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Romantic Poetry and the Periodical Press: Leigh Hunt's *Examiner* and John Keats

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Ringraziamenti

Desidero ringraziare la mia famiglia, senza la quale non avrei avuto la possibilità di proseguire gli studi. Ringrazio i miei genitori che mi hanno sempre sostenuta nelle mie scelte capendo la mia passione per la letteratura e, volendo che io fossi felice nel mio futuro lavoro, mi hanno dato questa grande occasione. Ringrazio mia sorella e mio fratello per esserci sempre. Senza Sofia sarei persa nei miei esami di storia come nella vita e nelle giornate in cui non pensavo di superare gli esami e lei mi rimproverava "tanto poi prendi trenta". Ringrazio il mio ragazzo che in questi due anni di università era con me nelle mie crisi di panico e negli attacchi d'ansia preesame. Anche lui è stato un punto fermo in questo percorso che penso si ricorderà per le domeniche in casa quando io ripetevo ad alta voce in tre lingue diverse e lui provava a tranquillizzarmi. Ringrazio mia cugina per l'aiuto reciproco che ci siamo date in quelle giornate dove sostenersi era necessario, e quegli amici che ci sono sempre. Infine, voglio fare un ringraziamento lontano a John Keats, che da più di dieci anni mi accompagna nei giorni felici e in quelli malinconici, nelle serate in cui prendo una sua raccolta di poesie e apro il libro senza guardare la pagina, iniziando solo a leggere. Non ho mai perso questa abitudine che mi fa sentire vicina al suo spirito, perché la sua poesia fa emozionare sempre gli animi sensibili.

When I have fears that I may cease to be
Before my pen has gleaned my teeming brain,
Before high-piled books, in charactery,
Hold like rich garners the full ripened grain;
When I behold, upon the night's starred face,
Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance,
And think that I may never live to trace
Their shadows with the magic hand of chance;
And when I feel, fair creature of an hour,
That I shall never look upon thee more,
Never have relish in the faery power
Of unreflecting love—then on the shore
Of the wide world I stand alone, and think
Till love and fame to nothingness do sink.

John Keats – *When I Have Fear*

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Introduction

This work aims at providing a thorough analysis of the movement known as Cockney School and its two main representatives, Leigh Hunt and John Keats. Coined by the *Blackwood's Magazine*, the term was used to refer disparagingly to a group of intellectuals and artists who gathered in London around the figure of Leigh Hunt in the 1810s. By connecting critical reviews, the socio-political ideals, and the works of the Cockney poets, this work retraces the movement's genesis, introduces its central figures, and discusses the political and poetical ideals that marked its uniqueness and relevance in the landscape of Romantic literature.

The first chapter provides an overview of the periodical press of the early nineteenth century and of the Cockney School, a radical literary movement that challenged established norms, redefining Romantic literature. The section starts with a brief introduction of the historical context and a section dedicated to the most relevant newspapers of the period, which is essential for the understanding of the events in the following chapters. Then, the focus turns to the central figures and voices within the movement, exploring the collective spirit that defined the Cockney poets, showing their professional relationships, friendships, shared intellectual ideals. The chapter presents the ideas that were the basis of the members' political and poetical aspirations, examining how the Cockney poets sought to redefine the purpose of literature in a rapidly changing social and political landscape.

The second chapter discusses the figure of Leigh Hunt, a central character in the Cockney School, who was able to connect diverse voices within the movement. This section delves into Hunt's multifaceted role both as an intellectual leader and a catalyst for creative expression. The analysis touches on different aspects of his person and works, from his influence as a writer and publisher to the significance of *The Examiner*, the journal which became the centre of Cockney ideals and in which the Cockney poets found the perfect outlet for their ideas. Beyond his editorial endeavours, Hunt's personal contributions to the Cockney School are highly significant. The analysis of Hunt's most relevant works provides a further contribution to the discussion of the Cockney School's fusion of artistic innovation and political dissent.

The third chapter focuses on John Keats, setting the poet against the literary background of the Cockney School. The genesis of Keats' association with the Cockney School lies in the formative years of the poet and in Keats' early encounters with the members of the movement. The cultural and intellectual milieu of early-nineteenth-century London becomes the setting where Keats' poetic sensibility intertwines with the rebellious spirit of the Cockney School. This chapter explores Keats' relationships with key members of the movement, especially with Leigh Hunt and Charles Cowden Clarke, highlighting the intellectual exchange and friendships typical of the Cockney circle. The chapter also explores Keats' first poems and his main contributions to *The Examiner*. Keats' poems *O Solitude* and *On First Looking into Chapman's Homer* emerge as the first two poems published in *The Examiner* by Leigh Hunt, followed by *Sleep and Poetry.* The radical nature of the Cockney School was the subject of contemporary criticism, as testified by *Blackwood*'s criticism on Keats, which includes Keats in the critique on the Cockney School of Poetry, revealing the tensions between established literary newspapers and the emergent revolutionary Cockney School members. *Endymion*, one of Keats' most famous works, becomes a focal point in the exploration of the poet's journey within the Cockney School. For this reason, this chapter delves into the analysis, reception and critique of *Endymion*, unravelling the controversy that surrounded the poem. In the last years, specifically in the years after the *Blackwood's* reviews, Keats finds a more refined and independent voice, which is represented by his odes, such as *Ode to a Nightingale* and *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, by the famous ballad *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* and his narrative poems *Lamia, Isabella* and *The Eve of St. Agnes*. After Keats' death, Hunt's pages on Keats in his *Autobiography* and Shelley's *Adonais* demonstrate the lingering admiration and closeness among the members of the Cockney School.

