tastes, & who would flatter him" (*KC*, II, 212). At various points in 1817, Keats was both quiet and reserved in the presence of the Hunt circle.¹⁷ In December 1819, this discomfort was still a reality: "I suffer greatly by going into parties where from the rules of society and a natural pride I am obliged to smother my Spirit and look like an Idiot" (II, 12).

Although silent in groups, Keats was confident, even boastful, in the selected pairings of paradoxical solitude.¹⁸ On 22 December, Keats explained the situation to Haydon: "believe me I never rhodomontade any where but in your Company – my

¹⁷ He was described as having an "almost austere reticence" in crowds. William Sharpe, *The Life and Letters of Joseph Severn* (London, 1892), 19n. See Chapter III.

¹⁸ Keats did, however, write several letters addressed to both his brothers and, later, to George and Georgina. Significantly, he occasionally wrote letters specifically to be circulated among his friends. See Chapter VI.

general Life in Society is silence” (I, 414). In a letter to Reynolds, Keats similarly admitted to an “occasional rhodomontade in chitchat” and Woodhouse later made note of a “Keats-like rhodomontade” (I, 325; II, 163). It was in the private audiences of those accustomed to his boasting that he constructed his poetic identity.¹⁹ Many of his celebrated formulations were also encouraged by the nature of his friendships, including the letter on negative capability to his brothers (I, 191), his preference for a life of sensations over thoughts to Bailey (I, 185), his comparison of life to a “Mansion of Many Apartments” in a letter to Reynolds (I, 280), his “Axioms” of poetry to Taylor (I, 238), and his “camelion Poet” and “egotistical sublime” to Woodhouse (I, 387). The idea of negative capability came out of “not a dispute but a disquisition with Dilke,” and he articulated the concept of the egotistical sublime while trying to provide the “best answer” to a question by Woodhouse (I, 193; 386). Keats wrote “all the more freely and fervently,” as Leonidas M. Jones notes, because his partners were so receptive.²⁰ Keats’s ideas were effectively expressed to a receptive audience and in the individual nature of letter writing.

Of the 252 extant letters that Keats wrote, the majority were addressed to his partners in paradoxical solitude. He only wrote two letters that survive to Hunt, one to Shelley, and none to any of the thirty other members that Cox includes in the Cockney School.²¹ Of course, the significance and the circumstances of these letters were numerous and varied; Taylor and Hessey, for example, received many of his letters because they were also his publishers. Brown, on the other hand, was almost always with Keats from the day they met, accompanying him on three separate trips and

¹⁹ See Chapter IV.

²⁰ Leonidas M. Jones, *The Life of John Hamilton Reynolds* (London, 1984), 142.

²¹ See Cox, 21.

living with him both at Wentworth Place and later in Winchester.²² Keats's distribution of letters provides an instructive pattern, however, when we explore how Keats constructed his poetic identity in these written exchanges.²³

Travel and wilderness:

Prologue to poetry and life

A selected partner was a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for paradoxical solitude. Keats was also required to travel. His theory of the poetical character, and the ambition that drove it, largely determined his restless journeying: he viewed these excursions as prologues to the life he intended to pursue (I, 264). Keats's constant departures from London included travelling to Margate with Tom in the summer of 1816 and again in 1817, to Oxford and Canterbury with Bailey in 1817, to Teignmouth with Tom in 1818, to the Lake District and Scotland with Brown in the summer of 1818, to Chichester with Dilke in 1819, to the Isle of Wight with Rice in 1819, and twice to Winchester with Brown in 1819. He used these trips as opportunities to gather "the fruit of Experience" (I, 168). After Keats decided in 1816 to become a poet, he spent the remaining five summers of his life mentally and physically distancing himself from London.²⁴

²² On 21 September 1819, Keats wrote that "[m]en who live together have a silent <p>moulding and influencing power over each other – They interassimilate." *L*, II, 208.

²³ One of the other variables that can be plotted is the amount of time that Keats knew each recipient. See Appendix A.

²⁴ In 1820, Keats was unable to follow through with his plan to visit Brown in Scotland because of his increased illness. *L*, I, 57-8. He left London for Italy on 17 September 1820, where he died on 23 February 1821.

Class-conscious interpretations of Keats's travel distinguish between the "true" Romantic quests of poets like Shelley or Byron and the "little" jaunts of Keats. Marjorie Levinson equates this compulsion to retreat from London life as a "mundanely mechanical aspect of Keats's composition," and she argues that the concept of "Romantic retirement" gains a whole new, and decidedly pedestrian, dimension with Keats.²⁵ In Levinson's interpretation, the circumstances of Keats's life, including his middle-class status and dim financial prospects, prevented his retirement from being poetically legitimate: "In short, the graciously comfortable bowers and dells enjoyed by Wordsworth and Coleridge were no more available to Keats than were the glory and grandeur of Greece and Rome, Byron and Shelley's enabling resorts."²⁶ However, as we will see, it was not only monetary restrictions that kept Keats in Britain; he was also overwhelmed by great distances and sublime landscapes.²⁷

Keats therefore sought out more British forms of these grand scenes, landscapes I designate as "wilderness." I use "wilderness" in its original definition of "wild or uncultivated land."²⁸ This includes the vastness of the ocean at Margate and the Isle of Wight, the unbounded views offered by mountaintops of the Lake District and the Scottish Highlands, and the mysteries of the night sky in all his travels, but does not include the suburban landscape of Hampstead. However, as both a theme and

²⁵ She notes that a "great deal of the poetry was conceived or composed at a number of modest, middle-class and, as it were, publicly designated resorts: Margate, Shanklin (the Isle of Wight), Burford Bridge (Surrey)." *Keats's Life of Allegory*, 7.

²⁶ Ibid, 7. Amy Clampitt notes in a poem from "Voyages: A Homage to John Keats," on the theme of Keats and Brown's northern trek: "epic/ distances fouled by necessity." "The Elgin Marbles," *What the Light Was Like* (London, 1986), ll. 18-9.

²⁷ Keats only discussed or imagined travelling to distant, exotic lands in response to periods of exposure to the coterie. See Chapter VI.

²⁸ *OED* notes that "wilderness" is also tied up with ideas of solitude and wandering. <http://dictionary.oed.com>. My analysis is also informed by what Robert MacFarlane calls "wildness;" a sense that it is "*self-willed* land," free from human direction, confinement, and restriction. He argues that places of wildness exist all over Britain. *The Wild Places* (London, 2007), 30; 217; 225; 227.

a source of inspiration, Keats's travels in wilderness were unpredictable. The poems produced during these trips struggled to reflect the wilderness in which they were composed. This was largely due to the fact that, from his earliest imaginings of wilderness in the poetry of 1814, he approached new landscapes with Wordsworthian poetic expectations. Contrary to the conventional notion of Keats as a poet of bowers, I argue that he sought out wide expanses to inspire his poetry. He was drawn to images that represented mystery, exploration, and a sense of the unknown, as well as those that offered new perspectives on familiar landscapes, even if they did not always have the desired poetic effect.

Keats's journeys were not the "sad, vexing outings" of Levinson's interpretation; they roused a sense of wonder in the poet, providing him with the experience needed to compose a "long Poem," which he considered to be "the Polar Star of Poetry" (I, 170).²⁹ In order to encourage this epic result, Keats brought various motivating works with him on his travels, including Wordsworth, Shakespeare, Milton, and Dante.³⁰ Some of his excursions were specifically literary pilgrimages, such as his visits to Canterbury, Stratford, the Lake District, and Dumfries. All of his travels in paradoxical solitude were intended to inspire "some grand poem" (II, 113).

²⁹ Levinson, *Keats's Life of Allegory*, 7. I use "wonder" in the sense that Richard Holmes does in his study, *The Age of Wonder*, as a "childlike, but infinitely complex, word." *The Age of Wonder: How the Romantic Generation Discovered the Beauty and Terror of Science* (London, 2008), xx. Wordsworth, however, referred to wonder as "the natural product of ignorance." *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser, eds. 3 vols. (Oxford, 1974), III, 74.

³⁰ As Motion notes, each work served as a "talismán" as well as a source of knowledge. 261.

*Conclusion:**The importance of chronology*

This thesis explores the development of paradoxical solitude in Keats's life, letters, and poetry, thereby illustrating his poetic development up to 1818. I examine the briefest letters and lesser-studied poetry alongside his famous declarations and major poems in order to trace the evolution of Keats's concept of the poetical character. Beginning in 1814, the year of his earliest remaining poems, each chapter examines approximately one year of the poet's life. Since none of Keats's letters from 1814 until the summer of 1816 remain, I rely on his poems and scholarly biographies for the details of his life. In the chapters that cover the period from 1816 to 1818, however, I draw heavily on Keats's own letters and on the correspondence of his friends. Paradoxical solitude was a guiding concept of his poetry, and knowledge of how Keats applied this to his poetical character broadens our understanding of his swift rise to poetic greatness. Ultimately, this thesis refines the theory of Keats as a coterie poet and uncovers the truth behind his maxim "[t]hat which is creative must create itself" (I, 374).

Chapter overview

Chapter I, "'Their Solitary Way': a Tradition of Paradoxical Solitude," provides an analysis of the evolving role of solitude in Keats's literary predecessors, from the paradoxical solitude of Adam and Eve in Milton's *Paradise Lost* to Wordsworth's portrayal of the Solitary in *The Excursion*. Eighteenth-century writers

like Shaftesbury, Addison, Thomson, and Young added levels of complexity to the concept of solitude and its role in the poetic process by extolling the virtues of the individual creative mind. The larger literary and philosophical context established in this chapter informs my analysis of paradoxical solitude in the life and work of Keats.

Chapter II, ““O, Solitude’: Formulating Paradoxical Solitude, 1814-1816,” traces the development of Keats’s ideas of solitude and inspiration from his first attempt at verse in 1814, until he set off for Margate in the summer of 1816. I analyze the poet’s association with the circle around George Felton Mathew, exploring how, as Keats’s life was enriched by artists and friends, poetry took on a secondary role to conviviality. Keats, who began reading Wordsworth during this time, wrote “O, Solitude” in reaction to the crowded, suburban lifestyle of the coterie. This poem, in which Keats crystallized his early ideas of poetic composition, served as a blueprint for his subsequent verse. Mathew, however, was a dominant personality who preferred hosting a group to attempting to create a “brotherhood of poets” in a spot “sequester’d, wild, and romantic.” Keats cut ties with the group and later managed to form an ideal partnership with Joseph Severn. His poems from the summer of 1816 also reveal Keats’s conviction that wilderness was a requisite part of paradoxical solitude. Realizing the importance of first-hand experience to his newly formulated poetic identity, Keats planned to travel with a kindred spirit to witness the ocean.

Chapter III, “Discovery and Independence: *Poems*, 1816-1817,” explores Keats’s poetic response to the landscape of Margate. This trip, taken with Tom, was inspired by Wordsworth’s poems and perceived as a necessary “prologue” to composition. Keats’s poetic attempts were frustrated by these preconceptions. I discuss the impact of Keats’s introduction to the Cockney School on his theory of paradoxical solitude, particularly through his relationships with Clarke, Hunt, and

Haydon. I incorporate John Barnard's recent scholarship to demonstrate how Keats tried to make *Poems*, his first volume, into a declaration of his poetic independence.

Chapter IV, "Poetic Wilderness: The Composition of *Endymion*, 1817-1818," examines Keats's poetic transformation in the period between the publication of *Poems* and the completion of the draft of *Endymion*. Keats's poetic "test," as he referred to the poem's composition, was designed to emphasize his identity as an independent poet. This involved forgoing the Hunt circle, its frequented locations, and its shared activities. The poet made various journeys into wilderness to avoid the insular and familiar traits of domesticity and enable the poem's composition through travel. After a failed attempt at true solitude on the Isle of the Wight, Keats successfully generated inspiration by restlessly traversing southern England. His practice of cultivating paradoxical solitudes provided him with the comfort and confidence he was unable to find either alone or in a coterie environment. As an allegory for the poet's quest for inspiration, *Endymion* sheds light on the continuing process of constructing Keats's poetic character.

Chapter V, "A Most Social Time: Development of Paradoxical Solitude, January – May 1818," explores Keats's efforts to distance himself from the pressures he experienced amid group settings and the poetic attitudes that these gatherings seemed to promulgate. During this time, Keats's Wordsworthian concept of poetic creation as solitary discovery acquired a philosophical backing in the writings of William Hazlitt. This development helped Keats, who had become disillusioned after meeting Wordsworth, to continue to shape his poetical ideal in his image. This chapter also explores Keats's relationship with Reynolds and his desire to cut the Hunt circle from his life. Both the influence of Hazlitt and the support of Reynolds

readied Keats for the next step in his “one way” forward, a walking tour of the Lake District and Scotland with Brown (I, 271).

In Chapter VI, “Poetic Pilgrimage: Poetry of Experience, June – December 1818,” I argue that the poet initially gained confidence throughout the pilgrimage by substantiating his preconceptions. After seeing how Wordsworth lived, however, the nature of Keats’s journey changed. He contrasted his walking tour with Wordsworth’s fashionable lifestyle, cultivating the image of himself as an experienced traveller in his letters. By emphasizing the intensity of his travel, Keats presented himself as a “post-Wordsworthian” poet, one who had surpassed his model. His newly acquired poetic confidence insulated him from the attacks of *Blackwood’s* that awaited him on his return to London. Reynolds also asserted Keats’s identity as a “post-Wordsworthian” poet, both directly in communication with the poet and publicly as an anonymous reviewer. The chapter concludes by exploring the ways in which *Hyperion* was intended to both represent and advance Keats’s poetic development in relation to Wordsworth.

The Conclusion briefly explores how confidence gained from paradoxical solitude led Keats to an independent poetic voice that he still needed to protect. I reconsider, in light of the preceding chapters, the advice that Keats gave to Shelley in his 16 August 1820 letter. Keats counselled him to “curb” his “magnanimity and be more of an artist” (II, 332). Keats’s definition of what it meant to be an artist had a distinctly independent element, and he projected it back to the Hunt circle through Shelley: “an artist must serve Mammon – he must have ‘self concentration’ selfishness perhaps” (II, 332-3). In a final attempt to control his personal and poetic relations, Keats asserted, “My Imagination is a Monastery, and I am its Monk.” It was

only through paradoxical solitude that he was able to construct a poetic identity of a solitary creator and independent guardian of his own poetry.

CHAPTER I
 “THEIR SOLITARY WAY”
 A TRADITION OF PARADOXICAL SOLITUDE

“Solitude and fit society”:

Adam and Eve in paradise

The origin of paradoxical solitude is Milton’s depictions of Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost* (1667). In this poem, Adam resides in a world of pleasure that he is unable to enjoy fully in a state of solitude.¹ After rigorous self-examination, Adam comes to the realization that he needs a reciprocal relationship. He inquires of God, “in solitude/ What happiness,” for who can “enjoy alone,/ Or all enjoying, what contentment find?” (VIII, ll. 364-6). God replies that Adam is not alone, but is in fact surrounded by countless living creatures, “all...at [his] command,” to which he counters: “among unequals what society/ Can sort, what harmony or true delight?” (VIII, ll. 371, 383-4). Adam, forced to restate his claim, appeals to his own sense of rationality: “of fellowship I speak/ Such as I seek, fit to participate/ All rational delight” (VIII, ll. 389-91). He recognizes that he is fundamentally incomplete.² Upon congratulating Adam’s determination, God equates his urge for partnership with the discovery of the individual self:

¹ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Alastair Fowler, 2nd edn. (London, 1968, repr. 2007). See Bk. II, l. 347; II, l. 66; III, l. 527; IV, l. 208; VIII, l. 299.

² When Adam questions God, James Turner notes that “the craving for partnership is so ‘deeply graven,’ and so energetically maintained throughout the long wrestling-match with God, that it seems to define his whole being; he is unfinished without Eve.” *One Flesh: Paradisal Marriage and Sexual Relations in the Age of Milton* (Oxford, 1987), 283.

‘Thus far to try thee, Adam, I was pleased,
And find thee knowing not of beasts alone,
Which thou hast rightly named, but of thyself,
Expressing well the spirit within thee free’ (VIII, ll. 437-440).

To know “of thyself,” God informs Adam, is to recognize limitations and to acknowledge an innate need for interdependence (VIII, l. 439). After expressing this awareness, God creates for him “[t]hy likeness, thy fit help, thy other self,/ Thy wish, exactly to thy heart’s desire” (VIII, ll. 450-1).

By complicating the character of Adam with this desire for partnership, Milton departed from his Biblical source. In Genesis, God pronounces it “not good for man to be alone.”³ In Milton’s recasting, however, this companionship is represented as essential to Adam’s knowledge of himself. In Genesis, God simply declares the inadequacy of solitude, compels Adam to sleep, extracts one of his ribs, and fashions a suitable partner for him.⁴ However, Adam’s capacity for self-awareness is a fundamental human characteristic in *Paradise Lost*. God still constructs Eve from a “rib he formed and fashioned with his hands,” but she is not created until Adam is able to demonstrate to God his knowledge of the limitations of solitude (VIII, l. 469). As Adam later explains to the angel Raphael, man was not created to cope with solitude:

Thou in thyself art perfect, and in thee
Is no deficiency found; not so is man,
But in degree, the cause of his desire

³ “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.” Genesis 2. 18. *The Bible: Authorized King James Version with Apocrypha*, Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett, eds. (Oxford, 2008), 3.

⁴ Genesis, 2. 21-4. There is a distinct account of Eve’s creation in the Torah; Genesis 1. 27 claims that Adam and Eve were created simultaneously: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”

By conversation with his like to help
Or solace his defects (VIII, ll. 415-9).

In order to develop and grow beyond this “deficiency,” humanity requires communication. Adam was tested on his ability to distinguish between his relationship to the world of animals and the “rational delight” and “harmony” that can only result from a more equal companionship with another human.

Company, contingent upon Adam’s knowledge of himself, is also an extension of that self. Eve is uniquely created in order to match Adam’s inner desires. In this “better balance” in prelapsarian Eden, James Turner notes, Eve is a resourceful and valuable companion who participates “fully in a joint society of love with Adam and with God.”⁵ Eve’s explicitly subordinate role (“Not equal, as their sex not equal seemed”) exposes Adam’s unbalanced idea of “fellowship” (IV, l. 296).⁶ God created Eve, “much deceived, much failing, hapless Eve,” for Adam, “exactly to thy heart’s desire” (IX, l. 404; VIII, l. 451). Despite the fact that she is his partner in almost every aspect of life, working in the garden, preparing meals, and making their employment into a “delightful task...sweet...[even]...were it toilsome,” Eve’s humanity is ultimately derivative: “He for God only, she for God in him (IV, ll. 437-9; IV, l. 299).”⁷

The two become defined by this relationship and they are represented as separate but complementary parts of a whole. Eve praises him, declaring that “[p]art of my soul I seek thee, and thee claim/ My other half,” and Adam similarly celebrates

⁵ Turner, *One Flesh*, 148. William Hazlitt, however, felt that Eve had an independent character: “She is the idol of the poet’s imagination, and he paints her whole person with a studied profusion of charms.” *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P. P. Howe. 21 vols. (London, 1930-34), IV, 105.

⁶ However, in Genesis 3. 16, God ordains subordination as a punishment only after the fall. For literal interpretations of this passage, see Turner, *One Flesh*, 99-106.

⁷ Turner, *One Flesh*, 148.

their “unfeigned/ Union of mind, or in us both one soul” (IV, ll. 487-8; VIII, l. 604).⁸ Milton therefore portrayed them as incomplete in themselves: “For contemplation he and valour formed,/ For softness she and sweet attractive grace (IV, ll. 297-8). As J. B. Broadbent notes, until the Fall in Book IX, Adam and Eve even share a “descriptive unity.”⁹ Adam refers to Eve as “bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh, my self/ Before me” (VIII, ll. 495-6). In this solitude they temporarily experience the bliss Adam longed for: “About them frisking played/ All beasts of the earth, since wild, and all of all chase/ In wood or wilderness, forest or den” (IV, ll. 340-2).

Within the framework of the poem, solitude is an inferior state; Milton employed a distinctly negative, egotistical sense of solitude.¹⁰ Satan idealizes “solitary flight,” insisting that there is nothing more valuable than being “self-begot, self-raised” (II, l. 632; V, l. 860). The need for interdependence eludes Satan throughout all his soliloquizing. In his solitude he despairs, “Which way I fly is hell; myself am hell” (IV, l. 75). Satan’s pride, as Andrew M. Cooper observes, “steadily leads him through introspective isolation to nihilism.”¹¹ Nicholas von Maltzahn argues that when they are alone, Adam and Eve move from egotism into solipsism. Both are depicted as being susceptible to narcissism. Eve is too much drawn to her own image and Adam is similarly drawn to his image in her.¹²

⁸ Adam’s love is expressed by the desire to expand into what G. K. Hunter calls an “other self.” *Paradise Lost* (London, 1980), 191-2.

⁹ J. B. Broadbent, *Some Graver Subject: an Essay on Paradise Lost* (London, 1960), 188.

¹⁰ See, for example, Bk. III, ll. 440-3. Mary Beth Long argues that this concept of solitude as a morally inferior state was in keeping with popular seventeenth-century notions. “Contextualizing Eve’s and Milton’s Solitudes in Book 9 of *Paradise Lost*,” *Milton Quarterly*, 37, no. 2 (Nov., 2003), 100. Solitude, defined as “the state of being or living alone; loneliness, seclusion, solitariness (of persons),” was not in common use in English until the seventeenth century. <http://dictionary.oed.com>

¹¹ Andrew M. Cooper, *Doubt and Identity in Romantic Poetry* (London, 1988), 7.

¹² Nicholas von Maltzahn, “John Milton, *Paradise Lost*,” *A Companion to Literature from Milton to Blake*, ed. David Womersley (Oxford, 2000), 204. Conversely, Long argues that Eve’s narcissism may also be a way of demonstrating that she legitimately enjoys her solitary state; she has a predilection for solitude and thus has to *learn* to appreciate Adam’s company.

In *Paradise Lost*, solitude is only paradoxical in the case of Adam and Eve. Milton used “alone” in its conventional sense when referring to God’s pronouncement that it is “not good for man to be alone” and Satan’s joyful discovery of Eve, “behold alone/ The woman” (VIII, l. 445; IX, ll. 480-81). However, Milton returned to paradoxical usage when describing Adam and Eve as “linked in happy nuptial league,/ Alone as they” (IV, ll. 339-40). The descriptions “[s]ole Eve, associate sole” and “solitude is sometimes best society,” occur when their state of paradoxical solitude is threatened by traditional solitude (IX, ll. 227, 249). Adam speaks both phrases in resigned acceptance of Eve’s proposal to divide the labour in the garden. Recalling his incompleteness before the creation of Eve, Adam knowingly incurs “Divine displeasure” and death for “her loved society,” asking, “how can I live without thee” (IX, ll. 993, 1007, 908). He wavers at one point, exclaiming, “O might I here/ In solitude live savage, in some glade/ Obscured,” but Eve leads him from soliloquy to dialogue, and the renewal of their solitude is marked by this return to interdependence (IX, ll. 1084-6).¹³ Adam and Eve exit the poem holding hands, just as they first entered it: “They hand in hand with wandering steps and slow,/ Through Eden took their solitary way” (IV, l. 321; XII, ll. 648-9).¹⁴

Both critics and admirers of the poem struggled to interpret the conspicuously paradoxical portrayal of solitude. In the 1732 edition of the poem, for example, Richard Bentley felt the rendering of solitude was contradictory, and he endeavoured to rewrite the final lines to include a social aspect that was “entirely agreeable to this Scheme”:

This is suggested by her fascination with her image in the lake, where she literally seeks the solitude of reflection. Long, “Contextualizing,” 105.

¹³ Kristin A. Pruitt, *Gender and the Power of Relationship: “United as one individual Soul” in Paradise Lost* (Pittsburgh, 2003), 73.

¹⁴ Hunter, *Paradise Lost*, 191. Pruitt observes that it is Eve who initiates the “restoration of the relationship.” *Gender and the Power of Relationship*, 158.

And why *their Solitary Way*? [...] When even their former Walks in Paradise were as solitary, as their Way now: there being no Body besides Them Two, both here and there. Shall I therefore, after so many prior Presumptions, presume at last to offer a Distich, as close as may be to the Author's Words, and entirely agreeable to his Scheme?¹⁵

In the main text, directly under Milton's final lines and marked with an asterisk, Bentley offered an alternative ending:

THEN *hand in hand with SOCIAL steps their way*
Through Eden took, WITH HEAV'NLY COMFORT CHEER'D.¹⁶

For Bentley, editor of the first "critical" edition of *Paradise Lost*, Milton's presentation of Adam and Eve's solitude had a paradoxically social quantity that upset the logic of the poem.¹⁷ This ambivalence was a significant part of the poem's legacy.

"*With a choice few retir'd*":

Literary fellowship and the solitary imaginative agency

In the early eighteenth century, the paradoxical use of solitude extended from Milton's version of Biblical Eden to attempts to reclaim Paradise in the everyday. In the 17 March 1711 issue of *The Spectator*, Joseph Addison, essayist, poet, and co-founder of the magazine, described his view of paradise:

¹⁵ Richard Bentley, *Milton's Paradise Lost: A New Edition* (London, 1732), 399n.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 399.

¹⁷ Fowler, *Paradise Lost*, 6.

True Happiness is of a retired Nature, and an Enemy to Pomp and Noise; it arises, in the first place, from the Enjoyment of ones self; and, in the next, from the Friendship and Conversation of a few select Companions. It loves Shade and Solitude, and naturally haunts Groves and Fountains, Fields and Meadows.¹⁸

This concept of happiness as a process is much like the bliss Adam experienced in Eden; it requires first learning about the self and then selecting companionship to enjoy the wilderness.

This concept of solitude lent itself to the eighteenth-century notion of retirement. As Raymond D. Havens notes, terms like “retirement” and “solitude” were only rarely distinguishable in the literature of the period.¹⁹ The paradoxical nature of solitude, employed by Milton and endorsed by Addison, led to further ambiguous and complex uses of the term. Poems in praise of solitude by Thomson, Pope, and Ogilvie actually depicted a quiet life in the country with a few friends and literature.²⁰ The Countess of Winchelsea’s “Petition for an Absolute Retreat” (1713), for example, dealt with morals being drawn from solitude in nature; she embarked on an “absolute Retreat” from society with a friend and her husband:

‘Mongst Paths so lost, and Trees so high,
That the World may ne’er invade,
Through such Windings and such Shade,
My unshaken Liberty’ (ll. 3-7).²¹

¹⁸ Joseph Addison, Richard Steele & Others, *The Spectator*, ed. G. Gregory Smith. 4 vols. (Toronto, 1930), No. 15, 59. James Sambrook argues that Addison “could gauge the temper and taste of his age perhaps better than anyone else.” *The Eighteenth Century: the Intellectual and Cultural Context of English Literature 1700-1789*, 2nd edn. (London, 1986, repr. 1993), 59.

¹⁹ Raymond D. Havens, “Solitude and the Neoclassicists,” *ELH*, 21, 4 (December, 1954), 260.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 260. John Ogilvie wrote a number of poems on the subject, including “Paradise,” (1760) and “Solitude, or the Elysium of the Poets, a Vision” (1765).

²¹ Anne Kingsmill Finch, Countess of Winchilsea, *Miscellany poems, on several occasions, written by a lady* (London, 1713).

Praising the natural world for providing respite from the city and asking “Courteous Fate” for abundance, the poet evoked Paradise: “[a]ll that did in *Eden* grow,/ All, but the *Forbidden Tree*,/ Wou’d be coveted by me” (ll. 32, 35-7). This social retreat amid wilderness echoed Milton’s Eden.

For Milton’s heirs, this paradoxical solitude became the standard concept of solitary retirement. As Havens observes, throughout the eighteenth century, the titles of the poems evoked this paradox: “Retirement,” “Solitude,” “Meditation,” “Contemplation,” “Contentment,” “Melancholy,” “The Enthusiast,” “The Fire Side,” “Nature,” “The Choice,” and “Grongar Hill,” were all poems concerning a chosen group of friends and books in an Edenic natural world.²²

Shaftesbury, soliloquy, and self-creation:

Solitude and inspiration

In the literature and aesthetics of eighteenth-century sensibility, Stephen D. Cox argues that one can readily discern “early stages of development of what might be called a mystique of the individual self.”²³ There arose numerous theories of original genius during this period, along with evidence of a “willingness to attribute an almost sacred significance to the process of the individual mind.”²⁴ Solitude, a state from which knowledge of self was a release, became the state to which writers

²² Havens, “Solitude and the Neoclassicists,” 260-2. Havens further notes that while solitude was predominately a literary fashion, it was also an undeniable fact: “Instances abound of withdrawal to a quiet rural existence and the English aristocracy, being landed gentry, had homes in the country where bad roads made communication difficult or impossible.” 262.

²³ Stephen D. Cox, *“The Stranger Within Thee”: Concepts of the Self in Late Eighteenth-Century Literature* (London, 1980), 37.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 37.

returned in order to create. Sambrook contends that eighteenth-century “poets, artists, and critics developed their notions of the creative imagination alongside the philosophers.”²⁵ Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, published a series of anonymous papers on subjects including human sociability and creativity between 1699-1711, ultimately collecting and publishing them as *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*.²⁶ This work was fundamental to the notion that solitary retirement was a prerequisite to creative insight.²⁷

For Shaftesbury contemplation and composition were best suited to solitary retirement in the wilderness of the natural world. In the 1714 version of *Soliloquy, or Advice to an Author*, published as part of *Characteristics*, Shaftesbury quoted Horace, *Epistles* 2. 2. 77 (“The entire troop of authors loves a grove and shuns cities”), and then proceeded to immediately modify it by reducing Horace’s “troop” of authors to an individual.²⁸ *Soliloquy* prized the imaginative superiority of self-communication over collaboration with others. Indeed, Shaftesbury reflected, “all great wits” were more comfortable in the company of their own minds: “It is remarkable in all great wits that they have owned this practice of ours, and generally described themselves as people liable to sufficient ridicule for their great loquacity by themselves and their

²⁵ James Sambrook, *The Eighteenth Century: the Intellectual and Cultural Context of English Literature 1700-1789*, 2nd edn. (London, 1986, 1993), 125. He observes that most of these writers took Locke’s theories of perception as their starting point. 125. Although Locke was Shaftesbury’s mentor, the two disagreed on a number of subjects, including the nature of the individual. For a comprehensive account of ideas of personal identity in Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), see Zachary Leader, *Revision and Romantic Authorship* (Oxford, 1996, repr. 1999), 316-22.

²⁶ See Lawrence E. Klein’s “Introduction,” in Anthony Ashley Cooper, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, 2nd edn. (1714), ed. Lawrence E. Klein (Cambridge, 1999).

²⁷ This belief extends back at least as far as Horace and Virgil; much earlier than that, Sophocles’s *Philoctetes* (409 BCE) explores the tragic effect solitude has on Philoctetes’s mind.

²⁸ Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, 73.

profound taciturnity in company.”²⁹ In *Soliloquy*, the nature of community was antithetical to creative endeavours.

Although Shaftesbury argued that these solitary, meditative habits were a vital practice for the creative mind, he nevertheless discouraged adopting inner conversation as the subject of composition: “I hold it very indecent for anyone to publish his meditations, occasional reflections, solitary thoughts or other such exercises as come under the notion of this self-discoursing practice.”³⁰ However, quiet retirement and conversation with a single individual were considered suitable. In *The Moralists*, an idealized pastoral landscape was the setting for the philosophical discussion between Theocles and Philocles. Theocles makes the following remarks “in favour of retirement”:

‘not only the best authors but the best company require this seasoning. Society itself cannot be rightly enjoyed without some abstinence and separate thought. All grows insipid, dull and tiresome without the help of some intervals of retirement [...] What relish then must the world have, that common world of mixed and undistinguished company, without a little solitude, without stepping now and then aside out of the road and beaten track of life, that tedious circle of noise and show, which forces wearied mankind to seek relief from every poor diversion?’³¹

Shaftesbury presents the case for solitude in moderation, as a way of escaping the “tedious circle of noise and show.” This conclusion recalls the debate of Adam and Eve, however, Shaftesbury emphasized the soliloquy, whereas Eve leads Adam from soliloquy to dialogue.³² Shaftesbury argued for the transfer of power from the union to the individual.

²⁹ Ibid., 73.

³⁰ Ibid., 74.

³¹ Ibid., 249.

³² “For solitude is sometimes the best society/ And short retirement urges sweet return.” Bk. IX, ll. 249-50. See Pruitt, *Gender and the Power of Relationship*, 158.

“Virtue of Soliloquy”:

Legitimacy and integrity

Shaftesbury’s writing placed a greater emphasis on internal dialogue, insisting upon the necessity of honest, rigorous, and deliberate discourse with the self. Lawrence E. Klein contends that Shaftesbury was “original in conceiving the pursuit of self-knowledge as a procedure of inner conversation.”³³ Shaftesbury developed paradoxical solitude by dismissing the notion that humanity was inherently incomplete, emphasizing instead the power and creativity of the individual. Just as God taught Adam that he must first understand his own mind, Shaftesbury advocated methodical confrontation with the self.

And if in our private capacity we can have resolution enough to criticize ourselves and call in question our high imaginations, florid desires and specious sentiments, according to the manner of soliloquy above-prescribed, we shall, by the natural course of things, as we grow wiser, prove less conceited [...] An honest home-philosophy must teach us the wholesome practice within ourselves. Polite reading, and converse with mankind of the better sort, will qualify us for what remains.³⁴

Like Milton and Addison, Shaftesbury argued that one should appreciate and understand the self, expressing “well the spirit within thee free,” before proceeding to

³³ Klein, “Introduction,” *Characteristics*, viii. Although it could be argued that Socrates’ maxim, “life without examination is not worth a man living,” posited a similar claim twenty-one centuries before Shaftesbury, and that soliloquy as a rhetorical device for understanding the self stretched back almost as far, this was indisputably a persistent theme in Shaftesbury’s career. Plato, *Apology of Socrates* (398), trans. Michael C. Stokes (London, 1997), 38a, 87. The Latin *soliloquium* was coined by St. Augustine. *Confessions*, trans. E.B. Pusey (London, 1907), Bk. 11, 7, 4. Carol Hanbery Mackay, *Soliloquy in Nineteenth-Century Fiction: Consciousness Creating Itself*, (London, 1987), 1.

³⁴ Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, 162.

the next stage of growth, namely wider social engagement with the selected company of “the better sort” (VIII, l. 440).³⁵

Shaftesbury postulated that certain company was intrinsically solitary and, by virtue of his theory of soliloquy, the essence of solitude was binary. He considered this concept by examining the mental process of a person who has committed a fault:

He is concerned for it. He comes alone upon the stage, looks about him to see if anybody be near, then takes himself to task without sparing himself in the least. You would wonder to hear how close he pushes matters and how thoroughly he carries on the business of self-dissection. By virtue of this soliloquy, he becomes two distinct persons. He is pupil and preceptor. He teaches and he learns.³⁶

The recognition of an inherent need for another voice had evolved in *Characteristics* into the individual’s recognition of this duality within the self. Shaftesbury argued that the most sincere and rewarding company was solitude, even calling the possibility of traditional solitude into question:

So that we make no doubt to assert that not so much as a recluse religionist, a votary or hermit was ever truly by himself. And thus since neither lover, author, mystic or conjuror (who are the only claimants) can truly or justly be entitled to a share in this self-entertainment, it remains that the only person entitled is the man of sense, the sage or philosopher.³⁷

³⁵ In his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), Adam Smith posited the opposite view of Milton’s Eden, recreating Adam’s circumstances in order to argue that self-consciousness was based entirely on society:

Were it possible that a human creature could grow up to manhood in some solitary plane, without any communication with his own species, he could no more think of his own character, of the propriety or demerit of his own sentiments and conduct, of the beauty and deformity of his own mind, then of the beauty and deformity of his own face.

D.D. Raphael and A.L. Macfie, eds. (Oxford, 1976), III, 1.3, 110.

³⁶ Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, 72.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 80.

The product of such a monologue was integrity: “by a certain powerful figure of inward rhetoric, the mind apostrophises its own fancies, raises them in their proper shapes and personages and addresses them familiarly, without the least ceremony or respect.”³⁸ This interrogation of the self, which Carol MacKay refers to as “soliloquy’s fundamental act of self-creation,” placed the creative powers firmly with the solitary individual.³⁹ The individual mind was the engine of creation and thus, Shaftesbury contended, “[h]e who deals in characters must of necessity know his own, or he will know nothing.”⁴⁰

Shaftesbury’s endorsement of solitude and retired life provoked response from his critics. In *A Search into the Nature of Society*, added in 1723 to the second edition of *Fable of the Bees: or Private Vices, Public Benefits*, Bernard Mandeville wrote:

That boasted middle way, and the calm Virtues recommended in the *Characteristics*, are good for nothing but to breed Drones, and might qualify a Man for the stupid Enjoyment of a Monastick Life, or at best a Country Justice of the Peace, but they would never fit him for Labour and Assiduity, or stir him up for great Atchievements and perilous Undertakings.⁴¹

In Mandeville’s opinion, solitude did not inspire, but actually prevented “great Atchievements.”⁴² Although Shaftesbury’s model of solitude expressed in *Characteristics* was attacked as merely slothful ease, Sambrook argues that these ideas “prompted the emergence of a new kind of nature-poetry in Thomson’s *Seasons*,

³⁸ Ibid., 84.

³⁹ MacKay, *Soliloquy in Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, ix.

⁴⁰ Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, 85.

⁴¹ Bernard Mandeville, *A Search into the Nature of Society, Fable of the Bees: or Private Vices, Public Benefits* (1732), ed. by F. B. Kaye, 2 vols., 6th edn. (Oxford, 1924), I, 333.

⁴² The “stupid Enjoyment of a Monastick Life” was similarly attacked by David Hume, who composed a litany of complaints against solitude in his *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*. See *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ix, pt. 1, *Enquiries Concerning the Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals* by David Hume, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford, 1902), 270.

and influenced developments of this kind for over a century.”⁴³ The ideal eighteenth-century escape was a “useful Life,” isolated in “various Nature,” with “rural Quiet, Friendship [and] Books” (“Spring,” ll. 1160-3).⁴⁴

In Thomson and other eighteenth-century writers this community was formed around literature itself and the potential of the imagination. Lisa Steinman observes that “eighteenth-century ideas of solitude commonly assume that solitary poetic musings include a social dimension,” adding that “solipsism and subjectivity were viewed with distaste.”⁴⁵ In “Winter,” for example, Thomson expressed his wish to retire to a life of cultured ease, comprised of poetry, study, and paradoxical solitude:

Now, all amid the Rigours of the Year,
In the wild Depth of Winter, while without
The ceaseless Winds blow Ice, be my Retreat [...]
A rural, shelter'd, solitary, Scene;
Where ruddy Fire and beaming Tapers join,
To chear the Gloom. There studious let me sit,
And hold high Converse with the MIGHTY DEAD (“Winter,” ll. 424-32).

Thomson’s vision of rural life, “shelter’d” and “solitary,” was a contemplative retreat that would lift sadness and induce the pensive mood conducive to poetic inspiration: “THUS in some deep Retirement would I pass,/ The Winter-Glooms, with Friends of pliant Soul,/ Or blithe, or solemn, as the Theme inspir’d” (“Winter,” ll. 572-4).⁴⁶

In a letter, Thomson described a poet as one who “in some rural retirement, by his own intellectual fire and candle as well as natural, may cultivate the muses, enlarge

⁴³ Sambrook, *The Eighteenth Century*, 126. Sambrook contends that “the direct, acknowledged debt of the ‘new’ poets Thomson and Akenside to Shaftesbury is obvious enough,” 127-8. See also Sambrook, *James Thomson: a Life 1700-1748* (Oxford, 1991), 71.

⁴⁴ James Thomson, *The Seasons* (1746), ed. James Sambrook (Oxford, 1981).

⁴⁵ Lisa M. Steinman, *Masters of Repetition: Poetry, Culture and Work in Thomson, Wordsworth, Shelley, and Emerson* (Basingstoke, 1998), 33.

⁴⁶ See John Chalker, “Retirement and Nature in Thomson’s Seasons,” *Pre-Romanticism in English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century: The Poetic Art and Significance of Thomson, Gray, Collins, Goldsmith, Cowper & Crabbe*, ed. J. R. Watson (London, 1989), 143.

his internal views, harmonize his passions, and let his heart hear the voice of peace and nature.”⁴⁷ Solitude in the wilderness was the best state for Thomson to think, find his muse, expand his knowledge and calm his feelings. In “Autumn,” the poet similarly “reads what the Muse, of These/ Perhaps, has in immortal Numbers sung;/ Or what she dictates writes” (“Autumn,” ll. 1319-20). Thomson transcribed poetry from the wilderness. Literary activity was an essential element of this rural retreat, expressed in his description of an ideal evening: “A Friend a Book the stealing Hours secure,/ And mark them down for Wisdom. With swift Wing,/ O’er Land and Sea Imagination roams” (“Autumn,” ll. 1333-35).

Solitary retirement was again represented as a paradoxically social activity. As John Chalker observes, the poet withdrew from the world with a few choice friends in search of direction, knowledge, participation, acceptance, and imaginative potential.⁴⁸ This was a conscious, thoughtful withdrawal, and in this retired state the poet was privy to a divine “Truth,” which “breaking on his Mind,” “Elates his Being and unfolds his Powers” (“Autumn,” ll. 1335-7). The fellowship of a small, selected literary community, and the realization of solitary imaginative agency, was represented as mutually and vitally interdependent. This concept, developed from Shaftesbury’s emphasis on individual introspection, emphasized the necessity of selected company to creativity.

⁴⁷ Letter, 27 October 1730. Qtd. in A. D. McKillop, *The Background of Thomson’s Seasons* (Minneapolis, 1942), 178.

⁴⁸ Chalker, “Retirement and Nature in Thomson’s *Seasons*,” 140.

Self-reverence and the “wretched unanimity with the throng”:

The prose of Edward Young

By the middle of the eighteenth century, self-knowledge became further established as an understanding of the creative self and “original genius.”⁴⁹ Edward Young’s *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759) exemplified the view that self-discovery was critical to creative formation.⁵⁰ Young borrowed “two golden rules from *Ethics*, which are no less golden in Composition, than in life”: “I. *Know thyself*; 2dly, *Reverence thyself*.”⁵¹ Creativity was ignited when in solitude and Young therefore emphasized the need to become acquainted with the self above all others. He employed the same image of an “inner fire” as Thomson: “Therefore dive deep into thy bosom; learn the depth, extent, bias, and full fort of thy mind; contract full intimacy with the Stranger within thee; excite and cherish every spark of intellectual light and heat.”⁵² This cultivation of the imagination through introspection in the natural world became the image of the true poet.⁵³

Young praised solitude at the expense of company. In his view, the social element thoroughly cheapened the creative enterprise: “Thyself so reverence, as to prefer the native growth of thy own mind to the richest import from abroad; such borrowed riches make us poor. The man who thus reverences himself, will soon find

⁴⁹ Stephen D. Cox, *Stranger Within Thee*, 3.

⁵⁰ M. H. Abrams observes “the principle novelty is Young’s contempt for, and almost abandonment of, the traditional rhetorical framework of art, with its emphasis on study, example, precept, and the skilful manipulation of means to end.” *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (Oxford 1953, repr. 1971), 198.

⁵¹ Edward Young, *Conjectures on Original Composition: In a Letter to the Author of Sir Charles Grandison*, 2nd edn. (London, 1759), 52.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 53.

⁵³ See Steinman, *Masters of Repetition*, 29.

the world's reverence to follow his own."⁵⁴ There was an attendant legitimacy to being the sole creator and owner of a work:

His works will stand distinguished; his the sole property of them; which property alone can confer the noble title of an *author*, that is, of one who (to speak accurately) *thinks*, and *composes*; while other invaders of the press, how voluminous, and learned soever, (with due respect be it spoken) only *read*, and *write*.⁵⁵

Young divided the fates of the two separate "luminaries in literature," the "well-accomplished Scholar" and the "divinely-inspired enthusiast," and attacked the uniformity of thought and work he felt that group composition produced. Within a crowd, the author was deprived of new ideas and would "never stand alone":

he makes one of a group, and thinks in wretched unanimity with the throng: Incumbered with the notions of others, and impoverished by their abundance, he conceives not the least embryo of new thought; opens not the least vista thro' the gloom of ordinary writers, into the bright walks of rare imagination, and singular design.⁵⁶

Independent poetry was analogous to a vista for the "bright walks" of the wandering imagination, and in comparison the group seemed claustrophobic. Young equated "Imitative" poetry with listening to a "twice-told tale," and "*Original*" poetry with discovery: "Thus every telescope is lifted at a new-discovered star; it makes a hundred astronomers in a moment, and denies equal notice to the sun."⁵⁷ Young saw original composition as a discovery of the imagination of an individual mind. Ambition should be towering, like the landscape that inspires it:

⁵⁴ Young, *Conjectures*, 54.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

Ambition is sometimes no vice in life; it is always a virtue in Composition. High in the towering *Alps* is the fountain of the *Po*; high in fame, and in antiquity, is the fountain of an *Imitator's* Undertaking; but the river, and the imitation, humbly creep along the vale.⁵⁸

In *Conjectures on Original Composition*, independence of thought and ambitious creation is likened to vistas and mountains, while group composition is associated with recycled ideas and the more humble landscape of the vale.

“*Dwellers in a Solitude*”⁵⁹:

Paradoxical Solitude in The Excursion

In *The Excursion*, Wordsworth followed the tradition that the solitude of the “Individual Mind” provided the ideal mechanism for poetic effort (“Preface,” l. 19, 63). However, Wordsworth also chose the “principle subject” of the poem to be “the sensations and opinions of a poet living in retirement.”⁶⁰ The poem opens with a declaration of the importance of solitude and retirement to its composition. In the prose preface to the 1814 edition, Wordsworth stated that the idea for *The Recluse* (his purposed poetic trilogy, of which *The Excursion* was the second part) was conceived “when the Author retired to his native Mountains.”⁶¹ Similarly, the verse “Preface” describes *The Excursion* as the author’s views “On Man, on Nature, and on Human Life/ Musing in Solitude” (ll. 1-2). However, the poem was also addressed to “a dear Friend,” Samuel Taylor Coleridge, to whom the conception of the work was

⁵⁸ Ibid., 16.

⁵⁹ *The Excursion: The Recluse Part I Book I. The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, E. de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire, eds. 5 vols. (Oxford, 1949, rev. 1952-9), V, Bk. II, l. 622.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 2.

⁶¹ Preface (prose), *The Excursion*, 1.

indebted.⁶² The poem, a glorification of composition in solitude, owed its existence to a friend.⁶³

The poet experienced the traditional advantages of solitude, “delight/ Pure” and “dear remembrances,” which either “soothes/ Or elates the Mind”; but he took it a step further and made this the subject of the poem (“Preface,” ll. 4-5, 7, 7-8). The theme of Wordsworth’s great epic disputed Shaftesbury’s reservations about publishing one’s meditations.⁶⁴ Although he was fully “conscious of affecting thoughts,” he still questioned their origin: “these emotions, whencesoe’er they come,/ Whether from breath of outward circumstance,/ Or from the Soul,” and this inquiry became the theme of the poem: “I would give utterance in numerous verse” (“Preface,” ll. 10-12, 13).

Hazlitt attacked the poem for its self-indulgence. In the *Examiner*, in consecutive weeks in August and again in October 1814, Hazlitt observed that the poet “lives in the busy solitude of his own heart; in the deep silence of thought.”⁶⁵ Wordsworth’s approach to his subject matter appeared reminiscent of the unhealthy withdrawal condemned by Mandeville.⁶⁶ Instead of the integrity of Shaftesbury’s self-discourse, Hazlitt saw Wordsworth’s self-examination as a form of intellectual self-

⁶² Ibid., 2

⁶³ Coleridge was more than the inspiration and audience of *The Recluse*, he was meant to provide the philosophical framework. Kenneth R. Johnston notes that Wordsworth “tried to fulfil the promise Coleridge recognized in him by writing the kind of magnum opus that Coleridge always planned but never wrote.” “Wordsworth and the *Recluse*: The University of Imagination,” *PMLA*, 97, 1 (January, 1982), 61. Johnston notes that many scholars insist that the *Recluse* was a near impossible task, and put the blame on both poets: “partly by [Wordsworth’s] huge creative egotism, partly by Coleridge’s unending dream of a great modern philosophical poem.” *Wordsworth and the Recluse* (London, 1984), xii. See *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs. 6 vols. (Oxford, 1956-71), IV, 574-5.

⁶⁴ Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, 4.

⁶⁵ Hazlitt, “Character of Mr. Wordsworth’s New Poem, *The Excursion*,” *Examiner*, 1814. 21 August, 1814; 28 August, 1814; 2 October, 1814. Hunt, *Examiner* (1814), Volume VII (London, 1997).

⁶⁶ Hazlitt’s attack echoed Wordsworth’s own disparagement of the Solitary in *The Excursion*.

cannibalism: “The power of his mind preys upon itself. It is as if there were nothing but himself and the universe.”⁶⁷ Wordsworth, however, was aware that his approach might provoke criticism, and the “Preface” took a defensive stance.

Of the individual Mind that keeps her own
Inviolat retirement, subject there
To Conscience only, and the law supreme
Of that Intelligence which governs all –
I sing: – ‘fit audience let me find though few!’ (“Preface,” ll. 19-23).

When the Wanderer in his childhood purchases the “divine Milton,” in the “hollow vale,/ Hollow and green,” he spent his time “on the green turf/ In pensive idleness” (I, ll. 250, 259-61). The Solitary even supplies an argument to counter Mandeville’s charge of the “stupid Monastick Life.”⁶⁸

What other yearning was the master tie
Of the monastic brotherhood, upon rock
Aerial, or in green secluded vale,
One after one, collected from afar,
An undissolving fellowship? – What but this,
The universal instinct of repose,
The longing for confirmed tranquillity,
Inward and outward; humble, yet sublime (III, ll. 392-9).

The benefits of this self-improvement, where the “humble heart,/ Self-questioned where it did not understand,” are best seen when Wordsworth praises the education of the Wanderer, who “[i]n the woods,/ A lone Enthusiast, and among the fields [...] passed/ The better portion of his time” (I, ll. 241-2; 347-50).⁶⁹ It was there he keeps “[i]n solitude and solitary thought/ His mind in a just equipoise of love (I, ll. 355-6).

⁶⁷ Hazlitt, “Observations on Wordsworth’s poem, *The Excursion*,” *Works*, IV, 113.

⁶⁸ Mandeville, *A Search into the Nature of Society, Fable of the Bees*, I, 333.

⁶⁹ The poet, not just the Wanderer, admits “I, whose favourite school/ Hath been the fields, the roads, and rural lanes.” Bk. II, ll. 28-9.

The poet, not just the Wanderer, admits “I, whose favourite school/ Hath been the fields, the roads, and rural lanes” (II, ll. 28-9).

The individual mind, in a state of pure and uncorrupted retirement, was the ideal foundation for his epic poem.⁷⁰ Examining one’s own mind was a way of looking into one great universal mind: “when we look/ Into our Minds, into the Mind of Man – / My haunt, and the main region of my song” (“Preface,” ll. 39-41). Wordsworth made the “little heard” argument about the reciprocal relationship between the human mind and the natural world:

How exquisitely the individual Mind
(And the progressive powers perhaps no less
Of the whole species) to the external World
Is fitted: – and how exquisitely, too –
Theme this but little heard of among men –
The external World is fitted to the Mind (“Preface,” ll. 63-7).

Fitted to the mind, the natural world provided the inspiration for poetry.⁷¹ “The Poets,” Wordsworth wrote, “call the groves/ They call upon the hills and streams,” because nature speaks “with a voice/ Obedient to the strong creative power/ Of human passion” (I, ll. 475, 476-7, 478-81). The Wanderer cries, “‘Hail Contemplation!’” among the “academic groves” and acknowledges “a nook/ That seemed for self-examination made” (III, ll. 101; 105; 471-2). Of his solitary musings, he writes, “I oft perceive/ Fair trains of imagery before me rise” (“Preface,” ll. 2-3). Experience of the landscape is vital.

Ah! that such beauty, varying in the light
Of living nature, cannot be portrayed
By words, nor by the pencil’s silent skill;

⁷⁰ See also, Bk. IV, ll. 365-72.

⁷¹ See Geoffrey H. Hartman, *The Unremarkable Wordsworth* (Minnesota, 1987), 156.

But is the property of him alone
Who hath beheld it, noted it with care,
And in his mind recorded it with love! (IX, ll. 520-5).

As Hazlitt observed, the landscape of the poem was “left loose and irregular in the rude chaos of aboriginal nature,” and the poet leads the reader over this terrain: “The boundaries of hill and valley are the poet’s only geography, where we wander with him incessantly over deep beds of moss and wavering fern, amidst the troops of red-deer and wild animals.”⁷² This landscape also lent legitimacy to the poetic project; Wordsworth claimed that his retirement to the mountains ensured “authentic comment.”⁷³

The Excursion was largely Wordsworth’s blueprint for becoming a poet. The poem, as Nigel Alderman argues, “seeks to display not only how a poet is produced, but also how he can be reproduced.”⁷⁴ Aside from laying out his inspiration, the poem itself reiterates these themes. Wordsworth describes how the Wanderer grew up in solitude:

He, many an evening, to his distant home
In solitude returning, saw the hills
Grow larger in the darkness; all alone
Beheld the stars come out above his head,
And travelled through the wood, with no one near
To whom he might confess the things he saw.
So the foundations of his mind were laid (I, ll. 126-32).

The Poet, however, grew up in the selected company of the Wanderer, and both men benefit from his earlier lifestyle of travelling and reflections:

As I grew up, it was my best delight

⁷² Hazlitt, *Works*, IV, 112.

⁷³ Preface (prose), *The Excursion*, 2.

⁷⁴ Nigel Alderman, “Unity Sublime: *The Excursion*’s Social Self.” *The Yale Journal of Criticism*. 18. 1. (2005), 21.

To be his chosen comrade. Many a time,
On holidays, we rambled through the woods:
We sate – we walked; he pleased me with report
Of things which he had seen; and often touched
Abstrusest matter, reasonings of the mind
Turned inward (I, ll. 60-6).⁷⁵

The Wanderer learned about himself first and was then able to guide another.

Much as Thomson did before him, Wordsworth tried to counter the charge of promoting indolence by presenting the ease and leisure of retirement as both positive and in keeping with nature. Wordsworth contrasted the “pleasure” that the “wealthy” and the “luxurious” experience, who were “by stress/ Of business roused,” with that of the Poet and the Wanderer (II, ll. 97-8):

but how faint
Compared with ours! who, pacing side by side,
Could, with an eye of leisure, look on all
That we beheld; and lend the listening sense
To every grateful sound of earth and air;
Pausing at will – our spirits braced, our thoughts
Pleasant as roses in the thickets blown,
And pure as dew bathing their crimson leaves (II, ll. 103-10).

Travelling together in a state of active indolence, the two men enjoy a mutually beneficial relationship with the landscape. When the Wanderer sees a “snow-white Ram” and its reflection in a deep pool, Alderman observes that “physical exertion leads to a concentrated sight whose very contingency valorizes its benevolent significance” (IX, ll. 446-7).⁷⁶ The journey itself provided vital experience for the poet.

⁷⁵ In the 1827 version, the lines read: “A pair if random travellers; we sate – /We walked; he pleased me with his sweet discourse/ Of things which he had seen; and often touch’d/ Abstrusest matter, reasoning of the mind/ Turned inward.” Bk. I, ll. 65-9.

⁷⁶ Alderman, “Unity Sublime,” 34.

*Paradoxical solitude in The Excursion**Solitude and grief*

In the poetic tradition of Milton and Thomson, Wordsworth's solitude was also explicitly paradoxical.⁷⁷ Sally Bushell demonstrates the assimilation of passages from *The Tuft of Primroses* into *The Excursion*, but observes that the "spot that seemed/ Like the fix'd centre of a troubled world" was no longer Grasmere, as it was in the original: "There is a strong distinction to be made between his remote and self-isolated valley, containing only one cottage, and Grasmere, which represents a model of a far more sociable withdrawal."⁷⁸ However, this "self-isolated valley" was hardly solitary and remote.

Some representations of solitude in *The Excursion* are similar to the eighteenth-century concept of retirement. When the funeral procession is viewed, the Wanderer suggests that they verify the identity of the dead: "Perhaps it is not he but some one else/ For whom this pious service is performed;/ Some other tenant of the solitude" (II, ll. 400-2). In fact, the solitude of *The Excursion* has many tenants. As the poet and the Wanderer approach the Solitary's "hermitage," which he shares with "one poor shepherd," they come across a "wreck of party-coloured earthenware" amid the rocks; this is near the spot where the Solitary would meet the local children and

⁷⁷ Wordsworth also noted: "the poetry of the period intervening between the publication of the *Paradise Lost* and the *Seasons* does not contain a single new image of external nature." *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, III, 73.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 72. Sally Bushell further notes that for the final (1850) version, this passage is moved from Book V to Book III and transferred from the mouth of the Poet to the mouth of the Solitary. *Re-Reading The Excursion: Narrative, Response and the Wordsworthian Dramatic Voice* (Burlington, 2002), 72.

where he “shared their simple sports” (II, ll. 651, 463, 434, 450). This solitude involved cohabitants, parties, and sporting events.

The Solitary himself refers to it as “our narrow world” (II, l. 527). When he retells the tale of the “homeless Pensioner” who completes the errands of “[o]ur housewife,” he mentions “[l]eading sometimes an inexperienced child/ Too young for any profitable task” (II, ll. 744, 763, 770-1). In addition to these figures, he also lives close enough to these “other vales,” that as soon as his room-mate failed to reappear, “our dame, the queen/ Of this one cottage and this lonely dale,” immediately rushes into his “little sanctuary” (II, ll. 769, 775-6, 777). The Solitary explains how the housewife and “[h]er husband” all “sallied forth together” in search of his “ancient Friend” (II, ll. 794, 795, 785). The tale is told at his “hermitage” during their “pastoral banquet,” where the mourning child acts as a “willing Page, as he was bid,/ Ministering to our need” (II, ll. 651, 89, 687-8). This is a well-populated solitude in a “spot so parsimoniously endowed” (III, l. 17). This “sweet Recess,” described as “[s]o lonesome,” appears more like a close-knit rustic community (II, ll. 349, 354).

This crowded solitude may be ascribed to Wordsworth’s desire to promote a social vision in *The Excursion*. Kenneth R. Johnston argues that one of the ways that Wordsworth attempted this was to make the Solitary a conspicuously weak character; in passing from Book I to Book II, “we move from a strong character (the Pedlar-Wanderer) and an affecting story (“The Ruined Cottage”) to a weak character (the Solitary) with a life story whose affect is lessened by his self-pitying attachment to it.”⁷⁹ True solitude in *The Excursion* is portrayed as negative. Usually it is the isolation of the grief-stricken, but the disdainful and despondent withdrawal of the

⁷⁹ Johnston, *Wordsworth and the Recluse*, 263. However, as Coleridge remarked, when Wordsworth speaks, ““though under a feigned name, it is clear that he himself is speaking, as in the different dramatis personae of the ‘Recluse.’” Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, 2 vols. (London, 1817), II, 100.

Solitary was a conscious choice.⁸⁰ That “loss of confidence in social man,” occurred after the “heavy change” of losing his wife and children in rapid succession, after which “[s]ociety became my glittering bride,/ And air hopes my children” (IV, ll. 261-2; III, l. 669; III, ll. 735-6).

The early solitude of the Solitary and of Margaret amounts to the emotional state of “loneliness,” of those who were “secluded there,/ Lonesome and lost” (I, ll. 159-60).⁸¹ The misery of these characters is strikingly different from the retired state of contemplation praised by Wordsworth in the “Preface” and by the characters of the Poet and the Wanderer. Margaret’s character becomes defined by separation: “Nine tedious years; From their first separation, nine long years,/ She lingered in unquiet widowhood” (I, ll. 872-3). The Solitary suffered a similar fate, after “[d]eath suddenly o’erthrew/ Two lovely Children – all that they possessed!/ The Mother followed,” leaving him “miserably bare” (II, ll. 199-201).

An uncomplaining apathy displaced
This anguish; and, indifferent to delight,
To aim and purpose, he consumed his days,
To private interest dead, and public care (II, ll. 206-9).

Although Margaret is not saved, the Solitary is. Significantly, the Solitary’s despondency was not corrected by the Wanderer’s sermonizing alone, but by his enthusiastic speech endorsing a life of activity and retirement following “nature’s course.”

⁸⁰ His choice of solitude was in response to the failure of the French Revolution, and only after his failed new beginning in America. This echoed the fate of Satan after his failed rebellion in *Paradise Lost*.

⁸¹ The *OED* defines loneliness as a neutral solitude: “Want of society or company; the condition of being alone or solitary; solitariness, lonesomeness.” <http://dictionary.oed.com>. In *Solitude: A Philosophical Encounter*, however, Philip Koch refers to loneliness as a “longing” that is “intrinsically painful.” (Illinois, 1994), 31-4.

Rise with the lark! your matins shall obtain
 Grace, be their composition what it may,
 If but with hers performed; climb once again,
 Climb every day, those ramparts; meet the breeze
 Upon their tops, adventurous as a bee
 That from your garden thither soars, to feed
 On new-blown heath [...] with all your might
 Chase the wild goat; and if the bold red deer
 Fly to those harbours, driven by hound and horn
 Loud echoing, add your speed to the pursuit;
 So, wearied to your hut shall you return,
 And sink at evening into sound repose (IV, ll. 491-504).

Wordsworth presents three different views of solitude in *The Excursion*; one of freedom and inspiration, one of busy retirement, and one of despondent grief. The legacy of solitude from Milton, broadened and altered along the way, is further developed in Wordsworth's poem.

At various points in Keats's career, the major poems discussed above influenced him directly. Keats heavily annotated his 1807 edition of *Paradise Lost*, and he returned to the poem as a guide at various stages of his career.⁸² He knew *The Seasons* through Hunt and Hazlitt, who praised the poem in *The Feast of the Poets* (1814)⁸³ and in his lecture "On Thomson and Cowper" (1818), respectively.⁸⁴ *The*

⁸² Beth Lau, *Keats's Paradise Lost* (Orlando, 1998), 155, 96. Beth Lau discerns that a "curious pattern" in Keats's *Paradise Lost* marginalia is an interest in "references to solitude, especially the solitude of women."⁸² However, since Eve is the only female character in *Paradise Lost*, Keats's interest in the solitude of female characters can be more precisely described as an interest in the solitude of Eve. In fact, Keats's marginalia demonstrates his fascination with the paradoxical solitude of Adam and Eve. Lau notes that in his 1807 edition of the poem, he systematically underscored phrases such as "thus alone" and "pensive here I sat/ Alone" (IX, l. 457; II, ll. 777-8). Significantly, Keats highlighted many paradoxical presentations of solitude but left traditional depictions unmarked (III, ll. 440-3). Phrases such as "Sole Eve, associate sole," "alone as they," and "solitude is sometimes the best society," are all indicated in the midst of otherwise unmarked sections (IX, l. 227; IV, l. 340; IX, l. 249). He also underscored the poem's paradoxical closing lines "[t]hrough Eden took their solitary way" (XII, l. 649). 55, 153, 113, 153.

⁸³ Hunt, *Feast of the Poets* (1814), *Revolution and Romanticism, 1784-1859* (Oxford, 1989), ll. 15-6.

Excursion was a major foundation of Keats's poetic identity. He wrote to Haydon about the influence of *The Excursion*: "there are three things to rejoice at in this Age – The Excursion Your Pictures, and Hazlitt's depth of Taste" (I, 203).⁸⁵ The complex tradition of literary solitude that Keats inherited and absorbed provides a context for understanding Keats's concept of paradoxical solitude.

⁸⁴ See *L*, I, 227. See Chapter V.

⁸⁵ Beth Lau catalogues ninety separate echoes or allusions to *The Excursion*. *Keats's Reading of the Romantic Poets* (Manchester, 1991), 50-9. I explore the influence of *The Excursion* in the following chapters.

CHAPTER II

“O, SOLITUDE”

FORMULATING PARADOXICAL SOLITUDE, 1814-1816

Wonders and Wandering:

Patterns in Keats's earliest verse

Under all the conventionality of his 1814-1816 poetry lay glimpses of the poetic themes that fascinated and inspired Keats throughout his career.¹ His notions of the inspiration located in the natural world, wandering, fame, ambition, and solitude can be located in these early verses. “Imitation of Spenser,” the first poem of which there is a copy, reveals that Keats’s poetical sensibilities were rooted in the “wonders” of the natural world:²

Ah! could I tell the wonders of an isle
That in that fairest lake had placed been,
I could e’en Dido of her grief beguile,
Or rob from aged Lear his bitter teen (ll. 19-22).

If only the poet could describe these wonders, he felt, the resulting poem would be almost miraculous. This poetic effort is a fragment, highlighting his failed ambition to translate literary landscape into poetry. As the title indicates, Keats was not

¹ For order of composition, see Stillinger, 417-20.

² Ward contends that “a writer often reveals himself more directly in his first work than he ever does again.” 30. She argues for the sincerity of Keats’s description of the wonders of the landscape, maintaining that it was “a paradise to be regained.” 32. It was no coincidence, Ward argues, that this scene is “strikingly similar to his first view of Lake Windermere” which, four years later, “stunned him into silence.” 31. See *L*, I, 298-9.

attempting to locate his own voice in this poem; the island seems imagined because it was: “For sure so fair a place was never seen,/ Of all that ever charmed romantic eye” (ll. 23-4).³

The poem reveals, as John Barnard observes, Keats’s “desire to emulate.”⁴ The isle of Mirth and the Bower of Bliss of *The Faerie Queene* influenced the landscape of the isle and the “woven bowers” reflected in the lake (l. 6).⁵ The bower, as Rachel Crawford notes, was a convention used to explore the nature of poetic productivity within confined space; as a piece of “vernacular landscape,” the bower was assumed to be “both sumptuous and highly designed.”⁶ Andrew Motion argues that the “isle” is a “miniature England.”⁷ As we will see, the exploration and description of Britain would come to preoccupy his life and writings. Yet, the poet had no experience of this. Richard Cronin argues that these lush descriptions feel distant and the imagery is detached: “quite without the shocking intimacy that is Keats’s peculiar achievement.”⁸ Lacking first-hand knowledge, Keats focused instead on style, lapsing into “chromatic richness.”⁹ “Imitation of Spenser” is about the poet’s reading, but also contains the implicit hope that one day he *will* be able to tell the

³ This poem is also written in Spenserian stanzas.

⁴ Barnard, 15. David Hill Radcliffe argues for the following distinction: “Ambitious poets imitated Spenser as preparation for higher things; minor poets imitated *The Faerie Queene* because it was easy.” *Edmund Spenser: A Reception History* (London, 1996), 94.

⁵ Bk. II, Cantos 6 and 12, *Spenser: The Faerie Queene*, A. C. Hamilton, Yamashita Hiroshi, Fukuda Shohachi, and Toshiyuki Suzuki, eds. 2nd edn. (London, 2006). Allott also notes the influence of Thomson, Beattie, Milton, and Mary Tighe. 3.

⁶ Rachel Crawford, *Poetry, Enclosure, and the Vernacular Landscape, 1700-1830* (Cambridge, 2002), 230.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁸ Richard Cronin, *Colour and Experience in Nineteenth-Century Poetry* (London, 1988), 65. See ll. 10-13.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 65.

wonders of such an isle.¹⁰ The indications of Keats's early reading, *The Faerie Queene*, *King Lear*, and the *Aeneid*, also suggest his early love of the epic.¹¹

Another of Keats's earliest poems, "To Lord Byron," expresses his attraction to the solitary wanderer. The sonnet, written in December 1814, celebrates the "sweetly sad" melody of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*.¹² In Byron's poem, the eponymous hero leaves everything behind in order to embark on an epic journey: "His house, his home, his heritage, his lands [...] Without a sigh he left" (I, ll. 235-6).¹³ *Childe Harold* also evokes the power of the natural world upon the individual, experienced on his solitary travels through grand landscapes.¹⁴

From the dark barriers of that rugged clime,
Ev'n to the centre of Illyria's vales,
Childe Harold passed o'er many a mount sublime,
Through lands scarce notic'd in historic tales (II, ll. 406-9).

In the preface to the first and second cantos, Byron claimed that the poem was largely composed "amidst the scenes which it attempts to describe."¹⁵ *Childe Harold* also celebrates the restless and wayward nature of the hero, widely considered to be a portrait of the poet himself.¹⁶ Stuart Sperry argues that Keats soon realized that "the creative processes must seek their materials in a broad awareness of human

¹⁰ Motion notes the "sumptuous details, Classical references and painterly gestures would all become trademarks." 63. Emphasis mine.

¹¹ Gittings notes that the invocation of the dawn was derived from Fairfax's Tasso, 69.

¹² See Ward, 44 and Gittings, 73. Byron began the poem in 1812.

¹³ Byron, George Gordon, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage: A Romaunt, The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. by Jerome J. McGann. 7 vols. (Oxford, 1980-93), II.

¹⁴ Greg Kucich compares the pilgrimage of Endymion in Keats's later poem to Byron's *Childe Harold*. *Keats, Shelley, and Romantic Spenserianism* (Pennsylvania, 1991), 170-1.

¹⁵ "Preface" [to Cantos I – III], *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, 3.

¹⁶ Marlon Ross notes that "Byron always celebrates his own protean self-possession by making himself a masquerading hero of his own tale." *The Contours of Masculine Desire*, 31. Byron's solitude was, at times, just performance. See Fiona MacCarthy, *Byron: Life and Legend* (London, 2002), vii.

experience,” and he was drawn to the “imaginative adventure and discovery” of Byron’s poem.¹⁷

Another theme that foreshadowed Keats’s later preoccupations was poetic fame. Written in February 1815, “Ode to Apollo” depicts Keats’s poetic heroes sitting with the muses in “Western halls of gold” (l. 1, 5).¹⁸ Miriam Allott suggests that this poem was an early illustration of the poet’s “reverence for poetic achievement and of his individual re-working of influences from various literary sources.”¹⁹ Also written in 1815, “To Chatterton” was a similar celebration of poetic fame: “thou art among the stars/ Of highest heaven” (ll. 9-10). Both poems emphasize Keats’s personal ambition.

“To Hope,” composed in February 1816, provides an early example of Keats’s response to solitude: “When by my solitary hearth I sit,/ And hateful thoughts enwrap my soul in gloom” (ll. 1-2).²⁰ Perhaps encouraged by Byron’s example, the poet attempts a solitary journey through the forest but ends up discouraged: “Whene’er I wander, at the fall of night,/ Where woven boughs shut out the moon’s bright ray” (ll. 7-8). Keats’s appreciation of the wandering hero is stifled in the “bowers” of the literary landscape. Dispirited by solitude, the poet sinks further into “Sad Despondency.” The reappearance of the moon is all that can uplift his spirits and restore his “musing.” The moon, solitary, aloof, perpetually retreating and appearing,

¹⁷ Sperry, 66.

¹⁸ Ian Jack notes that Keats’s relationship with Apollo is “most perfectly” expressed in Poussin’s “The Inspiration of the Poet,” which was in England at the time. *Keats and the Mirror of Art* (Oxford, 1967), 181. See Appendix B.

¹⁹ Allott, 14.

²⁰ George Keats noted Keats’s “frequent melancholy.” *KC*, I, 285. See Chapter IV. Gittings argues that the morbid thoughts were “a real description of his state at this time.” 75.

resonated deeply with Keats as a symbol for the poetic imagination.²¹ The night sky matched his ambition with a suitably grand atmosphere.

Keats's earliest poems focus on the materials of poetic inspiration: wonder, wilderness, and travel. They also reveal both the poet's desire for solitude and his failure to endure it. These poems outline the traits Keats associated with poetic fame. His first experience of composing with another poet, however, added a new dimension to his concept of his poetic identity and took his poetic themes in another direction.

Poetry's secondary role:

The coterie of George Felton Mathew

Early in 1815, Keats and George Felton Mathew quickly became friends, reading, composing, and discussing poetry together.²² They spent evenings reading each other's verses aloud and conversing on Tasso, Spenser, and works such as William Sotheby's translation of Wieland's *Oberon* and Mary Tighe's *Psyche or the Legend of Love*.²³ Along with introducing him to a fellow poet, this friendship exposed Keats to his first coterie. The group was interested in more than literary pursuits, and Mathew played the role of gracious host:

²¹ Robert MacFarlane notes that "the clean luminous presence of the moon" has the ability to "silver the world into strangeness." *The Wild Places* (London, 2007), 32.

²² Bate, 51.

²³ Motion, 70. See also Earle Vonard Weller's "Keats and Mary Tighe," *PMLA*, 42, 4 (December, 1927), 963-5. Roe adds to this list Shakespeare, Milton, Chatterton, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Pope. "Poetics, Politics, and the *European Magazine*," 39.

But I always delighted in administering to the happiness of others: and being one of a large family, it pleased me much to see him and his brother George enjoy themselves so much at our little domestic concerts and dances.²⁴

Many of the leisured activities and poetic practices exhibited by the Mathew circle are considered by recent commentators to be “suburban.” Nicholas Roe argues that this “prosperous genteel circle,” with its poetry readings and its balls, enjoyed middle-class luxury and abundance.²⁵ The group gathered at Goswell Street or at Mathew’s father’s home in Regent’s Park and exchanged poems with other aspiring poets, such as Frederick Leffler.²⁶ Although Caroline Mathew recalled that Keats “wrote a great deal of poetry at our house,” composition became almost secondary to the activities of the coterie, and the poetry he did write was confined to the themes and styles of the group (*KC*, II, 185).

While associating with the Mathew coterie, Keats composed verse that is characterized by Roe, Motion, and Bate as poor. This “execrable verse”²⁷ was composed by a group with farcical “poetic pretensions,”²⁸ under the lead of “the passive languor of Mathew.”²⁹ Stephen Coote makes the following observation on Mathew’s poem, “To a Poetical Friend”:

Here, in ridiculous, jingling quatrains, Mathew concocted an equally ridiculous tradition of verse in which Keats is the heir of a poetry that derives from the ‘gay fields of Fancy,’ an anodyne world of knights, damsels, dungeons and dragons, which harmlessly beguiles the mind after work.³⁰

²⁴ “Mathew to Milnes,” 3 February 1847. *KC*, II, 185.

²⁵ Nicholas Roe, “Poetics, Politics, and the *European Magazine*, *K-SJ*, XLIX (New York, 2000), 35. Mathew was the son of a “prosperous textile dealer with a home in the fashionable new Regent’s Park.” Ward, 41.

²⁶ Gittings, 76. See also *KC*, II, 168.

²⁷ Roe, “Poetics, Politics, and the *European Magazine*,” 34.

²⁸ Motion, 71.

²⁹ Bate, 57. Attempting to paint a fair picture, Bate refers to Mathew as “someone who at least pretended to be a poet of sorts.” He later admits, “Mathew’s own verses must be seen to be believed.” 52, 53.

³⁰ Stephen Coote, *John Keats: a Life* (London, 1995), 33.

This scholarly consensus provides a reason for the failure of Keats's poems composed in this environment: the group itself. The poetry, as Graham Hough argues, suggests "a small and rather silly mutual admiration society."³¹

Scholarly tradition is also dismissive of the pretentious nature of the Mathew circle. Ayumi Mizukoshi characterizes the group around Mathew as a "domestic circle" that thrived on "pleasant conversation" and "poetry readings," while maintaining "convivial and cultivated appearances" under the guidance of a "part-time poetaster-reviewer."³² Motion notes that Keats needed to "recover" from his deplorable experiment with the Mathew coterie.³³ Roe argues that the Mathew circle offered "what appeared to be a cultured life, although its shallowness is suggested by the enthusiasm for reading and writing fashionable 'verses of "sentiment"' in which Keats joined Mathew."³⁴ Keats's association with Mathew is deemed to represent a transitional phase.³⁵

The example of this "interlude" with the Mathew circle, and the homogeneity of its critics' language, all suggest that something more than conflicting personalities or shared taste resulted in Keats's poetic failure.³⁶ Keats's failed verse arose from the context of a suburban, artistic community. Despite the encouragement and hospitality he received, Keats's creative urges were stultified in a coterie environment. Scholars agree that time with the Mathew circle reversed Keats's poetic development; as Motion argues, these poems "weaken the creative tensions he had begun to form in his earliest work."³⁷

³¹ Graham Hough, *The Romantic Poets* (New York, 1964), 160.

³² Ayumi Mizukoshi, *Keats, Hunt and the Aesthetics of Pleasure* (London, 2001), 110.

³³ Motion, 72.

³⁴ Roe, "Poetics, Politics, and the *European Magazine*," 35.

³⁵ Mathew felt Keats enjoyed the lifestyle, remarking that the poet "was fond of company" and "could amuse himself with the frivolities of life." *KC*, II, 185.

³⁶ Motion, 72.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 72.

In this ostensibly cultured atmosphere, Mathew was viewed “as the leader in a shared poetic enterprise.”³⁸ During this period, Keats wrote three Petrarchan sonnets dedicated to the women in the Mathew circle: “Woman! When I behold thee flippant, vain,” “Light feet, dark violet eyes, and parted hair” and “Ah, who can e’er forget so fair a being.”³⁹ These poems, in Gittings’s estimation, represented “the low-water mark of his poetry.”⁴⁰ Keats’s poetry did shift in a new direction during his time with the Mathew circle. Significantly, he began to write similar poetry to that which Mathew approved of and composed. For example, Mathew’s poetical interest in winning a lady’s favour through heroic tales is illustrated in his poem to Keats, “To a Poetical Friend”:

Oh thou, who delightest in fanciful song,
And tellest strange tales of the elf, & the fray;
Of Giants tyrannic, whose talismans strong
Have power to charm the fair ladies astray.⁴¹

In “Woman! When I behold thee flippant, vain,” Keats expresses his own chivalrous feelings: “Heavens, how desperately do I adore/ Thy winning graces! To be thy defender/ I hotly burn” (ll. 10-12). Although retaining the influence of *The Faerie Queene*, the poems bear the mark of Mathew’s influence. In “Ah, who can e’er forget so fair a being,” Keats seems to imitate his poetic friend: “God! She is like a milk-

³⁸ Motion, 70.

³⁹ Ward argues that these three poems were written in 1815 and dedicated to Mary Frogley, citing Keats’s grouping of the poems with his poems of 1814/1815 in *Poems*, coupled with Mathew’s praise of the sonnets in his review. Ward, 419n. Gittings agrees. 78. Claude Lee Finney and Allott, however, attribute the poems to the spring of 1816. *The Evolution of Keats’s Poetry*, 2 vols. (London, 1936), I, 111; Allott, 43-44. Stillinger argues that the three sonnet stanzas “are clearly presented as three stanzas of a single poem.” 546.

⁴⁰ Gittings, 78. These poems represented what Bate calls “the coy idiom, the comfortable corner-poetry,” that Keats found himself indulging in when composing in a coterie environment. Bate, 101. Chapter III explores how Keats falls back into this habit during his time with the Hunt circle.

⁴¹ Qtd. in Bate, 55. No line references given.

white lamb that bleats/ For man's protection" (ll. 3-4). Chivalry, bowers, and attempts at seduction in the approved fashion had replaced the early fascinations with solitude, wilderness, and travel.⁴²

Mathew's other poems suggest much about the dynamic of their relationship. In "Of Solitude," although he demonstrates a shared interest in natural scenery and the "stern solitude" of the trees, the suburban ideal of a friendly cottage is ultimately chosen: "The humblest cottage was my highest aim" (ll. 18, 5).⁴³ His poem "Of Friendship" also hints at his guarded views of solitude, independence, and ambition: "Love thyself last. Let not ambition lurk" (l. 14).⁴⁴ Keats's response, "O, Solitude," not only subverted Mathew's wary attitude to solitude and friendship, but also combined the two concepts in a way that preserved his earlier poetic themes. The influence of Wordsworth's poetry was largely responsible for this return.

The influence of Wordsworth:

Breaking through adopted style

Although Keats did not purchase *Poems by William Wordsworth* until the autumn of 1815, his summer poems suggest his awareness of the poet.⁴⁵ "To Emma Mathew" was actually addressed to either Ann or Caroline Mathew, but Keats employed this fictitious name in imitation of Wordsworth's *Poems on the Naming of*

⁴² Gittings interprets these lines as evidence that the poet "had been too closely protected from life" up to this point. 78.

⁴³ The dates of composition for Mathew's poems are unknown. Rollins, *KC*, II, 193n.

⁴⁴ *KC*, II, 198.

⁴⁵ Pinion, *A Keats Chronology*, 19. See also Gittings, 86. Keats's copy of Wordsworth's 1815 *Poems in Two Volumes* was among his books at his death. Lau clarifies that Keats owned an octavo two-volume set of Wordsworth's poems, and not, like 1807 *Poems*, a duodecimo set. *Keats's Reading of the Romantic Poets* (Ann Arbor, 1991), 12-3. See also Gittings, 87n., and Ward, 69.

Places.⁴⁶ At this stage, Keats had at least read *Lyrical Ballads* and probably the 1807 *Poems*.⁴⁷ As soon as Keats discovered Wordsworth, Gittings argues, he immediately became his ideal poet; in particular, the series *Poems on the Naming of Places* were “favourites of Keats.”⁴⁸ Keats earlier displayed similar fascinations, but the connection between poetry and landscape was fortified by his discovery of Wordsworth’s poetry. Wordsworth thought of poetry in relation to place; as Jonathan Bate notes, “before Wordsworth, the poetry of place tended to be inspired by *occasion* [...] whereas with Wordsworth the poetry of place began to be inspired by place itself.”⁴⁹ The lakes and mountains from his own experience filled his poetry.⁵⁰

Keats’s development was fitful, however, as the coterie style he adopted from his time with the Mathew circle co-existed with the return to the poetic wilderness instigated by reading Wordsworth’s poetry. With no experience of wilderness, Keats was forced to rely on second-hand accounts. In “To Some Ladies,” he wistfully imagines accompanying the Mathew sisters while they are “the wonders of nature exploring” (l. 1). He follows them in his mind:

Yet over the steep, whence the mountain stream rushes,
With you, kindest friends, in idea I muse –
Mark the clear tumbling crystal, its passionate gushes,

⁴⁶ Wordsworth used the name “Emma” to refer to the his sister, Dorothy. See Ernest de Selincourt, ed. *The Poems: John Keats* (London, 1905, rev. 1926), 39. See “It was an April morning,” from *Poems on the Naming of Places*, l. 39.

⁴⁷ See Allott, 18-22. Composed in 1800, *Poems on the Naming of Places* appears in 1800, 1802, 1805 editions of *Lyrical Ballads*. See *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. Michael Mason. 2nd edn. (London, 2007).

⁴⁸ Gittings, 92, 89. As we will see in Chapter IV, Keats would later borrow this practice when visiting Bailey at Oxford, dubbing an area around the river “Reynolds’s Cove.”

⁴⁹ Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth* (London, 2000), 205.

⁵⁰ Even though he had yet to read the poem, Keats may have been aware of Hazlitt’s review of *The Excursion*, where he noted that the “vastness and magnificence” of the poem “resembles the country in which the scene is laid.” *Examiner*, 21 August 1814, 540. Motion, 121 and Gittings, 138.

Its spray that the wild flower kindly bedews (ll. 5-8).⁵¹

The poet longs to be in “the wild labyrinth strolling” through the mountains and rivers, so that he can “muse” in the encouraging “moonbeamy air” (ll. 9, 12).⁵² Unable to experience these scenes himself, Keats latched on to the shell the girls presented him with upon their return.⁵³ Gathered from “the verge of the sea,” the shell served as an emblem of both the wilderness and their friendship (l. 14).

Fascinated by this artefact, Keats wrote another poem with the shell as its theme. “On Receiving a curious Shell,” however, is filled with the poetic references common to the circle, which he compares to the music of the shell: “In this little dome all those melodies strange,/ Soft, plaintive and melting, for ever will sigh” (ll. 33-4). In place of the landscape explored in the previous poem, Keats asks: “Hast thou a steed with a mane richly flowing?/ Hast thou a sword that thine enemy’s smart is?” (ll. 9-10). Instead of the verge of the sea, the poem references the “fair lady’s bower” (l. 16). Chivalry re-emerges among these landscapes, as in his verses dashed off as valentines to the Mathew sisters.⁵⁴ In “To Emma Mathew,” however, the poet returns to the nature of Wordsworth’s poetry. Casting aside the bower, he calls for Emma (one of the Mathew sisters) to travel with him to “the riches of Flora” (l. 2): “We will hasten, my fair, to the opening glades,/ The quaintly carved seats, and the freshening shades” (ll. 5-6). This was the product of what Motion calls Wordsworth’s “corrective influence.”⁵⁵

⁵¹ In 1817 *Poems*, “rove” replaces “muse.” Allott notes that muse “is required by the rhyme.” 6n, 18.

⁵² The Mathew sisters were on holiday at the seaside resort of Hastings; Keats journeyed there in 1817. Allott, 18. See Chapter IV.

⁵³ On Keats and gift-exchange, see Sharp, “Keats and Friendship,” 76.

⁵⁴ “Had I a man’s fair form” and “Hadst thou liv’d in days of old.” See Stillinger, 547.

⁵⁵ Motion, 72. Hazlitt noted that in Wordsworth’s writings, “we meet with no knights pricked forth on airy steeds.” *Works*, IV, 120. Barnard notes that the distinction between the “youthful

With “O, Solitude,” written in October or November 1815, Keats turned to Wordsworth’s example and revisited the themes of wonder, wilderness, and travel.⁵⁶ The sonnet, possibly written in response to Mathew’s “Of Solitude,” represented Keats’s early ideas on poetic solitude and suburban company.⁵⁷ Instead of composing separate verses on solitude and friendship as Mathew had, Keats combined the concepts. By locating “the highest bliss of human-kind” in a flight from the suburban environment, this poem expresses Keats’s need to escape the insulated, domestic world of Mathew (l. 13).⁵⁸

“O, Solitude”:

Poetic manifesto of paradoxical solitude

Motion suggests that “Nature’s observatory” described in “O, Solitude” is “not a remote Lake District peak but a suburban hillock.”⁵⁹ The internal evidence of the poem, however, challenges this interpretation. The speaker describes his viewpoint as being located atop a “steep,” which, once reached, makes the “dell,” with its “slopes” and “river,” merely “seem a span” (ll. 3, 4, 5, 5, 6). “Span,” the resulting size of all this after the climb, is defined by the *OED* as:

fancies” that the two men shared was that, for Keats alone, they pointed to “something beyond fashionable poeticising.” 29.

⁵⁶ Allott, 22.

⁵⁷ Published in *The Examiner*, 5 May 1816, this poem had particular influence on “To Some Ladies” and the poems of the summer. See Gittings, 87.

⁵⁸ Stillinger places “O, Solitude” directly after the three sonnets “Woman! I behold thee,” “Light feet, dark violet eyes,” and “Ah, who can e’er.” 13.

⁵⁹ Motion, 72. Jones argues that this indicated a Victorian interest “in the scientific objectification of nature.” “Keats in the Suburbs,” *The Persistence of Poetry*, 125. However, this is more a reflection of Keats’s fascination with astronomy, which from an early age instilled ideas of wonder, mystery, and discovery that he later associated with poetry. See Chapter IV.

the distance from the tip of the thumb to the tip of the little finger, or sometimes to the tip of the forefinger, when the hand is fully extended; the space equivalent to this taken as a measure of length, averaging nine inches.⁶⁰

The poet draws further attention to these long sight-lines by describing other features in the now distant dell, including “flowery slopes” and a “river.”⁶¹ The perspective is wide, vast, and panoramic, not one obtained from a “hillock” or “modest look-out.”⁶² The geography of the poem is not enclosed by the city or bordered by cottages as in Mathew’s poem.

Ultimately, categorizing this observatory as a “modest look-out” and emphasizing that it is “not a *Wordsworthian* mountain” is an attempt to recast it as suburban landscape.⁶³ “O, Solitude” has been interpreted by Motion and Roe as an overt celebration of “sociality,” a concept endorsed by Leigh Hunt.⁶⁴ However, Keats’s image of ascent and enlarged vision owes very little to the man who stated, “[d]islike mountains, can’t bear height, my legs shudder at the thought of it.”⁶⁵ The cliff that Keats imagines, which provides both a physical and imaginative distance

⁶⁰ Keats uses “span” in another poem of this period to represent a miniscule amount: “To possess but a span of the hour of leisure.” “To Some Ladies,” l. 27.

⁶¹ In another poem from around this time, “Had I a man’s fair form,” Keats says “I am no happy shepherd of the dell,” l. 7. He uses the term in the same sense as Wordsworth does when describing “Emma’s Dell” in “It was an April morning,” the first poem of the sequence *Poems on the Naming of Places*, *Poems by William Wordsworth*, 2 vols. (London, 1815), II, l. 46. As Wordsworth indicates in the table of contents, this poem was composed in 1800. I, l.

⁶² MacFarlane remarks that height “at least in its imaginative form, was the laxative which Keats’s blocked mind thought it needed: the ‘mountain top’ [in “I stood tip-toe upon a little hill”] again proved to be a spiritual vantage-point as well as a physical one.” *Mountains of the Mind*, 158.

⁶³ Motion, 97. Emphasis mine.

⁶⁴ Hunt’s association with the suburban is explored in Chapter IV. Hunt wrote a series of sonnets on Hampstead that Keats was probably familiar with; the first “Sonnet to Hampstead” was published in the 19 August 1813 issue of the *Examiner* and reprinted, along with the other five poems in the sequence, in his 1814 *The Feast of Poets*. Allott, 45.

⁶⁵ Leigh Hunt, 2 July 1847. Qtd. in William Allingham, *A Diary*, ed. H. Allingham and D. Radford (London, 1907), 37. Wordsworth, the life-long climber, reached the peak of Helvellyn for the final time in August 1840 at the age of 70. Stephen Gill, *Wordsworth: a Life* (Oxford, 1989), 403.

between the poet and the suburban scene, evokes the solitude of Wordsworthian mountains.⁶⁶

This sonnet shows Keats drawn to vastness, the distancing of the familiar, and the act of departure to inspire creative thoughts. As Robert MacFarlane claims in *Mountains of the Mind*, by the nineteenth century, height “equaled escape, it equaled solitude, it equaled spiritual and artistic epiphany.”⁶⁷ By literally overcoming the vales and “artificial lakes” of his suburban environment, the poet placed himself amidst the inspirational wilderness of Wordsworth’s poetry.⁶⁸ In “O, Solitude,” Keats was already transcending his familiar landscape by climbing an imagined mountain that towered over a conventionally suburban landscape.⁶⁹

However, “O, Solitude” acknowledges that the natural world was insufficient for bringing about the “bliss” Keats longed for; communication with an “innocent

⁶⁶ As Jennifer Ann Wagner argues, Keats had “intuited the expansive vision” that poets such as Wordsworth gained from experiencing such heights. *A Moment’s Monument: Revisionary Poetics and the Nineteenth-Century English Sonnet* (London, 1996), 85. MacFarlane remarks that height “at least in its imaginative form, was the laxative which Keats’s blocked mind thought it needed: the ‘mountain top’ [in “I stood tip-toe upon a little hill”] again proved to be a spiritual vantage-point as well as a physical one.” *Mountains of the Mind*, 158. Although reminiscent of “Tintern Abbey,” this mountain seems to once again be drawn from *Poems on the Naming of Places*. “A narrow girdle of rough stones,” centres around the poet’s description of how he “[s]auntered on this retired and difficult way” with “two beloved Friends,” which is echoed in Keats’s image of two kindred spirits escaping into the mountains. Wordsworth, “A narrow girdle of rough stones,” *Poems by William Wordsworth*, II, ll. 9, 6. “Tintern Abbey,” ll. 5-7.

⁶⁷ Robert MacFarlane, *Mountains of the Mind: a History of a Fascination* (London, 2003), 160.

⁶⁸ Motion, 106. The act of stargazing is also conveyed in the description “Nature’s observatory,” escaping the “murky buildings” and the suburban dell offers the vantage point of a pristine sky. Deer were also not associated with the heath. Alan Farmer, in his study of the Heath, quotes Charles Dickens: “the donkey is truly the indigenous animal of Hampstead Heath.” *Hampstead Heath* (London, 1984, repr. 1996), 109.

⁶⁹ Elizabeth Jones notes that a suburban environment was “artificial, ornamented, socialized, [and] domesticated.” “Sex and disease in the Cockney School,” *LH: LPP*, 84. MacFarlane explains the power of altitude: “Climbing upwards came to represent – and it still does – the search for an entirely new way of being.” *Mountains of the Mind*, 211. He continues: “Certainly, the equation of height with goodness is embedded in our language and consequently in the way we think. Our verb ‘to excel’ comes from the Latin *excelsus*, meaning elevated or high [...] One does not, under any linguistic circumstances, progress down.” 141-2.

mind” was required.⁷⁰ Roe argues that this is not “an isolated Wordsworthian vigil,” but Keats pointedly vowed to maintain the contemplative “vigil” itself, borrowing on the sense of authenticity associated with it through Wordsworth’s poetry: “let me thy vigils keep/ ‘Mongst boughs pavilioned” (ll. 6-7).⁷¹ This solitude, although paradoxical, seeks the attendant legitimacy of Wordsworthian images and language. “O Solitude” is the first poem where Keats fully integrates the company of another into the solitary environment. The companion provides conversation and company, while the wilderness supplies the location for what Roe refers to as “jacked-up claims for visionary insight.”⁷² “O Solitude,” with its soaring cliff, its act of departure from a suburban landscape, and its paradoxical solitude, was a rebuke to the physical and poetical confines of the Mathew circle.⁷³

“George Felton Mathew”:

Poetical Friends and Paradoxical Solitude

As a reply to Mathew’s own address “To a Poetical Friend,” Keats composed an epistle on the idea of a “brotherhood in song” (l. 2). He announced that a poetic union like that of Beaumont and Fletcher would be “doubly sweet” and capable of promoting “a feeling/ Of all that’s high, and great, and good, and healing” (ll. 2, 9-10). Evoking the time the two men spent walking in the countryside, Keats appealed

⁷⁰ See “Nuns fret not at their convent’s narrow room,” *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, E. de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire, eds. 2nd edn. (Oxford, 1954), III, ll. 5-9.

⁷¹ Roe, *FH*, 261.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 261.

⁷³ Whereas Keats imaged remoteness amid a suburban scene, Hunt “relentlessly domesticated” everywhere he went, from his cottage to his infirmary room. Nikki Hessell, “Jailhouse Journalism: Leigh Hunt and the *Examiner*, 1813-1815,” *K-SJ*, LIV (New York, 2005), 81.

to creative properties of travel, noting that “the coy muse, with me she would not live/
In this dark city” (ll. 32-3).⁷⁴ The muse was only located in the distant wilderness:⁷⁵

Should e'er the fine-eyed maid to me be kind,
Ah, surely it must be whene'er I find
Some flowery spot, sequestered, wild, romantic,
That often must have seen a poet frantic (ll. 35-8).

The “sequestered,” “wild,” and “romantic” landscapes required too much independence, however, and Keats reached out for the guidance and assistance of another:

Yet this is vain – O Mathew lend thy aid
To find a place where I may greet the maid,
Where we may soft humanity put on,
And sit and rhyme, and think on Chatterton,
And that warm-hearted Shakespeare sent to meet him
Four laurelled spirits, heavenward to intreat him (ll. 53-8).

A friend was required as a guide to the wilderness destination and the ensuing literary conversation. In this poem, as Aileen Ward notes, poetry was a “horizon” that could only be reached through the sublime natural world and “the stimulus of a sympathetic friend” (l. 12).⁷⁶ However, Keats’s relationship with Mathew was not of this

⁷⁴ As Barnard notes, Keats was inspired by “poetic wanderings” with Mathew. 23. David Pirie offers this reading of their shared solitude: “Then the countryside would become a shared viewpoint from which they can both care about society and swap radical versions of political history.” “Keats,” *The Penguin History of Literature: the Romantic Period*, ed. David Pirie (London, 1994), 352. However, Mathew was very conservative-minded, and he famously deprecated Keats’s tendency to be a “faultfinder with everything established.” *KC*, II, 186.

⁷⁵ Jennifer N. Wunder argues that Keats’s muse is often viewed “in hermetic terms.” *Keats, Hermeticism, and the Secret Societies* (London, 2008), 99.

⁷⁶ Ward, 51. See also Jerome McGann’s *The Beauty of Inflections: Literary Investigations in Historical Method and Theory* (Oxford, 1988), 27.

dynamic.⁷⁷ Mathew was a dominant personality who preferred to host group gatherings rather than engage in individual partnerships. Although Keats was unable to realize paradoxical solitude with someone of this personality, he soon met another partner more suited to his creative needs.

Outside his shell:

Keats and Joseph Severn

Keats met Joseph Severn in the spring of 1816, and their friendship was the poet's first experience of paradoxical solitude outside the imaginative realm of poetry.⁷⁸ Severn recorded that meeting Keats that spring raised him "to the third heaven," and he felt as though a "new world was opened to me & I was raised from the mechanical drudgery of my art to the hope of brighter & more elevated courses."⁷⁹ Severn not only put Keats on a pedestal, but also noted this unequal reciprocity was the foundation of their friendship:

on my part my receiving such intellectual gifts with a warm feeling of gratitude & on his part the generosity of imparting his poetical gifts, his taste in the arts, his knowledge of history, his most fascinating power of communicating all these.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Motion notes that after this poetic exchange, "their intellectual companionship could not survive for long." 88.