1. The Cockney School

1.1 Historical Background

The early nineteenth century in Britain was marked by deep transformations in politics, economy, society, and culture. This period, which goes from the aftermath of the French Revolutionary Wars to the beginning of the Victorian era, was characterized by significant changes driven by the Industrial Revolution, by political reforms and social upheavals. Following the defeat of Napoleon in 1815, Britain emerged as one of the preeminent powers in Europe, solidifying its position both politically and militarily. The Congress of Vienna, convened from September 1814 to June 1815, aimed to restore stability to a continent ravaged by over two decades of revolutionary and Napoleonic conflicts[1]. Britain's role in the Congress was essential, as it was represented by Foreign Secretary Viscount Castlereagh, who was instrumental in shaping the diplomatic discourse. The primary objectives of the Congress were to redraw the continent's political map, re-establish old boundaries, and create a framework that would prevent future large-scale wars. The re-establishment of a balance of power was critical to British interests, ensuring that no single nation could dominate Europe as France had under Napoleon. To this end, Britain supported the strengthening of neighbouring countries around France, such as enlarging the Kingdom of the Netherlands and enhancing the power of Prussia and Austria. Moreover, the Congress of Vienna led to the creation of the German Confederation, a loose association of German states intended to replace the defunct Holy Roman Empire and act against future French aggression. The early nineteenth century was a period of expansion for the British Empire. Britain's dominance in global trade and its growing industrial base supported its colonial ambitions. The British East India Company solidified control over large parts of India, and British influence expanded in Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific. The empire played a crucial role in supplying raw materials for Britain's industries and markets.

Britain witnessed in the early nineteenth century not only significant expansion but also a gradual shift towards a more inclusive and representative political system, which culminated in the Reform Act of 1832 While the Reform Act did not establish universal suffrage, it marked a significant step towards a more inclusive political system, even if it was still limited to men. Moreover, the Reform Act of 1832 set a precedent for future electoral reforms. In addition to the Reform Act of 1832, a notable reform was the abolition of slavery throughout the British Empire, achieved through the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833, which reinforced the previous Act of Parliament of 1807[2]. This legislation marked the culmination of decades of abolitionist activism and parliamentary debate, leading to the emancipation of enslaved individuals in British colonies and the eventual abolition of the transatlantic slave trade. Another important reform was the Factory Acts, a series of laws passed between 1802 and the mid-nineteenth century, which aimed at regulating the working conditions in factories and protecting the rights of workers, particularly women and children. These acts established minimum age requirements, limited working hours, and improved safety standards.

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[1] Simon Bainbridge, "The Historical Context", ed. Nicholas Roe, *An Oxford Guide to Romanticism,* Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005, p. 15.

In the beginning of the nineteenth century Britain was at the forefront of the Industrial Revolution, a period of rapid industrialization that began in the late eighteenth century and continued into the nineteenth century. This period was marked by significant technological advancements, such as the steam engine, which revolutionized manufacturing and transportation. The textile industry saw dramatic changes with the introduction of machines like the power loom, leading to increased production and the growth of factories. The Industrial Revolution brought about significant social changes, including the mass migration of people from rural areas to urban centres in search of work. Cities like Manchester, Birmingham, and Liverpool grew rapidly, becoming major industrial hubs. This urbanization led to overcrowded living conditions, poor sanitation, and the rise of slums. These conditions led to public health crises and highlighted the need for urban planning and social reforms[3]. The harsh working conditions in factories, long hours, and low wages led to the emergence of labour movements advocating for workers' rights. The early nineteenth century saw the rise of trade unions and the beginnings of organized labour protests.

1.2 Journalism and The Periodicals of the Early Nineteenth Century

The early nineteenth century witnessed a dramatic evolution in journalism, characterized by the emerging influence of newspapers, magazines, and periodicals, collectively known as "periodical press"[4]. This era saw significant changes driven by legal and technological advancements that facilitated the spread of printed material. One key legal change was the suspension of the Licensing Act in 1695[5], which led to a publishing revolution, ending pre-publication censorship. This cessation of censorship and monopolistic control created both positive and negative outcomes. While it fostered a freer press and broke the monopoly, it also caused economic chaos and legal uncertainty about copyright. Technological innovations, particularly the advent of the steam press by 1814, revolutionized production, allowing newspapers like *The Times* to meet the demands of an expanding readership. The steam press, developed by Friedrich Koenig and Andreas Friedrich Bauer, revolutionized the printing industry by using steam power to automate the printing process. This innovation significantly increased the speed and efficiency of production. The steam press reduced costs, made printed materials more affordable, and enabled wider distribution, thus fostering the growth of newspapers and periodicals.

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[2] Simon Bainbridge, "The Historical Context", p. 15.
[3] *Ivi,* p. 24.

Partisan press flourished, with newspapers openly aligning themselves with specific political factions or ideologies, often revealing the proximity to more conservative or more liberal ideals, thus reflecting the closeness to the Whigs or Tories parties, even if some of the newspapers preferred to declare themselves independent. Papers like *The Morning Chronicle* and *The Examiner* supported liberal causes, advocating for parliamentary reform and civil liberties, while publications like *The Quarterly Review* espoused conservative principles, defending traditional institutions and values. Alongside political newspapers, literary and cultural magazines spread, providing platforms for emerging writers and intellectuals and contributing to the development of literary movements. Literary magazines like *The Edinburgh Review* and *The Blackwood's Magazine* engaged in critical discourse on literature and the arts. Periodicals also shaped literary movements, such as Hunt's *Examiner*, which beyond dealing with political affairs, such as news on the Napoleonic Wars, published the works of emerging poets and essayists[6], forming a new school of poetry. Magazines like *The Quarterly Review* published, among other issues, literary reviews on contemporary writers.

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[4] William Christie, "Essays, Newspapers, and Magazines", ed. Nicholas Roe, *An Oxford Guide to Romanticism,* Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005, p. 426.

[5] *Ibidem*.

[6] *Ivi,* p. 429.

The Times was founded by John Walter on 1 January 1785 as *The Daily Universal Register*. However, he changed its name to *The Times* on 1 January 1788. It provided comprehensive coverage of national and international news, politics, and culture. In 1803, Walter handed the paper to his son, John Walter Jr. *The Times'* reputation grew further and the adoption of the steam-driven cylinder press in 1814[7] increased the paper's circulation and efficiency, reaching 5,000 copies by 1815. Under the editorship of Thomas Barnes from 1817 and later John Thadeus Delane, *The Times'* influence increased, particularly in politics and finance. *The Times'* commitment to journalistic integrity and accuracy contributed to establish it as a preeminent newspaper in British society. *The Times* prided itself on independence[8] and objectivity in reporting, often presenting a balanced perspective on political issues.

Another influential periodical was *The Edinburgh Review*, founded in 1802 by Francis Jeffrey, Sydney Smith, and Henry Brougham. With its publications, which featured essays, criticism, and reviews, the magazine covered a wide range of subjects, including contemporary literature, philosophy, politics, and science. Its contributors included leading writers, thinkers, and politicians of the time, such as Thomas Babington Macaulay and Lord Byron. The journal's influence extended beyond Scotland, influencing debates and discussions throughout Britain. Established by a group of Whig intellectuals, it championed liberal principles such as civil liberties, and social progress[9]. The *Edinburgh Review's* liberal outlook contrasted with the conservative stance of publications like *The Quarterly Review*, which aligned more closely with Tory interests.

The Quarterly Review was launched in 1809 by John Murray's publishing house as a conservative counterpart to *The Edinburgh Review*. With its publication based in London, the journal offered commentary on literature, politics, and society from a distinctly conservative perspective. Notable contributors to *The Quarterly Review* included figures such as Sir Walter Scott, John Wilson Croker, and William Gifford[10], editor of the periodical. Despite its conservative orientation, *The Quarterly Review* maintained a reputation for scholarly rigor and literary excellence. *D*eeply associated with the Tory party[11], it defended traditional institutions such as the monarchy, the Church of England, and the aristocracy, opposing radical journals and supporting the status quo.

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[7] W. Christie, "Essays, Newspapers, and Magazines, p. 426.

[8] *Ivi*, p. 468.

[9] *Ivi*, p. 430.

[10] Nicholas Roe, *Fiery Heart, The First Life of Leigh Hunt*, Pimlico, London, 2005, p. 251.

[11] *Ibidem*.

The Morning Post was founded by John Bell in 1772. Its first editor, the Reverend Sir Henry Bate Dudley was succeeded by Reverend William Jackson. Originally a Whig paper, it was transformed into a moderate Tory organ by Daniel Stuart[12] in 1795, publishing contributions from notable writers like Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth. It was known for its conservative editorial stance and its support for the British monarchy. It published issues on different topics, from domestic to international news, often featuring exclusive reports and insightful commentary on current events. *The Morning Post* gained a reputation also for being among the first to publish regularly notices for plays, concerts, and operas. Throughout the early nineteenth century, *The Morning Post* remained a respected newspaper, reflecting the interests of the British elite and middle class until its closure in 1937.

The Drakard's Stamford News, published by John Drakard, was a weekly paper that began publication in Stamford, Lincolnshire, on September 15, 1809. The first editor of the *Stamford News* was Thomas Blore, a topographer. A relevant journalist, editor and publisher was connected to the *Stamford News* was John Scott, who edited several liberal newspapers. In 1807 Scott edited *The Statesman*, a newspaper launched by Leigh Hunt and his brother John. While editor of the *Drakard's Stamford News*, Scott wrote the attack on military flogging titled "One Thousand Lashes!"[13], published in 1810. Hunt reported it into *The Examiner*, leading to an indictment for libel, which caused his imprisonment. During Hunt's stay in prison for having libelled the Prince Regent, John Scott was the editor of *The Champion*[14] in London and was one of the acquaintances who visited Hunt.

Launched in 1814, *The Champion* was a Sunday radical newspaper. *The Champion*'s commitment to advancing the rights and welfare of the working class established its reputation as a leading voice for radicalism and reform in British society. *The Champion* was associated with Whig or liberal political views during the early nineteenth century, even if it aimed at independence and objectivity in reporting. John Hamilton Reynolds, one of Keats' closest friends, worked in this newspaper. Although Reynolds was not primarily known for his political writings, his liberal principles significantly shaped his contributions to journalism. Despite potential financial incentives, Reynolds consistently opposed the Tories, showcasing his commitment to his convictions. Upon joining John Scott's *Champion* in 1815[15], Reynolds initially focused on theatrical and literary subjects but frequently interwove political commentary into his articles. His admiration for Keats grew during his time at *The Champion*, evidenced by his enthusiastic praise and frequent references to Keats' works in reviews. However, Reynolds departed from *The Champion* in 1818.

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[12] W. Christie, "Essays, Newspapers, and Magazines", p. 428.

[13] Patrick O'Leary, "John Scott and Leigh Hunt", *Keats-Shelley Journal*, Vol. 33, 1984, p. 51, online, https://www.jstor.org/stable/30212926?searchText=John+scott+and+leigh+hunt.

[14] Jeffrey N. Cox, *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998, p. 45.

Another newspaper, whose editorial stance was generally liberal and reformist, was *The Morning Chronicle*. This daily newspaper aimed at parliamentary reform, free trade, and the abolition of slavery. Founded in 1769, *The Morning Chronicle* initially focused on reporting parliamentary debates, providing readers with accurate accounts of proceedings in the British Parliament. Over time, the newspaper expanded its coverage to include a wide range of topics, reflecting the diverse interests of its readership and it became known for its literary and cultural content, publishing reviews of books, plays, and art exhibitions. It also featured serialized fiction by popular intellectuals of the time. Under various owners until its suspension in 1862, it published works of prominent writers, including William Hazlitt, Charles Dickens, Eliza Lynn Linton, and John Stuart Mill. James Perry's ownership from 1789[16] occurred in a period of increased circulation and alignment with Whig interests, attracting renowned contributors, whose activism clashed with authorities. Perry's successor, John Black, oversaw the employment of literary greats like Dickens and Mayhew, enriching the paper's content with social commentary.