⁷⁸ Severn claims to have met Keats in 1817, but there is a letter from Keats to Severn dated 1 November 1816. *L*, I, 115-6. Scott notes that Severn may have been introduced to the poet as early as the fall of 1815. Severn, "My Tedious Life," (1873), *Joseph Severn: Letters and Memoirs*, ed. Grant F. Scott (Aldershot, 2005), 31n. See also *KC*, I, cxxix; Lowell, I, 105n.; Bate, 51.

⁷⁹ Severn, "My Tedious Life," (1873), *Joseph Severn: Letters and Memoirs*, 631; 632.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 631-2.

Significantly, Ward contends, Severn's "admiration must have reflected back to Keats the image he sought of the rising young poet."⁸¹ In Severn's company, Keats became relaxed and communicative; known for his moods of "almost austere reticence" in groups and around new acquaintances, he was seen by Severn as having a "fascinating power" of communication.⁸²

Keats was clearly the dominant personality, as evidenced by Severn's description of their wandering through the countryside:⁸³

it was a delight to me to stroll over the fields from smoakey London to enjoy & profit by the Brightness of his genius – and more so as he received me invariably with cordiality & always found a way of apparently making me equal to himself – I used to take my miniatures to do up the backgrounds as an excuse for intruding my miniature self on his superior society.⁸⁴

Although Keats made efforts to make him feel "equal," Severn was aware of the discrepancy.⁸⁵ Severn admitted in 1830 that he was "not a little proud of Keats as my friend," and just before his death in 1879 he said to a friend: "I may say that of all I have done with brush and pen, as artist and man, scarce anything will long outlast me...yet through my beloved Keats I shall be remembered."⁸⁶ Such adoring

⁸¹ Ward, 63.

⁸² In Sharpe's *The Life and Letters of Joseph Severn*, Severn refers to Keats's "fascinating power of conversation" and "great communicativeness." 19, 19n. Henry Stephens, Keats's room-mate from St. Thomas Street, remembered the poet as socially awkward. *KC*, II, 212.

⁸³ Motion, 93. Motion adds that "Severn could seem irritatingly adhesive, but Keats never lost patience with him." 92. Gittings notes that in the summer of 1817, Severn "attached himself like a spaniel to Keats." 216. Severn wrote to his sister Sarah on 27 June 1823, "I make a point never to know anyone who is not superior to me in fortune or ability, or some way or other, that I may still be raising myself and improving, even in moments of pastime." *KC*, I, cxxxiii.

⁸⁴ Severn, "My Tedious Life," *Joseph Severn: Letters and Memoirs*, 635.

⁸⁵ Scott argues that the predominant image of Severn as "the selfless friend" is not entirely accurate. Scott examines Fanny Brawne's comment about Severn's self-centeredness, "the eternal I—I—," as well as Lowell's attack on his character, but argues for fairer judgment. Scott, *Severn*, 2-8; 587.

⁸⁶ Severn, "To Brown," 17 January 1830, *Joseph Severn: Letters and Memoirs*, 298; 93. Severn asked to be buried alongside Keats with a matching stone, despite the fact that he

sentiments were integral to the dynamic of paradoxical solitude. Although he did not become one of Keats's most intimate friends until almost four years later, during the summer of 1816 this friendship proved to be more conducive to composing poetry than had the crowded coterie of the Mathew circle.

Re-writing "O, Solitude":

Imagined wildernesses

The three poems that Keats wrote in the summer of 1816 exhibit his need to travel into actual wilderness. In "To one who has been long in city pent," the poet leaves the city to read a "gentle tale of love and languishment" in the grass (l. 8). "Fatigued" from the walk, he returns home "at evening" (ll. 6, 9). Elizabeth Jones argues that this is a suburban poem because of "the excursionary character of the escape."⁸⁷ She infers that this was the escape of a "harassed Londoner who seeks no more from nature than a change of scenery and some leisure."⁸⁸ For Keats, however, these short ventures into the fields replaced the wilderness he lacked.

In "Oh, how I love on a fair summer's eve," the poet wants "far, far away to leave/ All meaner thoughts, and take a sweet reprieve/ From little cares" (ll. 4-6). He longs "to find, with easy quest,/ A fragrant wild with Nature's beauty dressed,/ And there into delight my soul deceive" (ll. 6-8). Because his quest for wilderness is

complained in 1836, "the present grave stone with its inscription is an eye sore to me." "To Brown," 13 July 1836, *Joseph Severn: Letters and Memoirs*, 338. Severn wanted to erect a new tomb for Keats upon which, after the line "Here lies one whose name was writ in water" he wanted to add: "Time/ Having reversed this sentence/ His friends & admirers/ now inscribe his name/ in Marble/ 1859." 338.

⁸⁷ Jones, "Keats and the Suburbs," *The Persistence of Poetry*, 125.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 125.

“easy,” however, the result would be no more than deception. Subsequently, once at his destination, even though he is “[m]using” on Milton and Sidney, he is not confident in his own poetic success; he may “[p]erhaps on the wing of poesy upsoar” (ll. 10, 12). This sonnet, with its undertone of hesitation and deception, represents the poet’s attempts to create imaginatively such an escape on Hampstead Heath.

“To a Friend that Sent me Some Roses” refers to the poet’s recent rambles “in the happy fields,” where he came across “the sweetest flower wild nature yields,/ A fresh-blown musk-rose” (ll. 5-6). Acknowledging that the wild flower “far excelled” the “garden-rose,” he is nevertheless forced to reconsider this preference when he received flowers from his friend, Charles Wells (l. 10). These roses, he wrote, “[w]hispered of peace and truth and friendliness unquelled” (ll. 14-15). He had not forgotten the importance of friendship to his creative process.

“I stood tip-toe upon a little hill” grew out of these attempts to create paradoxical solitude in the summer of 1816.⁸⁹ Keats’s efforts to imaginatively escape the suburban landscape through poetry had failed; Bate argues that the verses sunk into “flaccid repetition,” until the poet finally “jotted down some descriptive lines – perhaps fifty to a hundred – for a fourth poem, later expanded into the verse beginning ‘I stood tip-toe upon a little hill.’”⁹⁰ This poem fared no better, and for similar reasons.⁹¹ Despite the suitable partner in Severn, Keats’s poems lacked the inspiration of the wilderness. Imagining it was not sufficient, and in the final lines before he

⁸⁹ Bate, 63-5. The “bowery clefts and leafy shelves,” (l. 21) although a part of the landscape of the Heath, also echo the poem that ultimately provides the motto, Hunt’s *The Story of Rimini* (London, 1816), III, l. 473.

⁹⁰ Ibid. 65. See also Ward, 422, who argues that Keats composed the first sixty lines of “I stood tip-toe upon a little hill” on the Heath.

⁹¹ Ward observes that his drafts from this period “are full of false starts and stops, of wrenched syntax and misplaced accents and bad rhymes, of painful searching for the right word and angry scratching out of lines at a time.” 64.

shelved the poem, the poet asked the local flowers, “ye ardent marigolds,” to communicate a message to Apollo (l. 48):

When again your dewiness he kisses,
Tell him I have you in my world of blisses,
So haply when I rove in some far vale,
His mighty voice may come upon the gale (ll. 53-6).

Leaving a message with a flower was Keats’s only connection to the type of wilderness he required. This promise to the god of poetry to find him in “some far vale” suggests that while Keats wanted to retain some part of this landscape, he believed that he could not hear the voice of poetry in the suburban environment of Hampstead Heath.

In order to prepare for writing the epic poetry of his ambitions, Keats needed more authentic wilderness similar to that described in Wordsworth’s poetry. The poems Keats had written with the Mathew circle imitated the suburban style of the coterie. The paradoxical solitude he enjoyed with Severn also did not result in the poetry he desired; imaginative attempts to add grandeur to the suburban surroundings proved ineffective. Keats was left with the second-hand wilderness of sea shells and wild flowers. He devised a plan to distance himself mentally and physically from London. Days after sitting his examinations at Apothecaries’ Hall on 25 July 1816, accompanied by his younger brother Tom and by Wordsworth’s octavo *Poems in Two Volumes* (1815), Keats travelled to Margate for the remainder of the summer (I, 31).⁹² This journey was the realization of Keats’s desire to, in Kathleen Lundeen’s phrase,

⁹² Bate, 67.

“unsettle himself from the world.”⁹³ Margate provided an escape from the crowds of London, the suburban landscape of Hampstead, and the insular society of the Mathew circle.⁹⁴ Furthermore, this journey offered both the wilderness and the independence that Keats felt would fuel his creativity,⁹⁵ while the presence of Tom provided confidence and security.⁹⁶

⁹³ Kathleen Lundeen, “Keats’s Post-Newtonian Poetics,” *K-SJ*, XLIV (New York, 1995), 107. Keats wrote to Fanny Brawne on 25 July 1819: “I look not forward with any pleasure to what is call’d being settled in the world; I tremble at domestic cares.” *L*, II, 133.

⁹⁴ J. M. W. Turner, who was also inspired by Margate, claimed that the “loveliest skies in all of Europe [are] in the Isle of Thanet.” *The Oxford Companion to J. M. W. Turner*, Evelyn Joll, Martin Butlin, and Luke Herrmann, eds. (Oxford, 2001), 400.

⁹⁵ Keats had never been beyond the outskirts of London. Enfield, where Keats went to school, is roughly 15 miles northeast of the centre of the city. Contemporary guidebooks illustrate that Keats could not escape London entirely by travelling to Margate, noting that the population swelling from “4,766 inhabitants” to around 25,000 visitors in the summer months. Anon. *New Margate, Ramsgate, and Broadstairs Guide*, 6th edn. (Margate, 1816), 28.

⁹⁶ Critics and biographers dispute whether or not Keats spent all or just a portion of this time at Margate with Tom. A letter from George Keats to his brothers at Margate establishes that they were in fact there together, if only briefly. *L*, I, 55; see *KC*, I, 3. Ward proposes that they left together, as does Pinion. Bate claims Keats went alone but that after two weeks Tom “joined him for at least a while.” Coote agrees, while Gittings and Motion say Tom was already there and Keats went to meet him. Ward, 66; Pinion, *A Keats Chronology*, 21; Coote, *Keats*, 39; Gittings, 119; Motion, 99.

CHAPTER III
DISCOVERY AND INDEPENDENCE
POEMS, 1816-1817

“Calidore” and the “Wide Expanse”

“Calidore” was the first poem Keats worked on in Margate.¹ This poem, which relates the travels of a young knight with an “eye prepared to scan/ Nature’s clear beauty,” is in the same vein as the verse he wrote with the Mathew circle (ll. 29-30).² This poem depicts the enclosed boundaries, the bowers, which Mario D’Avanzo argues represents Keats’s “place of poetic inspiration.”³ However, the poet’s use of the bower seems to be a demonstration of his poetic development.⁴ Greg Kucich offers a similar view, arguing that Keats arranged Calidore’s legend as a “pilgrimage of his own creative growth beyond the bowers of luxurious fantasy that had captivated his youthful imagination.”⁵ The poem ends abruptly with the speaker contemplating the solitary nature of the moon and the mysteries of the constellations (ll. 65; 157-162). Keats had learned the importance of first-hand knowledge from the poetry of Wordsworth. As Keats wrote in an epistle to George, the lessons of other poets, or even the creatures of the natural world, could not substitute for his own experience:

¹ Motion, 102.

² *The Faire Queene* and Hunt’s *The Story of Rimini* also heavily influenced this poem.

³ Mario D’Avanzo, *Metaphors for the Poetic Imagination* (Durham, N. C., 1967), 164. The idea of Keats as a poet of bowers has long held critical sway. See, for example, Keith D. White, *John Keats and the Loss of Romantic Innocence* (London, 1996), 162.

⁴ In “Sleep and Poetry,” Keats describes his poetic journey: “First the realm I’ll pass/ Of Flora.” ll. 101-2. This early stage includes the “bowers,” “nooks,” and “nests” of his poems. See Barnard, 20.

⁵ Kucich, *Keats, Shelley, and Romantic Spenserianism*, 158.

“the still murmur of the honey bee/ Would never teach a rural song to me” (ll. 13-14).⁶

Keats began work on a new poem, forgoing the literary bower and drawing imagery from the actual scenery.⁷ Bate speculates that the poet frequented spots on the high ground to the north of the city noted for “extensive views.”⁸ This perspective might have been responsible for the detectable shift in Keats’s imagery from this point onwards. “Almost at once,” Ward observes, “the vast openness of the scene, with its endless motion and glimmer, entered into his poetry, adding a new dimension to the earthy, enclosed, overshadowed world of his earlier poems.”⁹

The sonnet, “To My Brother George,” details “the wonders” that he witnessed at Margate (l. 1). Keats related his first view of the ocean, and imbued it with the power to speak to poets (ll. 3-4).

The ocean with its vastness, its blue green,
Its ships, its rocks, its caves, its hopes, its fears,
Its voice mysterious, which whoso hears
Must think on what will be, and what has been (ll. 5-8).

The poem is an attempt to familiarize the poet with the landscape and, with his Wordsworthian ideal in mind, Keats catalogues the traits exhibited by each aspect of the natural world. However, it was now the element of friendship that was missing from the experience at Margate, and the poet sought it out.

⁶ A similar poetic offering from this period, “Specimen of an Induction” refers to a poem Keats never wrote.

⁷ As MacFarlane notes: “Openness is rare, but its importance is proportionally great. Living constantly among streets and houses induces a sense of enclosure, of short-range sight. The spaces of moors, seas and mountains counteract this.” MacFarlane, *The Wild Places*, 76.

⁸ Bate, 68.

⁹ Ward, 66.

Keats's brothers:

The importance of "social thought"

None of Keats's letters survive from this early trip, but scholars have speculated on his activities at Margate.¹⁰ Motion notes that Keats "certainly spent a good deal of time with Tom," and also "spent most of his time writing."¹¹ Tom acted as Keats's scribe, copying out his poems in a notebook.¹² Tom provided the support that Keats required in order to create; Gittings observes that Keats's "intense nature, always in danger of burning itself out in sheer mental effort, had the company of Tom to make it 'feel the gentle anchor pull.'"¹³ Henry Stephens, Keats's school room-mate, perceived that the poet's brothers filled a supportive role, and that "their praise of their Brother John amounted almost to idolitry."¹⁴ Much like Tom, George encouraged both the poet's aspirations and his own idea of the poet. Both brothers supported the solitary travels that Keats felt were prologues to poetic composition (I, 125).¹⁵

Although both offered similar admiration, there were differences in Keats's relationship with each brother. George, years older than Tom, was more pragmatic

¹⁰ Keats's first surviving letter is from 9 October 1816.

¹¹ Motion, 100.

¹² Tom transcribed Keats's earliest verse, including "Imitation of Spenser," the first one of which there is a copy. Allott, 3. Gittings notes that both of the Keats brothers were "supporters of his belief in himself, and companions with whom he shared his reading and thought." 151. Bate remarks that Keats's "intimacy with his brothers was without inhibition." 265n.

¹³ Gittings, 123. The quote is from "Lines Written in the Highlands," l. 40. See Chapter VI.

¹⁴ *KC*, II, 210. Stephens further reminisced that they "worshipped him" and "seemed to think their Brother John was to be exalted." 209.

¹⁵ It is significant that, as we will discuss below, Haydon, and especially Keats's brothers, pushed him to take a second, solitary trip to the Isle of Wight. Bate, 67-83.

and acted as a mentor to both brothers.¹⁶ Keats would later state, George “has ever been more than a brother to me, he has been my greatest friend;” he later added: “My Brother George always stood between me and any dealings with the world” (I, 358; II, 113). George observed that although Tom “had not the power to divert [Keats’s] frequent melancholy,” he managed to relieve the poet through “continual sympathy, explanation, and inexhaustible spirits, and good humour, from many a bitter fit of hypochondriasm” (*KC*, I, 285-4). Keats required specific partners for specific purposes; despite the presence of his receptive younger brother, the poet reached out to George for encouragement during this summer at Margate.¹⁷

The sonnet to George, full of wonder and optimism, could not move beyond description; it concludes by emphasizing the importance of “social thought” (l. 13). Without his connection with George, the poet was only able to amass a series of impressions from the natural world.¹⁸ The cancelled lines from the draft confirm that “social thought” implies more than conversation: “The Sights have warmed me but without thy love/ What Joy in Earth or Sea or Heaven above.”¹⁹ Despite his scrutiny of the landscape, Keats found no inspiration and appealed to his friendship with George.²⁰

After this sonnet, Keats wrote an epistle to George venting his poetic frustration: “Full many a dreary hour have I passed,/ My brain bewildered and my

¹⁶ Motion, 69.

¹⁷ Tom was also not present throughout the entire trip, so Keats may have turned to George during a period of his absence. Ward, 66 and Bate, 68.

¹⁸ Sperry observes that the poem reverts to “pointless, anticlimactic cataloguing.” 76.

¹⁹ See Allott, 12n, 48.

²⁰ Although Cox suggests that this phrase promotes “the importance of community,” and its “connection to his imaginings,” the poem refers specifically to “the social thought of *thee*,” not social thought in general. 94.

mind o'ercast/ With heaviness" (ll. 1-3).²¹ Despite his affirmation of the poetic value of the landscape in the sonnet, the epistle acknowledges the demanding nature of poetic creation. Determined to enter a poetic "trance" by intensely prying "'mong the stars," the poet could only glance at images "dimly seen" (ll. 25, 12).

Keats's frustration stemmed from contrasting his own struggle with what he imagined to be the Wordsworthian poet's ease of composition.²² Perhaps recalling Wordsworth's notion that "all good Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings," Keats expressed his view of the process of true poets: "A sudden glow comes on them, naught they see/ In water, earth, or air, but poesy" (ll. 21-2).²³ Keats, however, was not privy to the poetic scene in the sky: "what we, ignorantly, sheet-lightning call,/ Is the swift opening of their wide portal" (ll. 29-30).²⁴ He was again left cataloguing the natural scenes empty of their poetic significance. Keats's lack of inspiration was due to his lack of this experience of wilderness, and in outlining his plan to locate it he echoes "O, Solitude":

Fair world, adieu!
Thy dales, and hills, are fading from my view:
Swiftly I mount, upon wide spreading pinions,
Far from the narrow bounds of thy dominions (ll. 103-6).

²¹ As George Yost observes, the "dark tone" of the poem's opening lines suggests Keats's frustration in the search for poetry. "Keats's Tonal Development," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 23, 4 (Autumn, 1983), 574.

²² In his solitary musings, Wordsworth wrote, "I oft perceive/ Fair trains of imagery before me rise." "Preface," *The Excursion*, ll. 2-3. See Chapter I.

²³ Wordsworth, "Preface," *Lyrical Ballads*, 2nd edn. Michael Mason, ed. (London, 2007), 62. The preface was attached to the 1800 edition, and an enlarged version appeared in 1802, and was reprinted in 1805. 55.

²⁴ This was, of course, only Keats's perception of Wordsworth's methods; as Barnard shows, in the 1802 sonnet "Composed after a Journey across the Hambleton Hill, in Yorkshire," Wordsworth rejected a moment similar to this one celebrated by Keats as merely an act of "fancy." 30.

He must leave behind the suburban landscape of “dales” and “hills” and instead reach for the summit of “a lofty clift, which proudly towers/ Above the ocean-waves” (ll. 124-5). Having done that, however, he still lacked the confidence needed to compose the poetry of his ambition.

Seeking confidence:

“Epistle to Clarke” and “I stood tip-toe upon a little hill”

Keats sought out support from encouraging partners, writing a verse letter to George and another to Charles Cowden Clarke. These correspondences, and the relationships they highlight, were crucial to Keats’s formation of his poetical character.²⁵ Timothy Hilton notes the correlation between these friendships and the candid nature of the poems, concluding that the verses “follow no set pattern, and are essentially friendly poems not only in their tone, but also in their expectation of the reader’s sympathy.”²⁶ This sympathy was vital to Keats’s poetic development, and his letter to Clarke confesses his inability to achieve his poetic ambitions. The poem describes the conditions of Keats’s “venture on the stream of rhyme”:

With shattered boat, oar snapped, and canvas rent
I slowly sail, scarce knowing my intent,
Still scooping up the water with my fingers,
In which a trembling diamond never lingers (ll. 17-20).

²⁵ As Bate argues: “Without them – or without someone like them – he would probably have been unable to write very much, if at all, in this brave excursion to Margate.” 70.

²⁶ Timothy Hilton, *Keats and His World* (London, 1971), 20-1.

This poem, as Hilton argues, is “unabashedly concerned with personal ambition,” and this demonstrates the security and comfort that Keats could rely on from this audience.²⁷ Keats explored the poetic forms that he had discussed with Clarke: the sonnet, the ode, the epigram, and, foremost, the epic: “the king,/ Round, vast, and spanning all like Saturn’s ring” (ll. 66-7).²⁸ Influenced both by Clarke’s teachings and the examples like *The Faerie Queene* and *Paradise Lost*, Keats equated a poem’s scope with its value.²⁹

Writing this epistle to Clarke encouraged him to once again attempt a longer piece, and he revisited the sixty lines composed on Hampstead Heath with Severn.³⁰ After Keats penned the lines asking Apollo to reach him “when I rove in some far vale,” he was unable to return to the suburban description that filled the rest of the poem (l. 55).³¹ Spurred on by his communication with Clarke, however, he continued from these lines.³² Clarke later claimed that the passage refers to “the recollection of having frequently loitered over a foot-bridge that spanned [...] a little brook in the last field upon entering Edmonton.”³³ It was injected with new life, however, from his experience of travel and wilderness in Margate.

The lines Keats began on Hampstead Heath, originally composed under the title “Endymion” but later referred to by the first line, “I stood tip-toe upon a little hill,” were now charged with the experience of wandering under the night sky: “Lover

²⁷ Stephens noted that, when Keats voiced his poetic ambitions to his medical student friends, they occasionally reacted with “ridicule, & some mortification.” *KC*, II, 209.

²⁸ See ll. 56, 58. As we will see below, Clarke introduced Keats to many poets, including Spenser. Charles and Mary Cowden Clarke, *Recollections of Writers* (London, 1878), 126.

²⁹ Clarke’s teachings are discussed below.

³⁰ Ward, 422.

³¹ See Chapter II.

³² Gittings notes that “without pause,” Keats “carried on where the epistle to Clarke had just ended,” walking from Enfield. 122. Keats also appears to have gone back through the previous 60 lines, writing until 106 before he left off. Ward, 422; Gittings, 122.

³³ Charles and Mary Cowden Clarke, *Recollections of Writers* (London, 1878), 138-9.

of loneliness and wandering,/ Of upcast eye and tender pondering!” (ll. 121-2).³⁴ The moon is increasingly dominant in the poetic landscape.³⁵ In the change from the epistle to this piece, Gittings observes that Keats matched Wordsworth’s influence with his own experience: “Losing the stiffness of the epistle, catching the Wordsworthian emphasis of their sixty-line prologue, the verses took on a new authority.”³⁶ The scenes of the poem, in Gittings’ words, become “fully realized poetic experiences, a Middlesex counterpart to Wordsworth’s Westmorland mountainscapes.”³⁷ After he returned from Margate and read *The Excursion*, Keats completed “I stood tip-toe upon a little hill,” contrasting Wordsworth’s concept against his own experience. In the fourth stanza he asks: “What first inspired a bard of old to sing” (l. 163). This exploration was based on the passage on the origin of myth in *The Excursion*, which suggests, as Allott notes, that “various rural deities were called into being by imaginative response to the sun, moon and various familiar natural objects” (IV, ll. 347-87).³⁸

By using the example of the poet who was inspired to compose the story of Narcissus, Keats compared his previous experience as poet of the bower with his anticipated experience of poet of the wilderness. The speaker finds a “meek and

³⁴ For a detailed account of the composition of “I stood tip-toe upon a little hill,” see Ward, 32n. On the basis of different paper sizes and types, as well as a close study of manuscript insertions and deletions, Ward argues that lines 1-60 and 107-114 were probably written in London and completed in Margate, and lines 61-106 were composed entirely when at Margate. Stillinger, however, refers to the “elaborate datings” in Ward and Gittings as “too speculative.” 556. Allott argues that this second section consists of Keats’s recollections of the countryside around Edmonton. 85.

³⁵ The poem does not turn into “Endymion” until the “fourth section,” composed in December; however, after the “wonders of the sky and sea” at Margate, the decision to base a long poem on the story Endymion, a shepherd who falls in love with the moon and searches for her under the sea, seems inevitable. See Ward, 422.

³⁶ Gittings, 123.

³⁷ Ibid., 123. Ward contends that the poem Keats had “started so simply on a June morning on Hampstead Heath began to move in a new direction, though he could not quite see his goal.” 70.

³⁸ Allott 91n.

forlorn flower” after taking a “delicious ramble” to a “little space, with boughs all woven round” (ll. 172, 165-6). This tale, the personification of egotism, is associated with limited space, enclosed bowers, and insulated thoughts. Keats re-phrases the question of inspiration to incorporate his emphasis on travel and wilderness: “*Where* had he been, from whose warm head out-flew/ That sweetest of all songs?” (ll. 181-2).³⁹ The response requires freedom from confinement and “little spaces”: “Ah, surely he had burst our mortal bars,/ Into some wondrous region he had gone/ To search for thee, divine Endymion” (ll. 190-2). Here a journey into “some wondrous region” is “surely” the impetus for the story of the “wanderer by moonlight” (l. 185). A more dramatic departure supplied inspiration and also provided legitimacy (l. 165-6).⁴⁰

Keats may have had Hazlitt’s review of *The Excursion* in mind when formulating these ideas, where the critic noted that the “vastness and magnificence” of the poem “resembles the country in which the scene is laid.”⁴¹ Hazlitt added that the poem “excites or recalls the same sensations which those who have traversed that wonderful scenery must have felt.”⁴² The scenery, he argued, was of a specific kind:

There are no dotted lines, no hedge-row beauties, no box-tree borders, no gravel walks, no square mechanic enclosures. All is left loose and irregular in the rude chaos of aboriginal nature. The boundaries of hill and valley are the Poet’s only geography, where we wander with him incessantly over deep beds of moss and waving fern amidst the troops of red deer and wild animals.⁴³

“I stood tip-toe upon a little hill” exhibits Keats’s commitment to the Wordsworthian ideal that experience gained through travel and wilderness fosters creativity. This

³⁹ Emphasis mine.

⁴⁰ Sperry, 82.

⁴¹ *Examiner*, 21 August 1814, 540.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 540.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 541.

ambition, however, was maintained by the encouragement and confidence of friends like Clarke.

Assisted discovery and boundless prospect:

Clarke and "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer"

After Keats returned from Margate in late September 1816, he went to visit Clarke, one of his oldest friends and mentors.⁴⁴ Their relationship illustrates paradoxical solitude. In his *Recollections*, Clarke noted their custom of reading together, which began when Keats was still at Enfield, and continued afterwards in Clarke's garden "five or six times a month."⁴⁵ In an instructive phrase, Clarke described their shared afternoons "in Boswellian dialect – 'we had good talk.'"⁴⁶ He gathered from Keats's reading habits that the poet was special: "Like a true poet, too – a poet 'born, not manufactured,' a poet in grain."⁴⁷ This suggests that he shared Keats's belief in his ambitious goals.

The poet's earliest surviving non-verse letter was to Clarke, but he also inspired enough poetic confidence in his pupil that Keats showed him his first verse.⁴⁸ Although a mentor figure, Keats was comfortable around Clarke; Hyder Edward Rollins observes that Keats addressed all his other male friends by their surnames in

⁴⁴ Motion, 105. For an exploration of their relationship during the "lost years" of 1810-1815, see Roe, *JK&CD*, 88-110. See also Barnard, "Charles Cowden Clarke's 'Cockney' Commonplace Book," *KH*, 65-87.

⁴⁵ Clark, *Recollections*, 123, 125.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 125.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 126. Clarke thought Keats was so advanced that he read him Spenser's *Epithalamion* when he was only 16. 125.

⁴⁸ See Ward, 41 and Bate, 79. Keats's first, third, fourth, seventh, and tenth letter were all addressed to Clarke, before their correspondence dropped off entirely in March 1816. *KC*, I, lxxii.

his non-verse letters, but he referred to Clarke as “My daintie Davie,” “C.C.C.,” and, twice, as “My dear Charles.”⁴⁹ In this friendly environment, Clarke helped dispel many of Keats’s insecurities. As we have seen, the poet wrote to him freely about his doubts, and he was therefore acutely aware of the fragile nature of Keats’s confidence.⁵⁰ Clarke may have even shared Keats’s view of individual partnerships; Roe notes that “instead of bringing acquaintances together, he preferred to keep them in separate compartments – especially if this would preserve feelings of ‘friendly debt’ for his kindness (Keats’s words).”⁵¹ Regardless, this partnership provided the “social thought” that Keats needed.

The poet called on Clarke in October to see the 1616 folio edition of George Chapman’s translation of Homer (I, 32).⁵² Clarke noted the “teeming wonderment” of Keats’s first acquaintance with this work; they stayed up the whole night reading, and the poet did not arrive home at Dean Street until six o’clock the next morning.⁵³ The resulting sonnet, “On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer,” celebrates Chapman’s translation of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, as well as drawing on memories of

⁴⁹ See *KC*, I, lxxii and *L*, I, 14-15.

⁵⁰ See “To Charles Cowden Clarke,” ll. 16-18. *FH*, 226. Gittings notes that, even though no longer a schoolmaster, “Clarke regarded his grown-up pupils with a schoolmaster’s eye, and continued to do so all his life, handing out praise or blame to them in classroom terms throughout their adult careers.” 125.

⁵¹ *FH*, 269; 192. See “To Charles Cowden Clarke,” ll. 72-6. There is reason to question Roe’s interpretation, particularly as Keats later expressed his gratitude to Hunt, a man whose reputation is largely based on bringing different groups of people together, with a similar poetic metaphor: “I would fain/ Catch an immortal thought to pay the debt/ I owe to the kind poet who has set/ Upon my ambitious head a glorious gain.” “On Receiving a Laurel Crown,” ll. 3-6.

⁵² Borrowed from Thomas Alsager. Motion, 109.

⁵³ Clarke, *Recollections*, 130. Motion, 109. Since the sonnet was a tribute, Keats sent it to Clarke by messenger the moment it was completed. Clarke noted that they parted “at day-spring, yet he contrived that I should receive the poem from a distance of, may be, two miles by ten o’clock.” *Recollections*, 130. Roe argues that the poem was “a compliment” for Clarke that extended “beyond the ‘golden realms’ of Keats’s reading to acknowledge more broadly the formative richness of his schooldays.” *JK&CD*, 37.

Bonnycastle, William Robertson, and Keats's own experiences at Margate.⁵⁴ It took an evening in the company of Clarke, however, to inspire the poem's composition. Their time together, the "social thought" of Clarke, provided the impetus, the flash of insight that was Keats's actual discovery.⁵⁵ The poet's gaze that once wore his eyes to "dimness" now revealed the "wide expanse" and the "pure serene" that had eluded him in the summer (ll. 5, 7). As he shed his "ignorance," a new expansion, the boundless prospect of the ocean or night sky, was opened to him.

Keats wrote hopefully in the epistle "To My Brother George" that the moment of inspiration should be akin to suddenly envisioning poetry in the natural world (ll. 21-2). Jamey Hecht suggests that this creative concept is a matter of "being in the right place at the moment when the truth chooses to emerge (Chapman speaks, the new planet swims, the Pacific appears)."⁵⁶ This view ignores the ambition, determination, and travel required by Keats's theory of inspiration. Herschel saw the planet swim because he had a telescope meticulously trained on the night sky;⁵⁷ Balboa travelled halfway across the world in order to be in a position to witness the

⁵⁴ It was through the lens of Keats's experience at Margate that he chose his examples from Chapman. See, for example, the description of Ulysses' journey in "The Fifth Book," ll. 340-5. *The Odyssey, The Whole Works of Homer, Prince of Poets: In his Iliads, and Odysses*, translated by George Chapman (London, 1616). Daniel P. Watkins observes that "the inspiration of the poem arises from Keats's sense of imaginative discovery; moreover, the beautifully expressed sense of wonder at this discovery actually elides much historical reality, and even much of what Robertson chronicles." *Keats's Poetry and the Politics of the Imagination* (London, 1989), 31.

⁵⁵ Motion argues that Clarke "recognized at once that the lines addressed themes which had always preoccupied Keats, but which were now suddenly developed to greatness." 111.

⁵⁶ Jamey Hecht, "Scarcity and Poetic Election in Two Sonnets of John Keats," *ELH*, 61, 1 (1994), 103.

⁵⁷ Herschel often emphasized the effort involved in his discovery; he wrote insistently to the president of the Royal Society, Joseph Banks, on 19 November 1781: "The new star *could not* have been found out even with the best telescopes had I not undertaken to examine every star in the heavens including such as are telescopic, to the amount of at least 8 or 10 thousand." Qtd in Holmes, *Age of Wonder*, 103.

“appearance” of the Pacific Ocean.⁵⁸ The effort and experience were crucial precursors to understanding and appreciating the moment of discovery. Keats’s poetic method had a transformative quality which, as Luisa Conti Camaiora notes, was not

mere reportage, not a simple reproduction of realistic details, but rather, the creation of a mood, of sensations, of an atmosphere, and the establishing of links and associations with romance, myth, magic, and, ultimately, with the sublime and transcendental.⁵⁹

This sense of connectedness was inherited from the poetry of Wordsworth.

David Pirie, however, cites the poem’s conclusion as an example of Keats’s opposition to Wordsworth’s ideal of solitary discovery. Pirie argues that Cortez’s companions, on whose assistance he relied, “are not ignored by the poem.”⁶⁰ The closing lines of the poem “turn back from the singular Cortez to focus instead upon the plural mass of his followers.”⁶¹ The poem does not end with the explorer lost in reverie, but with his followers’ “wild surmise” (l. 13). However, the focus on Cortez is emphasized, not undermined, by concluding with an image of the searching glances of the crew. The phrase “eagle eyes” is a key image in the poem; as Motion claims, this “sense of forward-looking is one of the sonnet’s most important themes, as well as one of its greatest strengths. It shows Keats discovering, possessing, and authorising himself.”⁶² Cortez’s men staring at each other in “wild surmise”⁶³ implies

⁵⁸ Allott notes that Keats had “conflated memories of Balboa’s first sight of the Pacific,” learned from Robertson’s *History of America*, and “the effect on a man of sensibility of seeing such natural wonders” from William Gilbert’s *The Hurricane*. 62n.

⁵⁹ Luisa Conti Camaiora, “Keats in John Clare’s Letters,” *The Challenge of Keats: Bicentenary Essays 1795-1995*, Allan Christensen, Lilla Maria Crisafulli Jones, Giuseppe Galigani, and Anthony L. Johnson, eds. (Amsterdam, 2000), 175.

⁶⁰ David Pirie, ed. *The Penguin History of Literature: the Romantic Period*, London, 2004, 359.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 359.

⁶² Motion, 112. See also Vincent Newey, “Keats, history, and the poets,” *K&H*, 184. Bate notes that this image suggests Cortez’s “almost predatory eagerness. 8n, 88.

a sense of bewilderment at the magnitude of the discovery.⁶⁴ The act of scanning each other's faces suggests confusion; conversely, Cortez, perched above them on a peak, affirms the significance of the discovery with his rapt focus.⁶⁵ Like Keats's theory, Cortez's experience enabled him to make sense of and capitalize on the discovery.⁶⁶

The expanded vistas offered by such vantage points also echo Keats's other poems from this period, including the mountain climbed in "O Solitude" and the summit of Helvellyn where he imagined Wordsworth in "Great spirits now on earth are sojourning" (ll. 3). It was because of his relationship with Clarke, however, that Keats reasserted this belief with a previously unheard authority in "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer."⁶⁷

⁶³ In April 1817, Keats again used the phrase "wild surmise" to suggest an extravagant imagining, in a sonnet writing contest with Hunt: "And then I run into most wild surmises/ Of all the many glories that may be." "On Receiving a Laurel Crown from Leigh Hunt," ll. 13-14. As Levinson notes, "surmise" implies a "liminal, semi-detached state." *Keats's Life of Allegory*, 13.

⁶⁴ In William Robertson's *History of America*, Balboa commands his men to wait behind, so that he can gaze on the ocean first and alone. 2 vols. (London, 1777), I, 289-290.

⁶⁵ In *History of America*, Robertson describes how Balboa "advanced alone to the summit" and as "soon as he beheld the South Sea [...] he fell on his knees, and [...] returned thanks to God [...]. His followers [...] rushed forward to join in his wonder, exultation and gratitude." I, 289-90.

⁶⁶ This reaction, primed by Wordsworth's poetry in general, may owe a debt to *The Excursion* in particular. In a note, Wordsworth quoted William Gilbert's commentary on his own poem, *The Hurricane*:

[he] contemplates, from a sudden promontory, the distant, the vast Pacific – and feels himself a freeman in this vast theatre, and commanding each ready produced fruit of this wilderness, and each progeny of this stream – his exaltation is not less than imperial. Bk. III, l. 931n.

⁶⁷ See Gittings, 129. As Duncan Wu notes, this poem was "the first incontrovertible evidence of his genius." *William Hazlitt: The First Modern Man* (Oxford, 2008), 196.

*Keats and Leigh Hunt:**A failed partnership*

On 9 October 1816, Keats wrote of his excitement at the prospect of meeting Hunt: “’t will be an Era in my existence” (I, 113).⁶⁸ Keats was keen to meet an established poet and critic, noting that it was “no mean gratification to become acquainted with Men who in their admiration of Poetry do not jumble together Shakespeare and Darwin” (I, 113).⁶⁹ Hunt was more than just knowledgeable, however, he was an expert.⁷⁰ He had strong ideas about what constituted good and bad poetry, which he articulated in the system of poetry outlined in “Feast of the Poets” and a in the succession of “independent poets” that he introduced in the *Examiner*.⁷¹ Although Keats and Hunt shared many literary interests, they held different views about the poetic character. Keats’s notion of “bliss” from “O, Solitude” was markedly different from Hunt’s concept of sociality. Hunt’s concept, Roe argues, “was a healthy antidote to Wordsworth’s rural solitude;” it was a cheerful, suburban world of social converse.⁷²

Hunt was at the centre of a circle of artists. As we saw with the Mathew coterie, however, Keats found the poetical, as well as the physical, boundaries of a

⁶⁸ Clarke introduced Keats to Hunt on or around 19 October 1816. *L*, I, 113-14; *KC*, I, 4-6. Roe notes that “the date of Hunt’s first meeting with Keats has proved notoriously difficult to ascertain,” but offers the date of Saturday, 19 October as “reasonable conjecture.” *FH*, 269.

⁶⁹ Ironically, in his review of *Poems* in the *Examiner*, Hunt compares the poetry of Keats with that of Darwin, attributing to each the fault of indulging in a “super-abundance of detail, which, though not so wanting, of course, in power of perception, is as faulty and unreasonable sometimes as common-place.” 6 July 1817, *Examiner*, 429.

⁷⁰ Roe claims that Hunt had “an unrivalled knowledge of Chaucer, Shakespeare, Spenser and Milton, and of the Italian tradition including Tasso, Ariosto and Dante.” *FH*, 261.

⁷¹ *Feast of the Poets* (1814). *Examiner*, 29 Aug 1813, 545-7. See also Roe, *FH*, 199.

⁷² Roe, *JK&CD*, 118, 129. Roe notes that “Hunt did not aim for visionary peaks and unearthly intimations; he found Wordsworth’s elemental landscapes thoroughly uncongenial.” *FH*, xv.

group too constraining.⁷³ Jeffrey C. Robinson considers that “the group gathered around Hunt lived the principles it attributed to poetry.”⁷⁴ Although this was a driving engine for Hunt’s poetry, it had the opposite effect on Keats’s. The coterie mentality blocked out individual interests, as other people and other concerns crowded in. The petty squabbling that arose in the Hunt circle also detracted from Keats’s poetic intentions; as Robinson notes, “poetry and poetics may seem secondary to the drama of personalities and egos, cultures and communities.”⁷⁵ Just as it had with the Mathew Circle, this secondary role attributed to poetry prevented Keats from more than temporarily engaging with the Hunt circle.⁷⁶

There was also the overriding influence of the leader; in both cases, Mathew and Hunt encouraged the presence of their own ideas in Keats’s poems.⁷⁷ Hunt had a dominant personality and, as his *Autobiography* evidences, a tendency to “preach”:

[I am] quick to enjoy every object in creation, everything in nature and in art, every sight, every sound, every book, picture, and flower, and at the same time

⁷³ See Chapters IV and V.

⁷⁴ Robinson, “Hunt and the poetics and politics of Fancy,” 158.

⁷⁵ Jeffrey C. Robinson, “Hunt and the poetics and politics of Fancy,” *LH: LPP*, 158. Keats remained aloof during the group’s philosophical debates. While Hunt, Shelley, and Haydon all debated the merits of Christianity on 20 January 1817, Roe notes that Keats “hung back, and said little.” *FH*, 290.

⁷⁶ I use the definition of the Cockney School as represented by the work of Cox, Roe, and Robinson: a conscious identification with a set of values that Keats was free to reject. Richard Cronin, after establishing that from “from 1817, Keats made anxious efforts to free himself from Hunt’s stylistic and social mannerisms,” argues that the poet “remained throughout his career a Cockney poet.” Cronin’s “wider definition” of the term relies on the theme of encroachment and the threatening of boundaries in Keats’s poetry, all preventing him from reaching beyond his class. *The Politics of Romantic Poetry: In Search of the Pure Commonwealth* (London, 2000), 189. In Cox’s formulation of the Cockney School, however, identification is willed: “for ‘class’ points to a subject position always already given, whereas the group defines an intersubjective collectively always in the process of being imagined.” 5.

⁷⁷ This tendency persisted even after Keats no longer associated with either group; when both men reviewed *Poems*, Mathew singled out the poems Keats wrote with his coterie for praise, while Hunt criticized these ones most. Hunt, in turn, praised the poems most clearly indebted to his *The Story of Rimini*: “The *Specimen of an Induction to a Poem*, and the fragment of the Poem itself entitled *Calidore*, contain some very natural touches on the human side of things.” *European Magazine*, May 1817, LXXI, 435; *Examiner*, 6 July 1817, 429.

really qualified to do nothing, but [...] to preach the enjoyment of those objects in modes devised from his own particular nature and breeding.⁷⁸

His immediate dubbing of Keats as “Junkets” also hints at his dominant role.⁷⁹ Recent scholars have noted the transformative property of this title. Motion explains how, in October 1816, Keats had “become ‘Junkets,’ Hunt’s trusted favorite,” and Roe describes how “John Keats became ‘Junkets,’ a freeman of the Vale.”⁸⁰ These accounts assume Keats’s consent in this transformation. As Bate notes, however, “no one else felt the nickname appropriate enough to use it.”⁸¹ When the poet made it his signature in a 10 May 1817 letter to Hunt (“John Keats alias Junkets”), the context suggests the awkward sense of compliance that often marked their relationship (I, 140).⁸² This nickname appeared in writing only one other time, in a letter from Hunt to Clarke: ““What has become of Junkets I know not. I suppose Queen Mab has eaten him.””⁸³ There is discernable resentment in Hunt’s tone at not knowing Keats’s activities or whereabouts.

⁷⁸ Hunt, *The Autobiography of Leigh Hunt*, ed. J. E. Morpurgo. (London, 1949), 438. On 21 September 1817, Keats harshly referred to a coterie of bluestockings as “Sapphos in Poetry – Euclids in Geometry – and everything in nothing.” *L*, I, 163.

⁷⁹ Although Hunt adopted the name because of Keats’s accent, the *OED* define a “junket” as “a basket (orig. made of rushes),” or a “cream-cheese or other preparation of cream.” <http://dictionary.oed.com>. In the song, “Where be ye going, yon Devon maid,” Keats wrote “I love your meads and I love your flowers,/ And I love your junkets mainly.” ll. 5-6. Keats referred to Hunt as “Libertas” in his early poems. However, Keats never directly addressed Hunt by a familiar nickname in letters, as he did with Clarke.

⁸⁰ Motion, 117. Roe, *FH*, 270.

⁸¹ Bate, 92.

⁸² The next day he wrote an incendiary letter blasting Hunt as a “Selfdeluder.” *L*, I, 143.

⁸³ Hunt wrote to Clarke on 1 July 1817. *Recollections*, 194. The rest of this passage in the manuscript, excluded from *Recollections*, reads:

If not, I [doubt not *crossed out*] have no doubt that he will appear before long very penitent, & poetical, & really sorry. He wants a little more adversity perhaps to make him attend to others as much in reality, as he wishes to do in theory; & all that we can hope at present is, that a youth of his ardour may not bring too much upon himself too soon.

Barnard, “Hunt and Charles Cowden Clarke, 1812-18,” *LH: LPP*, 48-9.

Hunt's over-bearing treatment of Keats bordered on the patronizing.⁸⁴ The poet noted that Hunt understood "many a beautiful thing," but refused to give "other minds credit for the same degree of perception as he himself possesses" (II, 11). Motion acknowledges that there had "always been something faintly condescending in Hunt's attitude to Keats."⁸⁵ Their relationship dynamic was therefore very different from that which Keats had with his brothers, Severn, and Clarke.

When Hunt praised Keats's talents, he also incorporated himself into the praise. Largely credited with exposing Keats to the world, Hunt's "Young Poets" article in the *Examiner* also drew attention to himself for discovering the poet. Hunt noted that the poet had "not yet published any thing except in a newspaper," suggesting his own critical acumen, but neglected to mention that Keats was in the process of preparing a volume of poems.⁸⁶ Although Hunt printed "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer" in full, Roe notes that the poem was placed "strategically;" John Kandler agrees, observing that Hunt printed it "as an illustration of his argument" against the Augustan tradition.⁸⁷ Hunt also presented Keats as part of a group of "three young writers" that included Reynolds and Shelley.⁸⁸ Keats, "youngest of them all, and just of age,"⁸⁹ was introduced as a member of a "new school" of poetry constructed by Hunt.⁹⁰

⁸⁴ After Hunt published *Lord Byron and Some of His Contemporaries* in 1828, George wrote to Dilke about the "patronising" way Hunt spoke of his brother: "Hunt's sketch is not altogether a failure but I should be extremely sorry that poor John's name should go down to posterity associated with the littleness of L.H., an association of which he was so impatient in his Lifetime." *KC*, I, 313.

⁸⁵ Motion, 137-8. Particularly his two reviews of *Poems*, both of which Gittings argues were "staggering in their patronizing attitude." 214.

⁸⁶ Hunt, *Examiner*, 1 December 1816, 761-2.

⁸⁷ Roe, *FH*, 278. John Kandler, "The politics of Keats's early poetry: 'Delight' with 'liberty,'" *The Cambridge Companion to Keats*, ed. Susan J. Wolfson (Cambridge, 2001), 3.

⁸⁸ *Examiner*, 1 December 1816, 762.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 762. He continued to mould Keats's identity after the poet's death; his *Lord Byron and Some Contemporaries* (1828) picked up where Shelley's *Adonais* (1821) left off in

On the same day that Reynolds published a review of *Poems* in the *Champion*, Hunt published Keats's sonnet, "Written on a blank space at the end of Chaucer's tale 'The Floure and the Leafe.'" Gittings remarks that "Hunt managed a brief note to explain who J.K. was, but unaccountably omitted to add the vital information that J.K. had just published a book of poems."⁹¹ Once Hunt did review the volume, however, he used it to advance his own theories. As Gittings argues, "after a pompous start," Keats's poems are not mentioned again, but the rest of the column was "devoted to a re-hash of Hunt's views on English poetry from Dryden to Wordsworth, worked up from his notes to *The Feast of the Poets*."⁹² Self-interest is at the heart of Hunt's promotion of Keats.

However, some scholars insist that Keats's ties to the Hunt circle were permanent. Cox asserts that "Keats never left the Cockney School."⁹³ His major evidence for this, however, is the fact that Keats, before setting off to Italy in 1820, briefly lived at Hunt's cottage.⁹⁴ The poet's decision to do so was the outcome of illness and a lack of alternatives;⁹⁵ the arrangement also ended abruptly, when Keats walked out in anger after cutting the stay to only three weeks.⁹⁶ Robinson emphasizes

creating the myth of Keats as a soul too sensitive for the harsh criticism of *Blackwood's* and the *Quarterly*. See Motion, xix.

⁹⁰ Hunt, *Examiner*, 1 December 1816, 761-2. Hunt contributed a total of nineteen poems to the newspaper in 1816. 42, 122, 154, 203, 266, 330, 377, 409, 424, 440, 456, 472, 504, 536, 552, 570, 663, 725, 774.

⁹¹ Gittings, 183.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 214.

⁹³ Cox, 188. He argues that scholars, attempting to separate Keats from Hunt, have long contrived to remove the poet "from the immediate social context that nurtured his poetry." 84.

⁹⁴ Cox relies exclusively on the fact that Keats took residence with Hunt from 23 June to 12 August 1820 to support his claim that Keats was a lifelong member of the group. See 36, 41, 84, 187, 188.