James Perry was also the founder and editor of another newspaper, *The European Magazine*[17], a monthly publication in London, which emerged in January 1782, initially titled *The European Magazine, and London Review*. It served as a comprehensive source of information and analysis on European affairs during a pivotal period of political and social upheaval, and it also included articles on literature, politics, science, art, and commerce. Its notable content included articles published under initials or pseudonyms and many of its contributors remained anonymous. Relevant contributions to the magazine include what scholars believe to be the first published poem by William Wordsworth in 1787 and some of Hunt's poems[18]. Despite its success, *The European Magazine* was absorbed into *The Monthly Magazine* in 1826, marking the end of its publication.

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[15] Leonidas M. Jones, "Reynolds and Keats", *Keats-Shelley Journal*, Vol. 7, 1958, p. 48.,online, https://www.jstor.org/stable/30212579?searchText=Reynolds+and+keats&searchUri=%2Faction%2FdoBasicSearch%3FQuery%3DReynolds%2Band%2Bkeats%26so%3Drel&ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_search_gsv2%2Fcontrol&refreqid=fastly-default%3A71682a4526e199aeeb1837589d14b60a.

[16] N. Roe, *Fiery Heart,* p. 53.

[17] *Ivi*, p. 53.

Hunt himself founded and edited influential newspapers of the time: *The Examiner*, *The Reflector, The Indicator* and *The Tatler*. Founded in 1808 by Leigh and John Hunt, *The Examiner* emerged as a liberal and reformist newspaper in London. Under the editorship of Leigh Hunt, *The Examiner's* commitment to liberal ideals and fearless journalism established its reputation as a voice for reform in England. *The Examiner* was indirectly associated with Whig or liberal political views and, while Hunt declared its independence, it often criticized conservative policies and institutions, also leading to the brothers Hunt's imprisonment for having libelled the Prince Regent[19].

From 1810 to 1812, Hunt became the editor of *The Reflector*, a quarterly magazine published by his brother John. Among his contributions to the publication was *The Feast of the Poets*, a satirical piece that aimed to critique the most influential literary figures of the time[20]. His satire proved to be controversial, especially among contemporary poets. However, Hunt's biting commentary in The Feast of the Poets improved the magazine's notoriety during its brief run. From 1814 to 1817, Hunt and William Hazlitt embarked on a collaborative endeavour: the creation of *The Round Table* essays, serialized in *The Examiner*. These essays, fifty-two in number, touched different contemporary topics, from literature to politics and society. Hunt wrote twelve of the essays with other collaborators such as Charles Lamb, while the main part of the series was authored by Hazlitt, renowned for his incisive criticism. In 1817, the essays were gathered into two volumes, both titled *The Round Table: A Collection of Essays on Literature, Men, and Manners*[21]*.*

In 1819 Hunt became the editor of *The Indicator*, a weekly literary periodical. Hunt's wit was evident in the pages of *The Indicator*, which featured essays, reviews, and literary criticism that demonstrate his deep appreciation for literature and his commitment to advancing progressive causes. The first work by Keats published in *The Indicator* was *La*

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[18] N. Roe, *Fiery Heart*, p. 76.

[19] J. Cox, *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School,* p. 39.

[20] *Ivi,* p. 7.

[21] *Ivi*, p. 22.

Belle Dame Sans Merci[22]. Although *The Indicator* had a relatively short life, ending in 1821 after just two years of publication, it further improved Hunt's reputation as a liberal journalist. In his later years, Hunt faced struggles with financial issues and poor health, yet he persevered tirelessly in his literary pursuits. He launched *The Tatler* in 1830, intending it to be a daily publication focusing on literary and dramatic criticism. *The Tatler* aimed to provide readers with insightful commentary on the cultural and artistic trends of the day, reflecting Hunt's discerning eye for quality. However, despite his efforts and the initial excitement surrounding the magazine, *The Tatler* faced numerous challenges. Financial difficulties plagued the publication, making it difficult to sustain operations. Additionally, the competitive nature of the media landscape was a significant obstacle. Despite Hunt's dedication and the quality of the content, *The Tatler* struggled to attract a consistent readership and generate sufficient gains. As a result, the magazine ceased publication in 1832 after a relatively short life.

During the 1820s Hunt's reputation was undermined by *The Blackwood's Magazine*, a conservative journal, founded in 1817 by William Blackwood. The periodical initially appeared as the *Edinburgh Monthly Magazine*, but after a failed start, Blackwood relaunched it as *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*. This magazine, often referred to as *Maga*, became popular for its blend of satire, reviews, and sharp criticism. Known for its provocative and satirical content, the magazine featured essays, fiction, poetry, and commentary on contemporary events. *The Blackwood's Magazine* became renowned for its contributions by influential writers such as Sir Walter Scott, John Gibson Lockhart, and John Wilson[23]. John Gibson Lockhart, born in 1794, was a Scottish writer, editor, and biographer, best known for his intimate biography of Sir Walter Scott, his father-in-law, titled *Life of Sir Walter Scott*. Beyond his biographical endeavours, Lockhart distinguished himself as a novelist with works such as *Valerius: A Roman Story* and *Adam Blair*, both acclaimed for their intriguing storytelling and psychological depth. Lockhart's involvement with *The Blackwood's Magazine* began in 1817 when he joined as a contributor, becoming one of its editors from 1817 to 1819. Lockhart's contributions to Blackwood's ranged from literary criticism to political commentary.

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[22] Leigh Hunt, *Autobiography with Reminiscences of Friends and Contemporaries*, Vol. II, Smith, Elder and Co., London, 1850, p. 216.

[23] J. Cox, *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School,* p. 22.

The magazine's often controversial editorial stance made it a focal point of literary and political debates of the time. *The Blackwood's Magazine* was deeply associated with Tory or conservative political views and its opposition to liberal and radical ideologies, such as those expressed by Hunt in *The Examiner*. It was through the attacks of the *Blackwood's Magazine* that the second generation of romantic poets began to be called "Cockney School"[24]. The *Blackwood's Magazine* embarked in a series of written reviews dealing with this emergent group of intellectuals around Leigh Hunt. The articles were written by John Gibson Lockhart under the pseudonym of Z.[25]. The attacks were often characterized by a satirical and mocking tone: humour, sarcasm, and wit were used to criticize the perceived shortcomings of the Cockney poets.

The critiques were not limited to the literary work of the Cockney poets but often included personal attacks on their lifestyles and social status[26], so that this personalized criticism aimed to discredit the poets as individuals. Moreover, the Cockney poets were associated with liberal and radical political views, and *The Blackwood's Magazine*, being more conservative in its orientation[27], used the attacks to condemn and ridicule these political ideologies. Some of the attacks extended also to religious and moral grounds, with the Cockney poets being accused of moral laxity, a common strategy to undermine their credibility and reputation. The Cockney poets' perceived lack of patriotism or adherence to traditional English values was a recurrent theme in the attacks as *Blackwood's* portrayed them as outsiders. While these attacks perpetrated by the *Blackwood's Magazine* might have denigrated the reputation of the Cockney poets temporarily, they did not prevent the Cockney poets from continuing spreading their ideas.

In 1821, *The Blackwood's Magazine* gained notoriety due to its involvement in a fatal duel between John Scott[28], editor of the rival *London Magazine* at the time, and Jonathan Henry Christie, the agent of John Gibson Lockhart. The duel was sparked by libelous statements published in *The Blackwood's Magazine* about Scott and his publication. These statements attacked Scott's character and integrity, leading to a confrontation between Scott and Christie. As a result of the duel, Scott was shot and fatally wounded[29]. This incident highlighted the contentious nature of the rivalry between *The Blackwood's Magazine* and its adversaries, as well as the serious consequences that could arise from the publication of defamatory material in the press during that period.

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[24] J. Cox, *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School,* p. 17.

[25] Emily L. De Montluzin, "Killing the Cockneys: 'Blackwood's" Weapons of Choice against Hunt, Hazlitt, and Keats", *Keats-Shelley Journal*, vol. 47, 1998, p. 87, online, http://www.jstor.org/stable/30213200.

[26] J. Cox, *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School,* p. 22.

[27] *Ivi*, p. 20.

[28] Robert Morrison, "*Blackwood's* under William Blackwood", *Scottish Literary Journal*, Aberdeen, Vol. 2, 1995, p. 61, online, https://www.proquest.com/openview/1ce10b81200eebea3a7834b3dd9d898d/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=1818560.

1.3 The Foundation of the Cockney School and its Main Members

The Cockney School emerged in early-nineteenth-century London as a literary and intellectual collective, which found its centre in the editorial work of Leigh Hunt. Most of the poets of the Cockney School were divided between their commitment to poetry and their need to earn from their writings as they came from the lower-middle class, so that it was typical for the poets in the circle to seek in poetry a professional career[30]. This is common to many members of the circle around Leigh Hunt, including John Keats, who came from the lower-middle class and had not sufficient income not to worry about earning money. My analysis seeks to unravel the foundations of the Cockney School, shedding light on its main features through the presentation of its key members.

The first who emerges as a pivotal figure in the formation of the Cockney School is Leigh Hunt[31], whose career will be later deeply discussed. His early life and literary ambitions laid the basis that would significantly impact the Romantic movement. Raised in an environment where dissent and intellectual pursuits were encouraged, Hunt's ideology was shaped by a fervent commitment to freedom of expression. In 1808, Hunt's establishment of *The Examiner*[32] marked a turning point for the Cockney School. He published the works of many authors, in particular the ones who were his closest friends and collaborators. In fact, Hunt considered writing a social or even an ideological activity[33] and as editor, he provided a platform that attracted like-minded writers, fostering a community that challenged established norms. His editorial policies were characterized by a strong rejection of censorship, which would cause him troubles with the government. Hunt's own writings were characterized by wit and a deep understanding of societal issues. The circle who gathered around his charismatic leadership was varied and was formed by many prolific intellectuals including John Keats, Percy Shelley, Charles Lamb, William Hazlitt, Benjamin Haydon, Horace Smith, Cornelius Webb, and many others[34].

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[29] Robert Morrison, "*Blackwood's* under William Blackwood", p.61.

[30] J. N. Cox, *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School*, p.17.

[31] *Ivi*, p.7

[32] *Ivi,* p. 38.

[33] *Ivi*, p.17.

Initially associated with the Cockney School was John Keats, who was one of its most significant members[35]. Keats' early exposure to literature was heavily influenced by Leigh Hunt's ideals and by his friendship. Keats' association with Hunt and the intellectual atmosphere of *The Examiner* left a significant mark on his poetic development, which will be discussed in detail in the third chapter. Despite the harsh critiques of many of the works published in this early period, Keats found in the collaboration with the Cockney School a supportive element for his person and his career.

Percy Bysshe Shelley was very close to the Cockney School's radical ideals[36]. Shelley's background, influenced by his wife's politically engaged family, laid to his commitment to social and political reform. His engagement with Leigh Hunt and *The Examiner* reflected a shared vision of a more egalitarian society and exemplified the intersection of literary innovation and political activism. Moreover, Shelley's collaboration with intellectuals of the Hunt's circle is visible in the numerous passages written by Hunt in defence of Shelley's poetry in *The Examiner*[37].