⁹⁵ As Bate and others have shown, Keats's decision to stay with Hunt has to be viewed in the context that his brother, sister, and six of his closest friends were all unavailable. 645. Keats, too sick to stay by himself, needed a place to live until Brown returned from Scotland at the end of the summer. Bate, 645.

⁹⁶ On 13 August 1820, Keats wrote to his sister Fanny: "An accident of an unpleasant nature occurred at Mr. Hunt's [...] some one of Mr. Hunt's household opened a Letter of mine –

Keats's frequent mentioning of Hunt. Yet, after a 21 September 1817 letter praising Hunt's virtues, the context of these references was almost wholly negative.⁹⁷ As we have seen, Hunt was rarely individually addressed, receiving only two of 252 extant letters Keats sent to friends (I, 136; II, 316).⁹⁸ This was not because the two were in constant contact, making letters unnecessary; on the contrary, they were rarely in the same city from April 1817 until June 1818.⁹⁹ The reason is that Keats was a brief fixture of the group, and he kept only loose ties with Hunt after he left.¹⁰⁰

Despite the tension and brevity that marked their relationship, it did foster poetry.¹⁰¹ In "Keen, fitful gusts are whispering here and there," the poet recollects the five-mile walk from Hunt's Hampstead cottage to the house in Southwark where he lived with his brothers.¹⁰² During the solitary walk, although the "stars look very cold about the sky," because of his evening of friendship and talk of Milton and Petrarch, the poet felt "little of the cool bleak air" (ll. 3, 5). Distance and temperature were neutralized by the "friendliness" that he found "in a little cottage" (ll. 9-10). In "On leaving some friends at an early hour," however, also written to mark a meeting with

upon which I immediately left Mortimer Terrace." *L*, II, 313. Hunt's ten year-old son Thornton broke the seal of a letter to Keats from Fanny Brawne. Bate, 652. In June, Keats had written to Fanny Brawne: "If I am the Theme, I will not be the Friend of idle Gossips. Good gods what a shame it is our Loves should be so put into the microscope of a Coterie." *L*, II, 293.

⁹⁷ See Gittings, 215. Keats's criticisms of Hunt ranged from disagreements about poetic language to questions of his character. See *L*, I, 214 and *L*, II, 11.

⁹⁸ See Appendix A.

⁹⁹ During this period Keats spent roughly 60% of his time in London. From 15 April 1817 until 22 June 1818, Keats spent 264 of 432 days in London (from 10 June until 3 September; from 5 October to 22 November; from 5 December to 4 March 1818; from 10 May to 22 June). See Chapter V.

¹⁰⁰ George Keats's impression of his own time with the group provides a significant parallel; he wrote in a letter to Dilke in 1825: "I had moved out of your circle leaving but faint traces that I ever existed within it." *KC*, I, 286.

¹⁰¹ Roe argues that Hunt's *The Story of Rimini* "disturbed Keats into more adventurous writing." *FH*, 259.

¹⁰² Allott, 63n.

the Hunt circle, the poet longs to be “in regions clear and far” (l. 2). Faced with this prospect of the wilderness, he again expressed his need for paradoxical solitude:

Let me write down a line of glorious tone
And full of many wonders of the spheres.
For what a height my spirit is contending!
'Tis not content so soon to be alone (ll. 11-14).

Keats experienced a momentary surge of confidence from their early meetings and he dedicated *Poems* to Hunt. However, the group dynamic was again the problem. Robinson, who asks whether Hunt was “more serious with Keats, more sympathetic with the young poet, when they were alone,” hits on the reason for the failing of their relationship.¹⁰³ Keats noted in a 17 December 1818 letter to the George Keatses:

if I were to follow my own inclinations I should never meet any one of that set again, not even Hunt – who is certainly a pleasant fellow in the main when you are with him – but in reality he is vain, egotistical and disgusting in matters of taste and in morals (II, 11).¹⁰⁴

Although Hunt opened many doors for the poet, his dominant role in their relationship kept Keats on his guard. As Lilla Maria Crisafulli Jones notes, “Keats needed to free himself, by a decisive intellectual act of will, from a man of dominant character.”¹⁰⁵ Despite all of his help, Keats always believed that Hunt “undervalued” him.¹⁰⁶ Hunt’s attempts to recast Keats in his own image ultimately failed, and another friendship encouraged an identity that was more lasting.

¹⁰³ Robinson, “Hunt and the poetics and politics of Fancy,” 158.

¹⁰⁴ Sperry argues that “disgusting” in this context referred to “self-centered and obtrusive.” 143.

¹⁰⁵ Lilla Maria Crisafulli Jones, “Shelley’s Keats,” *The Challenge of Keats: Bicentenary Essays, 1795-1995*, 224.

¹⁰⁶ In his *Autobiography*, Hunt wrote that Keats “suspected both Shelley and myself of a wish to see him undervalued!” 274.

Ambition and independence:

Haydon and paradoxical solitude

On 31 October 1816, Keats anticipated “seeing so soon this glorious Haydon and all his Creation” (I, 114-15).¹⁰⁷ Benjamin Robert Haydon, a painter obsessed with greatness, represented a counterpoint to Hunt’s occasionally frivolous attitude to poetry.¹⁰⁸ Haydon insisted that the subject of art should be lofty, and that hard work and determination were necessary for its creation. Keats agreed on the intensity required for this achievement: “How glorious this affection for the cause/ Of steadfast genius, toiling gallantly!” (l. 9-10).¹⁰⁹ Two of the poems that he wrote about their time together, “On Seeing the Elgin Marbles” and “To B. R. Haydon,” share the theme of the overwhelming nature of art; the “godlike hardship” of both poems compares the task of art to an eagle unable to fly (ll. 4, 5; l. 3). Because of Haydon’s own ambitions, Keats was comfortable discussing his own epic plans with him.¹¹⁰ Despite Haydon’s boldness, Keats remained the dominant character. Haydon embraced the powerful effect of Keats’s friendship: “you add fire, when I am exhausted, & excite fury afresh – I offer my heart & intellect & experience” (I, 124).

Haydon’s boisterous encouragement and extravagant praise reinforced Keats’s heroic idea of the poet. These shared qualities led to an agreed vision of an ideal

¹⁰⁷ *L*, I, 114-5. Keats may have also met Haydon at Hunt’s on 19 October. See Roe, *FH*, 269 and *KC*, I, 4.

¹⁰⁸ Bate argues that the “twin influences” of Haydon and Hunt touched “different sides” of Keats. 97-8.

¹⁰⁹ “Addressed to Haydon.”

¹¹⁰ Keats wrote to Haydon that, “Byron, Scott, Southey, & Shelley think they are to lead the age, but” Haydon, *Diary*, 7 April 1817, II, 106-107. Keats’s actual opinion, consisting of the next eight or ten words, is deleted. Bate, 132. Haydon added: “This was said with all the consciousness of Genius; his face reddened.” *Diary*, 106-107. See also *L*, I, 143. Ian Jack remarks that Haydon “must be one of the few men who ever seriously considered putting up a brass plate in their own honour.” *Keats and the Mirror of Art*, 23.

Wordsworthian poet. In “Addressed to Haydon,” Keats used the quotation “singleness of aim” from Wordsworth to emphasize this determination (l. 6).¹¹¹ His first references to Wordsworth were in letters to Haydon on 20 and 21 November (I, 118).¹¹² After reading “Great spirits now on earth are sojourning,” Haydon suggested that Keats copy out the poem so that he could send it to Wordsworth.¹¹³

Keats was inspired by their time alone. On 20 December, he wrote to Haydon, “Last Evening wrought me up” and included the poem “Great spirits now on earth are sojourning” (I, 117). As he had done after an inspired evening with Clarke, Keats immediately sent the work to the partner who inspired it.¹¹⁴ Haydon’s reply to the sonnet caused Keats to remark: “Your Letter has filld me with a proud pleasure and shall be kept by me as a stimulus to exertion – I begin to fix my eye upon one horizon” (I, 118). Catching Haydon’s enthusiasm, the poet wrote that he found “glory” in his new friend’s suggestion to introduce an ellipsis in the penultimate line, adding “[t]he Idea of your sending it to Wordsworth put me out of breath” (I, 118).

Keats wrote earnestly about his poetic aspirations and fears to Haydon, and the painter returned this frankness.¹¹⁵ In early March, he wrote Keats a “sacred secret,” revealing his dreams of glory and renown and his belief that “immortal beings” might smile on him and “shake his <their> hand<s> in awful encouragement” (I, 124). During his journey to the Isle of Wight, this idea of a great artist watching over him

¹¹¹ Wordsworth’s “Character of the happy warrior” (1807). See Allott, 66n.

¹¹² See Stillinger, “Keats and Wordsworth,” *Romantic Complexity* (Chicago, 2006), 24.

¹¹³ Motion notes that it took “a month before Haydon was as good as his word.” 129. Haydon also strongly encouraged Keats to immerse himself in Shakespeare. Motion, 160.

¹¹⁴ “The author had passed the evening in company with H. That night he could get no sleep. The next morning he sent Haydon this sonnet.” Sperry, “Richard Woodhouse Interleaved and Annotated Copy of Keats *Poems* (1817),” *Literary Monographs*, I, Eric Rothstein and Thomas K. Dunseath (Madison, 1967), 150.

¹¹⁵ Keats resorted to self-mockery when communicating with Hunt. He writes of his “occasional depressions” to Haydon and on the same day writes to Hunt: “Does Shelley go on telling strange Stories of the Death of Kings? Tell him there are strange Stories on the death of Poets – some have died before they were conceived.” *L*, I, 142; 139-140. The letter continues in this vein. See also Chapter IV.

led Keats to write, “I have of late had the same thought,” fancying Shakespeare to be his presiding genius (I, 142).

Haydon also knew what Keats lacked in his relationship with the coterie, claiming to have suffered the same fate himself: “the Friends who surrounded me, were sensible to what talent I had, – but no one reflected my enthusiasm with that burning ripeness of soul” (I, 124). He recognized Keats’s talent in such a way, however, and instilled in him the confidence to view himself as an independent poet.¹¹⁶ As Bate argues, without Haydon’s influence, Keats might have experienced more difficulty resisting the coterie:

Without it Keats could have slipped so easily, after his brave effort at Margate, back into the coy idiom, the comfortable corner-poetry, that had been his principal nourishment before he went to Margate, and that Leigh Hunt – at an admittedly higher level than G. F. Mathew – still represented.¹¹⁷

Keats was able to withstand the coterie because friendships like those with Haydon, Clarke, Severn, and his brothers, granted him the confidence to be independent. Keats’s *Poems*, published in March 1817, reveals both the inherent contradictions and the effort required to assert his autonomy in a volume of largely occasional verse.

¹¹⁶ Bate notes that he helped the poet to “maintain his faith in himself.” 101.

¹¹⁷ Bate, 101. Haydon also saw the hazard of Keats’s association with the coterie. In his *Autobiography*, he wrote of his first meeting with Keats: “The greatest calamity for Keats was his being brought before the world by a set who had so much the habit of puffing each other that every one connected with it suffered in public estimation.” *The Autobiography and Journals of Benjamin Robert Haydon, 1786-1846*, ed. Malcolm Elwin (London, 1950), 296. Haydon also had well-documented differences with Hunt and his circle. See Roe, *FH*, 274.

*Re-evaluating Poems:**Barnard and Keats's publishing*

Barnard's research on the details surrounding the publication of *Poems* demonstrates that, in 1817, Keats was a more independent poet than is commonly believed.¹¹⁸ Although primarily concerned with the production of the volume, Barnard's findings have broader application, including providing evidence of how *Poems* was published and structured. His research demonstrates that Keats avoided the guidance and assistance of the coterie in order to retain his autonomy. This was an important step in following Wordsworth's example.

Scholars traditionally argue that the Hunt circle was significantly involved in the preparation of *Poems*.¹¹⁹ Newman White contends that Shelley helped Keats print the volume, while Charles E. Robinson and William St. Clair suggest that he may have even paid for its advertising.¹²⁰ Cox claims that Shelley assisted the poet in finding a publisher, and in Cox's view, this generosity is seen as a gesture typical of what would come to known as the Cockney School.¹²¹ However, Barnard's research supplies evidence that challenges all of these claims. Shelley's misguided belief that Keats was a man of wealth implies that he offered no financial aid.¹²² Far from

¹¹⁸ Barnard, "First Fruits or 'First Blights': A New Account of the Publishing History of Keats's *Poems* (1817)," *Romanticism*, 12.2 (2006), 71-101.

¹¹⁹ See in particular, Cox, 82-122.

¹²⁰ Newman. I. White, *Shelley*, 2 vols. (New York, 1940), I, 504. Charles E. Robinson, "Percy Bysshe Shelley, Charles Ollier, and William Blackwood: the Contexts of Early Nineteenth-Century Publishing," *Shelley Revalued: Essays from the Gregynog Conference*, ed. Kelvin Everest (Leicester, 1983), 188. William St. Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge, 2004), 165. See also Barnard, "First Fruits," 71.

¹²¹ Cox, 63.

¹²² Shelley wrote to Hunt on 3 August 1817: "In fact I should imagine among your intimate friends nothing could be more easy that to arrange a loan. [...] Your Brother I do not doubt

helping him to publish the volume, Shelley explicitly tried to prevent Keats from publishing it.¹²³ Apologists for the Cockney School ignore this point. Cox does not mention this exchange. Roe also ignores this, despite providing an account of the conversations between Keats and Shelley at the Vale of Health on 18 December, the same day the advice was likely given.¹²⁴ In fact, Shelley's attempt to discourage its publication appears to be his only connection with *Poems*.¹²⁵

Critics also find coterie ties with the Ollier brothers, who were thought to have published *Poems*.¹²⁶ Motion attributes an agreement between Keats and the Olliers to the autumn of 1816, but Barnard proves that they were not in business then.¹²⁷ Although Keats's desire to meet the "Author of the Sonnet to the Sun" has been established as indicating enthusiasm for meeting Charles Ollier, this may have been due to Keats's enjoyment of his poetry and not because he considered him to be a potential publisher (I, 113).¹²⁸ Instead of following any of the numerous channels provided by Hunt's coterie, Keats took a much more decisive and independent route:

will or can do nothing. But there is Keats, who certainly *can*." [Shelley's emphasis]. *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 2 vols. Frederick L. Jones, ed. (Oxford, 1964), I, 550.

¹²³ Keats wrote to Shelley on 16 August 1820: "I remember you advising me not to publish my first-blights, on Hampstead heath." *L*, II, 323.

¹²⁴ Roe, *FH*, 283. Barnard notes Roe's silence on this point. "First Fruits," 86.

¹²⁵ There is evidence that suggests he did not own a copy; on 5 December 1825, Mary Shelley wrote a note to Charles Ollier asking for Keats's "first publication." *Letters of Mary W. Shelley*, 2 vols. Frederick L. Jones, ed. (London, 1944), II, 344n., 11.

¹²⁶ Cox includes both James and Charles Ollier in his "roster" of the Cockney School. *PPC*, 21. Richard Marggraf Turley also refers to the Ollier brothers as "'Cockney' publishers." "Keats, Cornwall and the 'Scent of Strong-Smelling Phrases,'" *Romanticism*, 12, 2 (2006), 112.

¹²⁷ Motion, 117. Barnard, "First Fruits," 74. Barnard quotes from an unpublished letter by Hunt to Ollier on 27 August 1816 asking whether "this cessation of the Banking House in Pall Mall affects you at all unpleasantly" and a letter from Hunt to John Taylor, confirming that the Ollier brothers were only "just about to commence" business by 11 December 1816. 74.

¹²⁸ As Barnard observes, Keats's letter to Clarke on 31 October 1816 is written in the singular: "I pray thee let me know when you go to Ollier's and where he resides." 73-4. Keats knew Ollier's "Sonnet on Sunset" because Clarke copied it into his commonplace book in August 1813. Joan Coldwell, "Charles Cowden Clarke's Commonplace Book and Its Relationship to Keats," *K-SJ*, XXIX (New York, 1980), 89-90. See also Barnard, "Charles Cowden Clarke's 'Cockney' Commonplace Book," *K&H*, 68, 81-2.

he masterminded the production himself. Barnard emphasizes the magnitude of this decision:

Leigh Hunt may have been of crucial importance to Keats, but the decision to risk moving from periodical to volume publication seems to have been Keats's alone, and was almost certainly funded by himself. No wonder its failure caused him to regard his first fruits as his 'first-blights.'¹²⁹

Although the encouragement of the Hunt circle proved vital to the composition of many of the poems, Keats's decision to organize and publish his own volume was a symbolic act of independence from them. Barnard further contends that, despite Keats's finances, the poet commissioned the volume and paid for both its paper and its printing himself.¹³⁰

Keats's determination to become a poet solely on his own terms can also be seen in the structure of the volume. Roe claims that *Poems* "was carefully presented to reinforce [a] link with Hunt, through imitation of Hunt's lyrical idiom but also in the way the collection as a whole was structured."¹³¹ Roe counts the number of poems that celebrate Hunt, noting the dedicatory sonnet that opens the volume and the catalogue of items from his Hampstead cottage in the poem that closes it.¹³² However, an inexperienced but determined young poet arrived at the structure of *Poems* haphazardly. Examining the "typographic awkwardness" and unusual arrangement of

¹²⁹ Barnard, "First Fruits," 76.

¹³⁰ Barnard estimates the total cost of the expenditure at either £29 or £50, depending on whether Keats had 250 or 500 copies printed, including the £4 4s for the vignette of Shakespeare; Keats's income was £55 a year by October 1816. "First Fruits," 76; 79. Barnard also relates Keats's tendency to spend and loan money unwisely. 80-2. Gittings observes that the poet thought a larger inheritance was coming his way, and therefore felt that he could "spend and lend what he touched freely." 144. Keats remained in possession of the copyright of *Poems* until he sold the rights to Taylor and Hessey on 16 September 1820. Barnard observes that if the Olliers had paid for the publication of *Poems*, the copyright would have been in their possession. "First Fruits," 76. The "Assignment of Copyright by Keats" is found in *L*, II, 334-6.

¹³¹ Roe, *JK&CD*, 106.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 106.

the volume, Barnard concludes that it was “produced somewhat amateurishly.”¹³³ Indeed, he notes that the volume lacked standard contemporary features such as a table of contents, which was particularly telling as *Poems* was “a volume that needs one.”¹³⁴

Additionally, almost everything that Keats had written up to the moment the volume went off to the printer was included.¹³⁵ Twenty-eight of the thirty-three poems that he had written between February 1815 and January 1816 were used.¹³⁶ Even after including all of the poems he had at hand, Keats may have realized that the volume was slight. The poet therefore incorporated earlier fragmentary verses into more recent compositions, resulting in longer patchwork poems like “I stood tip-toe upon a little hill” and “Sleep and Poetry.”¹³⁷ Keats’s main concern was to ensure that his first volume was substantial in size; it was therefore a hurried collection of every line of Keats’s verse, complete with an apologetic disclaimer.¹³⁸

¹³³ “[A]1 blank; [A]2a half-title; [A]2b printer’s address; [A]3a title-page; [A]3b blank; [A]4a dedicatory sonnet to Leigh Hunt; [A]4b note by Keats, ‘The Short Pieces in the middle of the Book, as well as some of the Sonnets, were written at an earlier period than the rest of the Poems.’” Barnard, “First Fruits,” 76.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 78.

¹³⁵ With the exception of “Oh, how I love, on a fair summer’s eve” and “To Lord Byron.”

¹³⁶ Stillinger observes that Keats “[a]lmost certainly [...] had no texts of most of the seven earlier pieces that have since been recovered via album copies and other manuscripts. ‘Introduction,’ *Poems (1817): a Facsimile of Richard Woodhouse’s Annotated Copy in the Huntington Library*, ed. Jack Stillinger (London, 1985), ix. An exception to this is “Written in Disgust of Vulgar Superstition,” which Tom Keats had a transcript of. Allott, 97.

¹³⁷ Ward argues that passage that begins, “The breezes were ethereal,” has no logical connection with the rest of the poem, and seems to belong to an earlier time; namely, back when he was dresser at Guy’s. ll. 221-30. 59. Bate argues that Keats salvaged and expanded upon earlier fragments such as “I stood tip-toe upon a little hill” because he badly “needed to fatten the forthcoming volume.” 122.

¹³⁸ On the page opposite “I stood tip-toe upon a little hill” appeared the disclaimer, “The Short Pieces in the middle of the Book, as well as some of the Sonnets, were written at an earlier period than the rest of the Poems.” *Poems, by John Keats* (London, 1817), facsimile reproduction (Oxford, 1989). Cox argues that *Poems* resembled coterie manuscript volumes but, with the exception of “Poems by Two Friends,” the compositions that he compares to Keats’s volume were all written after 1817, and logically cannot be considered influential: Reynolds and Bailey’s manuscript of poems was given to Thomasine Leigh on 25 December 1816, but Cox compares the structure of *Poems* to *Heath Flowers* (1817) by Cornelius Webb and Hunt’s *Foliage* (1818). 17; 78; 89. *L*, I, 64.

Poems was neither born out of the generosity of the group nor calculated as a manifesto of community poetry.¹³⁹ It also did not bear the mark of the coterie in its production. By 1816, when Keats was first considering putting together a volume, he was surrounded by examples of his friends' work. Hunt had already published *Juvenilia; or, a Collection of Poems* (1801), *The Feast of the Poets* (1814), *The Descent of Liberty* (1815), and *The Story of Rimini* (1816).¹⁴⁰ Shelley had circulated *The Devil's Walk* (1812), *Queen Mab* (1813), *Alastor, or The Spirit of Solitude* (1816), and *Mont Blanc* (1816).¹⁴¹ Reynolds had seen *Safie, an Eastern Tale* (1814), *The Eden of the Imagination* (1814), and *An Ode* (1815) through the press, and was in the process of publishing the *Naiad* (1816).¹⁴² Four of these volumes appeared in the twelve-month period prior to the publication of Keats's volume. Yet *Poems* was remarkably different. Despite having so many members of the circle in a position to either help or to serve as an example, Keats clearly acted alone. As Barnard's research shows, Keats's decision to publish his first volume of poetry without appealing to the coterie for any kind of help exhibits his independence.¹⁴³ In a volume of poetry filled with verses addressed to members of two different coteries, Keats managed to demonstrate autonomy in its production.

This act of self-reliance, a reaction to the group mentality, increased Keats's confidence. He displayed this new-found poetical self-possession during an October 1817 meeting with his guardian, Richard Abbey. Their conversation is reported as ending with Keats insisting, "I mean to rely upon my Abilities as a Poet," to which

¹³⁹ See Cox, 82-122.

¹⁴⁰ Roe, *FH*, 52; 126; 215; Anthony Holden, *The Wit in the Dungeon: The Life of Leigh Hunt* (London, 2005), 359.

¹⁴¹ Holmes, *Shelley: The Pursuit* (London, 1974, repr. 1995), 823; Roe, *FH*, 258; 254.

¹⁴² Bate, 101. See also Roe, *FH*, 270.

¹⁴³ Keats's determination to publish *Poems* was proof of what Barnard calls "the astonishing self-motivation which led to his swift development into maturity." 2.

Abbey responded: “John, <are you Mad or Silly> you are either Mad or a Fool, to talk in so absurd a Manner” (*KC*, I, 307). Keats replied: “My Mind is made up, said the youngster very quietly. I know that I possess Abilities greater than most Men, and therefore I am determined to gain my Living by exercising them” (*KC*, I, 307). Keats’s assurance that his abilities were exceptional owed something to the example of the coterie; mainly the weakness he perceived in their own verse. The encouragement that he received, however, came principally from outside of the group.

As Barnard explores, Keats’s two most overlooked helpers were his brothers, George and Tom.¹⁴⁴ Tom, who had assisted Keats in Margate, continued to lend a helping hand; in December, he gave a “great deal of time and energy to transcribing his poetry this month.”¹⁴⁵ Barnard also suggests that Tom was “in some way supporting his brother’s work in the volume’s final stages” and is quick to point out “George’s eager encouragement.”¹⁴⁶ George, with his subsequent history of taking on risky business ventures, may well have backed Keats’s idea to publish his own work.¹⁴⁷

Although surrounded by both established and upcoming poets, Keats wrote to his brothers about his poetic concerns and aspirations. This may have been due to their shared vision of Keats as a Wordsworthian poet.¹⁴⁸ His brothers encouraged this

¹⁴⁴ Barnard, “First Fruits or ‘First Blights,’” 83.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 87.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 87; 92.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 83.

¹⁴⁸ While living at Southwark with George and Tom, Keats appeared calm and contented. He referred to “home’s pleasant lair” in “Keen, fitful gusts are whispering here and there,” and celebrated their living arrangement in his sonnet, “To my Brothers.” l. 8. Although he states, “for rhymes I search around he poles,” he references the gentle influence of Tom: “Many such eves of gently whispering noise/ May we together pass, and calmly try/ What are this world’s true joys.” ll. 5, 11-13). The poem bears the influence of both Wordsworth’s four “Personal Talk” sonnets (1807) and Hunt’s *Quiet Evenings. To Thomas Barnes, Esq.* and *To T. M. Alsager, Esq.* (1815). Allott, 65n.

view, agreeing that the poet needed wilderness and travel in order to produce great works. On 17 March 1817, just days after *Poems* was published, Keats explained:

My Brothers are anxious I shod go by myself into the country – they have always been extremely fond of me; and now that Haydon has pointed out how necessary it is that I shod be alone to improve myself, they give up the temporary pleasure of<t> living with me continually for a great good which I hope will follow – So I shall soon be out of Town (I, 125).¹⁴⁹

As he did the previous summer, Keats left an insulated coterie in order to explore the unbounded prospect of the sea for the “great good” he hoped would follow. Aside from the positive reinforcements from his brothers, one final, negative episode may have helped Keats forever separate the “eternal poetry” he felt he “cannot exist without,” from the social life at the Hunt household (I, 133).

One final episode:

Laurel crowns and “Ode to Apollo”

In early April 1817, Keats met with Hunt in Millfield Lane in Hampstead to give him a presentation copy of *Poems*.¹⁵⁰ The two men went back to the Vale of Health, where Hunt placed laurels on Keats’s head, and Keats crowned Hunt with ivy. A commemorative sonnet contest ensued, but Keats could not summon any inspiration: “I would fain/ Catch an immortal thought” (ll. 3-4). Lost in speculation, the poet felt more like Cortez’s men than the explorer himself: “And then I run into

¹⁴⁹ Barnard argues that this letter is misdated in *L* as 17 April; since Keats left for the Isle of Wight on 14 April, he must have been written on 13 or 14 April and left it with his brothers to mail. “First Fruits or ‘First Blights,’” 73n.

¹⁵⁰ Roe places this episode directly before Keats leaves for the Isle of Wight. *FH*, 295; Allott dates the sonnet composed to mark the occasion as “written before 18 April 1817.” 109.

most wild surmises/ Of all the many glories that may be” (ll. 13-14). This laurel incident quickly became humiliating for Keats, and he wrote the repentant “Ode to Apollo,” declaring, “like a blank idiot I put on thy wreath” (l. 8).¹⁵¹ This was the type of coterie behaviour that appeared in both the Mathew and Hunt circle; the rejection of this was a pivotal moment in the formation of Keats’s poetic identity.¹⁵² As Roe observes, this experience “marks the occasion as the last on which Hunt and Keats agreed about poetry.”¹⁵³ Keats’s later associations with the Hunt circle were from the point of view of an outsider.¹⁵⁴

Before Keats embarked on a journey to the Isle of Wight, he made another lasting change: he found a publisher. John Taylor and James Hessey, Reynolds’s publishers, understood Keats’s conception of the poet. Taylor in particular shared Keats’s poetic ideal, something that inspired confidence in both men.¹⁵⁵ Tim Chilcott comments on their relationship:

Above all, Keats’s emphasis upon the imaginary autonomy of the poet, his necessary independence and difference from other men, was an idea which came close to Taylor’s own beliefs about the poetic character....[f]or him, as for Keats, independence was an inevitable and essential quality of the artist.¹⁵⁶

With these new publishers, Keats turned his work firmly in a new direction. He realized he needed more experience and more travel, as he wrote in the final poem from *Poems*, “Sleep and Poetry”:

¹⁵¹ See Bate, 140.

¹⁵² Jennifer Wallace refers to this incident as “after-dinner flippancy,” remarking that it “was the convivial playing at poetry, epitomized by symbolic and ostentatious rituals.” *Lives of the Great Romantics: Keats, Coleridge & Scott by their Contemporaries. Volume 1: Keats*, ed. Jennifer Wallace (London 1997), 66-7.

¹⁵³ Roe, *FH*, 295.

¹⁵⁴ See in particular Chapter V.

¹⁵⁵ See Chapter IV.

¹⁵⁶ Tim Chilcott, *A Publisher and His Circle: the Life and Work of John Taylor, Keats’s Publisher* (London, 1972), 36.

An ocean dim, sprinkled with many an isle,
Spreads awfully before me. How much toil,
How many days, what desperate turmoil,
Ere I can have explored its widenesses.
Ah, what a task! (ll. 306-10).

The effort was daunting and Keats turned to “humbler thoughts” for “sweet relief”: “brotherhood/ And friendliness, the nurse of mutual good” (ll. 313, 317-8). Insecure about his poetic future, Keats viewed solitude as invaluable because of its attendant guise of legitimatization, self-sufficiency, and poetic maturity. He designed his next publication to symbolize a departure both from the 1817 volume and the coterie context in which large parts of it were conceived. Paradoxical solitude was essential in this renewed attempt to establish an independent poetic identity.

CHAPTER IV
POETIC WILDERNESS
THE COMPOSITION OF *ENDYMION*, 1817-1818

Banishment and change:

Reynolds and the Isle of Wight

While formulating plans for his departure to the Isle of Wight, Keats wrote a letter to Reynolds acknowledging the need to initiate a change in their lives: “You must soon bring all your present troubles to a close, and so must I” (I, 125). Just days after the laurel incident with Hunt, Keats offered Reynolds the following advice: “Banish money—Banish sofas – Banish wine – Banish Music – But right Jack Health – honest Jack Health, true Jack Health – banish health and banish all the world” (I, 125).¹ Keats, casting out the symbols of the Hunt circle with this allusion to *I Henry IV*, also conjured up the main relationship in Shakespeare’s play.² Falstaff pleads with Hal to banish their other friends, but to keep “sweet,” “kind” “true,” and “valiant,” Jack Falstaff.³ Keats substituted the emblems of the Hunt circle for the names of Falstaff’s companions, indicating their uselessness in the face of what was indispensable: the “true” friendship of “honest Jack Health” (I, 125). About to embark on a “trial” of his “Powers of Imagination,” Keats symbolically discarded all

¹ Chapter III. See also Roe, *FH*, 295.

² See E. B. Murray, “Keats’s ‘Jack’ Reynolds,” *Notes and Queries*, 16 (2), 1969, 57.

³ William Shakespeare, *I Henry IV*, 2, 5. ll. 478-85. *The Complete Works*. 2nd edn. Stanley Wells, Gary Taylor, John Jowett, and William Montgomery, eds. (Oxford, 2005).

remnants of the world of the Cockney School, with the exception of Reynolds's friendship (I, 169).⁴

Reynolds was a crucial partner in paradoxical solitude. After meeting in October 1816, the poet suitably impressed Reynolds, and their relationship quickly took on the dynamic that Keats's creativity seems to require.⁵ Reynolds wrote to R. M. Milnes in 1846, that Keats "had the greatest power of poetry in him, of any one since Shakespeare!" (KC, II, 173). Reynolds had, as Motion argues, a "clear sense of his limitations [...] there was never any doubt who was the better poet."⁶ Motion's contention that Keats felt "like the senior partner in their relationship" seems undeniable.⁷ By March 1817, Reynolds was aware of the stabilizing influence he provided, referring to himself as Keats's "affectionate and steady friend" (I, 377). Bate observes that Keats was "often franker in expression to Reynolds than to others," and notes that Reynolds also became, after Keats's brothers, one to whom the poet would "write without reserve of the larger hopes and misgivings he felt about himself as a poet."⁸

⁴ The repetition of the term "Health" seems to refer to Reynolds's illness; he was, however, unable to "banish" this sickness in time to join Keats on the Isle of Wight as planned.

⁵ Jones, *The Life of John Hamilton Reynolds*, 97. Gittings describes him as "a young and approachable writer of about [Keats's] own age, with a growing but not too over-whelming reputation." 140. Reynolds requested that the words "The Friend of Keats," the same size as his own name, be engraved on his tombstone; as Bate notes, this was a full thirty years before Keats's reputation skyrocketed. 105.

⁶ Motion, 120. Reynolds would, almost unconsciously, Gittings notes, incorporate "phrases in poetry and prose from Keats, using them as familiar quotations." 141. Reynolds wanted copies of all of Keats's verse. Jones, *The Life of John Hamilton Reynolds*, 108.

⁷ Motion, 229. See *L*, I, 377. For a fuller discussion of Reynolds's supportive role to Keats, see Chapters V and VI.

⁸ Bate, 102-4. Along with his four sisters, Reynolds also introduced Keats to Taylor, Hessey, Charles Wentworth Dilke, Charles Brown, James Rice, and Benjamin Bailey. Gittings, 146. Ward adds John Martin and Richard Woodhouse to this list. 107.

Keats anticipated Reynolds joining him on the Isle of Wight so that they could read and work together as he had with Tom the previous summer at Margate.⁹ Reynolds was unable to come, however, possibly due to illness (I, 125). As the two letters written from the Isle of Wight confirm, Keats immediately felt this isolation. Already “rather lonely” on his first day there, 15 April, he “unbox’d a Shakespeare” at breakfast for ““Comfort,”” and by the afternoon he confessed to his brothers: “You, Haydon, Reynolds &c. have been pushing each other out of my Brain by turns” (I, 128-9). Even his imagined visitations, however, were in accordance with paradoxical solitude, with each partner appearing separately and individually replacing the previous one.

It was these actual partnerships that Keats feared to abandon. Even when he seemed to express interest in the activities of the Hunt circle, imagining “some Fairy” granting him “the power of seeing how our Friends got on, at a Distance,” the focus was on his “kindred spirits” and not on the wider coterie: “I should like, of all Loves, a sketch of you and Tom and George in <Full> ink which Haydon will do if you tell him how I want them” (I, 132). This “Distance” was embellished; attempting to demonstrate that he was living the “change” he advocated to Reynolds, Keats referred to the mainland as if it were a separate continent, exaggerating the distance between himself and the coterie: “from here I can see your continent” (I, 132, 131).¹⁰ The necessity of maintaining a “view” of home, however, implies his continued reliance upon it. Keats was ready to be an outsider, but not an exile. Although he missed the

⁹ “I shall forthwith begin my *Endymion*, which I hope I shall have got some way into by the time you come, when we will read our verses in a delightful place I have set my heart upon near the Castle.” *L*, I, 134. When Reynolds was unable to join him, Keats arranged for Tom to come instead, even buying a copy of *Marmion* to present him on arrival; however, Tom was also unable to immediately join him. Gittings, 200.

¹⁰ Carisbrooke itself still offered opportunities for exploration: “another reason of my fixing is that I am more in reach of the places around me – I intend to walk over the island east – West – North South.” *L*, I, 131.

company of a single friend, Keats determined to compose something amid the wilderness of the Isle of Wight. Haunted by a passage from *King Lear*, he composed a sonnet exploring the power of the sea on his mind. He used this sonnet as a poetic means of banishing coterie life, reinvigorating his senses, and washing away his old self.¹¹

“*On the Sea*”:

Ocean’s Musick and the wideness of the Sea

The landscape of the Isle of Wight suited paradoxical solitude, and Keats recounted to Reynolds his visit to Shanklin, “a most beautiful place” (I, 130).¹² However, much like “On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer,” literature provided the impetus for first-hand observation. Keats still required a guide to point out the element of the natural world that should be scrutinized and, taking a cue from Shakespeare, he explored the poetic power of the ocean. In “On the Sea,” healing power is communicated through the voice and expanse of the sea: the “eternal whisperings” of the sea, which, after the tidal pull, leave the caverns to “their old shadowy sound” (l. 1, 4).¹³ Keats later wrote to the Reynolds sisters: “I have found in the Ocean’s Musick – varying (though selfsame) more than the passion of Timotheus, an enjoyment not to be put into words” (I, 158). Although he was unsure how to

¹¹ “From want of regular rest, I have been rather *nervus* – and the passage in *Lear* – ‘Do you not hear the Sea?’ – has haunted me intensely.” *L*, I, 132.

¹² In *An Historical and Picturesque Guide to the Isle of Wight* (1806), John Bullar wrote: few places of equal extent possess greater variety and beauty of scenery than this far-famed island; comprehending, as it does, within the space of a few miles, sublime coastal views, terrific chasms formed by the convulsions of nature, richly cultivated plains, and romantic wooded seclusions. (London, 1806), 1.

¹³ As Wagner notes, the poem is “dominated by tropes of sound and space.” *A Moment’s Monument*, 93-4.

capture the effect, the influence lingered. Keats continued to hear “the voice most audibly” even after he returned inland (I, 158).

Having committed to banishing the “music” of the coterie, the poet felt cleansed by the ocean’s voice in the silence, which had the power to soothe ears recently din’d “with uproar rude” (l. 11).¹⁴ The sea was also viewed as the cure for those who have been “fed too much with cloying melody,” a phrase suggestive of the type of excessive sensuousness embraced by Hunt (l. 12).¹⁵ Offering relief to the overwhelmed or underused senses, the experience of the sea rejuvenated the poet and granted him the fresh start he desired.¹⁶ The sea also provided relief for the other scenes: “O ye who have eye-balls vexed and tired,/ Feast them upon the wideness of the sea!” (ll. 9-10).¹⁷ As we saw in Chapter III, an expanded viewpoint imparted inspiration by creating a sense of distance associated with the Wordsworthian poet.¹⁸

Nevertheless, the absence of a suitable partner left Keats sleepless and anxious (I, 132).¹⁹ A partnership would have been the “resource” capable of preventing the poet from experiencing a “continual burning of thought” (I, 139). Despondent and lonely, Keats left after only nine days on the island. The poet did not want to give up on the sea as muse, however. On 23 April, Keats attempted to recreate his trip from

¹⁴ He used “din” in a similar context in the opening of *Endymion*: “So I will begin/ Now while I cannot hear the city’s din.” Bk. I, ll. 39-40.

¹⁵ Two of the *OED* definitions for “cloy” are: “To stop up, block, obstruct, choke up (a passage, channel, etc.); to crowd or fill,” and “To clog, obstruct, or impede (movement, activity, etc.); to weigh down, encumber.” <http://dictionary.oed.com>. In a 23 August 1819 letter, Keats referred to “a cloying treacle to the wings of independence.” *L*, II, 144.

¹⁶ In this poem, as Richard W. Bevis notes, the sea is presented as “an antidote to the littleness of the world.” *The Road to Egdon Heath: The Aesthetics of the Great in Nature* (Montreal, 1999), 135. The sea is given the same calming properties in the sonnet, “When I have fears that I may cease to be.”

¹⁷ He was perhaps thinking of the blindness of the Duke of Gloucester in *King Lear*.

¹⁸ The quirring of sea-nymphs that “starts” the poet is, as Warner remarks, similar to the “surmise” of the Chapman’s Homer sonnet: “a glimpse into an unexplored realm that is figured in both sonnets as the ‘wideness of the sea.’” Warner, *A Moment’s Monument*, 94.

¹⁹ Keats brought Wordsworth’s *Poems in Two Volumes* to Margate in 1816 and Shakespeare in seven volumes to the Isle of Wight.

the previous summer by recruiting Tom and travelling down the south coast to Margate.²⁰ Tom's presence, and their contented activity of reading together, alleviated Keats's anxiety that "the Cliff of Poesy" would forever tower above him: "yet when, Tom who meets with some of Pope's Homer in Plutarch's Lives reads some of those to me they seem like Mice to mine" (I, 141).²¹ Although "comfortable," something was still missing at Margate with Tom, and Keats remained unable to begin work on *Endymion* in earnest (I, 139).

Morbidity of solitude:

Poetic despair and the support of Haydon

Throughout the summer of 1817, Keats struggled with the frustration of his own high ambitions. His letters exhibited a vulnerability that threatened to sabotage his poetic efforts. From May to September, Keats confessed to experiencing "such a state of Mind" that left him "not in a Mood to write" (I, 141, 142). To various friends he reported feeling "tormented" by a "horrid Morbidity of Temperament," which appeared "at intervals" and prevented composition (I, 142).²² His "Brain" became "so overwrought" that he was left with "neither Rhyme nor reason" (I, 146). Although he was determined, without guidance the result was poetic frustration:

²⁰ Bate notes that he intended to return to the same room he had taken seven months ago. 163.

²¹ The "Cliff of Poesy" was an image that haunted Keats during this time. *L*, I, 131, 139, 141, 169.

²² As Motion notes, this reaction may also owe something to Wordsworth. 66. In his review of *The Excursion*, Hazlitt described the "restless morbidity of temperament" suffered by "those persons who have been devoted to the pursuit of any art or science." *Works*, IV, 116.

instead of Poetry I have a swimming in my head – And feel all the effects of a Mental Debauch – lowness of Spirits – anxiety to go on without the Power to do so which does not at all tend to my ultimate Progression (I, 146).

In a letter to Haydon, Keats concluded that this morbidity was “no doubt the greatest Enemy and stumbling block I have to fear – I may even say that it is likely to be the cause of my disappointment” (I, 142). When he decided to leave Margate for Canterbury, he confessed to Taylor and Hessey: “I was not right in my head when I came” (I, 146-7).

In this instance, Haydon was well-suited to help the poet. The letter Keats wrote crediting Haydon with suggesting the trip also hinted at his advisory role in both the design of Keats’s journey and in his conception of *Endymion* (I, 125).²³ Haydon never travelled with the poet, but the partnership forged between the two men can be observed at significant points throughout his journey. While advocating solitary travel, Haydon continuously supplied ambition, encouragement, and the majority of the itinerary.²⁴ As we have seen, the two men shared a sense of ambition. In one letter from Margate, Keats even referred to their separate concerns on “our sojourn” (I, 141).²⁵

After Keats experienced his distress on the Isle of Wight, an encouraging reply from Haydon reached him in Margate on 8 May. Assuring him that the “eager anxieties of a great Spirit” were indeed natural, Haydon claimed that men “of great views” always felt tormented (I, 135). Their similar ideas of genius also meant that

²³ George noted, looking back on Keats’s illness: “no one in England understood his character perfectly but poor Tom and he had not the power to divert his frequent melancholy.” *KC*, I, 285.

²⁴ Along with the Isle of Wight, Haydon suggested Bo-Peep in Hastings, and encouraged Keats to go to Oxford. See Motion, 180 and Haydon, *The Diary of Benjamin Robert Haydon*, ed. Willard Bissell Pope. 5 vols. (Cambridge, Mass., 1960-3), II, 126.

²⁵ Robert Woof argues that Keats “parallels the two arts, his own writing of *Endymion* and Haydon’s work on *Christ’s Entry*.” “Haydon, Writer, and Friend of Writers,” *Benjamin Robert Haydon, 1786-1846: Painter and Writer, Friend of Wordsworth and Keats*, David Blayney Brown, Robert Woof, Stephen Hebron (London, 1996), 44.

Haydon's advice could be practical. In an article on the painter, David Higgins remarks that Haydon sometimes represented genius as "an intensely powerful, almost unstoppable, force, but he generally argued that it needed the aid of circumstances to bring it to full fruition."²⁶ Haydon was sensitive to Keats's need to control his own experiences, including both the location and company in which he was composing:

by habitual exercise, you will have habitual intercourse, and constant companionship, and in every want, turn to the great Star of your hopes with a delightful confidence which will never be disappointed (I, 135).²⁷

Haydon added: "I think you did quite right to leave the Isle of white if you felt no relief in <having> being quite alone after study – you may now devote your eight hours a day with just as much seclusion as ever" (I, 134-5). By stressing both "seclusion" and "constant companionship" as parts of his poetic method, he reinforced Keats's own idea of the poet (I, 135).²⁸ As we saw in Chapter III, Haydon also shared Keats's aversion to the idea of sociality and coterie poetry.²⁹ He alleviated the poet's fear of other personalities crowding on his own work by emphasizing Keats's autonomy. Upon receiving a letter containing "On the Sea," Haydon immediately dashed off another note on 8 May, praising the poet's independent voice:

²⁶ David Higgins, "Art, Genius, and Racial Theory in the Early Nineteenth Century: Benjamin Robert Haydon," *History Workshop Journal*, 58 (2004), 22.

²⁷ "Trust in God with all your might My dear Keats this dependence with your own energy will give you strength, & hope & comfort." *L*, I, 135.

²⁸ He ended the letter with another piece of advice that Keats followed: "go on, dont despair, collect incidents, study characters, read Shakespeare and trust in Providence – and you will do – you must, you shall." *L*, I, 135.

²⁹ Haydon viewed Hunt's celebration of sociality as a cover for a "painful, hypochondriac Soul": "hence his wish to be to be surrounded by inferior intellects and being delighted to suck in their honey praise; hence his unwillingness to leave company or to be left by them [...] and hence his horror of being left alone *even for an hour!*" *Diary*, II, 81. Late in his life, the painter expressed his belief that the members of the Hunt circle were, above all else, concerned with one another's egos.

“You have taken up the great trumpet of nature and made it sound with a voice of your own” (I, 136).

Haydon thus fuelled the ambitious conception of *Endymion*. Significantly, the letter in which Keats referred to the poem as “a trial of my Powers of Imagination” was filled with Haydonesque grandeur and the trappings of Christianity that Keats adopted during their communication (I, 169). *Endymion* would take him “but a dozen paces towards the Temple of Fame” but he noted “God forbid that I should be without such a task!” (I, 170). When the poet returned to Hampstead in October and was struggling to complete the poem, he sought to revitalize his efforts by copying the letter verbatim for Bailey.³⁰ Keats’s reaching out to Haydon from the Isle of Wight, much like his reaching out for George the previous summer in Margate, reveals the importance of a particular person at a specific time.

Keats wrote to both Hunt and Haydon on 10 May, and these two letters highlight the role each man played in encouraging the poet during the developing stages of *Endymion*. His letter to Hunt explained that he was “too much in Solitude” on the Isle of Wight and he had therefore “set off pell mell for Margate, at least 150 Miles” (I, 138). Keats reported that he had paired up with Tom in order to alleviate this loneliness and to regain his composure.³¹ He made no mention of the coterie or Hampstead as possible solutions to this loneliness. After offering some criticism of Hunt’s *The Nymphs*, Keats discussed his insecurity about achieving fame and the prospect of “continual uphill Journeying,” but said he recently “felt more confident,” ending the letter with a series of jokes (I, 139-140).³²

³⁰ Bate, 171.

³¹ “Tom is with me at present and we are very comfortable.” *L*, I, 138-9.

³² “I hope you have made a Horse shoe business of – ‘unsuperfluous lift’ ‘faint Bowers’ and fibrous roots.” *L*, I, 139. Hunt did not make any alterations to these passages.

Haydon's letter was at once more honest, open, and mutually advantageous.³³ He began with a passage from *Love's Labour Lost* as a way to symbolize their relationship: "I pray God that our brazen Tombs be nigh neighbors" (I, 141).³⁴ After announcing his wish to "couple" himself with Haydon in Shakespeare's lines, he added that the "bill-pestilence" and the "difficulties" similar to those he had just discussed with Hunt "make our Prime Objects a Refuge as well as a Passion" (I, 141). Keats suggested that, through their ambition, he and Haydon were together taking "Refuge" from the world associated with the Hunt circle.³⁵

The letters Keats exchanged with Haydon reinforced the mindset required for the composition of *Endymion*:

I know no one but you who can be fully sensible of the turmoil and anxiety, the sacrifice of all what is called comfort the readiness to Measure time by what is done and to die in 6 hours could plans be brought to conclusions. – the looking upon the Sun the Moon the Stars, the Earth and its contents as materials to form greater things (I, 143).

As Haydon had previously prescribed, Keats was working hard and approaching his "test" with strict discipline. Reading and writing "about eight hours a day," he followed the maxim "Not begun at all 'till half done" (I, 141). Although Keats's 11 May 1817 letter concluded with evidence of how Haydon bolstered his pride, he confessed that "occasional depressions" resurfaced, ending his writing for the day with, "I am glad you say every Man of great Views is at times as tormented as I am" (I, 142).

³³ Ward argues that in Keats's letter to Hunt "the familiarity was forced;" the poet could write to Haydon about his "hopes and fears without self-mockery, but to Hunt no longer." 119. Motion also notes that the letter to Hunt was "awkward," as opposed to the "shrewd as well as heart-easing" letter from Haydon. 173. To Haydon, Keats noted: "I wrote to Hunt yesterday – scarcely know what I said in it." *L*, I, 143.

³⁴ *Love's Labour Lost*, 1, 1. ll. 1-7.

³⁵ Bate argues that Keats wrote to Haydon with "grateful warmth and also with an openness he could not show Hunt – Haydon understood so much better what he was trying to do." 164.