Shelley's odes often reflect his idealistic and radical views, blending personal emotion with broader philosophical themes. For example, *Ode to the West Wind* employs terza rima to create a flowing, musical quality while exploring themes of change and renewal. In his lyrical dramas, Shelley combines elements of lyric poetry and traditional drama, frequently featuring mythological or allegorical content. *Prometheus Unbound,* published in 1820[38], exemplifies this, reflecting Shelley's idealism and belief in human potential for progress and change. The work celebrates the triumph of the human spirit over tyranny and oppression, themes that resonate strongly with the ideals of individual liberty and social change supported by the other poets of Hunt's circle. The main character, Prometheus, serves as a symbol of rebellion against unjust authority and as a beacon of hope for humanity's liberation from bondage. Its exploration of themes such as freedom, justice, and the transformative power of love reflects the broader Romantic movement's emphasis on individual expression and human authenticity, embodying the spirit of rebellion and idealism that characterized the Cockney poets' literary endeavours[39]. Additionally, Shelley wrote longer narrative poems that tackled grand themes such as love, revolution, and the human condition. *The Revolt of Islam*, for instance, is a narrative poem using Spenserian stanzas to convey a tale of revolutionary idealism.

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[34] J. N. Cox, *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School,* p.21.

[35] John Kandl, "The Politics of Keats' Early Poetry", Susan J. Wolfson, editor, *The Cambridge Companion to John Keats*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001, pp. 1-3.

[36] Theresa Kelley, "Life and Biographies", ed. Timothy Morton, *The Cambridge Companion to Shelley*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2006, p. 21.

[37] T. Morton, *The Cambridge Companion to Shelley*, p. 33.

[38] *Ivi*, pp. 123-127.

Shelley attracted Hunt's attention for the first time when he published *The Necessity of Atheism*, questioning the existence of God. Because of this pamphlet, Shelley was expelled from Oxford but began the acquaintance with Hunt that would be essential in his life. To Shelley, Leigh Hunt[40] was a close friend and an influential figure. Through Hunt, Shelley became acquainted with other members of the group and participated in the intellectual and social circles that defined the Cockney milieu. These personal relationships facilitated the exchange of ideas, collaboration on literary projects, and mutual support. Shelley often expressed his admiration for Hunt's writing and Hunt's efforts in promoting liberal and radical causes, supporting him during his imprisonment for libel. Similarly, Hunt valued Shelley's intellectual insights and poetic talent, often discussing literary theories and political activism with him. Shelley was also acquainted with John Keats, and while their interactions were limited, they participated in the same literary and social circles in London. Shelley respected Keats' poetic abilities, and Keats, in turn, admired Shelley's intellect. Furthermore, Hazlitt, essayist and critic associated with the Cockney School, had some interactions with Shelley. While they did not have a close personal relationship, they shared similar radical political views and participated in public debates on issues such as freedom of expression and social reform. Shelley started some correspondence also with Charles Lamb, where they show admiration for each other's works. Overall, Shelley's relationship with members of the Cockney School was characterized by mutual admiration, shared political ideals, and occasional collaboration in literary and social causes.

Shelley's commitment to politics is reflected in one of his major works dealing with political themes, *The Mask of Anarchy*[41]. *The Mask of Anarchy* is a political poem written by Shelley in 1819 in response to the Peterloo Massacre, where British cavalry charged into a crowd of peaceful protesters in Manchester who were demanding political reform. This poem is often regarded as one of the earliest expressions of the principle of nonviolent resistance in modern literature. Despite its historical importance and profound message, *The Mask of Anarchy* remained unpublished during Shelley's lifetime. It wasn't until 1832 that the poem was printed, when Edward Moxon published it in London with a preface written by Hunt. It is significant that it was meant to be published by Hunt in *The Examiner* on December 9, 1819. In fact, Shelley initially submitted the manuscript for publication in *The Examiner* in 1819, but it was withheld from publication by Hunt because he believed that the general public was not yet ready to fully appreciate the depth of the ideals embodied in the poem[42]. The decision to delay publication reflects Hunt's concern for the reception of Shelley's uncompromising message. Many of Shelley's works were characterized by a revolutionary spirit and a fervent belief in the power of the people to effect meaningful change.

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[39] T. Morton, *The Cambridge Companion to Shelley*, pp. 123-127.
[40] Jeffrey N. Cox, *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School,* p.197.
[41] T. Morton, "Receptions", *The Cambridge Companion to Shelley*, p. 30.

Lamb was another close friend of Hunt and contributor to *The Examiner*[43], although he did not align entirely with the radical political views often associated with the movement. Lamb's works, especially his essays, combined wit and introspection. *Essays of Elia*[44] and *The Last Essays of Elia,* Lamb's most famous works, are two collections published under the pseudonym Elia. These essays are characterized by their personal tone, qualifying as reflections on everyday life and human experiences. Lamb's exploration of human emotions and societal conventions, often through the lens of personal experiences, provided a counterpoint to the more overtly political themes present in the works of other members.

Lamb's close friendship with Leigh Hunt moved from their shared literary interests. Lamb contributed essays to Hunt's periodical, *The Examiner*, and supported him during his imprisonment for libel. Lamb also had a friendship with John Keats, and it was evident from their correspondence that Keats admired Lamb's literary talents and sought his advice on his poetic endeavours[45]. They shared a mutual appreciation for literature and poetry, and Lamb provided encouragement and support to Keats during his early career. Although Lamb did not have as direct a relationship with Shelley as he did with Hunt and Keats, he was acquainted with Shelley and was familiar with his works. Lamb's literary tastes leaned more towards the classical and the fanciful rather than the radical political sentiments often expressed by Shelley and other Cockney poets[46]. However, Lamb's writings occasionally touched upon social issues and reflected some of the progressive ideals of the Cockneys.

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[42] Jeffrey N. Cox, *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School,* p. 61.
[43] *Ivi,* pp. 52-54.
[44] William Christie, "Essays, Newspapers, and Magazines", *An Oxford Guide to Romanticism,* Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005, p. 431.
[45] Jeffrey N. Cox, *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School,* p. 121.

Essayist and critic William Hazlitt[47] was another intellectual associated with the Cockney School. Hazlitt's sharp and witty critiques contributed to the intellectual fervour of the group. His essays, often published in *The Examiner*, covered a wide range of topics from literature to politics. Hazlitt emphasized in his works the subjective experience and his passionate defence of free expression. His influence on the Cockney School was profound, particularly through his pioneering work in literary criticism. He actively participated in the literary endeavours of the group, contributing essays, reviews, and critical commentary to publications associated with Cockney writers including *The Examiner* and *The Indicator*[48]. For example, he contributed to the periodical titled *The Round Table*[49] from 1817 to 1819, edited in collaboration with Hunt, which aimed to provide a platform for Cockney writers to express their views on literature, politics, and society. His essays in *The Round Table* often addressed cultural and social issues. Hazlitt and Hunt had a particularly close relationship and the two shared similar political and literary interests.

Hazlitt's major works connected with the Cockney School show his voice of dissent against social injustice. His collection of essays *The Spirit of the Age*[50], published in 1825, profiles several contemporary literary and political figures, including some associated with the Cockney School, such as Hunt. Hazlitt offers insightful critiques of their works and personalities, reflecting his engagement with the intellectual currents of his time. Furthermore, his political essays, including those collected in works such as *Political Essays, with Sketches of Public Characters*[51] published in 1819, reflect his radical views. He advocated democratic reform, criticized abuses of power, and supported the cause of individual liberty. Through his essays and public lectures, Hazlitt critiqued monarchy, aristocracy, and institutions that perpetuated social inequality.

Political Essays[52] published in 1819 by William Hazlitt is as a significant collection of essays, exploring various political themes and issues of the time. In this collection, Hazlitt delves into a wide range of topics, providing detailed analyses and critical insights into matters such as reform, democracy, freedom of speech, and the role of government[53]. Hazlitt's essays reflect his support for progressive political movements and his opposition to the oppressive policies of the British government. Through his prose he advocates social and political reform, calling for greater individual freedoms and democratic governance. Hazlitt passionately argues for the need for societal and political change, advocating for reforms. Furthermore, Hazlitt discusses the importance of democracy and the role of the people in shaping their own governance, one of the most recurrent themes in the essays of the Cockney School writers. Through his essays, Hazlitt encourages civic engagement and urges citizens to actively participate in the political life of their nation. Additionally, *Political Essays* addresses the fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression. Hazlitt strongly defends this right as essential to a free society, condemning censorship and governmental suppression of dissenting voices.

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[46] Jeffrey N. Cox, *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School,* pp. 19-20.
[47] *Ivi,* pp. 21-22.
[48] *Ivi,* p. 73.
[49] *Ivi,* p. 38.
[50] *Ivi,* p. 40.
[51] William Christie, "Essays, Newspapers, and Magazines", pp. 434-435.
[52] *Ivi,* pp. 433-436.

Many works by Hazlitt reflect his political engagement, such as *The Spirit of the Age: Or Contemporary Portraits*[54], a collection of character sketches penned by Hazlitt and published in 1825. The book portrays 25 individuals, primarily British, whom Hazlitt believed epitomized significant trends in the thought, literature, and politics of his era. These subjects include thinkers, social reformers, politicians, poets, essayists, and novelists, many of whom Hazlitt personally knew or encountered. Originally serialized in English periodicals, particularly in *The New Monthly Magazine* in 1824, the essays were subsequently collected and published as a book. Through his essays, Hazlitt offers insightful and vivid portraits of his contemporaries, showcasing his deep understanding of their achievements and contribution. The essays offer a panoramic view of the age, reflecting Hazlitt's commitment to social critique and his keen observations of the individuals who shaped the cultural and intellectual landscape of the time. Through his essays, he celebrates the virtues and accomplishments of his subjects while offering incisive commentary on the social and political issues of the day.

The correspondence[55] between William Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt offers a fascinating glimpse into the intellectual and personal relationship between two prominent members of the Cockney School. Their letters, which spanned several years, touched upon a wide range of subjects, including literature, politics, philosophy, and personal matters. Hazlitt and Hunt shared a deep appreciation for literature and the arts, and their letters often reflect their mutual admiration for each other's work. They discussed contemporary literary trends, critiqued each other's writings, and exchanged ideas on various literary topics. In addition to their literary discussions, Hazlitt and Hunt also engaged in political discourse, particularly during a time of social and political upheaval in England. They shared progressive views on issues such as liberty, democracy, and social reform, and their correspondence often delved into debates surrounding these topics. Their letters reveal a shared commitment to advocating for political change and social justice.

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[53] James Mulvihill, "The Poetics of Authority: Representation in Hazlitt's Political Criticism", *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology,* Vol. 101, No. 4, 2002, p. 548, online, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27712276.
[54] Jeffrey N. Cox, *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School,* p. 40.
[55] *Ivi,* pp. 51-52.

While Hazlitt's relationship with John Keats was not as intimate as his friendship with Leigh Hunt, there is evidence to suggest that they were acquainted and respected each other's work. In fact, Hazlitt wrote a favourable review of Keats' poetry in *The Examiner* of December 1, 1817. Hazlitt expressed both admiration for Keats' poetic talent and reservations about certain aspects of his style and approach, acknowledging the richness of Keats' imagination and his ability to create vivid images and sensations through his verse[56]. Both Hazlitt and Keats shared a commitment to Romantic ideals and a fascination with the power of the imagination. the review,

On the other hand, Hazlitt's connection with Charles Lamb was more complex, marked by both admiration and occasional disagreements. Lamb shared some literary affinities with Hazlitt, particularly in their interest in literary criticism. Hazlitt praised Lamb's essays under the pseudonym "Elia", while Lamb admired Hazlitt's intellect, wit, and rhetorical skill[57]. However, there were instances of friction between the two men, caused by personal differences and divergent views on certain literary matters. Hazlitt and Lamb engaged in lively intellectual exchanges, both in person and through correspondence. They discussed a wide range of topics, including literature, philosophy, politics, and personal experiences. Despite occasional disagreements, Hazlitt and Lamb shared a genuine friendship marked by loyalty and understanding. On many occasions, both Hazlitt and Lamb expressed admiration for each other's work and defended each other against critics. Hazlitt was criticized, as other Cockney writers, by the *Blackwood's Magazine*, which defined him "Cockney Aristotle" and attacked his *Liber Amoris*[58], a deeply personal work exploring themes of love, desire, and obsession.