Speaking of his own efforts at greatness, Keats explained that he “could not talk about Poetry” with Hunt because he “was not in humor with either his or mine” (I, 143). He remarked that Hunt’s “self delusions” of being “a great Poet” were “very lamentable” (I, 143). Perhaps compelled by Haydon’s shared dislike of coterie poetry, he continued: “they have inticed him into a Situation which I should be less eager after than that of a galley Slave [...] I could not be deceived in the Manner that Hunt is – may I die tomorrow if I am to be” (I, 143). Not surprisingly, when Keats returned to Hampstead in early June, he did not see much of Hunt. Motion notes that Keats “visited Haydon but made no effort to contact Hunt, who had recently returned from Marlow and moved into 13 Lisson Grove North.”³⁶ In early July, Hunt wrote, ““What has become of Junkets I know not.””³⁷ They did not see each other again until October.³⁸

Bailey, Oxford, and the inspiration of the act of writing

After spending the remainder of the summer at home in Hampstead, Keats grew restless. He needed new and varied partnerships, as well as locations, to complete *Endymion*. He travelled to Oxford to see a friend he had met through Reynolds, Benjamin Bailey. Oxford offered new landscapes to explore, including a “particularly nice nest” among the beds of rushes dubbed “Reynolds’s Cove,” where

³⁶ Ward, 123; Motion, 182.

³⁷ Clarke, *Recollections of Writers*, 194.

³⁸ Roe, *FH*, 296.

Keats and Bailey read Wordsworth together (I, 162).³⁹ They spent many days becoming “naturalized riverfolk” among the numerous rivers and streams (I, 162).

The relationship he formed with Bailey during his visit from 3 September until 5 October proved immediately beneficial. After the pretension of the coterie, Keats was eager to embrace “so real a fellow as Bailey” (I, 160).⁴⁰ Bailey allowed him to feel comfortable, and Keats was therefore talkative: “His conversation was very engaging [...] Our conversation rarely or never flagged, during our walks, or boatings, or in the Evening” (KC, II, 274). Bailey later noted that they had “what the French happily call the *besoin de parler*,” and their conversation ranged over various topics (KC, II, 263).⁴¹ His genuine “Enthusiasm” for Keats’s work also helped create a positive atmosphere in which they worked and together read “the old Poets” (I, 160).⁴²

Bailey was a supportive and encouraging partner. A sonnet he had written the previous summer suggests why Keats found him such a ready partner in paradoxical solitude:⁴³

I kneel not at Ambition’s shrine!
Let loftier souls the lone night spend
Bright wreaths of future fame to twine [...]
I only wish, when I am dead,
To live again in *Friendship’s Heart*!!! (ll. 1-3, 13-14)⁴⁴

³⁹ In the tradition of Wordsworth’s *Poems on the Naming of Places*.

⁴⁰ Keats referred to Bailey as “one of the noblest men alive at the present day.” *L*, I, 204. As Gittings notes, Bailey’s genuine interest in Keats was “the opposite of Hunt’s friendly but careless condescension.” Gittings, 228. See KC, II, 260-1.

⁴¹ Bailey was one of the few friends Keats talked to openly about his feelings towards women and sex. See *L*, I, 341.

⁴² Bate describes the effect as “an essential, though rapid, moral deepening – moral in the broadest sense of the word.” 215. Bate posits that Bailey was possibly the “last of Keats’s close personal friends to affect his intellectual development in an essential formative way.” 196.

⁴³ Dated 21 August 1817. See Paul Kaufman, “The Reynolds-Hood Commonplace Book: a Fresh Appraisal,” *K-SJ*, X (Winter 1961), 52.

⁴⁴ Qtd. in Kaufman, “The Reynolds-Hood Commonplace Book: a Fresh Appraisal,” 52.

Aware of Bailey's tendency to put friendship ahead of his own ambition, Keats wrote: "[I] pray that if after my death any of my Labours should be worth saving, they may have as 'honest a Chronicler as Bailey'" (I, 160). Bailey wrote to Taylor, "I am so glad *Endymion* is so near the commencement of his Pilgrimage into & through the world of letters" (*KC*, I, 19).⁴⁵ Bailey, who understood the type of poet that Keats aspired to be, encouraged the poet's ambitious scope, directing his reading to the epics of Milton, Dante, and Wordsworth.⁴⁶ Under Bailey's guidance, Keats's own ideas of poetic composition were reinforced.⁴⁷

Much of Keats's growth, along with the rapid poetic success of Book III of *Endymion*, can be attributed to the dynamic of paradoxical solitude between the two men.⁴⁸ Under the focused and individual encouragement of Bailey, Keats composed the entirety of Book III in under a month, writing upwards of 50 lines a day: "I am getting on famous with my third Book – have written 800 lines thereof, and hope to finish it next week – Bailey likes what I have done very much" (I, 166). As Bailey later recorded:

He wrote, & I read, sometimes at the same table, & sometimes at separate desks or tables, from breakfast to the time of our going out for exercise, - generally two or three o'clock. He sat down to his task, - which was about 50 lines a day, - with his paper before him, & wrote with as much regularity, & apparently with as much ease, as he wrote his letters. Indeed he quite acted

⁴⁵ Bate argues that Bailey "seems to have been free of envy." 200.

⁴⁶ Bailey noted: "I knew his inner man so thoroughly." *KC*, II, 263. It was at this time that Keats marked the passages of paradoxical solitude in *Paradise Lost*. See Lau, *Paradise Lost*, 155, 96.

⁴⁷ Bailey also encouraged the "disinterested" nature Hazlitt outlined in his *Principles of Human Action*. Motion, 188. See *L*, I, 166. Keats wrote to Jane and Mariane Reynolds, "[Bailey] delights me in the Selfish and (please god) the disinterested part of my disposition." *L*, I, 160.

⁴⁸ Motion observes, "in less than a month, Bailey had helped Keats to discover books, ideas and feelings which clouded his present, but enormously enlarged his ambitions for the future." 194. Motion adds that Keats sent Bailey "some of the most important letters he ever wrote." 187. See also Earl R. Wasserman's "Keats and Benjamin Bailey on the Imagination," *Modern Language Notes*, 68, 5 (May, 1953), 361-5.

upon that principle he lays down [...] ‘That if poetry comes not as naturally as leaves [to] a tree, it had better not come at all’ (*KC*, II, 270).

However, in a 10 September letter to his sister, Keats made a confession that conflicted with the “ease” noted by Bailey: “I have been writing very hard lately even till an utter incapacity came on, and I feel it now about my head” (I, 155).⁴⁹ Regardless of the effort expended, in the company of Bailey at Oxford, he wrote more within those three weeks than he had in the four months previously.⁵⁰ There was a direct link between their relationship and their “industrious lives” (I, 154).⁵¹

Disruption and interference:

A return to coterie life

After being back at Hampstead for three days, Keats’s letters were filled with exasperation at the Hunt circle; “at Loggerheads,” the group were “pour ainsi dire jealous Neighbours” and they continued attempting to impress their personalities and ideas onto his poetry (I, 169). Wary of Hunt and Shelley’s desire to “dissect & anatomize” *Endymion*, Keats managed to elude such an attempt.⁵²

⁴⁹ Bailey’s memory was also written 31 years after the event. See Bate, 207.

⁵⁰ See Bate, 207.

⁵¹ Stephen Hebron notes that “Bailey and Keats quickly established a methodical working pattern.” *John Keats* (London, 2002), 42.

⁵² Keats was particularly apprehensive of Shelley’s influence. “I refused to visit Shelley, that I might have my own unfettered scope.” *L*, I, 170. Shelley was strong-minded, poetically-gifted, and independent. Richard Holmes argues that, from the beginning, Keats found him to be “overbearing.” Holmes, *Shelley: The Pursuit*, 359. Cox notes that Keats’s desire to keep free of Shelley’s influence “might be accounted an indication of poetic competitiveness and anxiety.” 49. Hunt believed Keats felt that Shelley “undervalued” him. *The Autobiography of Leigh Hunt*, 274. See also, Roe, *FH*, 283, 290.

Haydon says to me Keats dont show your Lines to Hunt on any account or he will have done half for you – so it appears Hunt wishes it to be thought. When he met Reynolds in the Theatre John told him that I was getting on to the completion of 4000 Lines. Ah! says Hunt, had it not been for me they would have been 7000! (I, 169).⁵³

Keats wrote a letter to Bailey congratulating himself on maintaining both an artistic and physical distance from the influence of Shelley, and resisting being viewed as an "élève" of the Cockney School (I, 35-6, 168-70).⁵⁴

The coterie world contrasted sharply with his time at Oxford, to which Bailey referred as "the silence & solitude of that beautiful place" (KC, II, 269).⁵⁵ Keats complained that "[i]n this World there is no quiet nothing but teasing and snubbing and vexation;" "disgusted with literary Men," he longed to be "transported" back to Oxford (I, 169). Circumstances had deteriorated further since he had left Hampstead in September:

Things have happen'd lately of great Perplexity – You must have heard of them – Reynolds and Haydon retorting and recriminating – and parting for ever – the same thing has happened between Haydon and Hunt – It is unfortunate – Men should bear with each other – there lives not the Man who may not be cut up, aye hashed to pieces on his weakest side (I, 209-210).

When Keats wrote of this falling-out in a letter to his brothers, he again alluded to *I Henry IV*: "there has been a quarrel of a severe nature between Haydon & Reynolds & another ('the Devil rides upon a fiddle stick') between Hunt & Haydon...they all are dreadfully irritated against each other" (I, 205). Hal's proverbial "the devil rides upon a fiddle stick" appears only seven lines from the "banish all the world" speech that

⁵³ Keats later noted that he had had "several hints" to this effect. *L*, I, 214.

⁵⁴ See *L*, I, 35-6, 168-70. Keats did not see Bailey's advice and conversation as having any attendant shackles.

⁵⁵ This was during the "absence of the numerous members & students of the University." *KC*, II, 269.

Keats adapted earlier to highlight the emptiness of Hampstead life (I, 125).⁵⁶ By echoing Hal's detached response to the downfall of the thieves, Keats subtly implied that any remaining ties between him and the Hunt circle were illusory and superficial.⁵⁷

Keats instead sought the company of those individuals with whom he had established paradoxical solitude: Clarke, Severn, Haydon, Reynolds, and Rice.⁵⁸ Although he tried to meet with these friends individually, they inevitably gathered in Hampstead, and he again ended up among the coterie. However, he now viewed the group from the perspective of an outsider. His 8 October letter to Bailey addressed the foreignness of this lifestyle, including all the distractions and irritations that seemed jarring to the poet recently returned from Oxford. Speaking of visits to the homes of Hunt and Haydon, Keats remarked: "I know nothing about any thing in this part of the world" (I, 168-9). Just as he referred to mainland England as "your continent" in a letter to Reynolds from the Isle of Wight, he again suggested that Hampstead was a separate part of the globe (I, 131).⁵⁹

It was significant that Keats chose this moment to copy an extract from earlier correspondence to George into his letter to Bailey. The poet took the opportunity to question Hunt's view of composing a long poem, asking rhetorically:

⁵⁶ *I Henry IV*, 2, 5, l. 144.

⁵⁷ Although Hal is only playing the King at this stage in the play, his chilling response to Falstaff's proposed banishment, "I do, I will" foreshadows the actuality. II, iv, l. 481.

⁵⁸ Keats expressed his hope to detain Rice a further "24860 times." *L*, I, 172. Motion lists Rice among Keats's friends "who made the fewest demands on him." 223.

⁵⁹ Complaining of Hunt's infatuation with Shelley, Keats revealed his dislike of all the vying for attention. Distracting tensions were caused by Hunt's harsh criticisms of Haydon's painting, Haydon's struggle to make progress, and Horace Smith being "tired of Hunt." *L*, I, 169. Bate argues that the "bickering and dissatisfaction" of the group "weighed on [Keats]." 219. Cox views these arguments in a different light: "Productive debate, not universal agreement, was the group's goal." 54.

Do not the Lovers of Poetry like to have a little Region to wander in [...] Do not they like this better than what they can read through before Mrs. Williams comes down stairs? [...] Did our great Poets ever write short Pieces?" (I, 170).⁶⁰

Keats reasserted his belief in the value of ambitious poetic scope.⁶¹ The letter concluded with Keats's pained memory of the "Mockery" he made of these ideals at Hunt's cottage and a promise to persist with *Endymion* (I, 169-70). Repeating his earlier comments to George, Keats reassured both himself and Bailey that, even when at Hampstead, he remained free from the group and committed to composing a long, experimental poem: "You see Bailey how independent my writing has been – Hunt's dissuasion was of no avail" (I, 170).

On 22 November, less than a month after he returned from Oxford, Keats was planning another escape (I, 186). He consciously compared the volatile type of friendships that existed in a coterie setting with the paradoxical solitude of his own relationships. He wished to be again alone writing with Bailey, noting that he was tired of all literary men and vowing to "never know another except Wordsworth" (I, 169).

⁶⁰ Keats downplayed the size of his task at other occasions as well, in keeping with his ambitious view for the future; he referred to composing *Endymion* as climbing a "little eminence" before his "Years of more momentous Labor." *L*, I, 141.

⁶¹ He imagined an ambitious poem to be like an epic journey at sea with only the stars as guidance: "a long Poem is a test of Invention which I take to be the Polar Star of Poetry, as Fancy is the Sails, and Imagination the Rudder." *L*, I, 170.

"Fellowship Divine":

"Stepping of the Imagination towards a truth"

In a 21 September 1818 letter, Keats explored the relationship he shared with Reynolds by copying out all ten stanzas of Katherine Philips's poem, "To Mrs. M. A. at Parting" (I, 163).⁶² The speaker in Philips's poem celebrates the "twin souls" of herself and a friend, but with an emphasis on the specific individual: "But only, only thee." The poem exalts the "mingled souls" that "[i]nspired with a flame divine" that is "happiness." This celebration of the "sacred name of friend" inspired a crucial section of *Endymion*. On 30 January 1818, Keats rewrote a passage on "happiness" in Book I. He copied it out in a letter to Taylor and included the declaration, "My having written that Argument <Passage> will perhaps be of the greatest Service to me of any thing I ever did" (I, 218).⁶³ The language and the sentiment of this addition were notably similar to Philip's poem:

Wherein lies happiness? In that which becks
Our ready minds to fellowship divine,
A fellowship with essence, till we shine
Full alchemized, and free of space. Behold
The clear religion of heaven! (I, ll. 777-781).

"Fellowship divine," a concept that Keats felt was "the greatest Service to me of any thing I ever did," grew out of his partnerships in paradoxical solitude and found suitable language in Philips's poem.

⁶² Keats's appreciation for Philips amid his attack on coteries may be viewed as odd, as she has come to be seen as "a near-perfect case study of a mid-seventeenth-century coterie poet." Elizabeth H. Hageman and Andrea Sununu, "More Copies of it abroad than I could have imagin'd": Further Manuscript Texts of Katherine Philips, 'the Matchless Orinda,'" *English Manuscript Studies*, 5 (1995), 127. Keats, however, may not have been aware that she held this distinction.

⁶³ Bailey later referred to the articulation of this concept of fellowship divine as the shrine of Keats's "Pilgrimage into & through the world of letters." *KC*, I, 19.

Although indebted to Philips's lines, Keats redefined the concept in his own terms, singling out the idea of "compleat" friendships and adding in the margin: "A compleat friend – this Line sounded very oddly to me at first" (I, 165). Due to the poet's own shifting partnerships, the idea of a single friendship being "compleat" seemed unusual. He noted that "there is a most delicate fancy of the Fletcher Kind" in her other poetry, perhaps as an attempt to steer the definition toward his own notion of a "brotherhood in song" (I, 165).⁶⁴ Keats was inspired by this celebration of individual friendship, and it helped him to compose a vital bridge in Book I of *Endymion*.

Keats seemed to realize, only after he had written this section, that an articulation of this dynamic was vital to the logic of the poem. He ended his note to Taylor with the assurance that, when he composed the passage, "it was a regular stepping of the Imagination towards a Truth" (I, 218). This section also included a description of a "kind of Pleasure Thermometer"; the "[r]icher entanglements" lead to the chief intensity: "the crown of these/ Is made of love and friendship" (I, ll. 798, 800-1). This awareness informs a reading of *Endymion* as an imaginative journey in paradoxical solitude through a poetic wilderness.

"My Herald thought into a wilderness":

Poetic wilderness

Keats's conception of *Endymion* was ambitious. It would, he predicted, "be a test, a trial of my Powers of Imagination and chiefly of my invention [...] by which I

⁶⁴ "To George Felton Mathew," l. 2.

must make 4000 Lines of one bare circumstance” (I, 169-70). The conditions of the “trial” originated in Keats’s preconceived ideas about the connection between solitude, wilderness, and the nature of creativity. He further proposed to finish the poem by the following autumn.⁶⁵ Keats’s productivity varied with his situation. Despite his falter on the Isle of Wight and constant changes of location, he was able to complete Book I in a month. Book II, however, which was written entirely at Hampstead, took him three months.⁶⁶ At Oxford with Bailey, the poet was back on target for Book III: “within these last three weeks I have written 1000 lines” (I, 168).⁶⁷ The beginning of Book IV, written at Hampstead, moved slowly; between 5 – 30 October he had only composed 300 lines (I, 175).⁶⁸ The poet went alone to Burford Bridge on 22 November and, once there, wrote over 80 lines a day, completing the rest of the Book in only six days.⁶⁹ As these dates prove, Keats was only able to meet the challenge of his time limit when composing in the conditions of paradoxical solitude.⁷⁰

The poet’s diverse and varied destinations were due to the fact that his search for inspiration increasingly became the theme of the poem itself.⁷¹ This entanglement of poet and poem explains why *Endymion* reflects the journeys of its author. From late spring until early winter, Keats restlessly traversed over southern England in an

⁶⁵ “Oh, may no wintry season, bare and hoary,/ See it half finished, but let autumn bold [...] Be about me when I make an end.” Bk. I, ll. 54-7.

⁶⁶ Bate argues that “some of the worst lines Keats ever wrote mar the last six hundred of the second book.” 185.

⁶⁷ Keats here composed upward of “50 lines a day.” *KC*, II, 270.

⁶⁸ Keats added: “they would have been five but I have been obliged to go to town.” *L*, I, 175.

⁶⁹ “I am just arriving at Dorking to change the Scene – change the Air and give me a Spur to wind up my Poem.” *L*, I, 187. See also Allott, 244-5 and Ward, 139. Although Keats was planning to follow Tom to Devonshire and resume their partnership, this fell through and he ended up at Burford Bridge alone. *L*, I, 186-7.

⁷⁰ For a map approximating the extent of Keats journeys, see Appendix C and Appendix D.

⁷¹ In this assessment I am in agreement with Sperry, who argues that *Endymion* was “a work whose scope and meaning to a large extent evolved during the months Keats worked on it.” 114.

attempt to generate poetic momentum.⁷² Throughout the seven and a half month period in which *Endymion* was composed, however, it was Keats's practice of cultivating paradoxical solitudes that produced the comfort, control, and confidence that he was unable to find either alone or in a coterie environment.⁷³

As we have seen, Keats's evolution from the amateur author of *Poems* to the autonomous poet in *Endymion* was a calculated move.⁷⁴ There were clear lyrical and thematic similarities between the two publications, but the argument, scope, and method of composition signalled a distinction between this new poetic journey and his "first-blights, on Hampstead heath" (II, 323).⁷⁵ Foreshadowed by the longer poems "I stood tip-toe upon a little hill" and "Sleep and Poetry," *Endymion* explores the hero's solitary quest through extraordinary landscapes in search of the moon goddess.

A useful definition of the poetic wilderness of *Endymion* is supplied by Hunt, whose own suburban concept of poetry encouraged Keats to experiment with uncultivated poetry: "It was a wilderness of sweets, but it was truly a wilderness: a domain of young, luxurious, uncompromising poetry."⁷⁶ Many scholars follow Hunt's lead. Sperry highlights the waywardness of the poem, contending that it is "labyrinthine and overgrown," and "a little wilderness amid whose tangles one can wander happily but at the risk of becoming lost."⁷⁷ Martin Aske determines that "what

⁷² Keats revised the final Book and completed the title page, dedication, and preface at Teignmouth. *L*, I, 253. Gittings notes: "As at many other times in his life, it seemed to him that the change of scene would solve the problems of a poem." 221.

⁷³ The most significant question for Keats during this time was, Sperry argues, "the adequacy of his habits and method of composition." 115.

⁷⁴ Keats commented on the task of composing *Endymion*: "when done it will take me but a dozen paces towards the Temple of Fame." *L*, I, 170.

⁷⁵ "If *Endymion* serves me as a Pioneer perhaps I ought to be content." *L*, I, 239.

⁷⁶ Hunt, *Lord Byron and Some of his Contemporaries*, I, 251.

⁷⁷ Sperry, 90. Shelley wrote to Ollier on 6 September 1819: "much praise is due to me for having read it, the Authors intention appearing to be that no person should possibly get to the end of it." *Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. F. L. Jones. 2 vols. (Oxford, 1964), II, 177. 40.

needs emphasizing” in this poem “is the invitation to ‘wander.’”⁷⁸ Motion sees this as a positive aspect of the poem, arguing that it concerns the growth of an imagination in a fashion similar to the Wordsworthian theme of the growth of a poet’s mind;⁷⁹ he concludes that the “wayward” nature of *Endymion* was both deliberate and the poem’s “greatest triumph.”⁸⁰

An escape from his domestic surroundings was the necessary beginning of the poem: “So I will begin/ Now while I cannot hear the city’s din” (I, ll. 39-40):

And now at once, adventuresome, I send
My herald thought into a wilderness –
There let its trumpet blow, and quickly dress
My uncertain path with green, that I may speed
Easily onward, through flowers and weed (I, ll. 58-62).

Jacqueline Zeff remarks that the progression in *Endymion* is in the language of “a perpetual journey.”⁸¹ She refers to the poem as the literal and metaphorical fulfilment of Keats’s assertion in “Sleep and Poetry”: “Then I will pass the countries that I see/ In long perspective, and continually/ Taste their pure fountains” (ll. 99-101).⁸² The poem rolls forward like the “[o]ld ocean,” moving “with a wayward indolence” (II, ll. 378-50).⁸³ Although clearly not reproductions of Keats’s own travels, *Endymion*’s supernatural and subterranean adventures represent the various uncultivated and mysterious landscapes that Keats associated with inspiration. There are other aspects

⁷⁸ Martin Aske, *Keats and Hellenism* (Cambridge, 1985, repr. 2005), 69, 70.

⁷⁹ Gittings makes a similar point, arguing that *Endymion* concerned “the growth of the poet’s mind in the guise of a narrative.” 306. Any resemblance would have been purely coincidental, however, as the *Prelude* was not published until 1850.

⁸⁰ Motion, 170.

⁸¹ Jacqueline Zeff, “Strategies of Time in Keats’s Narratives,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 17, 4, *Nineteenth Century* (Autumn, 1977), 626.

⁸² Zeff further notes that the crises which “persistently” engage *Endymion* “change little in basic plot; it is their environments which change and hence their values.” 626.

⁸³ Barnard argues that *Endymion* is “more a poem in process than a considered whole.” 35.

of the poem, however, particularly the character of Endymion, which reflected and magnified aspects of its author.

Endymion *as allegory*:

Astronomy, pilgrimage, and paradoxical solitude

The story of *Endymion* concerns the trials of a shepherd-king searching for a goddess; it thus explores the travels of a moon-obsessed solitary through various fantastical landscapes in search of inspiration.⁸⁴ Keats organized his trial of poetic invention around the astronomer who first charted the moon's journey. The general context for the myth of Endymion and Cynthia was widely known;⁸⁵ however, the eponymous character's background as an astronomer was emphasized⁸⁶ in Andrew Tooke's *Pantheon* and Edward Baldwin's *Pantheon*.⁸⁷ As soon as Keats announced that he would "trace the story of Endymion," he noted that the "very music of the name has gone/ Into my being" (I, ll. 35; 36-7).⁸⁸ The poet was influenced at an early

⁸⁴ Jack notes that "there can be no doubt that at one level [*Endymion*] portrays the poet's quest for inspiration as an aspect of the soul's search for beauty." *Keats and the Mirror of Art*, 146.

⁸⁵ Along with Drayton's *The Man in the Moone* and Sandys's Ovid, Keats knew of Spence and Lempriere from his time at Enfield. Clarke, *Recollections*, 123-124. See Finney, *The Evolution of Keats's Poetry*, I, 260-8. See also *The Excursion*, Bk. IV, ll. 851-71, which Hazlitt quoted from approvingly. *Works*, XIX, 13 and IV, 115.

⁸⁶ Tooke wrote: "*Endymion* was a famous *Astrologer*, who first described the Course of the Moon, and he is represented *sleeping* because he contemplated nothing but the Stars." *The Pantheon* (London, 1713, repr. London, 1976), 242. Edward Baldwin (a pseudonym for William Godwin) described Endymion's background in a similar way: see *The Pantheon: or Ancient History of the Gods of Greece and Rome, Myth and Romanticism: a Collection of the Major Mythological Sources used by the English Romantic Poets*, Burton Feldman and Robert D. Richardson, Jr., eds. 4th edn. (London, 1814, fasc. London 1984), 207.

⁸⁷ Alan Osler argues that Edward Baldwin's *Pantheon* was the prime influence for Keats's *Endymion*. "Keats and Baldwin's 'Pantheon,'" *The Modern Language Review*, 62, 2 (April 1967), 221.

⁸⁸ Gittings contends that the poem's "solitary hero," with his "alternations of elation and despair, is more and more Keats." 202.

age by his lessons in astronomy and, in particular, by John Bonnycastle's *An Introduction to Astronomy*.⁸⁹

The moon had long been a symbol of the poet's own quest for inspiration.⁹⁰ Book III of *Endymion* contains a lengthy ode to the moon's creative power (III, ll. 42-71). It "sits most meek and most alone" and the eye of the "high Poet" is "bent/ Towards her with the muses in thine heart" (III, ll. 46; 48-9). Endymion wonders what quality of the moon arouses his senses: "'What is there in thee, Moon, that thou shouldst move/ My heart so potently?'" (III, ll. 142-3). The answer comes in the form of a description of the moon as representative of various elements necessary to composition, including wilderness and friendship:

Thou wast the deep glen,
Thou wast the mountain-top, the sage's pen,
The poet's harp, the voice of friends, the sun.
Thou wast the river, thou wast glory won [...]
Oh, what a wild and harmonized tune
My spirit struck from all the beautiful! (III, ll. 163-71).⁹¹

Endymion's fixation with the moon also leads him on "[s]trange journeys" to "[w]herever beauty dwells,/ In gulf or eyrie, mountains or deep dells" (III, ll. 93-4).

The poem, which follows Endymion's "pilgrimage for the world's dusky brink," reflects Keats's belief that solitude and wilderness inspired poetic composition (I, l. 977).⁹² Keats identified with the idea of the solitary pilgrim.⁹³ When

⁸⁹ Roe has shown how when Keats was at school, John C. Ryland's imaginative teaching of science made a lasting impression. *JK&CD*, 34-9.

⁹⁰ It appears that Keats's first poetic effort, now lost, was a sonnet to the moon. See *KC*, I, 274. Before *Endymion*, Keats's most sustained attempt to versify this relationship was in "I stood tip-toe upon a little hill."

⁹¹ Thomas MacFarland groups this fervent address, including the poet's identification of the moon as the sun, under the rubric "the too-muchness of Keats." *The Masks of Keats: the Endeavour of a Poet* (Oxford, 2000), 110.

⁹² The poem remained an emblem of this wilderness. Keats sent a copy of the poem with the explorer Mr. Ritchie to be cast in the heart of the Sahara. Ritchie responded in a letter to

he provided his sister Fanny with an outline of *Endymion*, he introduced the hero as a shepherd who is “a very contemplative sort of a Person” who “lived solitry among the trees and Plains” on “a Mountain’s Side called Latmus” (I, 154).⁹⁴ Although the figure of the lonely shepherd is a convention of the pastoral, Endymion’s solitary nature is emphasized in unique ways throughout the poem. After abandoning the “goodly company” of his people, Endymion is depicted as a rugged traveller on a solitary voyage, and he is often referred to either by his background as a mountaineer, or by his status as traveller or outsider. Endymion is variously referred to as, “[t]he wanderer” (II, l. 137; IV, l. 561), “young mountaineer” (II, l. 203), “[t]he solitary” (II, l. 633), “[y]oung traveller,” (II, l. 650), “wayworn” (II, l. 651, 655), “wilderer stranger” (III, l. 219), “[w]arm mountaineer” (IV, l. 54), “young stranger” (IV, l. 132), “mournful wanderer” (IV, l. 407), “[t]he mountaineer” (IV, l. 722), and “wayward” (IV, l. 842).

Endymion becomes aware of the quest for poetic inspiration first through dreaming or imagining inspirational scenes. He then needs to gather experience; Bate refers to the period before a union between Endymion and Cynthia is possible as “spiritual maturing.”⁹⁵ Endymion’s pilgrimage is thus a prerequisite to their union.⁹⁶ For Keats, such journeys were the necessities of creativity. Book II explores the origin

Haydon: “Pray tell Keats that *Endymion* has arrived thus far on his way to the Desert, and when you are sitting over your Christmas fire will be jogging (in all probability) on a Camel’s back ‘over those Afran Sands immeasurable.’” *L*, II, 16n. Upon hearing this news, Keats wrote to the George Keatses with evident approval: “One is in the wilds of america – the other is on a Camel’s back in the plains of Egypt.” *L*, II, 16.

⁹³ Wunder argues that Keats’s muse was often viewed “in hermetic terms.” *Keats, Hermeticism, and the Secret Societies*, 99.

⁹⁴ This contemplative aspect of his character is not developed. As Zeff notes, despite his tendency to “ponder,” Endymion is not a “truly *meditative* hero,” as he never evaluates his experiences. Bk. II, l. 886; l. 930. “Strategies of Time in Keats’s Narratives,” 629.

⁹⁵ Bate, 172.

⁹⁶ Bate argues that *Endymion* “cannot be understood apart from biographical considerations.” 173. As Sperry argues, the allegory is not fully coherent because the “scope and meaning to a large extent evolved during the months Keats worked on it,” and therefore the poem embodied new insights “discovered only in the course of composition.” 114.

of poetry, just as in “I stood tip-toe upon a little hill,” where the poet asked, “What first inspired a bard of old to sing” of myths, including the story of Endymion, “[t]he wanderer by moonlight” (l. 163; 185). Again, the answer was the wilderness itself. In *Endymion*, poetry is spoken by the natural world, and only discovered by one who journeys through it:

long ago ‘twas told
By a cavern wind unto a forest old;
And then the forest told it in a dream
To a sleeping lake, whose cool and level gleam
A poet caught as he was journeying
To Phoebus’ shrine (II, ll. 830-5).

After reaching that “inspired place,” the poet is able to interpret the discovery, transforming it into poetry that can be enjoyed and understood by all:

and in it he did fling
His weary limbs, bathing an hour’s space,
And after, straight, in that inspired place
He sang the story up into the air,
Giving it universal freedom (II, ll. 835-9).

Gaining this inspiration requires ambition, determination, and travel.

In Book II, Endymion, who has for “many days” been “wandering in uncertain ways:/ Through wilderness and woods of mossed oaks,” begins following a butterfly (II, ll. 47; 48-9). Like a “new-born spirit” he passes “[t]hrough the green evening quiet in the sun,” crossing over “many a heath, through many a woodland dun,/ Through buried paths, where sleepy twilight dreams/ The summer-time away” (II, ll. 70-4). He travels to the most remote places in this search:

One track unseams
 A wooded cleft and, far away, the blue
 Of ocean fades upon him; then, anew,
 He sinks adown a solitary glen
 Where there was never sound of mortal men (II, ll. 74-8).

There is an inherent danger when wilderness borders on the sublime, as the more extreme landscape brings on feelings of poetical frustration.⁹⁷ In a state of astonishment and despondence, Keats again employs the image of the “sick eagle”.⁹⁸

The solitary felt a hurried change
 Working within him into something dreary –
 Vexed like a morning eagle, lost and weary
 And purblind amid foggy, midnight worlds (II, ll. 633-6).

The primary source of poetic material for Keats, vision, is lost in these “midnight worlds”; Endymion can “see/ Naught earthly worth my compassing” (II, ll. 161-2). Descending “far in the deep abyss,” he encounters strange and sublime sights: “whence he seeth/ A hundred waterfalls whose voices come/ But as the murmuring surge” (II, ll. 232, 241-43). In these fantastic landscapes, Endymion experiences the “deadly feel of solitude,” and complains of feeling like a solitary and an exile (II, l. 284). He suffers from a “homeward fever,” and finally can take no more: “let me see my native bowers!/ Deliver me from this rapacious deep!” (II, ll. 319; 331-2).

Paradoxical solitude emerges as the solution. After a brief encounter with the goddess Venus, Endymion receives advice that echoes Keats’s own quest for the muse in the natural world: “Endymion, one day thou wilt be blest./ So still obey the

⁹⁷ Edmund Burke believed that astonishment “is the effect of the sublime in the highest degree,” the state of the soul “in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror.” *A Philosophical Enquiry Into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*. 9th edn. (London, 1782), 80, 79. He also wrote that a life of solitude “contradicts the purposes of our being, since death itself is scarcely an idea of more terror.” 56.

⁹⁸ “On Seeing the Elgin Marbles,” l. 5

guiding hand that fends/ Thee safely through these wonders for sweet ends” (II, ll. 573-5). He needs a guide, just as the poet did while composing the poem. There are a number of characters that offer parallels to Keats’s relationships. Endymion’s sister, Peona, who mysteriously disappears and reappears at the beginning and end of the poem, suggests Tom’s involvement.⁹⁹ During Endymion’s interludes of solitude, a guide appears in the form of the cursed hermit Glaucus, and the two men are revealed to be “twin brothers” in a shared “destiny” (III, l. 713). Kucich argues that Keats saw this in his own life in his relationship with Reynolds; the poet’s changing of Glaucus “from a father-figure, in an early draft, to the ‘friend’ and ‘brother’ of the poem’s final version,” further established this.¹⁰⁰ Glaucus and Endymion are furthermore “engaged in a mutual process of bettering themselves.”¹⁰¹

In the end, Endymion renounces his solitary quest, stating that, along with other faults, he has been presumptuous “against the tie/ Of mortals each to each” (IV, ll. 640-1). His solitude, like Keats’s on the Isle of Wight, leaves him despondent. He rejects the search for wonder:

Caverns lone, farewell,
And air of visions, and the monstrous swell
Of visionary seas! No, never more
Shall airy voices cheat me to the shore
Of tangled wonder, breathless and aghast (IV, ll. 651-5).

When forced to choose between Cynthia and the Indian princess, Endymion instead decides to become a “hermit young” living in a “mossy cave” (IV, l. 860). This hermitage is another example of paradoxical solitude, as he instructs his sister to periodically join him and provide an audience: “Thou alone shalt come to me and

⁹⁹ Gittings, 210.

¹⁰⁰ Kucich, *Keats, Shelley, and Romantic Spenserianism*, 170.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 170.

lave/ Thy spirit in the wonders I shall tell” (IV, ll. 861-2). However, the Indian maiden then turns out to be the goddess after all, and in the final twenty-five lines the poem reverts to the earlier message of the significance of searching: the two, united, disappear “far away” (IV, ll. 1002). As Stillinger notes, the conclusion was inherent in the myth Keats was retelling, so these added complications of paradoxical solitude are instructive.¹⁰² The passage Keats felt to be a “stepping of the Imagination towards a truth,” which described “fellowship divine,” helps make sense of the poem’s rushed conclusion (I, 218; I, l. 778). These friends were guides through the poet’s numerous trials of experience, and it was only with their help that he was able to locate inspiration at the end of his pilgrimage.

The publishing of Endymion:

The help of his partners

Keats finished his draft of *Endymion* on 28 November 1817, and from early January to 21 March 1818 he revised and copied the poem. His friends provided vital assistance and guidance in the editing and publication process. Stillinger contends that *Endymion* was in fact the product of a joint effort between Keats and Taylor.¹⁰³ However, Margaret Ketchum Powell argues that an “examination of Taylor’s participation in *Endymion* shows that he was a conscientious editor, not a collaborator.”¹⁰⁴ She demonstrates that Taylor’s “pencil marks and underlinings” were

¹⁰² Stillinger, xviii.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 11-14.

¹⁰⁴ Margaret Ketchum Powell, “Keats and His Editor: The Manuscript of *Endymion*,” *Library*, s6-VI (1984), 140. Powel contends that Taylor’s handwritten comments in the

meant for Keats's eyes and not the printer's,¹⁰⁵ and that these changes were discussed in a meeting or "conference" between the two men as editor and author.¹⁰⁶ Taylor's writing in the manuscript of Book I, for example, indicates that the changes were made on Keats's authority, not Taylor's, suggesting that "at some point he and Keats sat down together in consultation over the notations which he had made."¹⁰⁷ Regardless, Keats's relationship with Taylor helped to improve the poem in both men's eyes.¹⁰⁸

Keats enlisted the help and assistance of his individual friends. He left the manuscript of Book III with George to deliver to Taylor, asked Clarke to correct the proofs of Book II (and possibly those of Book III and IV as well), and gave Reynolds the revised preface to pass on to Taylor.¹⁰⁹ It may have been in the context of this assistance that Keats wrote to Reynolds, "I could not live without the love of my friends" (I, 267). Keats claimed that the opinion of his friends and the general public was important, but he hated "a Mawkish Popularity;" he did not want to "be subdued before them" (I, 267). These were his thoughts at the rejection of his preface by Reynolds and Taylor.

He was trying to prevent the charge that, despite all his efforts in the poem itself, the preface was affected: "if there is any fault in the preface it is not affectation:

manuscript constitute the work of an editor and not a co-author. Keats wrote to Taylor on 24 April 1818: "I think I Did very wrong to leave you all the trouble of Endymion." *L*, I, 270.

¹⁰⁵ Powell notes that phrases and lines that were marked in pencil but not changed by Keats appear in the published version as they were in the manuscript (lines 44, 509, 552, 698, 726, 972). "Keats and His Editor," 144. The suggestions that Keats did not approve (and thus what Taylor did not ink over) were obviously not printed. 146. Gittings also remarks that "Taylor's bracketed suggestions for cuts were ignored." 290.

¹⁰⁶ Powell reasonably rules out the possibility that there was an elaborate exchange of letters, all now lost. "Keats and His Editor," 145.

¹⁰⁷ Powell adds: "Only such a consultation will plausibly explain the kinds and disposition of Taylor's notations." "Keats and His Editor," 143.

¹⁰⁸ Chilcott argues that the two men achieved a strong bond through personal kinship and "a sympathy in literary beliefs." *A Publisher and His Circle*, 26-7.

¹⁰⁹ Powell, "Keats and His Editor," 143, 142.

but an undersong of disrespect to the Public” (I, 267). The accusation of pretension brought Hunt to mind, and Keats set about deflecting any similarities between them:

though I am not aware there is any thing like Hunt in it, (and if there is, it is my natural way, and I have something in common with Hunt) look it over again and examine the motives, the seeds from which any one sentence sprung – (I, 266).

If there were similarities, he remarked, looking past the surface revealed fundamental differences.¹¹⁰ The affectation came from Keats’s claim to have “not the slightest feel of humility towards the Public – or any thing in existence, – but the eternal Being, the Principle of Beauty, – and the Memory of great Men” (I, 266).

Both the original and revised prefaces to *Endymion* insist that the poet thought of the poem just as he thought of his own journeys in the wilderness: as a prologue to the superior poetry he hoped to write. While he dismissed his first volume, he detected more merit in *Endymion* and hoped that it would be viewed as “a poor prologue to what, if I live, I humbly hope to do.”¹¹¹ Keats stated in the corrected preface that the poem was composed in a “space of life between” childhood and maturity, a state in which “the soul is in a ferment, the character undecided, the way of life uncertain, the ambition thick-sighted.”¹¹² The wandering, uncertain nature of *Endymion* was symbolic of this new beginning, but Keats’s later assessment of the trial validated the effort:

¹¹⁰ This dismissal of Hunt was not strong enough, so in his 10 April letter to Reynolds with the revised preface, Keats eliminated any mention of Hunt at all, changing the sentiment to: “if there is an affection in it ‘tis natural to me.” *L*, I, 269.

¹¹¹ Allott, 119.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 119. As Ward notes, it was “as though in finishing *Endymion* Keats had begun to be released from the preoccupation of proving himself a poet.” Ward, 151

In *Endymion*, I leaped headlong into the Sea, and thereby have become better acquainted with the Soundings, the quicksands, & the rocks, than if I had <stayed> stayed upon the green shore, and piped a silly pipe, and took tea & comfortable advice (I, 374).

Just as the sea was rejuvenating in “On the Sea,” so now the composition became, in Ross’s term, “the sea of self-creation.”¹¹³

Endymion was the “voyage of conception” that represented Keats’s journey toward becoming a poet in the mould of Wordsworth (I, 231). Travelling through various landscapes guided by a trusted friend, the poet succeeding in “banishing” the coterie influence and passing his own “test.” Having experienced the poetic wilderness of *Endymion*, the poet returned to Hampstead on 5 December 1817 with new confidence in his independence.

¹¹³ Ross, *The Contours of Masculine Desire*, 172.

CHAPTER V

A MOST SOCIAL TIME

DEVELOPMENT OF PARADOXICAL SOLITUDE, JAN – MAY 1818

“Literary Men”:

Negative traits of the coterie life

Between 6 January 1818, when Keats began correcting the manuscript of *Endymion*, and 19 May, when the poem was registered for publication, he was “very much engaged with his Friends” (I, 286).¹ However, Keats continued to develop his poetic character in opposition to his perception of the Cockney School. As we have seen, Keats’s creativity was frustrated by a combination of qualities that habitually surfaced in a coterie setting: affectation, disruption, interference, egotism, insulation, and familiarity. The increasing presence of these qualities during this highly social period encouraged the poet to escape their source.

Keats was repelled by the affectation he perceived to be an attendant element of coterie life and poetry.² Although he wrote of being disgusted with literary men to Bailey on 8 October 1817, by 1818 Keats found himself in the company of Horace Smith and John Kingston (I, 169).³ The poet observed that “their manners are alike;

¹ The beginning of this period was the most social. As Bate notes, from 17 December and 22 January, twenty-six of the thirty-seven days that Keats spent in London “were filled with social engagements.” 273. See *L*, I, 41.

² Due to his own preoccupation with self-fashioning, Keats may have been overly sensitive to it in others. See Levinson, *Keats’s Life of Allegory*, 25-6.

³ Bate refers to them as “men of literary interests.” 248. Jonathan Mulrooney notes that their company involved the kind of “affectation that inhibits genuine interaction.” “Keats in the company of Kean,” *SiR*, 42 (2003), 227.

they all know fashionables” (I, 193).⁴ Keats thought he was above the “literary world”: “Just so much as I am hu[m]bled by the genius above my grasp, am I exalted and look with hate and contempt upon the literary world” (II, 144). Although he stated his desire to be with “Kean & his low company,” it was with Reynolds that he ultimately decided to spend his time: “I know such like acquaintance will never do for me & yet I am going to Reynolds, on wednesday” (I, 193). His partnership with Reynolds once again helped him to reject coterie practices and find his own poetic voice.⁵

Keats found coterie life to be rife with infighting. On 18 January 1818, the internal conflict he had noted three months before was now amplified:⁶ “I am quite perplexed in a world of doubts & fancies – there is nothing stable in the world – uproar’s your only musick” (I, 204).⁷ Citing the “quarrel of a severe nature between Haydon & Reynolds & another (‘the Devil rides upon a fiddle stick’) between Hunt & Haydon,” Keats found himself unable to make progress with editing *Endymion* (I, 205). In the further commotion of Haydon and Reynolds being “dreadfully irritated against each other,” the poet’s composition was disrupted, restricting him to “only writ[ing] in scraps & patches” (I, 206).⁸ Keats’s notion of creativity was “anhilated” by the crowd’s “pressing” of identities upon him (I, 387; II, 77). In a letter to Bailey

⁴ The men of the Saturday night “Club” at Rice’s were far less pretentious, but Keats still compared them to “the good lads of Eastcheap,” a reference to the group around Prince Hal that he had “banished” in an earlier reference to the Hunt circle. See Chapter IV.

⁵ As Motion notes, “Keats refused several other invitations so that he could continue to concentrate on Reynolds.” 232.

⁶ See *L*, I, 169.

⁷ This expression suggests that Keats had altered his views on group composition since meeting the Hunt circle. In October 1816, Keats wrote the sonnet “How many bards gild the lapses of time,” celebrating the harmony of a throng of poets intruding into his mind before he sat down to compose. This hypothetical vision contrasted with the reality, as the group in the poem “[m]ake pleasing music, and not wild uproar.” l. 14.

⁸ Bate contends that the “quarrelling” and “petty jealousies” of the coterie “[d]istressed” Keats. 264. Bate later argues that the “gathering of wits at Horace Smith’s party” had “disturbed and fatigued Keats.” 271.

on 23 January, Keats noted the “retorting and recriminating – and parting for ever” between Reynolds and Haydon, and “the same thing” happening between Haydon and Hunt (I, 210).⁹ The friction generated by the group’s dynamic escalated from excessive criticism to personal hostility.¹⁰ The “soothing” property that Keats associated with friendship in “Sleep and Poetry” was lost in the acrimonious group setting.¹¹ As we will explore in this Chapter, the passive nature he adopted as part of his poetical character acted as a double-edged sword; it helped channel his experience into poetry, but it also left his identity constantly under threat of suffocation from company.

Keats objected to the tendency of the coterie environment to engender egotism. The atmosphere surrounding this group of literary aspirants was frequently charged with narcissism.¹² When “that set” was together, the outcome was often displays of vanity, which obstructed any genuine exchange of opinion (II, 11). Keats contrasted the “disinterested” nature of Bailey with the mercurial nature of the group: “that sort of probity & disinterestedness which such men as Bailey possess, does hold & grasp the tip top of any spiritual honours, that can be paid to any thing in this world” (I, 205).¹³ Selflessness, a quality Keats highly valued, was absent in the group setting.

⁹ Through Keats’s individual interactions with each man, “they will recollect the best parts of each other when this gust is overblown.” He added: “I have an affection for them both for reasons almost opposite – and to both must I of necessity cling.” *L*, I, 210.

¹⁰ Keats noted that Reynolds “answered Haydon in one of the most cutting letters I ever read; exposing to himself all his own weaknesses, & going on to an excess, which whether it is just or no, is what I would fain have unsaid.” *L*, I, 205. Roe notes that Hunt’s Hampstead cottage, often viewed “as a benign seedbed of Romantic genius,” was “also an arena of violent rivalries and quarrels that precipitated at least one suicide attempt.” *FH*, xv. Keats felt that the likelihood of causing offence was high. See *L*, I, 210.

¹¹ “be a friend/ To soothe the cares and life the thoughts of man.” II. 246-7.

¹² As Keats wrote of Haydon on 3 November 1817: “Pride! Pride! Pride!” *L*, I, 179.

¹³ He later compared disinterestedness among men with “finding a pearl in rubbish.” *L*, II, 80.

The coterie mentality also rendered mysterious things familiar. As Keats wrote in December 1818: “Hunt does one harm by making fine things petty and beautiful things hateful – Through him I am indifferent to Mozart, I care not for white Busts – and many a glorious thing when associated with him becomes a nothing” (II, 11). This familiarity, what Sidney Colvin refers to as “over-commenting and over-interpreting,” was antithetical to the mystery, discovery, and wilderness that Keats valued as the basis for poetry.¹⁴ The mounting frustration with the familiarity of coterie poetry can be seen in Keats’s 21 December 1817 review of Edmund Kean’s performance in *Richard III*.¹⁵ Keats’s assessment of the cautious nature of the time can also be applied to his feelings about the coterie:

In our imaginative days, *Habeas Corpus*’d as we are, out of all wonder, curiosity and fear; – in these fireside, delicate, gilded days, - these days of sickly safety and comfort, we feel very grateful to Mr Kean for giving us some excitement by his old passion in one of the old plays.¹⁶

The “fireside days” were “out” of the elements that make up Keats’s poetical character: the wonder of wilderness, the curiosity and discovery of travel, and the fear of true solitude and the sublime. Motion notes the implication of Hunt in this passage: “While this praise echoes articles about Kean that Keats had read in the *Examiner*, its reference to ‘fireside’ days is a sign that he wanted to establish a distinction between himself and Hunt (for whom the word was a touchstone).”¹⁷ Keats saw “these days” as too secure, too enclosed. They were “gilded,” a term he positively associated with a

¹⁴ Sidney Colvin, *John Keats: His Life and Poetry, His Friends, Critics and After-Fame* (London, 1887, repr. 2004), 263.

¹⁵ This review was for the *Champion*, a magazine associated with Reynolds.

¹⁶ Qtd. in Motion, 214.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 214.

harmonious group of poets when he was initially involved with the Hunt circle, but which had since gained a negative connotation.¹⁸

The negative traits of the coterie matched the vulnerabilities Keats perceived in his own nature. As we have seen, paradoxical solitude provided a relief from these insecurities. The comfort that he felt in these partnerships allowed him to openly communicate his ambitions and his concept of the poetical character. Significantly, when explaining the context of an epiphany he had experienced, Keats distinguished the nature of his discussion with Dilke from the hostile arguing of the coterie:

I had not a dispute but a disquisition with Dilke, on various subjects;¹⁹ several things dovetailed in my mind, & at once it struck me, what quality went to form a Man of Achievement especially in Literature & which Shakespeare possessed so enormously – I mean *Negative Capability*, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason (I, 193).

Keats was also able to explore the consequences of this concept with the sympathetic George. In the 27 December 1817 letter that contained this insight, Keats explained how poetic composition was threatened by the inability to maintain a state of uncertainty: “Coleridge, for instance, would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetralium of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half knowledge” (I, 193-4). He concluded:

¹⁸ The October 1816 poem “How many bards gild the lapses of time.” Keats continued to see a link between the “fireside days” and coterie poetry, and on 14 August 1819 he wrote: “One of my Ambitions is to make as great a revolution in modern dramatic writing as Kean has done in acting – another to upset the drawling of the blue stocking literary world – if in the course of a few years I do these two things I ought to die content.” *L*, II, 139.

¹⁹ The *OED* defines “dispute” as “to debate in a vehement manner or with altercation about something,” and “disquisition” as a “[d]iligent or systematic search; investigation; research, examination.” <http://dictionary.oed.com>. As we will see, however, even this form of discussion was tainted by the coterie; Keats later sought to “escape disquisitions on Poetry and Kingston Criticism.” *L*, I, 268.

This pursued through Volumes would perhaps take us no further than this, that with a great poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration (I, 194).

This concept, born out of this discussion with Dilke and developed in conversation with George, was indebted to the writings of Hazlitt.²⁰ During the period of correcting *Endymion*, the poet identified Hazlitt's writings as offering a philosophical backing for a fully realized theory of poetry. With their condemnation of coteries, emphasis on personal experience as a foundation for knowledge, and concept of disinterestedness, Hazlitt's writings and lectures served as both a buttress for Keats's preferences and as a blueprint for his developing ideas of the poetical character. From January through to May 1818, the negative elements generated by the coterie mentality clouded Keats's creativity and this "social period" ended in the same fashion as his previous associations with the Mathew circle in 1816 and the Hunt circle in 1817: in a withdrawal to paradoxical solitude and wilderness. Correspondingly, at this period when Keats was most exposed to coteries and most anxious to articulate a theory of creativity, his efforts to escape London resulted in the longest time away and the furthest distance gained from the capital.

Disillusionment:

Wordsworth and the "fireside Divan"

"Disgusted" with all "literary Men" except Wordsworth, Keats was anxious to meet the exemplar of the poetic significance of solitude (I, 169). He even succeeded in meeting with Wordsworth alone. When Kingston extended a dinner invitation to

²⁰ Discussed below.

both men on 3 January, Keats declined, instead calling on the poet at home in advance.²¹ Keats was, however, “surp[r]ised to find him with a stiff Collar” (I, 197). Gittings explains that Wordsworth was formally attired, “with frilled shirt-front, a stiff collar, knee-breeches and silk stockings, and seemed in a great hurry to go out and dine with his superior.”²² Disillusioned at finding Wordsworth engaged in such conventional pursuits, Keats’s visits to the older poet quickly diminished.²³ After Wordsworth left London in mid-January, Keats wrote to Haydon, reiterating his concerns about coteries and placing the older poet firmly within one of his own:²⁴

Wordsworth went rather huff’d out of Town – I am sorry for it. he cannot expect his fireside Divan to be infallible he cannot expect but that every Man of worth is as proud as himself. O that he had not fit with a Warrener that is din’d at Kingston’s (I, 265-6).

Keats observed that, in such a group, anyone who fancied himself a “Man of worth” would be just as proud as Wordsworth.²⁵ The term “fireside Divan” also undermined Wordsworth’s meditative stance in his “Personal Talk” poems, which influenced some of Keats’s earliest poetic attempts at paradoxical solitude.²⁶ Keats’s allusion to “a Warrener” levelled a similar criticism, demonstrating that involvement with a set like that of John Warren discredited Wordsworth.²⁷ A further rebuke of Kingston’s dinner parties made the disparaging identification clear.²⁸

²¹ Bate, 272.

²² Gittings, 268.

²³ This was not because, as Haydon insisted, Keats “never forgave” Wordsworth for referring to his “Hymn to Pan” as “a Very pretty piece of Paganism.” *KC*, II, 144. See Motion, 216-8 and Bate, 266-7.

²⁴ Bate, 272.

²⁵ The *OED* lists two meanings for “divan”: as a council and as a lounge. <http://dictionary.oed.com>

²⁶ See Chapter III.

²⁷ Warren published the work of Reynolds, among others. See Edmund Blunden, “Keats’s Letters, 1931; Marginalia,” *Studies in English Literature*, XI (Tokyo, October, 1931), 497.

Along with the implications of affectation, pride, and contending egos, Keats expanded upon another negative aspect of coterie writing: “I cant help thinking [Wordsworth] has retu{r}ned to his Shell – with his beautiful Wife and his enchanting Sister” (I, 251). Keats was dismayed by this insularity, which was at odds with his concept of poetry as mystery, discovery, and wilderness: a concept Wordsworth’s own verse helped articulate.²⁹ Keats consigned him, along with Hunt and Ollier, to the group of artists who “damned” something valuable through their own connection to it:

It is a great Pity that People should by associating themselves with the fine[st] things, spoil them – Hunt has damned Hampstead [and] Masks and Sonnets and italian tales – Wordsworth ha[s] damned the lakes [...] Ollier has damn’d Music (I, 251-2).³⁰

The initial lure to these “finest things,” a pleasure of discovery, was “damned” by this familiarity.

After actually meeting the poet, Keats seemed to include him with Hunt and the other “literary Men,” writing on 3 February 1818: “I will have no more of Wordsworth or Hunt in particular” (I, 224). Wordsworth the poet, however, remained in Keats’s revised triad of the “three things to rejoice at in this Age” (I, 203).³¹ Timothy Webb argues that Keats’s negative reactions were directed at “the ways in

Keats was also alluding to *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, 1, 4. l. 28: “He hath fought with a warrener.” See *L*, I, 265n.

²⁸ Keats’s negative reaction to Wordsworth’s association with a coterie was somewhat ironic: Wordsworth wrote to Haydon on 16 January 1820, asking: “How is Keates, he is a youth of promise too great for the sorry company he keeps.” *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, The Middle Years*, 2 vols. ed. E. de Selincourt (Oxford, 1937), III, 578.

²⁹ See Chapter II.

³⁰ W. H. Ainsworth wrote to William Blackwood on 2 March 1828: “The most curious portion are certain MS letters of Johnny Keats’s from which it was evident that the writer entertain’d the meanest opinion of Leigh and attributed his want of success to his precarious puffery.” See *L*, I, 252n.

³¹ See “Great spirits now on earth are sojourning.”

which the ‘Lakiest Poet’ (in Reynolds’s phrase) had rigidified into a public man.”³²

Keats was largely able to separate the poet from his work, and continued to look up to the ideal that Wordsworth represented.³³ However, Keats subtly began seeking reinforcing views for his concept of the poetic character as an independent, solitary explorer from the authoritative voice of Hazlitt.

Hazlitt on bluestockings, coteries, and the principles of human action

Keats, who shared many of Hazlitt’s beliefs, incorporated some ideas from his writings and lectures: “Hazlitt has damned the bigotted and the blue-stockinged how durst the Man?! he is your only good damner and if ever I am damn’d – <damn me if> I shoul’nt like him to damn me” (I, 252). Keats was referring to the lectures on poetry delivered at the Surrey Institute; throughout this series, Hazlitt “damned” Wordsworth and gave Crabbe “an unmerciful licking,” but he reserved some of his more vitriolic remarks for the bluestockings (I, 227).³⁴ Hazlitt’s opinions may have validated Keats’s own on this topic, and this agreement suggests a shared attitude towards poetic identity and group composition.³⁵

³² “The Younger Romantics and *Lyrical Ballads*,” *A Natural Delineation of Human Passions’: The Historic Moment of Lyrical Ballads*, ed. C. C. Barfoot (London, 2004), 223.

³³ This shows the resilience of Wordsworth’s example; after Keats met Hunt, the disillusionment extended to his poetry as well. See Chapter III.

³⁴ Hazlitt attacked Wordsworth during his final lecture, on 3 March. See Ward, 168. *L*, I, 227. The term “bluestocking” originally applied to the coterie of learned women that frequented the home of Elizabeth Montagu, but at this time referred to any literary woman. *The Routledge Dictionary of Historical Slang*, ed. Eric Partridge and Jacqueline Simpson (London, 1973, repr. 2000), 89. Although Hazlitt mentioned being “a great admirer of female writers of the present day,” he added: “but they are novel-writers, and, like Audrey, may ‘thank the gods for not having made them poetical.’” 289-90.

³⁵ Anne K. Mellor notes that “Keats’s hostility to Bluestockings did not grow less as he grew older.” “Keats and the complexities of gender,” *The Cambridge Companion to Keats*, ed. Susan J. Wolfson (Cambridge, 2001), 220.

Both men expressed distaste for the pretension that they saw embodied by the bluestockings.³⁶ In a 21 September 1817 letter to Reynolds, Keats launched his own tirade against this “set of Devils [...] Among such the Name of Montague has been preeminent,” who “having taken a snack or Luncheon of Literary scraps,” felt themselves to have achieved greatness (I, 163). Keats attacked the “smokeable” nature of their poetry, and later made explicit plans to “upset the drawling of the blue stocking literary world” with his own dramatic verse (II, 19; 139).

For Keats’s receptive mind Hazlitt’s prolific writings offered much more than a shared aversion to coteries. As we saw in Chapters I and III, Keats was greatly influenced by Hazlitt’s review of *The Excursion*.³⁷ Hazlitt had since become a leading critical voice in Keats’s mind and, on 10 January, the poet wrote to Haydon: “I am convinced that there are three things to rejoice at in this Age – The Excursion Your Pictures, and Hazlitt’s depth of Taste” (I, 203).³⁸ Keats here explicitly replaced Hunt, who had occupied this position in the triad of the “Great spirits” poem written fifteen months earlier, with Hazlitt.³⁹ This was not, however, the equal substitution of influence it seemed to imply. Hunt’s influence did drop off, but Haydon’s also waned, and the role that Hazlitt came to occupy had more in common with that previously

³⁶ Even though Keats greatly admired the verse by “the matchless Orinda” that prompted him to redefine her concept “compleat friend” on his own terms. *L*, I, 163-5. See Chapter IV.

³⁷ Hazlitt’s review appeared in the *Examiner* on 21 August 1814; 28 August, 1814; 2 October, 1814. *Examiner* (1814), Volume VII (London, 1997).

³⁸ Keats may have witnessed first-hand the “busy solitude” in Wordsworth’s heart, but his opinion of the poet remained strongly influenced by Hazlitt. P. P. Howe notes that Keats’s criticism of Wordsworth’s “Vanity and bigotry” in his 21 February letter to his brothers was “all said and done [...] Hazlitt’s opinion.” *The Life of William Hazlitt*, 2nd edn. (1947), 222n. See also *L*, I, 237 and Hazlitt, “Character of Mr. Wordsworth’s New Poem, *The Excursion*,” *Examiner*, 2 October 1814.

³⁹ “He of the rose, the violet, the spring,/ The social smile, the chain for freedom’s sake.” “Great spirits now on earth are sojourning,” ll. 5-6. Both this poem and the 10 January letter were addressed to Haydon.

held by the painter: although never an actual partner in paradoxical solitude, Hazlitt was a guiding voice in Keats's quest to realize it.⁴⁰

Keats attended all but one of Hazlitt's eight lectures, which he gave between 13 January and 3 March.⁴¹ These lectures inspired Keats's next long poem, *Isabella* and greatly influenced his reading habits.⁴² Hazlitt's 1805 *An Essay on the Principles of Human Action* also contained many ideas voiced by Keats during this time.⁴³ Hazlitt's argument that the human mind was in fact disinterested, and not mechanically determined to be "selfish," as was believed by adherents of the work of Thomas Hobbes, emphasized the consistency of sympathetic identification. This, in Hazlitt's view, was an active process that was both instinctive and inevitable, and which resulted in the creation of one's identity. Hazlitt argued that this sympathy grew with repeated association, but undesirable qualities also filtered through.⁴⁴ He thus fuelled Keats's own ideas about the potential for one's identity to be temporarily disassociated from the self, and further solidified Keats's distrust of poetic

⁴⁰ Hazlitt was of some permanence in this role. Timothy Corrigan notes that "Hazlitt was Keats's public phantom and conscience, a kind of public alter-ego for Keats's imaginative, spiritual, and ecstatic flights through Grecian Urns, mythological altars, and medieval passions." Timothy Corrigan, "Keats, Hazlitt and Public Character," *The Challenge of Keats: Bicentenary Essays 1795-1995*, ed. Allan Christensen, Lilla Maria Crisafulli Jones, Giuseppe Galigani, and Anthony L. Johnson (Amsterdam, 2000), 146.

⁴¹ *L*, I, 212, 227, 237. Hazlitt lectured on eight Tuesdays: 13, 20, and 27 January, 3, 10, 17, and 24 February, and 3 March. *L*, I, 227n. Keats only missed the 20 January lecture "On Chaucer and Spenser" because he arrived too late. *L*, I, 214.

⁴² On 21 February, Keats wrote to his brothers to say that he was reading Voltaire, days after Hazlitt gave a lecture that included "a very fine piece of discriminating criticism on Swift, Voltaire And Rabelais." *L*, I, 237. In his 3 February lecture, "On Dryden and Pope," Hazlitt suggested an adaptation of one of Boccaccio's tales. 82. Keats also purchased a copy of Hazlitt's *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* in January. Motion argues that Bailey "possibly" lent Keats a copy in Oxford in September 1817. 192.

⁴³ Bate argues that Keats "undoubtedly" read the work at Bailey's suggestion, which would mean that Keats was not familiar with the work until September 1817. 255. A copy was among Keats's books at the time of his death. *KC*, I, 254.

⁴⁴ Hazlitt, *An Essay on the Principles of Human Action: Being an Argument in Favour of the Natural Disinterestedness of the Human Mind* (London, 1805), 122-4. See Bate, 255-9.

composition within a group.⁴⁵ This foundation reinforced Keats's ideas about solitary poetic identity amid the busy coterie life around him.

Subverting the sonnet contests:

Keats's irregular ode

In the winter of 1818, there appeared to be a resurgence in Keats's coterie style poetry, including sonnet contests and occasional poems. Instead of instances of coterie poetry, however, these verses reveal Keats's collaboration with Reynolds. Along with their planned partnership on a book of verse based on the stories in the *Decameron*, many of the letters and poems celebrate their relationship while subverting the qualities associated with coterie poetry.⁴⁶

Keats's distaste for pretension may have been the consequence of his repeated exposure to coterie activities like mock-impromptu sonnet contests. A few days after the "Immortal Dinner" on 30 January, Keats dined with Horace Twiss and Horace Smith. Keats mocked Twiss for his "affectation of repeating extempore verses," and further noted that the entire enterprise was disingenuous: "Horace T. was to recite some verses and before he went aside to pretend to make on the spot verses composed before hand."⁴⁷ A week earlier, on 21 January, Hunt initiated a sonnet contest upon a theme of a lock of Milton's hair, for which he had already composed three sonnets.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ As Hazlitt noted, "a man must be employed more continually in providing for his own wants and pleasures than those of others." *An Essay on the Principles of Human Action*, 123.

⁴⁶ Chatterjee, 296.

⁴⁷ John Keats to George and Tom Keats, 30 January 1818. Qtd. in Christie's sale catalogue, May 1996, (New York), 86. Qtd. in Motion, 222.

⁴⁸ Bate, 285. Two weeks later, on 4 February, Hunt instigated another contest, and made the "arbitrary choice of the subject." Chatterjee, 272.

When Keats resolved to show Hunt some of *Endymion*, it was only of passing importance to Hunt's own poetic pursuits.⁴⁹ Hunt invited him to participate in a sonnet contest.⁵⁰ Bate notes that Keats did not seem "overeager" to revisit their practice; he appeared to be "far from feeling involved," because "the circumstances were artificial and inhibiting."⁵¹ However, the poet did more than begrudgingly participate; he actively undermined the contest. While Hunt jotted down a sonnet, Keats instead began an irregular ode.

Keats started composing his poem in the same notebook used by Hunt to write "Hero and Leander." In Cox's view, starting his poem in Hunt's volume was an example of Keats creating "a kind of immediate, lived intertextuality."⁵² After finishing one stanza and seven lines of another, however, Keats discarded the notebook, with plenty of blank sheets remaining, and continued his ode on a separate sheet.⁵³ At this stage, as Bate notes, the poem "turns not only from Hunt's notebook but from the particular occasion itself."⁵⁴ The conclusion of the new section, composed on a clean sheet, reads:

[I swear]
When every childish fashion
Has vanished from my rhyme
Will I, grey-gone in passion,
Give to an after-time
Hymning and harmony

⁴⁹ Bate argues that Keats showed Hunt parts of *Endymion* from sheer embarrassment at keeping his work from him for so many months. 285.

⁵⁰ Keats informed his brothers on 23 January that Hunt "allows it not much merit as a whole," arguing that "it is unnatural & made ten objections to it in the mere skimming over." *L*, I, 213. It was not surprising, however, that after going to such lengths to avoid Hunt's influence while composing the poem, he continued to reject it at the revision stage.

⁵¹ Bate, 286.

⁵² Cox, 70. Cox adds that such intertextuality "recreates in the text the bonds – personal, poetic, political – that held the group together in life." 72.

⁵³ Bate notes that "there are many other blank pages [in Hunt's notebook] that he could have used." 286.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 286.

Of thee, and of thy works, and of thy life (ll. 22-8).

The “childish fashion” Keats sought to eliminate from his poetry seems to refer to the poetic exercise itself. In an act of rebellion against the strictures of Hunt’s contest, Keats wrote a very different kind of poem in a space of his own choosing.

For the coterie, Cox argues, writing poetry was not “some separate solitary activity but a practice that flowed through their daily lives, connecting them to one another.”⁵⁵ However, in a letter to Bailey, Keats apologized for the poor quality of his poem: “This I did at Hunt’s at his request – perhaps I should have done something better alone and at home” (I, 212).⁵⁶ Gittings notes that Keats did in fact rewrite the poem, and that Hunt’s misguided example directed him onto an independent path: “Hunt’s over-enthusiastic association with Milton had sent Keats back to Shakespeare, and Hazlitt’s *Characters* had sent him back to *King Lear*.”⁵⁷ On 22 January, the day after Keats wrote the impromptu poem on Milton, he composed “On Sitting Down to Read *King Lear* Once Again,” a sonnet which emphasizes many of the themes that distinguish Keats’s poetry from that of the coterie.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Cox, 66.

⁵⁶ Bate notes that Keats wanted to “rewrite them (and do so twice again) in another context, without Hunt and his lock of Milton’s hair.” 287.

⁵⁷ Gittings, 276. “The following day, at home, he not only copied the lines into his folio Shakespeare, but wrote in it another and much finer poem on an allied theme.” 276.

⁵⁸ See Allott, 295.

The Wilderness of “On Sitting Down to Read King Lear Once Again”:

And “When I have fears that I may cease to be”

This poem rejects “golden-tongued Romance” in favour of the sombre backdrop of *King Lear* (l. 1). Keats credited the landscape of England as the inspiration for the play: “Chief Poet, and ye clouds of Albion,/ Begetters of our deep eternal theme!” (ll. 9-10). The play itself becomes part of the environment that formed it (“old oak forest”) and this in turn rejuvenates the poet as reader. Journeying through the play, he feels his poetic powers afresh: “When through the old oak forest I am gone [...] Give me new Phoenix wings to fly at my desire” (ll. 11, 14). The poem concerns the solitary act of reading and highlights wilderness as a creative power. As an individual reader of the play, the poet finds the transformative power of poetry both inspired and created by the wilderness.

Keats earlier described in his poetical “axioms” the individual nature of reading poetry: “I think Poetry should surprise by a fine excess and not by Singularity – it should strike the Reader as a wording of his own highest thoughts, and appear almost a Remembrance” (I, 238). Sperry observes how Keats felt “poetry was ideally a form of self-discovery each reader had to carry out in the light of his own unique experience,” and that it should appear, at least in part, “as the product of the reader’s own imaginative effort, serving to confirm his own perceptions and to encourage him to pursue their ramifications further.”⁵⁹ The creative independence of the poet was mirrored in the creative independence of the reader.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Sperry, 60.

⁶⁰ This was in contrast to his view of Hunt’s poetry; as Sperry notes, he dismissed Hunt’s poetry because of his “tiresome habit of explaining (and therefore restricting) some particular effect of beauty, insisting on the importance of his own intuitions.”⁶⁰ This was, in Keats’s

On 21 February, Keats wrote to his brothers “I have not seen Hunt since,” neglecting to mention his visit to see the lock of Milton’s hair a month before (I, 237; 210). Rollins suggests that Keats may have intentionally omitted this date;⁶¹ the poet’s letter to Bailey and the sonnet on Shakespeare that he wrote directly afterward suggest that he may have been rejecting both the meeting and the poem written during the contest (I, 212). Keats also stated, “Lord I intend to play at cut and run as well as Falstaff” (I, 237).⁶² In the 21 February letter to his brothers, after overlooking his meeting with Hunt, Keats quickly added, “I am a good deal with Dilke and Brown – we are very thick – they are very kind to me – they are well – I don’t think I could stop in Hampstead but for their neighbourhood” (I, 237). Although determined to “cut and run” from the coterie, he maintained his partnerships in paradoxical solitude.

His relationship with Reynolds was one of his most vital. Eleven days after the sonnet contest, Keats composed a verse letter commemorating the paradoxical solitude they shared (I, 221).⁶³ Addressing Reynolds by his sometime signature “Caius,” Keats wrote the following lines:⁶⁴

Then follow, my Caius, then follow!
 On the green of the hill
 We will drink our fill
 Of golden sunshine,
 Till our brains intertwine
 With the glory and grace of Apollo! (ll. 11-16).⁶⁵

view, an intrusion: “instead of giving other minds credit for the same degree of perception as he himself possesses.” *L*, II, 11.

⁶¹ *L*, I, 237n.

⁶² The poet was again referring to the coterie in the context of *Henry IV*. See Chapter IV.

⁶³ 31 January 1818.

⁶⁴ See *L*, I, 221n. and I, 228n.

⁶⁵ The poem is entitled “Hence Burgundy, Claret and Port.”

Much as he did in “O, Solitude,” the poet imagines himself journeying into wilderness in the company of a kindred spirit. The two would also drink their fill of the natural world until their brains “intertwine” with the god of poetry, echoing the “fellowship with essence” passage of *Endymion* that Keats included in a letter to Taylor the previous day (I, 218).⁶⁶

The poet ended his 31 January letter by apologizing to Reynolds for this “ranting” and his being unable to “write sense this Morning” (I, 222). He sought to make amends by including the sonnet, “When I have fears that I may cease to be,” which contained a clearer version of this same notion of paradoxical solitude (I, 222). The natural world once again holds the materials of great poetry that awaits discovery: “When I behold, upon the night’s starred face,/ Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance” (ll. 5-6). Motion notes that, like “On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer,” this poem shows that Keats “felt his success as a poet depended on his acquiring material rather than on using what was his by birthright.”⁶⁷ The poet also finds himself in a situation that parallels Cortez’s discovery: “then on the shore/ Of the wide world I stand alone and think” (ll. 12-13).⁶⁸ In order to make these poetic discoveries, the speaker in “When I have fears that I may cease to be” withdraws into solitude until “love and fame to nothingness do sink” (l. 14). As Keats wrote of Wordsworth: “he is a Genius and superior [to] us, in so far as he can, more than we, make discoveries, and shed a light in them” (I, 281). In Keats’s mind, this illumination came from the external circumstances of paradoxical solitude amidst

⁶⁶ *Endymion*, Bk. I, l. 779.

⁶⁷ Motion, 226.

⁶⁸ See Chapter II.

wilderness. From January to May 1818, Keats developed this concept most fully in his interactions with Reynolds.⁶⁹

The “Robin Hood” lyrics:

Coterie outlaws

At the end of his 3 February letter to Reynolds, Keats included two poems “written in the Spirit of Outlawry” (I, 225). These verses, the only ones written between *Endymion* and *Hyperion* that he included in his 1820 volume, carried a special significance.⁷⁰ Barnard offers the following explanation: “The background to the lines explains why Keats published [‘Robin Hood’] and ‘Lines upon the Mermaid Tavern’ next to one another in 1820, and demonstrates the signal importance of Reynolds’s poetic friendship to Keats at this stage in his career.”⁷¹ These poems represented a continuing dialogue between the two men about poetic voice, but the subtext was the withdrawal from the coterie in order to form a separate partnership in paradoxical solitude.

Keats’s sonnets were written “[i]n answer” to Reynolds’s own Robin Hood sonnets (I, 225). Keats took issue with the phrase “tender and true” in Reynolds’s poetic offering, “With coat of Lincoln green,” because of its association with Hunt: “this is the only <only> word or two I find fault with, the more because I have had so

⁶⁹ Aveek Sen notes that “the idea of literary ambition acquires a particular urgency in the Keats-Reynolds correspondence.” “Keats and the Sublime,” *Victorian Keats and Romantic Carlyle: the Fusion and Confusion of Literary Periods*, ed. C. C. Barfoot (Amsterdam, 1999), 23.

⁷⁰ Thomas R. Mitchell, “Keats’s ‘Outlawry’ in ‘Robin Hood,’” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, Vol. 34, 4, Nineteenth Century (Autumn, 1994), 765.

⁷¹ Barnard, “Keats’s ‘Robin Hood,’ John Hamilton Reynolds, and the ‘Old Poets,’” *Proceedings of the British Academy*, LXXV (1989), 182.

much reason to shun it as a quicksand” (I, 223).⁷² The risk of using Huntian vocabulary was similar to quicksand, and Keats associated both with the suffocating feeling of being trapped.⁷³ The poet’s language indicates that he wanted to avoid a deception that he had previously been victim of: “We must cut this, and not be rattlesnaked into more of the like” (I, 223).⁷⁴ The poet felt misled by his earlier association with the Hunt circle, and he once again asked Reynolds to join with him in permanently severing ties with the coterie and partnering instead with him.⁷⁵

Keats’s letter turned to the sense of space and freedom, explaining what he and Reynolds could achieve:

I don’t mean to deny Wordsworth’s grandeur & Hunt’s merit, but I mean to say we need not be teased with grandeur & merit – when we can have them uncontaminated & unobtrusive. Let us have the old Poets, & robin Hood” (I, 224-5).

As another example of choosing the individual over the group, Keats added: “Why should we be of the tribe of Manasseh, when we can wander with Esau?” (I, 224). Manasseh, an original “settlement of the Israelite tribes,” was rejected in favour of Esau, “an individual person who represents a specific lifestyle (the hunter).”⁷⁶ Keats identified with the solitary nomad over the settled tribe. In a similar vein, he likened

⁷² Reynolds agreed, changing “tender and true” to “young as the dew” in his 1821 text of the poem. See Rollins, *L*, I, 223n. Barnard notes that “‘tender’ is a favourite word in Hunt’s poetry.” “Keats’s ‘Robin Hood,’” 189.

⁷³ Keats had Hunt’s tendency to interfere in mind when, in justification of *Endymion*, he wrote: “I leaped headlong into the Sea, and thereby have become better acquainted with the Soundings, the quicksands, & the rocks.” *L*, I, 374.

⁷⁴ “To deceive or trick, as with the cunning of a serpent.” The *OED* also cites Keats’s use of “rattlesnake” as the only example of the word being used as a verb. <http://dictionary.oed.com>

⁷⁵ Keats wrote of “banishing,” along with Reynolds, the trappings of the Hunt circle on 17 March 1817. *L*, I, 125. Ross notes that the image of violent cutting applied to both the feminine “Devils” and the “impotent male mentors [...] both of whom threaten his progress toward literary greatness.” *The Contours of Masculine Desire*, 171.

⁷⁶ *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman. 6 vols. (New York, 1992), IV, 495; II, 574. See also Judges, 6. 15; 7. 23.

the modern poets to “an Elector of Hanover” who “governs his petty state,”⁷⁷ whereas the Elizabethans were “Emperors of vast Provinces, they had only heard of remote ones and scarcely cared to visit them” (I, 224). By contrasting the restrictive arenas of the moderns with the wide vistas of the Elizabethans, Keats concluded: “I will cut all this – I will have no more of Wordsworth or Hunt in particular” (I, 224).⁷⁸ These “Outlaw” poems celebrate freedom from the oppressive and restrictive nature of the coterie.⁷⁹

“Robin Hood: To a Friend” explores the loss of the group dynamic, but Keats was not overly sentimental or bitter.⁸⁰ The poem opens with a denial of the past: “No, those days are gone away” (l. 1).⁸¹ The positive undercurrent is revealed in the poem’s final lines: “Though their days have hurried by/ Let us two a burden try” (ll. 61-2).⁸² The days of the coterie behind them, the two men were free to move forward in paradoxical solitude. The possibilities of this poetic partnership are explored in “Lines

⁷⁷ Barnard notes that this reference “places Wordsworth and Hunt in the role of petty tyrants (and given Hunt’s power as a publicist and editor, there is a real point here).” “Keats’s ‘Robin Hood,’” 190.

⁷⁸ Barnard argues that Keats may have referred “more particularly to Hunt,” whose similar tastes and passions made him appear more “threatening.” “Keats’s ‘Robin Hood,’” 196-7.

⁷⁹ Barnard notes that the “‘Spirit of Outlawry’ placed Keats and Reynolds outside the differing kinds of poetic tastes represented by Hunt and Wordsworth.” “Keats’s ‘Robin Hood,’” 193.

⁸⁰ Read in the context of the “circle of his closest friends disintegrating around him,” Mitchell argues that the poem stated Keats’s “bitter acceptance that the glories of ‘the clan’ were forever past and his impatience with the false promise of Reynolds’s nostalgia.” “Keats’s ‘Outlawry’ in ‘Robin Hood,’” *Studies in English Literature*, 759. Keats also seems to be alluding to Hamlet’s call for “no more marriages,” a passage he later identified with in a letter to Fanny Brawne. *Hamlet*, eds. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London, 2006), III, i, l. 146-8. *L*, II, 312. Earlier in this letter to Reynolds, Keats attacked “egotism” in poetry through the voice of Hamlet, stating: “Many a man can travel to the very bourne of Heaven, and yet want confidence to put down his halfseeing.” *L*, I, 224. See Daniel W. Ross, “Revising a Map Misread: Hamlet, Romantic Self-Consciousness, and the Roots of Modern Tragedy,” *Shakespeare: Text, Subtext, and Context*, ed. Ronald Dotterer (Susquehanna, 1989), 120-21n.

⁸¹ Barnard, “Keats’s ‘Robin Hood,’” 193. See also Roe, *JK & CD*, 151.

⁸² As Chatterjee notes, these poems were influenced by Beaumont and Fletcher; both verses were written “in heptasyllabic couplets in imitation of seventeenth-century poets like Jonson, Fletcher, and Browne” and Beaumont’s epistle to Jonson “must have been in Keats’s mind” while composing “Lines on Mermaid Tavern.” 270-1. Stillinger notes that the “Mermaid Tavern, in Cheapside, is supposed to have been a frequent resort of Shakespeare, Jonson, Beaumont, Fletcher, and other dramatists.” 437n.

on the Mermaid Tavern.” Keats envisions a new Mermaid Tavern, located “[u]nderneath a new old sign” in the night sky (l. 19). The discovery of a “new” constellation by an “astrologer’s old quill” (l. 16) is similar to the discovery of Uranus or the Pacific ocean in “On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer,” or the “cloudy symbols of a high romance” in “When I have fears that I may cease to be” (l. 6): the “discovery” of translating some aspect of wilderness into poetry. In “Lines on the Mermaid Tavern,” despite the fact that the old poets are “dead and gone,” discovery and mystery will be a part of Keats and Reynolds’s relationship (l. 1). Barnard notes that this letter, “even more than usual, assumes mutual sympathy and an intimate knowledge on Reynolds’s part of Keats’s current thinking [...] When Keats signs himself, ‘Yr sincere friend and Coscribbler,’ he means it.”⁸³

The subtext for the poems was the activities of the coterie. Keats, dreading another musical evening at the Novellos’ house, enlisted Reynolds to “trudge” there along with him: “I will call on you at 4 tomorrow, and we will trudge together for it is not the thing to be a stranger in the Land of Harpsicols” (l. 225). This dreaded harpsichord party motivated “Robin Hood” and, in a similar fashion, a sonnet contest encouraged “Lines on the Mermaid Tavern.”⁸⁴

Barnard notes the “select group” of friends who received a copy of these poems: “Reynolds, Charles Dilke, Charles Brown, George Keats, and (probably) Hunt.”⁸⁵ Barnard is led to the assumption that Hunt was probably a recipient by evidence of the draft of “Robin Hood;” it was written on the same page as “To the

⁸³ Barnard, “Keats’s ‘Robin Hood,’” 187.

⁸⁴ This poem may have been composed at the same dinner with Smith and Twick that featured the mock-impromptu sonnet writing discussed above. See Barnard, “Keats’s ‘Robin Hood,’” 198, and Leonidas M. Jones, “The Date of ‘Lines on the Mermaid Tavern,’” *ELN*, 15, 3 (March 1978), 186-8.

⁸⁵ Barnard, “Keats’s ‘Robin Hood,’” 198. See Stillinger, *The Texts of Keats’s Poems* (Cambridge, Mass., 1974), 166-9.

Nile,” a product of Hunt’s most recent sonnet contest.⁸⁶ This same textual evidence, however, may lead to an altogether different conclusion. “Robin Hood” was written on the same sheet as a sonnet that characterized that very type of poetry it decried. This textual rebellion may in fact have been committed against coterie verse in the “Spirit of Outlawry” of the Robin Hood poems.⁸⁷ If Hunt was not a recipient of these poems, all the other four recipients were Keats’s partners in paradoxical solitude.

Diligent Indolence and the “voyage of conception”

On 19 February 1818, Keats wrote to Reynolds about wandering through great works of poetry and allotting both the time and space necessary for exploring the ideas one encountered along the way.⁸⁸

I have an idea that a Man might pass a very pleasant life in this manner – let him on any certain day read a certain Page of full Poesy or distilled Prose and let him wander with it, and muse upon it, and reflect from it, and bring home to it, and prophesy upon it, and dream upon it (I, 231).

This “voyage of conception” was only beneficial, however, if the reader had “arrived at a certain ripeness in intellect,” in which case, “any one grand and spiritual passage serves him as a starting post towards all ‘the two-and thirty Pallaces’” (I, 231). The “starting post” for this maturation was not literature, but experience of

⁸⁶ See Stillinger, *The Texts of Keats’s Poems*, 166. I argue that the sonnet “To the Nile,” although a subject chosen by Hunt, also contained a sentiment that challenged the familiarity of the coterie: “’Tis ignorance that makes a barren waste/ Of all beyond itself.” ll. 10-11.

⁸⁷ See Cox, 151 and Lau, *Keats’s Paradise Lost*, 9-22.

⁸⁸ In Bate’s view, this letter embodied the poet’s “confidence in a new beginning.” 641.

travel in wilderness; as Keats later noted, “there is a great difference between an easy and an uneasy indolence” (II, 77).⁸⁹

To this end, Keats adapted the fable of the spider and the bee.⁹⁰ Man, like a spider, “should be content with as few points to tip with the fine Webb of his Soul and weave a tapestry empyrean – full of Symbols for his spiritual eye, of softness for his spiritual touch, of space for his wandering of distinctness for his Luxury” (I, 232). Man, Keats deduced, was not content to fill the air with a “circuiting” from the very few starting points because “the Minds of Mortals are so different and bent on such diverse Journeys” (I, 232). Nevertheless, “common taste and fellowship” could exist “between two or three under these suppositions” (I, 232). As Sperry notes, Keats was speculating “on the possibility of each man pursuing his own imaginative voyage, discovering or creating his own spiritual world.”⁹¹ Keats argued that the numerous differences between individual’s minds did not prevent fellowship: “It is however quite the contrary – Minds would leave each other in contrary directions, traverse each other in Numberless points, and all last greet each other at the Journeys end” (I, 232). Keats was grappling with the mental dynamic of paradoxical solitude that he touched on with “fellowship divine,” and this led him to explore the nature of his poetical character.

Keats referred to the “The Sun, the Moon, the Sea and Men and Women” as creatures of impulse, all of which have “an unchangeable attribute”; the poet, however, “has none; no identity – he is certainly the most unpoetical of all God’s

⁸⁹ On 21 February, Keats wrote to George, “I have been abominably idle since you left – but have just turned over a new leaf – and used as a marker a Letter of excuse to an invitation from Horace Smith.” *L*, I, 235. Wandering, as we saw in Chapter IV, allowed for “delicious diligent Indolence!” *L*, I, 231.

⁹⁰ Bate, 251. Keats may have had this tale in mind because of Jonathan Swift, on whom Hazlitt had lectured two days before.

⁹¹ Sperry, 57.

Creatures” (I, 387).⁹² Since the poet had no self, poetry necessarily came from the external world. The poet, passive as the flower, was therefore free to take “hints from every noble insect that favors us with a visit” and bud “patiently under the eye of Apollo” (I, 232). Like the common belief that the chameleon changed to match its environment, the “camelion Poet” assumed the impression of wilderness he experienced (I, 387). Keats ended the 19 February letter with the unrhymed sonnet, “O thou whose face hath felt the Winter’s wind,” which he introduced by emphasizing the inspiration of the natural world:

I was led into these thoughts, my dear Reynolds, by the beauty of the morning operating on a sense of Idleness – I have not read any Books – the Morning said I was right – I had no Idea but of the Morning and the Thrush said I was right – seeming to say – (I, 232-3).⁹³

However, it was not the thrush, but Hazlitt’s lecture, “On Thomson and Cowper” that added an illuminating subtext for this letter.⁹⁴ Keats had attended this lecture on 10 February, just over a week before he wrote the poem, and there is significant commonality of thought and expression between the two (I, 227). Keats’s assertion that a state of pleasurable indolence remained unaffected by a “doze upon a Sofa,” explicitly referenced Cowper’s *The Task* (I, 231).

Hazlitt’s lecture opened with Thomson, but immediately turned to the theme of indolent composition: “Thomson, the kind-hearted Thomson, was the most indolent

⁹² Bate refers to this as “the impersonality of genius.” 252.

⁹³ Allott argues that this poem “restates in Keatsian terms the theme of ‘wise passiveness’ in Wordsworth’s *Expostulation and Reply*.” 310.

⁹⁴ Mellor, however, argues that Keats’s “diligent indolence” was located in “the very realm of ‘ease and indolence’ Hazlitt would condemn as effeminate;” she does, however, use Hazlitt’s “On Effeminacy of Character” as the basis for her interpretation, an essay not written until a year after Keats’s death. “Keats and the complexities of gender,” *The Cambridge Companion to Keats*, 217.

of mortals and of poets.”⁹⁵ Mounted on “stilts” of indolence, Thomson was privy to the inspiration of the natural world.⁹⁶

The feeling of nature, of the changes of the seasons, was in his mind; and he could not help conveying this feeling to the reader, by the mere force of spontaneous expression; but if the expression did not come of itself, he left the whole business to chance.⁹⁷

Although he praised Thomson’s passive receptivity, Hazlitt also criticized his tendency to fill up “the intervals of true inspiration with the most vapid and worthless materials.”⁹⁸ When his poetry was not inspired, it appeared contrived and pompous.

Hazlitt, similarly weighing Cowper’s poetry, allowed him certain advantages over Thomson, namely a “more fertile genius” and a “more entire forgetfulness of himself in his subject.”⁹⁹ Quoting approvingly from “The Winter Walk at Noon” from Book VI of *The Task*, Hazlitt read:

Stillness, accompanied with sounds so soft,
Charms more than silence. Meditation here
May think down hours to moments. Here the heart
May give a useful lesson to the head,
And Learning wiser grow without his books (ll. 83-7).¹⁰⁰

Cowper was criticized for his need, after venturing even slightly out of his suburban comfort (an adventure with “a little child on a common”), to return “to the drawing-room and the ladies again, to the sofa and the tea-kettle.”¹⁰¹ Hazlitt argued that

⁹⁵ Hazlitt, “On Thomson and Cowper,” 168. See Chapter I.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 169.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 170.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 170.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 180.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 183.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 181.

Cowper had “pampered refinements,” but that he “affects to be all simplicity and plainness.”¹⁰²

Hazlitt’s notion of “true inspiration” entering the poet’s mind and translating it into “gusto” appealed to Keats’s own concept of inspiration:¹⁰³ “We feel the effect of the atmosphere, its humidity or clearness, its heat or cold [...] He makes all his descriptions teem with life and vivifying soul.”¹⁰⁴ It was this passive form of knowledge that Hazlitt linked to poetry.¹⁰⁵ Hazlitt ended the lecture by assessing the history of pastoral poetry, concluding that it was not the “beautiful and magnificent alone that we admire in Nature,” but also the seemingly insignificant objects, such as “the face of a friend whom we have long known,” which are associated with childhood memories and “our feelings in solitude.”¹⁰⁶ It was in the presence of these deep-seated feelings, he argued, that “the mind takes the strongest hold of things, and clings with the fondest interest to whatever strikes it attention: with change of place, the pursuit of new scenes, and thoughts of distant friends.”¹⁰⁷ Hazlitt’s notion that this was the moment when the mind “takes the strongest hold of things” provided a foundation for Keats’s developing concept of the poetical character.¹⁰⁸

Hazlitt explored the difference on the mind between being in the crowded city and being alone in the natural world. While discussing “the transferable nature of our feelings with respect to physical objects,” he emphasized how forms of attachment

¹⁰² Ibid., 181.

¹⁰³ For Hazlitt’s “On Gusto” see the *Examiner* on 26 May 1816 or *The Round Table* (1817). *Complete Works*, I, 31.

¹⁰⁴ Hazlitt, “On Thomson and Cowper,” 172. Keats on the whole saw both as positive reviews, reporting to his brothers, “Hazlitts last Lecture was on Thompson, Cowper & Crabbe, he praised Cowper & Thompson but he gave Crabbe an unmerciful licking” *L*, I, 227.

¹⁰⁵ Nicola Trott, citing “Why the Arts are not progressive,” argues that Hazlitt made mechanical, definite knowledge “inimical to poetry.” “Keats and the prison house of history,” *K&H*, 271. See Hazlitt, *Works*, IV, 161.

¹⁰⁶ Hazlitt, “On Thomson and Cowper,” 199.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 199.

¹⁰⁸ As we will see in Chapter VI, Keats began to think of his “reach in Poetry” as something that he could “strengthen” through travelling to Scotland with Charles Brown. *L*, I, 342.

varied depending upon the personalities involved.¹⁰⁹ He elaborated, stating that for someone among a crowd of people in a populous city, “[e]very individual he meets is a blow to his personal identity.”¹¹⁰ People have this effect on our identity, he argued, “[b]ut it is otherwise with respect to nature.”¹¹¹ He explained the difference in the language of confidence, freedom, and space: “The heart reposes in greater security on the immensity of Nature’s works, ‘expatiates freely there,’ and finds elbow room and breathing space.”¹¹² In the city, one’s identity could be crowded and become oppressed, but nature provided room to become independent. “Thus nature is a kind of universal home,” Hazlitt argued, where one always heard “the same well-known language, striking on the heart, amidst unquiet thoughts and the tumult of the world, like the music of one’s native tongue heard in some far-off country.”¹¹³

Hazlitt presented poetry as the outcome of true inspiration, something that took hold of the mind, such as change of place, pursuit of new material, the face of an old friend, or childhood feelings of solitude. Since the poet became immersed in the wilderness, poetry was thus the product of an active poet. Poor verse was cited as affected and, in Cowper’s case, associated with the coterie or “drawing room” mentality. Hazlitt furthermore argued that the disinterested poetic identity was a double-edged sword, although free and receptive in nature, it was threatened amid groups of people. All of these points, which Keats echoed throughout his career and

¹⁰⁹ Hazlitt, “On Thomson and Cowper,” 200.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 201. It is ironic that Keats heard this address in a crowded hall; after the 20 January lecture that Keats arrived too late to hear, “all these pounced upon me. Hazlitt, John Hunt & son, Wells, Bewick, and all the Landseers, Bob Harris, Rox of Burrough Aye & more.” *L*, I, 214.

¹¹¹ Hazlitt, “On Thomson and Cowper,” 201.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 201-2.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 204.

noted in the 19 February letter to Reynolds, were reinforced by Hazlitt's philosophy.¹¹⁴

Epistle to Reynolds:

The limits of wilderness

On 25 March 1818, Keats sent a verse letter to Reynolds, who had been ill for over a month.¹¹⁵ Sperry notes that "To J. H. Reynolds"¹¹⁶ undergoes a "kind of disturbance" about three-quarters into the poem, which reveals "a great deal about Keats."¹¹⁷ Along with a change in tone, the poem seems to begin anew: "Dear Reynolds, I have a mysterious tale/ And cannot speak it" (ll. 86-7).¹¹⁸ Keats wrote the epistle from Teignmouth, literally "at home" by the "wide sea;" but instead of the happiness he anticipated, he "saw/ Too far into the sea" (ll. 92, 90, 93-4). Wilderness, as we have seen, often inspired poetry. These lines echo what Allott refers to as the poet's "'distancing' of ordinary life" through reflection, described in the final lines of "When I have fears that I may cease to be," but they also represent the concept of

¹¹⁴ As Gittings notes, with the underpinning of Hazlitt's philosophy, "Keats had at last formulated a poetic creed by which he was to work for the rest of his life." 263.

¹¹⁵ Keats confessed to writing the poem "in the hopes of cheering [him] through a Minute or two," even asking his friend to "excuse the unconnected[ness] subject, and careless verse." *L*, I, 263

¹¹⁶ Allott adds "Esq.," but this seems an arbitrary addition; Keats simply titled it, "To J. H. Reynolds." 320; *L*, I, 259.

¹¹⁷ Sperry argues that this poem "illuminates more clearly than any other single work the major problems with which Keats wrestled in passing from *Endymion* to his first attempt at *Hyperion*." 131. Aweek Sen, in exploring Keats's move from the beautiful to the sublime, sees this verse epistle as "a crucial moment in this transition." "Keats and the Sublime," *Victorian Keats and Romantic Carlyle*, 22.

¹¹⁸ For the sake of clarity of line references, my quotations are from the poem as it appears in Allott, not as it originally appeared in Keats's letter.

wilderness reaching a threshold.¹¹⁹ Keats saw “where every maw/ The greater on the less feeds evermore” (ll. 94-5). He compared the glimpse of unsuspecting cruelty, such as the “gentle Robin [...] Ravening a worm,” to the “Mood’s of one’s mind,” which he called “horrid” and claimed to “hate them well” (I, 262-3).

The only way forward, as Hazlitt described, was through the acquisition of knowledge.¹²⁰ On 3 May 1818, Keats wrote to Reynolds on this point: “An extensive knowledge is needful to thinking people – it takes away the heat and fever; and helps, by widening speculation, to ease the Burden of the Mystery” (I, 277).¹²¹ On the following day Keats left London to spend eight and a half weeks in Devon and make good on his plan to “Take refuge [...] from detested moods in new romance” (ll. 112, 111).¹²²

Isabella:

Testing ground for sociality

Keats wrote to Taylor on 27 February as he was copying Book IV of *Endymion*: “However it may be with me I cannot help looking into new countries with ‘O for a Muse of fire to ascend!’ – If Endymion serves me as a Pioneer perhaps I

¹¹⁹ Allott, 298n. See also Lear’s speech to Gloucester, delivered by the sea. *King Lear*, 4, 6. ll. 112-29.

¹²⁰ Although negative capability celebrated the mysterious, it was not a state opposed to the knowledge of experience; only an “irritable reaching after fact & reason.” *L*, I, 193. As A. C. Grayling notes, Hazlitt taught that “If knowledge can enlarge with attainments, then a man can grow greater, that is, less egotistic.” “‘A Nature Towards One Another’: Hazlitt and the inherent disinterestedness of moral agency,” *Metaphysical Hazlitt: Bicentenary Essays*, ed. Uttara Natarajan, Tom Paulin, and Duncan Wu, 154.

¹²¹ See Wordsworth’s “Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey,” l. 38.

¹²² Kucich notes that the poet’s choice to compose a romance reflected his anxiety over reaching the poetic heights of Milton and Spenser. *Keats, Shelley, and Romantic Spenserianism*, 4-5. Motion observes, Keats “wanted his poems to travel further into the world.” 255.

ought to be content” (I, 239). Eager to look into new countries, the poet confessed to wanting to “forget [*Endymion*] and make my mind free for something new” (I, 246).¹²³ On Hazlitt’s recommendation, Keats began an adaptation from Boccaccio.¹²⁴ *Isabella* was a testing ground for different types of sociality. It demonstrated, through the brothers, Keats’s perception of the coterie mentality and its self-interest. Isabella and Lorenzo became like a “Fireside Divan,” a self-enclosed unit, too limited and self-referential, which Keats perceived to be a repudiation of knowledge. As opposed to travelling into the wilderness and experiencing it, Isabella ends coiled around the pot of basil.¹²⁵

And she forgot the stars, the moon, and sun,
And she forgot the blue above the trees [...]
She had no knowledge when the day was done,
And the new morn she saw not, but in peace
Hung over her sweet basil evermore (ll. 417-23).

They had become a self-absorbed unit, and without Lorenzo the narrator tells us that Isabella “will die a death too lone and incomplete” (l. 487).

Kurt Heinzelman argues that Keats was attempting to narrate a tale about the role of self-interest in “an economic and poetic network of production and

¹²³ *Isabella*, as Bate notes, was another attempt at “a very different kind of longer poem.” 312. Diane Long Hoeveler notes that Keats “may have been seeking to free himself from the conventions of nineteenth-century sentimental poetry.” “Decapitating Romance: Class, Fetish, and Ideology in Keats’s *Isabella*,” *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 49, 3 (December, 1994), 338. Keats’s correcting of *Endymion*, from 6 January to 19 May 1818, overlapped with all the poems and letters discussed in this chapter; from late February until 27 April 1818, however, so did the composition of *Isabella: or, The Pot of Basil*. Allott, 326. Stillinger suggests looser dates, “February – April 1818.” 441. See *L*, I, 274.

¹²⁴ In his 3 February lecture, “On Dryden and Pope,” Hazlitt suggested that an adaptation of one of Boccaccio’s tales, “as that of *Isabella* [...] if executed with taste and spirit, could not fail to succeed in the present day.” 82.

¹²⁵ As we saw in Chapter III, Keats was intrigued by Philip’s concept of a “compleat friend,” and he went on to redefine it on his own terms as being “of the Fletcher variety.” As Keats wrote in the early sonnet “To my Brothers,” it was “fraternal souls” that lead to completion, not the merging of lovers. l. 4.

consumption.”¹²⁶ As Heinzelman notes, the tale was of a character whose search “for an authentic selfhood” was “undermined by the dominant mode of production;”¹²⁷ the brothers’ murder of their sister’s beloved was inevitable because “they literally permit no other interests but their own any place in the world.”¹²⁸ In this way, *Isabella* represents Keats’s notion of the annihilation of the poetic self in the presence of the group. As we have seen, the poet rejected the essential “willed identification” and “subjectivity in/as collectivity” of a coterie, but he also took issue with the idea of a group dedicated to literature and literary production.¹²⁹ Self-interest was the opposite of the disinterestedness advocated by Hazlitt.¹³⁰

Of course, Keats was also guilty of the self-interest inherent in paradoxical solitude, which is illustrated by the production of the poem. Although it did not come to fruition, *Isabella* was intended as a joint venture between Keats and Reynolds. In the advertisement for the two stories Reynolds ultimately published in *The Garden of Florence* in 1821, he cited “illness on [Keats’s] part, and distracting engagements on mine” that prevented them “accomplishing our plan at the time.”¹³¹ At the time of composition in 1818, however, Reynolds bowed out of the collaboration in a way that reflected his creative relationship with Keats:

¹²⁶ Kurt Heinzelman, “Self-Interest and the Politics of Composition in Keats’s *Isabella*,” *ELH*, 55, 1 (Spring, 1988), 160.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 160.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 165.

¹²⁹ Cox, 6. In a letter to Georgiana Keats on 15 January 1820, after commenting on how George was “busy this morning in making copies of my verses,” Keats alluded to the distinction between the mentality of a partner in paradoxical solitude and of a literary coterie: “Thank God there are a great many who will sacrifice their worldly interest for a friend: I wish there were more who would sacrifice their passions. The worst of Men are those whose self interests are their passion – the next those whose passions are their self interest.” *L*, II, 243.

¹³⁰ For a discussion on how the idea, popularized by Jurgen Habermas, that the public is constructed of individuals acting in their own self-interest, see chapter two of Paul Magnuson, *Reading Public Romanticism* (Princeton, 1998), 37-66.

¹³¹ See Stillinger, 442n.

I give over all intention and you ought to be alone. I can never write anything now – my mind is taken the other way: – But I shall set my heart on having you, high, as you ought to be. Do *you* get Fame, – and I shall have it in being your affectionate and steady friend (I, 377).

As Reynolds reaffirmed their relationship dynamic, he reflected back to the poet his legitimacy and inevitable success.

Like both *Poems* and *Endymion*, *Isabella* was the product of Keats's various partnerships in paradoxical solitude. Stillinger notes that Reynolds helped with the corrections, Woodhouse and Taylor came up with the title, and they were responsible for "some of the wording of about sixty of 504 lines."¹³² However, Keats was dissatisfied with *Isabella*, finding it "too smokeable" because there was "too much inexperience of life, and simplicity of knowledge in it" (II, 174).¹³³ "Smokeable" was a term he earlier used to refer to the bluestockings and again to refer to a lack of experience (II, 19).¹³⁴ Keats was sensitive of his own poetic affiliation with aspects of that literary scene.¹³⁵ Stylistically, the poem represented a further departure from Hunt, but several critics argue the resulting work exposed a certain lack of poetic confidence.¹³⁶ Kelvin Everest observes that, in particular, the passages where the narrator directly addressed the reader want self-assurance; this quality in the poem has

¹³² Stillinger, "Keats's Extempore Effusions," 315. See also Leader, *Revision and Romantic Authorship*, 262-315.

¹³³ In his 21-22 September 1819 letter to Woodhouse, Keats added: "this will not do to be public." *L*, II, 174.

¹³⁴ "Able to be ridiculed." The *OED* refers to this usage as "rare," citing Keats's letters as the only example. <http://dictionary.oed.com>

¹³⁵ By the time Keats wrote this letter on 21-22 September 1819, however, *Blackwood's Magazine* had published four instalments of "On the Cockney School of Poetry," linking Keats to the Hunt circle.

¹³⁶ Bate notes that "already in reaction to Hunt in so many ways, he swung impetuously against Hunt in many of the stylistic features of the poem;" he argues that *Isabella* was a "deliberate attempt" to defy Hunt; the use of feminine endings, for example, had "drastically waned" (down to 3 per cent from 25 per cent in *Poems*), 312-3. Chatterjee makes a similar observation: "Traces of Huntian vocabulary are frequent, but there is also a conscious attempt to break away from Hunt's influence." 298. However, descriptions of love scenes in the poem recalled Hunt: "so lisped tenderly." l. 54.

often been taken “as an early and uncertain form of what was to become a characteristic concern of Keats with his own status and role as poet.”¹³⁷ Instead of solidifying his departure from the coterie, *Isabella* confirmed the poet’s need to acquire experience of life.

Experiencing distance:

“Merry Old England” and “wonder-ways”

On 24 March, Keats wrote to his friend James Rice, weighing the virtues of having “a sort of Philosophical Back Garden, and cheerful holiday-keeping front one” (I, 254). He concluded, predictably, that suburban landscape could never suffice:

Alas! this never can be: <the> for as the material Cottager knows there are such places as France and Italy and the Andes and the Burning Mountains – so the spiritual Cottager has knowledge of the terra semi incognita of things unearthly; and cannot for his Life, keep in the check rein” (I, 254-5).

This example seems to refer to the physical limitations of the coterie life, recognizing that Hunt’s Hampstead cottage could never stand in for the wider world. However, Keats now took it a step further, moving beyond wilderness to the imagined sublimity of “terra semi incognita.”¹³⁸ Although he had just written a verse letter about the fear and terror of these landscapes, he also saw this exploration as an antidote to his lack of worldly knowledge.

In a letter to Reynolds on 10 April, Keats asked, “[w]ho would live in the regions of Mists, Game Laws indemnity Bills & when there is such a place as Italy?”

¹³⁷ Kelvin Everest, “*Isabella* in the Market-Place: Keats and Feminism,” *K&H*, 108.

¹³⁸ Even in his representation of the sublime, Keats inserted a “semi” into *terra incognita*.

(I, 269).¹³⁹ Keats, whose wilderness had been mainly British to this stage, suddenly rejected it. This rejection of England may have been in reaction to Hunt's three pieces for the *Examiner* entitled "Christmas and Other National Merry-Making Considered," that spanned this period.¹⁴⁰ These instalments emphasized the importance of "sociality" along with treasures of "Merry Old England."¹⁴¹ Keats's reaction to the first instalment suggested that he associated the article with the coterie: "[a] very proper lamentation on the obsolescence of christmas Gambols & pastimes: but it was mixed up with so much egotism of that drivelling nature that pleasure is entirely lost" (I, 191). Keats associated egotism with the coterie and the enclosed spaces of their domestic life. In order to gather the experience required to compose "unsmokeable" poetry, Keats felt that he needed literally to expand his horizons.¹⁴²

This desire to explore the world's more exotic locations surfaced in his writings from March to May 1818. In the third week of April, Rice travelled to Teignmouth to stay with Keats for a few days.¹⁴³ Keats composed a sonnet celebrating their partnership and wishing for the annihilation of time. The poet expressed his desire for "a day's journey" to "lengthen and dilate" and allow the two men to travel together (ll. 7, 8): "Oh, to arrive each Monday morn from Ind! / To land each Tuesday from rich Levant!" (ll. 9-10). Although various circumstances, including his finances, prevented him from acting on these desires, he expressed strong impulses to journey

¹³⁹ Although Keats alluded to Matthew Green's epistle *The Spleen*, this may also have been a swipe at Hunt. On 10 August 1817, Hunt wrote in the *Examiner* that the miserable English weather required a "set off" such as freedom, and thus the perpetual overcast served as a check against oppression; warmer climates, Hunt argued, such as in the Mediterranean, increased people's tolerance for oppressive governments. See also Roe, *FH*, 303. Consider, however, the Phoenician, Carthaginian, Greek, and Roman civilizations.

¹⁴⁰ Hunt, *Examiner*, 21 Dec. 1817; 28 Dec. 1817, 817-9; 4 Jan. 1818.

¹⁴¹ Porscha Fermanis argues that these articles may have influenced *Isabella*. "Isabella, Lamia, and 'Merry Old England,'" *Essays in Criticism*, 56, 2 (2006), 139-162. Hunt, *Examiner*, 21 Dec. 1817, 801-2.

¹⁴² Keats identified epic poetry with "magnitude and remoteness." Brian Wilkie, *Romantic Poets and Epic Tradition* (Madison, 1965), 152.

¹⁴³ Rollins suggests that Rice may have arrived sometime between 18-20 April. *L*, I, 41n.

to locations from India to the far East. As A. D. Atkinson notes, many of the details of Keats's letters and poems clearly suggested that "thoughts of the sea and travel were in his head."¹⁴⁴

He anticipated climbing Mont Blanc the following summer and referred to specific regions of mountainous wilderness within faraway countries, such as a volcano in Sicily, a volcanic peninsula in Russia, and mountain ranges in both Australia and South America (I, 255).¹⁴⁵ In his sonnet to Rice, Keats imagined the "happy thought" of having the time to visit India and the far East (l. 14). He planned on "retireing to scotland" with Bailey so he could "read [him] my 'Pot of Basil' [...] among the Snows of next Winter" (I, 293-4). On 9 April, he also laid out the following plan to Reynolds: "thus will I take all Europe in turn, and see the Kingdoms of the Earth and the glory of them" (I, 268).¹⁴⁶ He planned to travel to France¹⁴⁷ and to spend the winter in Italy with Tom.¹⁴⁸ Proposing to visit the continent, he also considered "shipping" off to Portugal with Tom for his health (I, 186; 147; 172).

None of these plans came to fruition. Relative to his ambitious plans, Keats did not travel far from London. From April 1817 until June 1818, he never remained away from the city's orbit longer than three months.¹⁴⁹ In the five trips Keats took in this time, the furthest he roamed from his birthplace was 222 miles.¹⁵⁰ He did,

¹⁴⁴ A. D. Atkinson, "Keats and Kamchatka," *Notes and Queries*, 196 (4 August, 1951), 345. Atkinson argues that Keats referred to the Andes, the Burning Mountains, the *Terra sem-incognita*, and magnets because he had been reading Buffon's *Natural History* and Robertson's *History of America*. 344.

¹⁴⁵ He referenced Mount Etna at *L*, I, 267; in the verse epistle to Reynolds, he wrote of "some Kamschatkan missionary church." *L*, I, 263. See Ward, 177.

¹⁴⁶ He later includes America in these plans. See *L*, I, 303.

¹⁴⁷ Bate, 316.

¹⁴⁸ See Ward, 176.

¹⁴⁹ His longest stay in London over this period was the 90 days between 5 December and 4 March. His other cumulative stays were 85 days (10 June – 3 September 1817), 48 days (5 October – 22 November), and 41 days (11 May – 22 June 1818).

¹⁵⁰ Approximate distances from London: to Dorking, 25 miles; to Oxford, 55 miles; to the Isle of Wight, 76 miles; to Devonshire, 222 miles.

however, travel often. During this fourteen-month period, he spent a little over half of his time in London.¹⁵¹ Keats's time in Devonshire had allowed him to think and, as Bate argues, "the solitary reflections of the weeks in Devon served as a preface to his efforts of the next year and a half."¹⁵² He decided to test the limits of wilderness. On 3 May, Keats wrote to Reynolds about Wordsworth: "we find what he says true as far as we have experienced and we can judge no further but by larger experience – for axioms in philosophy are not axioms until they are proved upon our pulses" (I, 279). He was convinced that literature, though instructive, was not sufficient: "We read fine – things but never feel them to thee full until we have gone the same steps as the Author" (I, 279). Keats planned a pilgrimage through Wordsworth's Lake District, and on to the northern-most tip of Scotland.

For a fortnight between his time in Devon and his trek through Scotland, Keats was back in London. But just as he needed to "banish" the trappings of the Hunt circle before he left for the Isle of Wight the previous summer, he once again rejected the new practices he had acquired that were associated with coteries: "we will have no more abominable Rows" (I, 125; 266). His letter to Haydon ended by elaborating his upcoming plans to leave behind the trappings of the Hunt circle for the wilderness: "I hope soon to be writing to you about the things of the north, purposing to wayfare all over those parts. I have settled my accoutrements in my own mind, and will go to gorge wonders" (I, 268). One of his "many reasons" for going "wonder-ways" was "to enlarge my vision – to escape disquisitions on Poetry and Kingston Criticism" (I,

¹⁵¹ Roughly 60%. From 15 April 1817 until 22 June 1818, Keats spent 264 of 432 days in London (from 10 June until 3 September; from 5 October to 22 November; from 5 December to 4 March 1818; from 10 May to 22 June).

¹⁵² Bate, 328.

268).¹⁵³ Of course, his journey was dependent on paradoxical solitude: “if Brown holds his mind, over the Hills we go” (I, 268).

Enlarging vision:

Retiring from the world for some years and “To Homer”

The last poem that Keats wrote before he set off on his walking tour was the Shakespearean sonnet, “To Homer.”¹⁵⁴ The poem addresses Keats’s lack of experience in the world, and his yearning to lift his own veil of ignorance (l. 5). He “longs” to explore the ocean of mystery currently before him: “As one who sits ashore and longs perchance/ To visit dolphin-coral in deep seas” (ll. 3-4). Again Keats wrote of the search for inspiration through discovery, which he imagined was granted to Homer: “And Neptune made for thee a spumy tent,/ And Pan made sing for thee his forest-hive” (ll. 7-8).

Instead of the opening assurance “Much have I travelled in the realms of gold” from “On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer,” this sonnet originated with his lack of knowledge: “Standing aloof in giant ignorance” (l. 1). Rather than proclaiming knowledge, the poet addressed his lack of it. Both sonnets adopt a similar structure, however; as Hecht points out, there is a neat break between seven lines of wandering and seven lines of insight in his earlier sonnet.¹⁵⁵ In “To Homer,” the speaker asserts at the eighth line: “Aye, on the shores of darkness there is light” (l. 8); there is no

¹⁵³ As Gittings argues, the wide horizon of experience Keats hoped to attain “would shake off the irritation he had felt at the suburban coteries of literary London, Leigh Hunt, Horace Smith, Kingston and the like.” 307.

¹⁵⁴ Although Allott places the sonnet before “Ode to May,” written 1 May, she dates it “April/May 1818.” 352-3. Stillinger reverses the order of the two poems. 445-6.

¹⁵⁵ Hecht, “Scarcity and Poetic Election,” 114.

question of the value of exploring the dark shores, the “precipices,” and the “untrodden green” (l. 10).¹⁵⁶ The clarity granted to Homer in the poem’s final lines is godlike: “There is a triple sight in blindness keen;/ Such seeing hadst thou, as it once befell/ To Dian” (ll. 12-14). By combining so much knowledge and experience, Homer no longer relied solely on vision. This process was the transformation that Keats sought through negative capability.¹⁵⁷

Keats told Reynolds on 27 April that he planned to “ask Hazlitt in about a years time the best metaphysical road I can take” (I, 274). At this point in his development, however, the poet opted for a more physical road.

I was purposing to travel over the north this Summer – there is but one thing to prevent me – I know nothing I have read nothing and I mean to follow Solomon’s directions of ‘get Wisdom – get understanding’ – I find cavalier days are gone by [...] I find there is no worthy pursuit but the idea of doing some good for the world – some do it with their society [...] there is but one way for me – the road lies through application study and thought. I will pursue it and to that end purpose retiring for some years (I, 271).

Keats took this tour as a necessary step in his poetic education. It at once freed him from the negative qualities of the coterie and allowed him to test the poetic theory that he had refined over the previous six months. He would literally walk in Wordsworth’s footsteps, and perhaps further.

¹⁵⁶ Much like in “When I have fears that I may cease to be,” Keats positioned himself on the cusp, “a budding morning in midnight.” l. 11.

¹⁵⁷ Negative capability did not always require grand scenery. See *L*, I, 273; 389. Homer’s evolution through knowledge foreshadows Apollo’s deification in *Hyperion*. See Chatterjee, 305.

CHAPTER VI
POETIC PILGRIMAGE
POETRY OF EXPERIENCE, JUNE – DECEMBER 1818

Charles Brown and the northern expedition:

An ideal of paradoxical solitude

Charles Brown was exceptionally well-suited to accompany Keats on an ambitious walking tour. With the knowledge gained in the course of an adventurous life, Brown's experience was crucial to the execution of their trek.¹ He encapsulated the steady nature that Keats seemed to require in a partner.² Scholars consistently emphasize Brown's sturdy character. Hebron refers to the "steady, methodical Brown."³ Bate notes that he "was distinguished by qualities of practical prudence, steadiness, and tireless capacity for detail."⁴ In Carol Kyros Walker's estimation, Brown was "a hearty, well-organized fellow who knew from experience how to stretch pennies, chart out a route on 'The Map' with chalk [...] and was in almost every respect Keats's guide."⁵ Brown shared Keats's belief in the poetic importance of experiencing wilderness.⁶

¹ Brown was a seasoned traveller, having spent five years in Russia and covered large parts of England on foot. Motion notes that in 1808, Brown "walked from London to Bath, Liverpool, York, Hull, Derby, Nottingham and Leicester, then back to London again." Motion, 262. As Motion observes, Brown was "well equipped to support Keats through the demanding physical trials ahead, and to sympathise with its discoveries." 262.

² See *L*, I, 344.

³ Stephen Hebron, *The Romantics and the British Landscape* (London, 2006), 76.

⁴ Bate, 345.

⁵ Walker, 5.

⁶ When they approached Ambleside, the first mountains of their trip, Brown wrote:

Brown also fostered Keats's poetry. He was an attentive audience when, in Ambleside, he listened as Keats recited his "beautiful and pathetic poem of 'Isabella.'" ⁷ Crucially, he was receptive to both the poet's emerging ideas and his fledgling poems. He transcribed "Old Meg she was a gipsy" and saved "This mortal body of a thousand days" from being "destroyed" in the poet's frustration (I, 317, 343). Richardson contends that Brown understood that "he must be a Boswell," because he not only "encouraged" Keats's writing, but he also "copied and preserved it." ⁸

As with all his relationships in paradoxical solitude, Keats acted as a senior partner. ⁹ Brown's 1822 account of their relationship alluded to his subordinate position:

And who am I? Not one indeed who can share the transports of his imagination, but an humble plodding man, a commonplace fellow, who had the foresight to carry with him pens and paper, and the willful industry to write a sketch of all he saw and all he felt. ¹⁰

Brown even admitted to being prepared to honour Keats "as a superior being." ¹¹ In 1841, he wrote in his *Life of Keats*: "I thought of him then, and I think now, [that] he had no fault. On the faulty side he was scarcely human" (*KC*, II, 78). ¹²

These mountains completely surpassed all our expectations. I had seen those of Wales; Keats had not seen any. Yet even he, with all his imagination, could not, until he beheld them, suggest to himself a true idea of their effect on the mind. You may hear people talk eloquently of these scenes; you may see them portrayed by the best painters – language and art are equally inefficient. The reality must be witnessed before it can be understood. *L*, I, 427.

⁷ Charles Armitage Brown, *Life of Keats*, ed. Dorothy Hyde Bodurtha and Willard Bissell Pope (London, 1937), 49. Bate argues that Brown "possessed an interest in the arts and a readiness to admire imagination." 345.

⁸ Richardson, *The Everlasting Spell*, 26, 11.

⁹ Motion observes that Brown often occupied "the role of right-hand man." 395.

¹⁰ Brown, "Mountain Scenery," *The New Monthly Magazine*, 1822.

¹¹ Brown, *Life of Keats*, 40.

Just as Brown exemplified the kindred spirit that Keats had envisioned in “O, Solitude,” their planned route through the Lake District and the Scottish Highlands represented “Nature’s observatory” (ll. 14, 4). However, as we have seen, this trek was also Keats’s experiment with more exotic landscapes. The wilderness he encountered at Margate, the Isle of Wight, and Teignmouth, all of which involved the presence of the sea, were typically English; they were also all popular with tourists. However, as Ward notes, Scotland was “still a foreign country to the Englishman of that time.”¹³ Keats’s trek also required the toughness that Robin Jarvis has identified in one who “willfully embraces the hardships of pedestrian travel.”¹⁴ The effort, as Walker explains, was undertaken with hopes of an imaginative pay-off: “For a poet, Scotland in 1818 held the allures of remoteness, mythical Celtic bards, Gaelic songs, rugged landscape, and primitive communities.”¹⁵ The trip began with Keats’s high hopes that it would be a poetic pilgrimage and a prologue to the life he wanted to live (I, 264). Arriving at Lancaster by coach on 24 June 1818, Keats and Brown set off on the following day with the formidable goal of reaching the northern extremity of Britain’s mainland (I, 340).¹⁶

¹² In his biography of Brown, Eric Hall McCormick notes his association with Keats “was the supreme experience of his life.” *The Friend of Keats: A Life of Charles Armitage Brown* (London, 1989), 1.

¹³ Ward, 195. Keats wrote to Tom from Ford: “I am for the first time in a country where a foreign Language is spoken.” *L*, I, 338.

¹⁴ Robin Jarvis, *Romantic Writing and Pedestrian Travel* (New York, 1997), 38. As Walker notes, it is significant that, by walking instead of riding in a chaise, Keats was “travelling as close to the earth as possible.” *Walking North with Keats*, 22.

¹⁵ Walker, 1. Walker argues that Brown probably brought the 1814 *Traveller’s Guide through Scotland*, but there were many other popular guidebooks that Keats may have read; including, Thomas Pennant’s *Tour in Scotland* (1769), William Gilpin’s *Observations Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty* (1795), Sarah Murray Aust’s *A Companion and Useful Guide to the Beauties of Scotland* (1799), John Stoddart’s *Remarks on Local Scenery and Manners of Scotland* (1801) and Wordsworth’s *Guide to the Lakes*, published anonymously in 1810.

¹⁶ Keats only made it as far as Inverness before sickness forced him to return to London.

*Wordsworthian preconceptions:**Poetry and reality*

This poetic pilgrimage, which took Keats through the landscapes that inspired Wordsworth's poetry, was based on specific preconceptions about the relationship between scenery and inspiration.¹⁷ Keats found the lake and mountains of Windermere to be "of the most noble tenderness" and predicted that "they can never fade away" (I, 299). These views should, Keats wrote expectantly to Tom on 25 June, "refine one's sensual vision into a sort of north star which can never cease to be open lidded and steadfast over the wonders of the great Power" (I, 299). The poet incorporated Wordsworth; the "open lidded" quality was peculiarly Keatsian, but the overall image was indebted to Wordsworth's depiction of Chaldean shepherds in Book IV of *The Excursion*.¹⁸

Beneath the concave of unclouded skies
 Spread like a sea, in boundless solitude,
 Looked on the polar star, as on a guide
 And guardian of their course, that never closed
 His steadfast eye (IV, ll. 695-9).

¹⁷ Richard Marggraf Turley argues that Keats's objective was to "acquire the cultural authority he felt (and knew) he lacked in the eyes of the public by acquainting himself with the principles of sublime rhetoric." *Keats's Boyish Imagination: The Politics of Immaturity* (London, 2004), 81. For a discussion of Keats's "legitimacy problem," see Levinson, *Keats's Life of Allegory*, 10-15

¹⁸ The metaphor of the constant North Star also appeared in *Endymion*. Bk. II, l. 842; I, l. 598. Keats wrote to Bailey on 8 October: "a long Poem is a test of Invention which I take to be the Polar Star of Poetry." *L*, I, 170. He used this image again in *Hyperion*, Bk. I, l. 353 and "Bright Star," ll. 1-6. Sperry argues that, in Keats's view, material elements were "condensed and transmuted until they approximate, or rather are sensed as concentrated in, the higher, ethereal nature of the star." 135. See also Gittings, 326.

At the first picturesque stop of their trip, the Ambleside waterfall, Keats declared: “I shall learn poetry here and shall henceforth write more than ever” (I, 301). The “finest spirits,” the poet wrote, were capable of adding “a mite to that mass of beauty which is harvested from these grand materials” and “put in ethereal existence for the relish of one’s fellows” (I, 301). These effusions echoed the opening “prospectus” of *The Excursion*:

Beauty – a living Presence of the earth,
Surpassing the most fair ideal Forms
Which craft of delicate Spirits hath composed
From earth’s materials (I, ll. 795-8).

Wordsworth’s poetry both informed Keats’s response to the landscape of the Lake District and anticipated its poetical significance.¹⁹

Once Keats and Brown reached the older poet’s home at Rydal Mount, however, the significance of his example was subtly transformed. In a letter to Tom on 26 June, Keats related his disillusionment: “Lord Wordsworth, instead of being in retirement, has himself and his house full in the thick of fashionable visitors quite convenient to be pointed at all the summer long” (I, 299).²⁰ One of the purposes of Keats’s expedition was to avoid “London rank and fashion,” yet his poetic exemplar was living a similarly pretentious lifestyle (I, 299).²¹ Wordsworth was out when they called the following day. Although “much disappointed” that the poet was not at home, Keats left a note and continued to explore Wordsworth’s “neighbourhood” (I,

¹⁹ Gittings notes that Keats’s description of “the countenance of such places” was akin to “a prose *Prelude*” as a definition of the poet’s experience. 327.

²⁰ Timothy Webb suggests the mock-title “Lord Wordsworth” may be in regard to “the egotism, the pride and the seemingly self-sufficient grandiosity that often marked his behaviour.” “The stiff collar and the mysteries of the human heart: the younger Romantics and the problem of *Lyrical Ballads*,” “*A Natural Delineation of Human Passions*”: *The Historic Moment of Lyrical Ballads*, ed. C. C. Barfoot (New York, 2004), 220.

²¹ Keats had received indications of Wordsworth’s lifestyle, expressed on various occasions after meeting the poet in London the previous January. *L*, I, 299. See Chapter IV.

302-3).²² In a letter to George and Georgina, Keats pointed out the landmarks familiar to him from *Poems on the Naming of Places*: “I have seen Kirkstone, Loughrigg and Silver How – and discovered without a hint ‘that ancient woman seated on Helm Craig’” (I, 303).²³ At this stage, Keats still found poetic confidence in identifying scenes from Wordsworth’s poetry; however, a shift towards attempting to exceed the poet’s experience of the Lake District landscape can be detected in his letters.²⁴

As Keats and Brown continued on to Carlisle, they attempted to climb Skiddaw. The poet drew a distinction between this experience and Wordsworth’s life at Rydal Mount. On 1 July, Keats wrote to Tom that Wordsworth’s “parlor window looks directly down Winandermere” (I, 307). His own view, on the contrary, was of a more dramatic nature: “we were high enough without mist, to see the coast of Scotland; the Irish sea; the hills beyond Lancaster; & nearly all the large ones of Cumberland & Westmoreland, particularly Helvellyn & Scawfell” (I, 306-7). He contrasted Wordsworth’s circumscribed view of the wilderness with the vista gained from his position three quarters of the way up Skiddaw. A month later, on 2 August, after climbing Ben Nevis, Keats observed: “Skiddaw is no thing to it either in height or in difficulty” (I, 352).²⁵ After this climbing experience, Keats remarked: “we went up Ben Nevis, the highest Mountain in Great Britain – On that account I will never ascend another in this empire” (I, 352).²⁶ Despite the fact that Ben Nevis was the only

²² Brown noted that “an old man escorted us into the park to see the waterfall.” *L*, I, 430.

²³ Published in the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. See “Poems on the Naming of Places. II. To Joanna,” l. 56. Keats repeated this in a letter to Tom. *L*, I, 307.

²⁴ Although Keats was disappointed to learn that Wordsworth was campaigning on behalf of William Lowther, and against the Whig candidate, Henry Brougham, he was quick to show understanding that friendship trumped politics: “What think you of that – Wordsworth versus Brougham!! Sad – sad- sad – and yet the family has been his friend always. What can we say?” *L*, I, 299. See also *L*, II, 149.

²⁵ As Walker notes, Keats may have been pleased with himself because other experts, such as Murray and Stoddart, did not actually make the climb. 204n.

²⁶ Skiddaw is 3054 ft., while Ben Nevis reaches 4406 ft. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <http://www.britannica.com>

mountain Keats had ever climbed, he imagined himself to be at the stage where he no longer needed to attempt any peak in Wordsworth's Lake District.²⁷

Keats began to assume more of an independent character as he and Brown approached Scotland. Walker argues that his letters at this point reflected "less of a desire to locate the world through Wordsworth's vision."²⁸ This was due to Keats measuring his newfound experience of wilderness against Wordsworth's life at Rydal Mount.²⁹ Travelling on foot through the scenes that Wordsworth now merely watched from his parlour, Keats began to see himself as the legitimate solitary poet he had long aspired to become.³⁰

His experience on this pilgrimage also led him to refine the influence of Hazlitt: "I cannot think with Hazlitt that these scenes make man appear little. I never forgot my stature so completely – I live in the eye; and my imagination, surpassed, is at rest" (I, 301).³¹ Keats was referring to the review of *The Excursion* where Hazlitt characterized people from Wordsworth's mountainous scenes with the line, "[t]he immensity of their mountains makes the human form appear insignificant."³² Keats, however, took this observation to refer to a general feeling of insignificance experienced in the presence of nature's grand scenes and his experience taught him otherwise. Although his idea of negative capability, of losing oneself in other objects, was based in Hazlitt's thinking, Keats's annulment of self at his first sight of

²⁷ In addition to aborting their climb of Skiddaw, Keats and Brown made it only to "the foot of Helvellyn" due to the mist. *L*, I, 306.

²⁸ Walker, 17.

²⁹ Bate notes that the trek was a "Spartanly economical excursion." 365.

³⁰ Keats also compared the view from Burns's window: "Yet can I ope thy window-sash to find/ The meadow thou hast trampled o'er and o'er." ll. 10-11. Wordsworth's 1820 journey would not have significantly altered Keats's view; John Wyatt comments: "The party was middle-aged, relatively well-off and as comfortable as it was possible to be on Europe's roads and in German, Swiss, Italian and French hotels in 1820." *Wordsworth's Poems of Travel, 1819-42* (London, 1999), 56.

³¹ This was not the first time Keats had questioned Hazlitt's thinking; see, for example, *L*, I, 173-4.

³² See Hazlitt, *Works*, XIX, 23-24.

mountains put the two men at odds. The poet found that he lived “in the eye” when gazing on the waterfall, and his imagination, “surpassed” by the reality, was at rest. However, he found the landscape unwilling to communicate.

Frustrated preconceptions and failed poetic senses

Having Wordsworth as a model both encouraged and frustrated Keats. Even as he imagined surpassing Wordsworth’s current experience in the wilderness, Keats failed to gain the accompanying inspiration.³³ John Glendening notes that “touring is often overdetermined, entailing many hopeful and contradictory preconceptions and frequent disappointments.”³⁴ The new confidence that Keats gained was undermined by his perception of his poetic output. He found the same landscape that inspired Wordsworth intractable. Evidence from the expedition suggests that Keats felt his senses failing him. Both the poems and the letters were filled with instances of his being unable to see, hear, or remember the landscapes he encountered.³⁵ At Burns’s cottage, the anticipated wonders remained out of his view: “My eyes are wandering and I cannot see” (l. 7).³⁶ He was unsuccessful in eliciting a response from the Ailsa

³³ Although Keats could not have known it, the lack of immediate poetic inspiration was also common to Wordsworth. Wordsworth wrote all of the poems from his 1803 tour of Scotland after returning home, thinking of them as “Memorials” of the journey. Although *To a Highland Girl* was written soon after his return, *Stepping Westward* and *The Solitary Reaper* were both written two years later, in 1805. Indeed, as Mary Moorman notes, the latter poem was suggested more by a passage from Thomas Wilkinson’s *Tour in the Highlands* than by any recollection of his own travel. *Yarrow Unvisited*, of course, commemorated a sight that he did not see until he visited Walter Scott in 1831. *William Wordsworth: The Early Years 1770-1803* (Oxford 1957, repr. 1968), 596.

³⁴ John Glendening, “Keats’s Tour of Scotland: Burns and the Anxiety of Hero Worship,” *K-SJ*, 41 (1992), 76.

³⁵ Cronin notes that the poet’s “alertness to beauty is an affair of the whole body.” *Colour and Experience in Nineteenth-Century Poetry*, 65.

³⁶ “This mortal body.”

Crag: “Thou answer’st not” (l. 9).³⁷ Descriptions failed him at Windermere, Derwentwater, and Fingal’s Cave (I, 298, 304, 349).³⁸ He was also unable to commit the landscape to memory; the Ambleside waterfall was found to “defy any remembrance” (I, 301). The poet was not feeling his way into the sublime through bafflement; far from being a poetic trope, the disruption of his senses undermined the stated purpose of his pilgrimage: “I will get such an accumulation of stupendous recollections that as I walk through the suburbs of London I may not see them” (I, 264).³⁹

Even his “sensual vision” appeared faulty (I, 299). Despite his claim to “live in the eye” among these landscapes, Keats found the atmosphere oddly distant when he visited the tomb of Burns (I, 301): “The clouds, the trees, the rounded hills all seem,/ Though beautiful, cold – strange – as in a dream/ I dreamed long ago. Now new begun” (ll. 2-4). He could only see, not feel, the beauty of the scene: “Though sapphire warm their stars do never beam;/ All is cold beauty” (ll. 7-8). At Dumfries his preconceptions diverged from the reality. As Sperry notes, the sonnet “creates the impression not so much of a single landscape as of two, one a landscape remembered or envisioned, the other an underlying image of the actual, which do not reinforce each other.”⁴⁰ Despite being in the actual wilderness, Keats felt as though he was once again writing poetry of dreamed or imagined landscapes.⁴¹

³⁷ “To Ailsa Rock.”

³⁸ Keats even attempted to sketch the north end of Loch Lomond in a letter for Tom. *L*, I, 334.

³⁹ Glendening notes that these “dispirited works” were produced by “an ambitious tourist and literary pilgrim,” under conditions of “hardship and fatigue and in settings rife with disquieting associations.” “Keats’s Tour of Scotland,” 80.

⁴⁰ Sperry, 140.

⁴¹ See Chapter II. Keats wrote to Tom that the sonnet had been composed “in a strange mood, half asleep.” He also acknowledged “prejudices” against the Scottish landscape. *L*, I, 309.

The poet knew “[t]he real of beauty” was present, but he could not free it from his “[s]ickly imagination” (ll. 10-11).⁴² Keats was frustrated by his muted response to the same scenes that had ushered Wordsworth and Burns into poetry;⁴³ however, the poetry of his earlier travels anticipated this failed outcome.⁴⁴ Keats’s 1816 sonnet to George depicted the many “wonders I this day have seen,” as well as the ocean’s “voice mysterious” (ll. 1, 7). At Margate and the Isle of Wight, Keats sensed the wonders, but lacked the “social thought” of a partner (l. 13). In his epistle to George from 1816, his “mind o’ercast” ensured that the wondrous sights were only “dimly seen” (ll. 2, 12). However, on this northern expedition two years later, with the wilderness of Scotland and the encouragement of Brown, Keats had hoped for the “sudden glow” of poetic inspiration (l. 21).⁴⁵

A similar disappointment occurred at the top of Ben Nevis.⁴⁶ “Read me a lesson, Muse” revisits the perceived vantage point of Cortez in “On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer.” However, he lacked the clarity of sight imagined in the earlier poem. Instead, the poet was “blind in mist” on the mountain’s peak (l. 2).⁴⁷ Surveying the view, Keats realized that his thoughts, as well as his sight, were obscured: “all my eye doth meet/ Is mist and crag, not only on this height,/ But in the world of thought and mental thought” (ll. 12-4).⁴⁸ The poem’s recurrent diction of “measurement,” Wagner argues, implies that Keats was meticulously defining the extent of his

⁴² As Sperry argues, Keats needed the landscape to “formulate his impressions of its beauty in a way that would conform with his sense of the creative process and his conception of the imagination as it operates upon the experience of the senses.” 138.

⁴³ Once Keats saw the mountains of the Isle of Annan, he wondered “[h]ow it is they did not beckon Burns to some grand attempt at Epic.” *L*, I, 331.

⁴⁴ See Chapter III.

⁴⁵ “To my Brother George (epistle).”

⁴⁶ As Brown notes, Keats “sat on the stones, a few feet from the edge of that fearful precipice, fifteen hundred feet perpendicular from the valley below, and wrote this sonnet.” *KC*, II, 63.

⁴⁷ This poem echoes the opening line of “To Homer”: “Standing aloof in giant ignorance.”

⁴⁸ As Wagner argues, Keats experienced “imaginative nearsightedness.” *A Moment’s Monument*, 101-2.

imaginative vision: “This sublime landscape, which should have suggested to him the boundlessness of the imagination, instead deflates him, reminds him only of how bounded his own abilities are.”⁴⁹ Unable to reflect on the landscape, Keats resorted to interrogating it in hopes of imaginative payoff.

Keats had planned to “clamber through the Clouds and exist,” but the highest point in Britain offered him no clear poetic view, no privileged space from where a “muse” could read him a lesson (I, 264).⁵⁰ Instead of the “mountain glory” he had anticipated from the poetry of Wordsworth, the poet was confronted by the “mountain gloom” of the reality.⁵¹ In his letters, however, Keats appeared to recover the sublime from disappointment. When he copied the disheartened “Read me a lesson, Muse,” he also wrote to Tom: “although we did not see one vast wide extent of prospect all round we saw something perhaps finer – these cloud-veils opening with a dissolving motion and showing us the mountainous region beneath as through a loop hole” (I, 353).⁵² The unsure voice of the poems contrasted sharply with the almost jaunty tone of his correspondence. This was because the letters were written with the intention of

⁴⁹ Ibid. 101-2. MacFarlane notes the paradox of altitude: it gives you greater vision but, in a way, “obliterates you.”: “Your sense of self is enhanced because of its extended capacity for sight, but it also comes under attack – is threatened with insignificance by the grand vistas of time and space which become apparent from the mountain-top.” MacFarlane is right that height can exalt and erase one’s sense of self, and his statement also applies to Keats: “Those who travel to mountain tops are half in love with themselves, and half in love with oblivion.” *Mountains of the Mind*, 156-7.

⁵⁰ Andres Rodriguez suggests that the poet “discovered that adventure alone does not make for either poetry or life, and that poetry’s false claims must be rejected.” *Book of the Heart: The Poetics, Letters, and Life of John Keats* (New York, 1993), 161.

⁵¹ See Marjorie Hope Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory: The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite* (1959, Washington, repr. 1997). Jack suggests that Keats may have intended the poems as “sketches,” made only to “refresh his memory later.” *Keats and the Mirror of Art*, 110. However, his frustration suggests this was not the desired outcome.

⁵² The poems were often fully integrated into the letters. With the exception of “This mortal body,” which he tried to destroy, and “Stanzas on some skulls,” the other thirteen poems from the trek were copied into letters. *L*, I, 343.

being distributed among friends, representing Keats's attempts to promote his image as a "post-Wordsworthian" poet (I, 301).⁵³

"John O'Grots":

Construction of a seasoned traveller

Keats wanted to advertise his new-found worldliness. In his letters to Tom, he lamented the presence of other tourists in the landscape. Conscious of "the miasma of London" in Windermere, the poet noted how fellow travellers detracted from the landscape: "Steam Boats on Loch Lomond and Barouches on its sides take a little from the Pleasure of such romantic chaps as Brown and I" (I, 299, 334).⁵⁴ He wrote about Staffa being a "fashionable place" and he mocked the crowds in his poem "Not Aladdin Magian" (I, 339).⁵⁵

All the magic of the place –
'Tis now free to stupid face,
To cutters and to fashion boats,
To cravats and to petticoats (ll. 47-50).

In contrast to his perceived ideas of the tourists, Keats wrote knowledgeably about the island, providing a detailed outline of its religious and royal history (I, 347-8).

⁵³ Richard W. Bevis observes the "general sunniness" of Keats's writing compared to the work of his contemporaries. *The Road to Egdon Heath: The Aesthetics of the Great in Nature* (Montreal, 1999), 137.

⁵⁴ From the fashionable crowds being entertained at Wordsworth's home to the dandy who, Brown noted, emerged "from the depths of sophistication" to read a "bouncing novel" over breakfast at a Derwent inn, Keats was continually confronted with the attitudes he endeavoured to escape. *L*, I, 431.

⁵⁵ Jennifer Davis Michael notes that tourists in search of "wild sublimity and ancient echoes gravitated especially toward the Scottish highlands and islands." "Ocean meets Ossian: Staffa as Romantic Symbol," *Romanticism*, 13, 1 (2007), 1.

Motion identifies Keats's letters from the trek to Tom as serving a "dual purpose."⁵⁶ He observes that, for all "their chatting and joshing," these letters actually contained "an element of calculation which does not appear in those he sent to his friends. They deliberately try out effects; they self-consciously record and report."⁵⁷ This shift from the usually candid tone of his correspondence with his brother was due to the fact that Keats now anticipated a wider audience. "Let any of my friends see my letters" he wrote, claiming he was "[c]ontent that probably three or four pairs of eyes whose owners I am rather partial to will run over these lines" (I, 301).⁵⁸ Keats wanted to appear sophisticated and knowing to this wider audience.⁵⁹

His letters to selected recipients were equally calculated. To each of his partners in paradoxical solitude he communicated his evolution to "post-Wordsworthian" poet in an individualized way. Reynolds, a fellow poet, received his mockery of picturesque clichés:

I put down Mountains, Rivers Lakes, dells, glens, Rocks, and Clouds, With beautiful enchanting, gothic picturesque fine, delightful, enchanting, Grand, sublime – a few Blisters &c – and now you have our journey thus far (I, 322).⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Motion, 267.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 267. Glendening argues that Keats "recorded the results of his literary sightseeing and sent them back rather like post cards, to his friends and relatives." "Keats's Tour of Scotland," 83.

⁵⁸ He explicitly directed Reynolds to view the letters addressed to Tom. *L*, I, 326.

⁵⁹ In a letter to Tom of 11 July Keats related the differences between the characters of the Scottish and Irish. *L*, I, 330. In contrast, in his 3 July poem to Fanny Keats, "A Song about Myself," he insisted that England and Scotland were not so different after all. ll. 94-115.

⁶⁰ Keats had ridiculed the picturesque in a letter to Reynolds in March 1818, while the poet was still formulating plans for the northern trek: "I am going among Scenery whence I intend to tip you the Damosel Radcliffe – I'll cavern you, grotto you, and waterfall you, and wood you, and water you, and immense-rock you, and tremendous sound you, and solitude you." *L*, I, 245.

Recognizing the irony of ridiculing the very type of quest that he was currently on, Keats took steps to neutralize this.⁶¹ Just as he appeared well-informed about the landscape in order to distinguish himself from the tourists of “Not Aladdin Magian,” he anticipated criticism of his pilgrimage by pre-empting it.

The poet’s motives for the trek even appeared altered in these letters. On 8 April, before he left for Scotland, Keats announced his objectives for the “pedestrian tour” to Haydon: “to make a sort of Prologue to the Life I intend to pursue – that is to write, to study and to see all Europe at the lowest expence” (I, 264). In a letter to Bailey on 22 July, however, his objectives appeared altered in a significant way:

I should not have consented to myself these four Months tramping in the highlands but that I thought it would give me more experience, rub off more Prejudice, use [me] to more hardship, identify finer scenes load me with grander Mountains, and strengthen more my reach in Poetry, than would stopping at home among Books even though I should reach Homer (I, 342).

To Bailey, the Oxford student, self-styled philosopher, and mentor who once took charge of Keats’s reading, the poet rejected the importance of “study.”⁶² Keats wrote that “the only Books I have with me are those three little Volumes [of Dante],” neglecting to mention that Brown had also brought Milton along with them (I, 343).⁶³ In terms of strengthening his poetic reach, Keats placed the experience of wilderness ahead of reading epic poetry, even the works of Homer. Keats saw “stopping at home among Books” as a literal ending point, whereas the “tramping in the highlands” delivered creative benefits.

⁶¹ Richard Abbey, the executor of the estate of Keats’s grandmother, referred to Keats and Brown as “Don Quixotes.” *L*, I, 311.

⁶² See Chapter IV. See also Motion, 187-8.

⁶³ Bate, 348. Bailey introduced Keats to Milton. See Chapter IV.

He continued to project his new role as an experienced traveller by exaggerating the extent of his tour.⁶⁴ Planning to visit Bailey during the trek, Keats wrote: “Cumberland however will be no distance to me after my present journey – I shall spin to you a minute – I begin to get rather a contempt for distances” (I, 343). In light of his recent and his anticipated travel, the distance from Inverary to Cumberland was trivial: “at least I hope I shall [see you] before my visit to America more than once I intend to pass a whole year with George if I live to the completion of the three next” (I, 343). Keats found vertical distances equally diminished: “By this time I am comparatively a mountaineer – I have been among wilds and Mountains too much to break out much about the[i]r Grandeur” (I, 342). He had evolved past being the awe-struck traveller silenced by the sight of the mountains: “The first Mountains I saw, though not so large as some I have since seen, weighed very solemnly upon me. The effect is wearing away – yet I like them mainly” (I, 342).⁶⁵

The purpose of these letters was to broadcast Keats’s new experience of wilderness and travel. On 21 June 1818, the day before he began the pilgrimage, he wrote to Taylor about his predicted ability to challenge authority: “Tell Dewint I shall become a disputant on the Landscape” (I, 296).⁶⁶ To George, he attempted to sympathize with the experience of travelling great distances. Writing to his brother only a week into his trek, Keats compared his journey to Ambleside to George’s transatlantic voyage to America:

⁶⁴ Some of his attitudes remained the same. He added: “I will confess to you that I cannot enjoy Society small or numerous [...] I am happier alone among Crowds of men, by myself or with a friend or two.” *L*, I, 341.

⁶⁵ Perhaps because he had only successfully climbed one mountain, he instead focused on the number he had *seen*.

⁶⁶ Peter de Wint, celebrated landscape painter (1784-1849). Motion observes that de Wint “is a painter who speaks as plainly about the wish to withdraw from the world as he does about the need to engage with its daily conditions.” 160. Jack argues that some of Keats’s descriptions are “that of a man who knows a good deal about landscape painting.” *Keats and the Mirror of Art*, 111.

I have had a great confidence in your being well able to support the fatigue of your Journey since I have felt how much new Objects contribute to keep off a sense of Ennui and fatigue 14 Miles here is not so much as the 4 from Hampstead to London. You will have an enexhaustible astonishment (I, 303).

The poet's development was largely performance. Before he set out, Keats signed a letter to Taylor with the signature "John O'Grots" (I, 296).⁶⁷ With these letters, Keats attempted to slightly alter the image that his partners reflected back at him. There was hopefulness in the joke the poet made as he fell into a chair immediately upon his return: "Bless thee, Bottom! bless thee! thou art translated."⁶⁸ Keats's pilgrimage with Brown represented a turning point in his poetic development, but there is evidence that he reached the limit of wilderness, explored in poems like "Epistle to Reynolds," and again felt the morbidity of solitude as he had in the Isle of Wight.⁶⁹

Reaching the threshold of wilderness:

"Lines Written in the Highlands"

Keats's 18-22 July letter to Bailey that concluded with the poem, "Lines Written in the Highlands," provides a different account of the walking tour (I, 344).⁷⁰ The poet speaks of the "deeper joy [...] [w]hen weary feet forget themselves upon a pleasant turf,/ Upon hot sand, or flinty road, or sea-shore iron scurf," but the poem does not merely glorify nomadic life (ll. 7-10). Instead, it acknowledges the wonder of

⁶⁷ The name of one of the northern-most points in Scotland. *L*, I, 296.

⁶⁸ See Bate, 363. See *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 3, 1. 1. 113.

⁶⁹ See Chapter V and IV.

⁷⁰ This was also a very different poetic form; as John Holloway notes, this was the only poem Keats ever wrote in "dense, heavy heptameters." *The Proud Knowledge: Poetry, Insight and the Self, 1620-1920* (London, 1977), 25.

wilderness and the necessity of a trusted friend.⁷¹ Keats was unable to shake the pressures of solitude and travel, which seemed to him necessary if he were to develop the poetic identity that he sought. The stream of consciousness character of the poem was intended to match the wandering nature of the poet. After long travel, the pilgrim becomes oblivious to the wonders around him: the eagles, the tides drenching “their time in caves,” and the “black mountain peaks,” are all missed by “the forgotten eye,” still “fast wedded to the ground” (ll. 18, 17, 21).⁷² This wilderness is unobserved because of the risk of losing friendship in the long journey: “Forgotten is the worldly heart – alone, it beats in vain” (l. 24).

Although, at this time, Keats had both the partnership of Brown and the wilderness of the Highlands, the vast distance and intense reverie it stirred, was great enough to awaken his morbid fears.⁷³ The speaker desires to reach “[b]eyond the sweet and bitter world,” but not to the point where it would “bar return, and make a man forget his mortal way” (ll. 30, 32). The cost was too high: “Oh, horrible to lose the sight of well-remembered face,/ Of brother’s eyes, of sister’s brow, constant to every place,/ Filling the air, as on we move” (ll. 33-5). The poet describes being on the verge of mental breakdown, only to be restrained through “the gentle anchor pull” of friendship (ll. 25-8; l. 40).⁷⁴

One hour, half-idiot, he stands by mossy waterfall,
But in the very next he reads his soul’s memorial.
He reads it on the mountain’s height, where chance he may sit down
Upon rough marble diadem, that hill’s eternal crown.
Yet be the anchor e’er so fast, room is there for a prayer

⁷¹ See, for example, “To George Felton Mathew,” “To My Brother George (sonnet),” *Endymion*.

⁷² These images describe the poet’s excited approach to Burns’s cottage. See *L*, I, 338.

⁷³ See Chapter IV. See also Holloway, *The Proud Knowledge*, 26.

⁷⁴ Bate, speaking of John Clare, argues that “[s]anity depends upon grounding in place.” *The Song of the Earth*, 173.

That man may never lose his mind on mountains bleak and bare;
 That he may stray league after league some great birthplace to find,
 And keep his vision clear from speck, his inward sight unblind (ll. 41-8).

This poem reads as a cautionary tale. Because of his partners, Keats would not “lose his mind on the mountains bleak and bare;” they also allowed him to “stray league after league” in a poetic pilgrimage while keeping his poetic vision clear and “unblind.” In the Scottish Highlands, Keats reached his limit of wilderness. Although he talked of returning to Scotland, his later travels remained closer to home, including another trip to the Isle of Wight.⁷⁵ Talk of exotic voyages to India and America vanished from his letters.⁷⁶ Keats’s northern expedition became the sole proof of his sublime credentials, and he maximized this experience.

“Solitary repreception & ratification”:

Keats and Blackwood’s

Upon his return from Scotland, Keats discovered that *Blackwood’s* had targeted him.⁷⁷ The essays “On the Cockney School of Poetry,” written by “Z” (John Gibson Lockhart and John Wilson), however, hinged more upon perceived group associations than poetic merit.⁷⁸ In fact, Z’s objections to the Cockney School often

⁷⁵ He travelled to Chichester and Winchester in 1819. See Conclusion.

⁷⁶ See Chapter V.

⁷⁷ What these attacks reveal about political and social biases, or constructions of style and gender, have been explored at length elsewhere; see *CH*, 13-26, Martin Aske, “Keats, the critics, and the politics of envy,” *KH*, Cox, and Duncan Wu, “Keats and the ‘Cockney School,’” *The Cambridge Companion to Keats*. See also Philip Flynn, “Beginning *Blackwood’s*: The Right Mix of *Dulce* and *Utile*,” *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 39, 2 (2006), 136-57.

⁷⁸ Z (John Lockhart and John Wilson). *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*.

matched Keats's own professed opinions of its vanity, affectation, and insularity.⁷⁹ Both men exaggerated these qualities in order to enhance antithetical aspects of their own characters.⁸⁰ Similarly, they both attempted to dissociate the Cockney School and its suburban muse from the more remote inspiration of a Wordsworthian poet.⁸¹ As we have seen, Keats shared the negative view of the suburban world later espoused by Z when mocking the "the well-fenced meadows" of the Cockney "microcosm."⁸² One of the main purposes of Keats's six hundred-mile, forty-four day pilgrimage was to trade in the meadows for grander mountains (I, 342). He had, to some degree, anticipated such attacks and had taken steps to pre-empt them.⁸³

Z's attacks began with Hunt. *Blackwood's* October 1817 article on the "Cockney School of Poetry" ridiculed Hunt's "extravagant pretensions."⁸⁴ Discussing *The Story of Rimini*, Z observed: "Every thing is pretence, affectation, finery, and gaudiness."⁸⁵ Z also raised the charge of suburban insulation.⁸⁶ Hunt, he argued, was "altogether unacquainted with the face of nature in her magnificent scenes."⁸⁷ Despite having "never seen any mountain higher than Highgate-Hill," Hunt was perceived as

⁷⁹ Z's accepted view of a great poet was very similar to Keats's in some respects: "None of them are men of genius – none of them are men of solitary reflective habit; - they are lectures of the Surrey Institution, and editors of Sunday papers, and so forth." *Blackwood's*, V (April – September, 1819), 97.

⁸⁰ Emily Lorraine de Mountluzin notes that "Hunt's own authentic whimsies and ritualized affections provided enough raw material for an army of satirists." "Killing the Cockneys: *Blackwood's* Weapons of Choice against Hunt, Hazlitt, and Keats," *K-SJ*, XLVII (1998), 89.

⁸¹ See David Minden Higgins, *Romantic Genius and the Literary Magazine: Biography, Celebrity and Politics* (London, 2005), 90-101, and Kim Wheatley, *Romantic Periodicals and Print Culture* (London, 2003), 126-7. In fact, Z and his brother had travelled through the Highlands to Lochaber just three years before Keats and Brown. See Colvin, *John Keats*, 290-1.

⁸² "On the Cockney School of Poetry, No. VI," *Blackwood's*, VI (October, 1819), 74.

⁸³ Mathews argues that Keats reacted with "dismay" to the *Quarterly* because the its strictures, "however flippantly expressed, had critical point." *CH*, 16.

⁸⁴ *Blackwood's*, II (October, 1817), 38.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁸⁶ For a discussion on Hunt's counter-culture suburbanism, see Elizabeth Jones, "Sex and disease in the Cockney School," *LH: LPP*, 78-94.

⁸⁷ *Blackwood's*, II (October, 1817), 39.

aspiring to be a “poet eminently rural.”⁸⁸ Lacking experience of the wonders of the natural world, he sought to glorify his immediate suburban surroundings. Z mocked the coterie, as Cox notes, for indulging in a “suburban fantasy of Hampstead rather than an accurate portrayal of the ‘real’ nature found in the Lake District.”⁸⁹

In essay No. IV, published in August 1818, Z shifted his focus to Keats. After rehashing the charges against Hunt in the previous three instalments, Z transferred his objections to Keats, dubbing him Hunt’s “disciple.”⁹⁰ As we have seen, Keats had articulated many of these negative attributes of coterie poetry and sought independence from them. Keats, with the experience of reaching the highest mountain in Britain, felt himself already beyond the reach of the *Blackwood’s* attacks.⁹¹

The main target was *Endymion*.⁹² Keats intended his preface to the poem to serve as both an apology and a defence.⁹³ His public hesitations about the poem were not, however, echoed in his private correspondence. In a letter to Hessey, Keats presented himself as indifferent to critical reception: “My own domestic criticism has given me pain without comparison beyond what Blackwoods or the <Edinburgh> Quarterly could possibly inflict” (I, 374). The term “domestic” suggests the criticism of the Cockney School, members of which had long sought to be involved in his poetry.⁹⁴ However, Keats presented himself as the final judge of his own work, and one who remained untouched by either the criticism of his enemies or the praise of his

⁸⁸ Ibid., 39.

⁸⁹ Cox, 30. See also Roe, *JK&CD*, 212-29.

⁹⁰ *Blackwood’s*, III (1818), 522.

⁹¹ William Allingham, *A Diary*, ed. H. Allingham and D. Radford (London, 1907), 37.

⁹² *Endymion* was published in April 1818, and the *Blackwood’s* essay appeared on 1 September.

⁹³ Both the original and revised prefaces to the poem suggest that Keats was aware of its limitations; he wrote in the rejected preface: “So this Poem must rather be considered as an endeavour than a thing accomplish’d.” He only slightly altered the wording in the revised preface: “the reader, who must soon perceive great inexperience, immaturity, and every error denoting a feverish attempt, rather than a deed accomplished.” 754; 119.

⁹⁴ Attempts to prevent the publication of *Poems* and the editorial manipulation of *Endymion* are discussed in Chapter III and IV.

friends: “and also when I feel I am right, no external praise can give me such a glow as my own solitary re-perception & ratification of what is fine” (I, 374).⁹⁵ Insisting that he was his own toughest critic, Keats confidently asserted that “[p]raise or blame has but a momentary effect on the man whose love of beauty in the abstract makes him a severe critic on his own Works” (I, 373).

This detachment, he argued, was because either “[p]raise or blame” resulted from a misunderstanding of his poetic character.⁹⁶ As Andrew Franta observes, being defended by the Cockney School or attacked by *Blackwood’s* amounted to the same thing in Keats’s mind: “both friends and enemies identify him as the kind of poet who writes verse for a coterie.”⁹⁷ Keats had worked hard to shed this association, and he thus tried to convince Hessey that he only received satisfaction through “solitary re-perception.”⁹⁸

Keats argued that *Endymion* was a product of his independence, but found himself in agreement with a 3 October 1818 letter in the *Morning Chronicle*, noting that the reviewer was “perfectly right in regard to the slipshod Endymion” (I, 374). Although the poem contained “beauties of the highest order,” the reviewer detected many passages “indicating haste and carelessness” (I, 374n). Keats took on this criticism, but argued that his solitude was crucial to the poem’s composition:

⁹⁵ In a letter to Woodhouse on 27 October 1818, Keats wrote of “the solitary indifference I feel for applause even from the finest Spirits.” *L*, I, 388.

⁹⁶ Andrew Lang notes “Keats was confused by the *Blackwood* men with Hunt and Webb.” *The Life and Letters of John Gibson Lockhart, Vol. 1* (1897, repr. London, 2004), 155.

⁹⁷ Andrew Franta, *Romanticism and the Rise of the Mass Public* (Cambridge, 2007), 91-2. Franta further notes: “In distancing himself from Hunt, Keats seeks not just to set himself apart from the Cockney style, but also to appeal to readers across party lines, to the world outside Leigh Hunt’s drawing room or the subscription list of the *Examiner*.” 92.

⁹⁸ Leader argues that Keats’s silence on the topic of publication was “an implicit admission that the poem would not have been a poem, would not have been finished – and thus its creator no poet – had it been left in a drawer or never reached an audience.” *Revision and Romantic Authorship*, 286.

That it is so is no fault of mine. – No! – though it may sound a little paradoxical. It is as good as I had power to make it – by myself – Had I been nervous about its being a perfect piece, & with that view asked advice, & trembled over every page, it would not have been written; for it is not in my nature to fumble (I, 374).⁹⁹

Keats continued to reject the “comfortable advice” of the group (I, 374). *Endymion*, he noted, was written “by myself,” and therefore achieved only limited success; however, had he taken advice from the coterie, he would never have attempted such an ambitious project.¹⁰⁰

Keats argued that independence was still the way forward, but added a single qualification: “I will write independently. – I have written independently *without Judgment* – I may write independently & *with judgment* hereafter” (I, 374). For Keats, neither critical rules nor advice could replace the poet’s self-sufficiency: “The Genius of Poetry must work out its own salvation in a man: It cannot be matured by law & precept, but by sensation & watchfulness in itself – That which is creative must create itself” (I, 374). He continued to emphasize his solitary nature in his serial letter to his brother and sister-in-law that began on 14 October. Attacking the domestic life he associated with coterie, Keats explicitly incorporated Wordsworth’s fashionable home:

Though the most beautiful Creature were waiting for me at the end of a Journey or a Walk; though the carpet were of Silk, the Curtains of the morning Clouds; the chairs and Sofa stuffed with Cygnet’s down; the food Manna, the Wine beyond Claret, the Window opening on Winander mere, I should not feel – or rather my Happiness would not be so fine, a<nd> my Solitude is sublime (I, 403).

⁹⁹ As we saw in Chapter IV, Taylor and Hessey welcomed Keats’s fierce independence as proof of what Chilcott calls “a sympathy in literary beliefs.” *A Publisher and His Circle*, 26-7.

¹⁰⁰ See Chapter IV.

There were many similarities between the luxuries dismissed here and those he sought to “banish” in his 17 March 1817 letter to Reynolds (I, 125). In both cases, Keats rejected sofas and wine for solitude: “Then instead of what I have described [...] there is a Sublimity to welcome me home – The roaring of the wind is my wife and the Stars through the window pane are my Children” (I, 403).

Along with providing an ideal life, solitude also helped him to reach epic heights:

I feel more and more every day, as my imagination strengthens, that I do not live in this world alone but in a thousand worlds – No sooner am I alone than shapes of epic greatness are stationed around me [...] I through my whole being into Triolus and repeated those lines ‘I wander, like a lost soul upon the stygian Banks staying for waftage,’ I melt into the air with a voluptuousness so delicate that I am content to be alone (I, 403-4).

These were Keats’s preconceptions of the northern trek finally realized: a strengthened imagination that allowed him to locate his identity in epic figures. The great scenes of poetry in the sky that eluded him at Margate were conquered.¹⁰¹ Now that he had the experience and legitimacy, poetry was open to him in his solitude. The epic scenes appeared around him:

and serve my Spirit the office <of> which is equivalent to a king’s body guard – then ‘Tragedy, with scepter’d pall, comes sweeping by’ According to my state of mind I am with Achilles shouting in the Trenches or with Theocritus in the Vales of Sicily (I, 403-4).

The poet had gone from “ignorantly” missing the poetic spectacle available to true poets to being able to control it at a whim (l. 29).

¹⁰¹ “A sudden glow comes on them, naught they see/ In water, earth, or air, but poesy.” “To My Brother George (epistle),” ll. 21-2. See Chapter III.

*Reynolds's defence:**Confirming Keats's vision*

In addition to the review in the *Chronicle* discussed above, Keats took special notice of a review “in the Examiner, copied from the Alfred Exeter paper, and written by Reynolds” (I, 393). Published anonymously on 6 October 1818, Reynolds's defence offered sustained praise for Keats as an independent poet.¹⁰² The review, written from the fictitious stance of a Devonshire man unfamiliar with the poet, proclaimed: “We are obscure men [...] aloof from the atmosphere of a Court; but we are surrounded by a beautiful country, and love Poetry, which we read out of doors, as well as in.”¹⁰³ Reynolds placed himself within this community, which reads as a thinly-veiled reference to the Cockney School, while identifying Keats as an independent poet located outside its boundaries.

Reynolds was careful to draw parallels between Keats and the “older poets”: “His feelings are full, earnest, and original, as those of the olden writers were and are; they are made for all time, not for the drawing-room and the moment.”¹⁰⁴ Far from being an imitator of Hunt, Keats was perceived as a poet comparable only to Shakespeare, Milton, and Homer;¹⁰⁵ he had already surpassed Wordsworth, who Reynolds noted “might have safely cleared the rapids in the streams of time, but he

¹⁰² Published in the 6 October 1818 issue of *Alfred, West of England Journal*, Hunt printed an abridged version in the *Examiner* on 11 October. Although directed at the *Quarterly*, Reynolds's anger was equally directed at *Blackwood's*; he complained in a letter to Keats on 14 October of “the ignorant malevolence of cold lying Scotchmen and stupid Englishmen.” *L*, I, 376.

¹⁰³ Reynolds, “Unsigned Review,” *Alfred, West of England Journal and General Advertiser* (6 Oct. 1818), rpt. *CH*, 120.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 121-2.

lost himself looking at his own image in the waters.”¹⁰⁶ Keats, on the other hand, “always speaks of, and describes nature, with an awe and a humility, but with a deep and almost breathless affection.”¹⁰⁷

This review presented a very different poet from the Cockney poet that Z defined as being “altogether unacquainted with the face of nature in her magnificent scenes.”¹⁰⁸ The poet’s deep respect for the natural world could be gleaned from his poetry, Reynolds maintained, and Keats’s unique method of composition allowed the sublime sights to be viewed unobtrusively.

You do not see him, when you see her. The moon, and the mountainous foliage of the woods, the azure sky, and the ruined and magic temple; the rock, the desert, and the sea; the leaf of the forest, and the embossed foam of the most living ocean, are the spirits of his poetry; but he does not bring them in his own hand, or obtrude his person before you, when you are looking at them.¹⁰⁹

The descriptions were those of a poet acquainted with the wildernesses of the world. Familiar with Keats’s ideas about poetical character from their exchanges, including the “Robin Hood” poems in February 1818, Reynolds used this review to present the poet’s own belief in the need for poetry to be “uncontaminated & unobtrusive” and to emphasize the importance of “the old Poets” (I, 224-5). Reynolds presented the negative capability of Keats against the egotistical sublime of Wordsworth.¹¹⁰

Continuing to project the poetic character that Keats proclaimed, Reynolds concluded his review by further expressing the sublimity of the poet’s images and the wandering nature of his muse:

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 119.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 119. In his 9 March 1817 review of *Poems* for the *Champion*, Reynolds noted that Keats “relies directly and wholly on nature.” 46.

¹⁰⁸ *Blackwood’s*, II (October, 1817), 39.

¹⁰⁹ *CH*, 119.

¹¹⁰ See Chapter V.

Poetry is a thing of generalities – a wanderer amid persons and things – not a pauser over one thing, or with one person. The mind of Mr. Keats, like the minds of our older poets, goes round the universe in its speculations and its dreams. It does not set itself a task. The manners of the world, the fictions and the wonders of other worlds, are its subjects.¹¹¹

Under the guise of anonymity, Reynolds described his own relationship with Keats. Keats was a writer beyond contemporary poets because of his selfless re-creation of the natural world; as such, Keats, like poetry itself, was a “wanderer.” He was “not a pauser over one thing, or with one person.” As a great poet rightfully belonging to a different age, Keats wandered through both friendships and the wonders of natural world, searching for and locating inspiration in both. By casting him as a remote poet travelling the landscape in search of his muse, Reynolds portrayed Keats’s image as a poet in a position of legitimacy and authenticity. He also shielded him equally from the attacks of *Blackwood’s* and from the praise of the Cockney School.

Hyperion:

Poetic evolution

With its combination of experienced landscapes and epic poetry, *Hyperion* was new territory for Keats.¹¹² As we have seen, over time Keats’s poems became less and less like Hunt’s. *Hyperion* reads as a response to both to the Hunt circle and *Blackwood’s*. Richard Cronin points out that the style and language were completely unlike Hunt; he also observes that Keats defiantly persisted with a theme involving

¹¹¹ CH, 119.

¹¹² Keats began working on the poem between late October and early December. *L*, I, 387. Stillinger, 460.

Greek mythology, despite *Blackwood's* mocking claim that *Endymion* showed that he only had "a sort of vague idea, that the Greeks were a most tasteful people."¹¹³ At the root of this reaction was the poet's new-found experience. One major distinction between *Endymion* and *Hyperion* was that the latter was injected with first-hand, somewhat exaggerated, experience of sublime scenery.¹¹⁴ As Ward suggests, this poem was the "journal of his trip to the north."¹¹⁵ *Hyperion* was a demonstration of Keats's desire to avoid appearing "smokeable," something he associated with coteries and "too much inexperience of li[f]e" (II, 174).¹¹⁶

One of Z's criticisms of *Endymion* was that the hero of the poem was "not a Greek shepherd, loved by a Grecian goddess; he is merely a young Cockney rhymester, dreaming a phantastic dream at the full of the moon."¹¹⁷ Duncan Wu argues that Z unintentionally "played a vital role in nurturing Keats's early promise," as his attacks were "sufficiently near the mark to Keats's own misgivings [...] to prompt him to discover his own voice."¹¹⁸ This seems an accurate assessment. With *Hyperion*, Keats was confidently embarking on a new poem that would demand a reappraisal of his poetical character. The poem was intended both to advance and represent his poetic development.

The story of the *Hyperion* has a clear parallel in Keats's projected evolution into a "post-Wordsworthian" poet. The only Titan to remain in power is Hyperion,

¹¹³ Cronin, *The Politics of Romantic Poetry*, 191. "No. IV," *Blackwood's*, III (1818), 522.

¹¹⁴ In January 1818, Keats acknowledged the "many bits of the deep and sentimental cast" in *Endymion*, noting "the nature of *Hyperion* will lead me to treat it in a more naked and grecian Manner." *L*, I, 207.

¹¹⁵ Ward, 193. Hebron notes: "The wild Scottish landscape would be an inspiration for the great epic poem he still aimed to write, its mountainous austerity an antidote to the cosy sociability of Hampstead Heath." *The Romantics and the British Landscape*, 61.

¹¹⁶ Keats was also clearly thinking about Fingal's Cave at Bk. I, l. 86.

¹¹⁷ *Blackwood's*, III (1818), 522.

¹¹⁸ Duncan Wu, "Keats and the 'Cockney School,'" *The Cambridge Companion to Keats* (Cambridge, 2001), 50.

god of the sun and brother of Saturn.¹¹⁹ Apollo, who will inevitably supplant him, is described as achieving godhood through “knowledge enormous” (III, ll. 113). As Gittings notes, two sides of Keats were embodied in the poem; Hyperion represented his former self and Apollo symbolized the new poet of knowledge and experience.¹²⁰ Undergoing such a dramatic change was clearly on Keats’s mind; as we saw in Chapter V, in “To Homer,” Homer’s evolution through knowledge in the poem is remarkably similar to Apollo’s deification.¹²¹ Despite the title, Apollo is clearly the hero of the poem (I, 207).

The figure of Saturn seems to represent Wordsworth.¹²² When the poem begins, Saturn is already displaced and far removed from his power and authority: “Far sunken from the healthy breath of morn” [...] “Upon the sodden ground/ His old right hand lay nerveless, listless, dead,/ Unsceptred.” (I, l. 2; ll. 17-9). He mourns the loss of his self, his egotistical nature: “I am gone/ Away from my own bosom; I have left/ My strong identity, my real self” (I, ll. 112-4). Saturn is the poet of egotistical sublime, and Apollo is the poet of negative capability.¹²³ Deified through knowledge by Mnemosyne, goddess of Memory, Apollo gains awareness of all manner of things: “Majesties, sovran voices, agonies,/ Creations and destroyings” (III, ll. 115-6). This description echoes Keats’s idea of the poetic character outlined to Woodhouse on 27 October 1818:

¹¹⁹ Allott, 396n.

¹²⁰ Gittings, 366. Trott notes that “Hyperion reflects the suffocated, accidental side of Keats, Apollo his (trans)figurative alter ego.” “Keats and the prison house of history,” *K&H*, 269.

¹²¹ See Chatterjee, 305. In the *Fall of Hyperion*, the poet himself replaces Apollo.

¹²² Sperry argues that Hazlitt’s criticism of Wordsworth may have influenced Keats’s portrayal of Saturn. 181-2. Saturn is not depicted as the “very old man” with a scythe, as he is in Godwin’s *Pantheon*. Qtd. in Jack, *Keats and the Mirror of Art*, 163-4. He still is, as Barnard notes, “vigorous and powerful.” 62.

¹²³ Barnard, 64. Sperry argues that Keats aimed to “dramatize certain competing ideas of the poetic character and method.” 155. For a fuller discussion of the egotistical sublime, see Chapter V.

As to the poetical Character itself, (I mean that sort of which, if I am any thing, I am a Member; that sort distinguished from the wordsworthian or egotistical sublime; which is a thing per se and stands alone) it is not itself – it has no self – it is every thing and nothing – It has no character – it enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated (I, 386-7).¹²⁴

Apollo is a human on the brink of being transformed into the god of poetry. Already in possession of his lyre, Apollo only requires experience and knowledge in order to overtake Hyperion.

The logic of the poem contends that this transference of power is inevitable. Oceanus explains to his fellow fallen Titans, “on our heels a fresh perfection treads,/ A power more strong in beauty, born of us/ And fated to excel us” (II, ll. 212-4). Keats wrote of a similar natural progression in a 3 May 1818 letter to Reynolds. After a brief comparison, Keats came to the conclusion that “Wordsworth is deeper than Milton;” this was, however, most likely due to “the general and gregarious advance of intellect, than individual greatness of Mind” (I, 281). Just as he believed Wordsworth had inevitably surpassed Milton, Keats felt destined to surpass them both. The structure and style of the poem attempted a similar feat. Barnard argues that the “objectivity of Milton’s style and narrative offered a new way out of the impasse which he believed modern poetry had reached with Wordsworth.”¹²⁵ As Keats had done when literally travelling through Wordsworthian landscapes, his task with *Hyperion* was to use Wordsworth’s ideal as a means of exceeding him. Barnard notes that Keats’s task was “to create a poetry which, starting from Wordsworth’s deeper

¹²⁴ Keats rejected Wordsworth’s “egotistical sublime” in favour of his own concept of a “camelion Poet” in a letter to Woodhouse on 27 October 1818. *L*, I, 386.

¹²⁵ Barnard, 61.

knowledge of the human heart, could achieve the epic and heroic grandeur of Milton.”¹²⁶

Keats, however, was again at a loss for words. His attempt to render Apollo’s deification fails, and the poem abruptly ends: “At length / Apollo shrieked – and lo! from all his limbs/ Celestial...” (III, ll. 134-6). Barnard notes Keats’s “inability to create a credible diction” for Apollo, noting that phrases such as “blithe wine” and “bright elixir peerless” belong to *Endymion* (III, ll. 118-9).¹²⁷ The limit of his tolerance of the sublime, and therefore his limit of knowledge, is reflected in his failure to create a “post-Wordsworthian” poet through the character of Apollo.¹²⁸ Despite the confidence with which he returned from his trek, the consummation of the poetic pilgrimage, *Hyperion*, was abandoned for the time.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 61.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 66. Barnard argues that this “Muse” was the same one that Keats wrote *Hyperion* in order to reject. 66. Ironically, Hunt criticized the deification of Apollo because there was “too effeminate and human” in the transformation, and because he “weeps and wonders somewhat too fondly.” *The Indicator*, 2 and 9 August 1820. Qtd. in Allott, 438-9. Bate argues that Keats reached the end of Book II by 1 December, the day that Tom died. 403. Keats wrote to George and Georgiana on 18 December 18: “I went on a little with it [*Hyperion*] last night – but it will take some time to get into the vein again.” *L*, II, 12.

¹²⁸ Barnard notes that “the Wordsworthian impasse turns out to be Keats’s as well.” 67.

CONCLUSION

“Direct communication of spirit” with George and the “everlasting restraint”

After Tom’s death on 1 December 1818, Keats’s friends instigated what Gittings calls “a programme of social distractions.”¹ On 16 December, Keats noted: “Within this last Week I have been every where” (II, 4). The poet attended a party at Novello’s along with the “complete set,” but the atmosphere was as tedious as before, and he remarked with exhaustion: “Hunt keeps on in his old way – I am complete{ly} tired of it all” (II, 11, 7). Keats was careful to note that none of the social activity was his idea: “if I were to follow my own inclinations I should never meet any one of that set again, not even Hunt” (II, 11).² His aversion to Hunt at this stage was total; despite the fact that Hunt’s newly released *Literary Pocket Book* contained two of Keats’s own sonnets, the poet described it as being “full of the most sickening stuff you can imagine” (II, 7).³

Keats satirized a typical scene from the Hunt circle in a letter to George and Georgiana.⁴ In this “Comedy,” set in “a little Parlour,” the egotistic and self-congratulatory nature of the group is emphasized by the characters applauding each other’s work: “Mr. Olier I congratulate you upon the highest compliment I ever heard

¹ Gittings, 390.

² This echoed Keats’s criticism of literary men in October 1817. See *L*, I, 169 and Chapter IV. As we have seen, Keats was usually “tired” or “disgusted” in the presence of literary men or women. *L*, I, 169, II, 11.

³ Ironically, *Blackwood’s* praised Hunt’s *Literary Pocket Book* while mocking the two poems by Keats, “Four Seasons Fill” and “To Ailsa Rock.” *CH*, 19-20.

⁴ Both Gittings and Bate observe that Keats’s description is easier to follow when arranged as a scene from a play. The “scene” is reproduced as Appendix E. See Bate, 432-3.

paid to the Book” (II, 14). Through the voice of Hunt, Keats mocked the self-importance, the predictable topics of discussion, and the entrenched opinions of the group: “now for me I am rather inclined to the liberal side of the things – {but} I am reckoned lax in my christian principles – & & & &c” (II, 14). Hunt, in Keats’s parody, laments the fact that “people think of nothing but money-getting,” but quickly states, “we shall floridize soon I hope” (II, 14). This coinage from “florid” was both a stab at Hunt’s tendency to create new words and the ostentatious nature of his verse; as Rollins notes, floridize suggests “to make ornate or showy” (II, 14n). This “Comedy” was also an attack on how the group composed poetry, sitting around a piano complimenting each other and hoping to, as Bate notes, “flower into publication.”⁵ Keats’s disdain for the confined nature and frivolous attitude of the coterie permeates this whole scene.⁶

Late in December 1818, Keats also expressed his dislike of coteries in general. He considered an invitation to meet a group of literary ladies who, having read *Endymion*, desired his acquaintance. Woodhouse assured him that, should he agree to meet them, “the opening there is for an introduction to a class of society, from which you may possibly derive advantage as well as gratification” (II, 10). Keats’s response, in a letter to George, was both ironic and detached:

Now I feel more obliged than flattered by this – so obliged that I will not at present give you an extravaganza of a Lady Romance. I will be introduced to them if it be merely for the pleasure of writing to you about it – I shall certainly see a new race of People – I shall more certainly have no time for them (II, 10-11).

⁵ Bate, 432.

⁶ Barnette Miller adds that a “parody on the conversation of Hunt’s set, in which Hunt is the principle actor, carries with it a ridicule that is unkindlier than the bitterness of dislike.” *Leigh Hunt’s Relations with Byron, Shelley and Keats* (New York, 1910), 43.

In contrast to the exhausting nature of these intrusions and distractions, Keats articulated the freedom of space and thought that typified his friendship with George:

sometimes I fancy an immense separation, and sometimes, as at present, a direct communication of spirit with you. That will be one of the grandeurs of immortality – there will be no space and consequently the only commerce between spirits will be by their intelligence of each other – when they will completely understand each other (II, 5).

Despite the distance between them, Keats tried to recapture their dynamic of paradoxical solitude, their “fellowship of essence”:⁷ “I shall read a passage of Shakspeare every Sunday at ten o Clock – you read one {a}t the same time and we shall be as near each other as blind bodies can be in the same room” (II, 5).⁸

Outside the special partnerships of paradoxical solitude, however, the poet portrayed himself as consistently misunderstood:

I feel I must again begin with my poetry – for if I am not in action mind or Body I am in pain – and from that I suffer greatly by going into parties where from the rules of society and a natural pride I am obliged to smother my Spirit and look like an Idiot – because I feel my impulses given way to would too much amaze them – I live under an everlasting restraint – Never relieved except when I am composing – so I will write away (II, 12).

He also felt unappreciated by the group, and traces of insecurity still appear in his fear of looking “like an Idiot.” The coterie setting smothered his spirit and he only felt “relieved” when he was able to get away and start writing. In a pattern that Keats observed throughout his poetic career, he looked to travel as the answer. On 22

⁷ The better he knew someone, the more he could endure their absence: “they would be so much the farth[er] from me in proportion as their identity was less impressed upon me.” No one, he explained, not even “Brown or Haslam,” knew him the way George did. *L*, II, 5.

⁸ See Chapter IV and *Endymion*, Bk. I, ll. 779-81. Although Keats did not seem to be aware of the time difference, he regretted what Robert Douglas-Fairhurst calls the “time lag of writing.” *Victorian Afterlives: The Shaping of Influence in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (Oxford, 2004), 82.

December, Keats told Haydon: “I have a little money which may enable me to study and travel three or four years [...] in which great solitude I hope God will give me strength to rejoice” (I, 415).⁹ He noted that his “Life in Society is silence” and added that he needed to once again “cut and run” and “banish” these associations:¹⁰

I feel in myself all the vices of a Poet, irritability, love of effect and admiration – and influenced by such devils I may at times say more ridiculous things than I am aware of – but I will put a stop to that in a manner I have long resolved upon (I, 414).

This manner that he had long resolved upon was solitary travel: “I should say I value more the Privilege of seeing great things in loneliness” (I, 414).

Keats wrote two final poems in 1818, both in the spirit of escaping the coterie and re-instigating his paradoxical solitude. “Fancy” opens with the lines, “Ever let the fancy roam,/ Pleasure never is at home,” emphasizing the necessity of space and freedom for composing poetry (ll. 1-2):

Then 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.
Oh, sweet Fancy, let her loose! (ll. 1-9).

The companion poem, “Bards of passion and of mirth,” expands the theme of “Lines on the Mermaid Tavern,” which, as we saw in Chapter V, was a call to Reynolds to reject the coterie and instead form a partnership with him. “Bards of passion and of mirth,” beckons the great poets of earlier times to provide guidance: “Teach us, here, the way to find you,/ Where your other souls are joying,/ Never slumbered, never

⁹ Haydon was attempting to borrow money from Keats. *L*, I, 414.

¹⁰ See *L*, I, 125 and I, 237.

cloying” (ll. 26-8).¹¹ Speaking of the immortality of these poets, the poem concludes with an image of “Double-lived” souls in “regions new” that fits with the paradoxical solitude that Keats desired:

Bards of passion and of mirth,
Ye have left your souls on earth!
Ye have souls in heaven too,
Double-lived in regions new! (ll. 36-40).

Planning to escape the coterie and establish paradoxical solitude in new wilderness, Keats’s ambitions were restored; as he had written to George two months earlier: “I think I shall be among the English Poets after my death” (I, 394). The poems on which Keats’s fame rests were not yet written, but they never would have been attempted without the confidence and sense of legitimacy that he gained from paradoxical solitude.

1819-1821:

Letter to Shelley

Keats was famously prolific in the last two years of his life. A brief sketch of his travels from this period reveals that the dynamic of paradoxical solitude remained at the centre of his poetical character. In January 1819, Keats travelled to Chichester in order to visit Dilke, where he composed *The Eve of St. Agnes* (II, 33n).¹² After setting the parameters of societal engagement with the solitary beadsman on one end and the “argent revelry” of the group on the other, the poem sees the two main

¹¹ “Cloying” is a term Keats associated with Hunt’s poetry. See Chapter IV.

¹² Composed in Bedhampton and Chichester between 18 January and 2 February 1819, and revised at Winchester in September 1819. Allott, 450.

characters flee into the unknown: “they are gone – aye, ages long ago/ These lovers fled away into the storm” (l. 37; ll. 370-1).

Keats maintained a similar pattern in his life. Although he wrote to his sister on 12 April 1819, “my Scotch jou[r]ney gave me a doze of the Picturesque with which I ought to be contented for some time,” he was travelling again less than two months later (II, 52). On 27 June, for the fourth straight summer, Keats embarked on a literary pilgrimage with Rice. After they crossed to Shanklin, Keats gave a “word or two on the Isle of Wight”:

But I have been so many finer walks, with a back ground of lake and mountain instead of the sea, that I am not much touch’d with it, though I credit it for all the Surprise I should have felt if it had taken my cockney maidenhead – But I may call myself an old Stager in the picturesque, and unless it be something very large and overpowering I cannot receive any extraordinary relish (II, 135).

The sea, the vital source of wilderness that did take his “cockney maidenhead” at Margate in 1816, was no longer perceived as overpowering enough. In the posture of the solitary poet with “a back ground of lake and mountain,” he wrote to Fanny Brawne: “I would rather be here alone at my task than in the bustle and hateful literary chitchat” (II, 131). Keats spent the next month with Rice on the island.

On 22 June, Brown joined them and thus, in keeping with the nature of paradoxical solitude, Rice returned home three days later (II, 132). Brown and Keats travelled together to Winchester.¹³ From here Keats wrote to Fanny, “I am g{ettin}g a great dislike of the picturesque” (II, 142). Keats, the professed hardened poet of travel, recounted a scenario that almost upset their boat as they crossed from Cowes: “Our Bow-lines took the top of their little mast and snapped it off close by the bord –

¹³ Gittings refers to Winchester as “a setting like Oxford but among hills.” 487.

Had the mast been a little stouter they would have been upset” (II, 142). This adventure, however, was dismissed as “trifling,” and he ended his letter by reaffirming his ambition: “but turn to my writing again – if I fail I shall die hard” (II, 142). He stayed in Winchester for a month, and in that time worked on *The Fall of Hyperion*, finished *Otho the Great* (written with Brown) and *Lamia*, and revised *The Eve of St. Agnes* (II, 143n, 157). After stopping in London for only four days, Keats returned to Winchester for another month, continuing to rework *The Fall of Hyperion* (which he ultimately abandoned) and, after a “sunday’s walk” through the “stubble fields,” composed “To Autumn” (II, 167). Friendship, travel, and wilderness remained at the heart of his creative process.

Once he returned to London on 11 September 1819, Keats did not travel for poetic purposes again. In April 1820, Keats planned to return to Scotland with Brown, but was prevented by his worsening health (II, 287-8). He did, however, maintain his affected foreignness, noting: “London appeared a very odd place [...] I walk’d about the Streets as in a strange land” (II, 187). He acknowledged that Reynolds was familiar with his “unsteady & vagarish disposition” (II, 167). He added: “I have led a very odd sort of life for the two or three last years – Here & there – No anchor – I am glad of it” (II, 167). Keats of course did have an anchor, in the form of his friends, who allowed him to imagine and ultimately achieve a sense of independence.

Although many of Keats’s notions of the poetical character remained the same, he perceived a change in his active pursuit of inspiration:

Some think I have lost that poetic ardour and fire ‘t is said I once had – the fact is perhaps I have: but instead of that I hope I shall substitute a more thoughtful and quiet power. I am more frequently, now, contented to read and think – but now & then, haunted with ambitious thoughts [...] I want to compose without this fever (II, 209).

He anticipated a comparable alteration in a letter to Reynolds from the Isle of Wight on 11 July 1819. He noted that he was “moulting”: “I have altered, not from a Chrysalis into a butterfly, but the Contrary. having two little loopholes, whence I may look out into the stage of the world” (II, 128). The cocoon imagery suggests a similarity to the insulated world of the “fireside Divan,” something he avoided and condemned throughout his career. But with its “doubling of solitude,” as Jacques Khalip refers to it, implies that he was referring to a more sheltered version of paradoxical solitude.¹⁴ Keats recognized that this change was against his natural character. Haunted by “ambitious thoughts,” he predicted that he might soon need to “perform a longer literary Pilgrimage” (II, 210).

By the summer of 1820, however, illness prevented Keats from further travel or composition. Six months before Keats’s death, Shelley invited the poet to stay with him in Italy (II, 313). Keats refused, citing his fragile health, but he nevertheless presented himself as a seasoned soldier: “There is no doubt that an english winter would put an end to me, and do so in a lingering hateful manner, therefore I must either voyage or journey to Italy as a soldier marches up to a battery” (II, 322). As he confessed to Clarke, however, his “sole motive” in declining this invitation was his conviction that he could not be “a free agent, even within such a circle as Shelley’s.”¹⁵ Having spent the last three years avoiding the influence of dominant personalities and coteries, Keats was not willing to jeopardize his independence.

Keats declared his autonomy in words as well as actions, advising Shelley to “curb” his “magnanimity and be more of an artist” (II, 322). He went on to provide his own definition of an artist, which had a distinctly independent element: “an *artist*

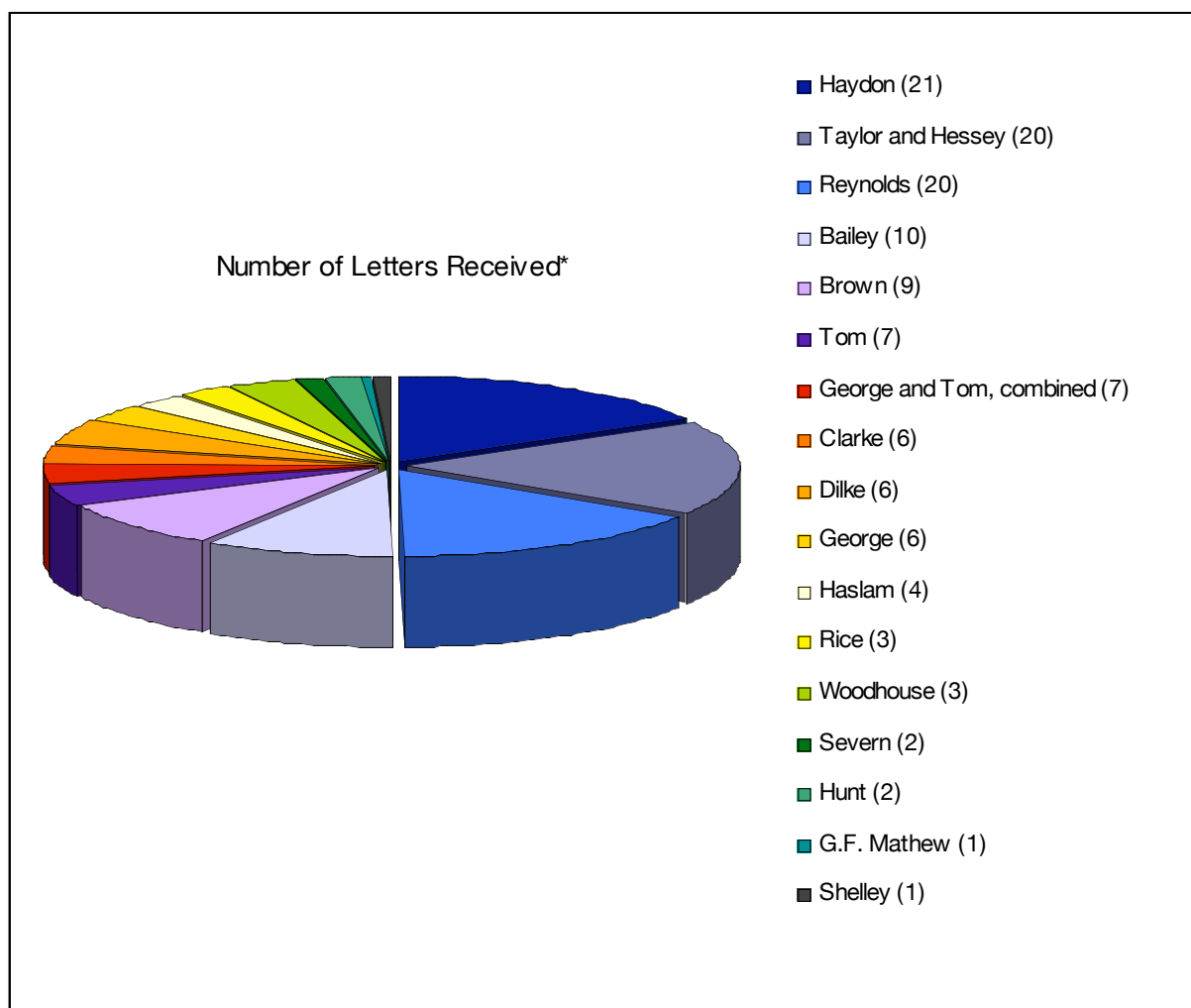
¹⁴ Jacques Khalip, “Virtual Conduct: Disinterested Agency in Hazlitt and Keats,” *ELH*, 73, 4 (2006), 887.

¹⁵ Clarke, *Recollections of Writers*, 151.

must serve Mammon – he must have ‘self concentration’ selfishness perhaps” (II, 323, 322). When Keats described his own creative enterprise, the language evoked a solitary, but sheltered, process: “My Imagination is a Monastery and I am its Monk” (II, 323). This self-definition implied a monastic discipline, a deliberately chosen way of life that he had striven to achieve throughout his career.¹⁶ Keats’s advice here, projected back to the Hunt circle through Shelley, echoed his earlier maxim: “That which is creative must create itself” (I, 374). It was only with the confidence, encouragement, and legitimacy that he received from his partners in paradoxical solitude that Keats was able to construct the poetic identity of a solitary creator and guardian of his own poetry.

¹⁶ As we have seen, Keats adopted this grand religious language when discussing ambition and communicating with Haydon. *L*, I, 170.

Appendix A



This chart is adjusted to account for the length of time that each recipient knew Keats. The number of letters addressed to each individual is divided by the number of months they knew the poet, with the earliest possible date being November 1815 (the date of his first-known letter).

George and Clarke's relationship with the poet extended from November 1815 – February 1821, while Tom's was cut short in December 1818. Keats met Dilke in September 1816, Haslam in February 1816, Hunt, Haydon, Reynolds, and Shelley in October 1817, Taylor and Hessey in March 1817, Rice in April 1817, Bailey in May 1817, Brown in August 1817, and Woodhouse in January 1818.

Appendix B



Nicolas Poussin, *The Inspiration of the Poet*. 1628.

Apollo, seated with his lyre, is granting inspiration to a poet while Calliope, the Muse of epic poetry, looks on.

Appendix C

**Keats's travels, April - June 1817 ***

- 1) London to Carisbrooke (80 miles)
Stayed from 15 April - 23 April
- 2) Carisbrooke to Margate (115 miles)
Stayed from 24 April - 16 May
- 3) Margate to Bo-Peep (via Canterbury) (50 miles)
Stayed from 16 May - 1 June
- 4) Bo-Peep to London (55 miles)
Stayed from 1 June - 10 June

*All distances approximate;
Arrows do not represent routes
taken, only the end destination.

Appendix D

**Keats's travels, September 1817 - May 1818 ***

1) London to Oxford (55 miles)

Stayed from 3 September - 5 October 1817

2) London to Burford Bridge, Dorking (25 Miles)

Stayed from 22 November - 5 December 1817

3) London to Exeter to Devonshire (225 miles)

Stayed from 4 March - 10 May 1818

*All distances approximate;
Arrows do not represent routes
taken, only the end destination.

Appendix E

Scene described in Keats's *L*, II, 14, arranged by Bate, 432:

Scene, a little Parlour – Enter Hunt, Gattie,¹ Hazlitt, Mrs. Novello, Ollier.

Gattie: Ha! Hunt! got into you[r] new house? Ha! Mrs. Novello, seen *Altam and his Wife*?²

Mrs. N: Yes (*with a grin*): It's Mr. Hunt's, isn't it?

Gattie: Hunt's: no, ha! Mr. Ollier, I congratulate you upon the highest compliment I ever heard paid to the Book. Mr. Haslit, I hope you are well.

Hazlitt: Yes, sir – no, sir.

[Hunt goes to the piano.]

Mr. Hunt (at the Music): La Biondina &c. [singing]. Mr. Hazlitt, did you ever hear this? – La Biondina &c. [resuming his singing].

Hazlitt: O no Sir – I never –

Ollier: Do, Hunt, give it us over again – *divino!*

Gattie: *Divino!* – Hunt, when does your *Pocket Book* come out? [His *Literary Pocket Book* for 1819.]

Hunt: 'What is this that absorbs me quite?' [Quoting from Pope's 'Dying Christian to His Soul.'] O, we are sp[i]nning on a little [referring to the *Literary Pocket Book*], we shall floridize [flower into publication] soon I hope – Such a thing was very much wanting – people think of nothing but money-getting – now for me I am very much inclined to the liberal side of things – but I am reckon'd lax in my Christian principles – & & & &c.

¹ Charles Ollier's brother-in-law.

² A tale by Charles Ollier.

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