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[56] Jeffrey N. Cox, *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School,* p. 87.
[57] William Christie, "Essays, Newspapers, and Magazines", pp. 442-443.

The Cockney school demonstrated to be an interdisciplinary circle mainly in Haydon's association with the group. Benjamin Robert Haydon was a painter closely associated with the Cockney School[59], particularly due to his friendships and collaborations with the other members of the group. His friendship with Hunt and other writers created a collaborative environment where visual and verbal arts converged. His visual representations, often intertwined with literary themes, contributed to the group's exploration of societal issues and cultural critique. Haydon collaborated with Cockney writers and intellectuals on various artistic projects[60], for example, he painted portraits of several members of the group, including Keats and Hazlitt. Haydon shared with the group the commitment to social reform and democratic ideals. He used his art as a means of advocating political and social change, addressing themes of justice, liberty, and human dignity in his paintings. Like the writers associated with the Cockney School, Haydon faced persecution and criticism from conservative critics and academic establishments.

While not as frequently associated with the group as some of its core members, Horace Smith's contributions are equally relevant to the affirmation of the circle. His most notable association with the Cockney School is through his friendship with Leigh Hunt, as they were friends and colleagues, and they collaborated on various literary projects. For instance, Smith contributed to Hunt's *The Examiner*. Additionally, Smith's participation in literary salons and social gatherings in London brought him into contact with William Hazlitt and Charles Lamb. The satirical poem *Horace in London*[61] reflects the urban experience of London during his time. While not a direct product of the Cockney School, its examination of city life and social satire resonates with some of the concerns of the movement. Its irreverent tone and focus on contemporary life reflect the satirical spirit of some Cockney writers.

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[58] Jeffrey N. Cox, *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School,* p. 19.

[59] *Ivi,* pp. 52-53.

[60] *Ivi,* p. 4.

[61] *Ivi,* p. 73.

The members of the circle around Hunt influenced one another, sharing several poetical themes and sometimes writing poems in similar style[62]. This can be exemplified by Cornelius Webb's poem *Invocatory to the Moon* published in *The Examiner*:

> Queen-Beauty of the Night—pale and alone—
> Eye not so coldly Love's brief happiness;
> But look as once when thou didst leave thy throne,
> In garb and gait a sylvan hunteress,
> And with bright, buskined limbs, through dew and flowers,
> Lightly, on sprightly feet and agile, bounded,
> With fawn-like leaps, among the Latmian bowers;
> While the wide dome of farthest heaven resounded
> With the shrill shouts of thee and thy nymph-rovers,
> When the hard chace of victory was won,
> And changed Actæon by his hounds was torn.
> But then thou hadst not seen Endymion,
> Nor knew the pain and coldness of his scorn;—
> Yet, if thy love was dear to thee, be dear to lovers![63]

Cornelius Webb was an integral figure within the Cockney School, whose association with *The Examiner* and his collaborative efforts with other members made him part of Hunt's circle. This sonnet could be virtually attributed to most of the members of the circle, due to the typical subject and structure used among them[64]. This poem evokes themes of love, transformation, and myth. It personifies the moon as a beautiful, pale, and solitary queen, suggesting the fleeting nature of romantic joy. The moon, depicted as the goddess Diana, is portrayed as a sylvan huntress. The imagery includes fawn-like leaps, referencing the mythological Latmian bowers where Endymion slept. Themes of transformation and myth are highlighted through references to Endymion, a shepherd loved by Diana but remaining eternally asleep, who we will also encounter in Keats' narrative poem *Endymion*. Webb's poem shows rich mythological allusions, depicted within a natural and celestial landscape. Many other works from the poets of the Cockney School share features with Webb's poem. For example, Shelley's sonnet *To the Moon shares* thematic similarities in its contemplation of the moon and its connection to nature and human emotion. In this sonnet, Shelley reflects on the moon's solitude. The moon is depicted as "pale for weariness" from "climbing heaven and gazing on the earth”, wandering “companionless among the stars”[65]. This makes clear that the project of the circle was a collective practice. Webb is now less known than other major authors in the circle, but his contributions were relevant for the Cockney School. He wrote collections of poems, prose works and contributed to famous journals such as the *New Monthly Magazine*[66], but despite his immediate success, he is nowadays almost unknown.

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[62] Jeffrey N. Cox, *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School,* p. 6.
[63] *Ivi,* p. 16.
[64] *Ivi*, p. 20.

The collaborative efforts of Leigh Hunt, John Keats, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Charles Lamb, William Hazlitt, Benjamin Haydon, Horace Smith, Cornelius Webb, and other intellectuals who formed the Cockney School influenced the literature of the Romantic period. Their collective contributions to poetry, prose, criticism, and art expanded the possibilities of literary expression. Through their radical political ideas, innovative literary techniques, and commitment to individual expression, they wrote about themes such as social injustice, the beauty of nature, the power of the imagination, and the complexities of human experience.

1.4 Political and Poetical Ideals of the Cockney School

The Cockney School was characterized by its innovative approach to poetry, its radical political views, and its dedication to social reform. The writers of the circle used their literary talents to celebrate the beauty and complexity of the human experience[67], to critique the injustices of society, and advocate for the rights of the common people. The Cockney poets embraced individual imagination. They found solace and inspiration in the natural world, echoing the Romantic reverence for nature through vivid imagery and sensory language. Infusing their verses with intense sensibility and emotional depth, they invited readers to engage with the human everyday experience. Through their poetry, essays, and political writings, they sought to inspire change in society. The blend of literary innovation and political activism became a defining feature of the Cockney School’s ideology.

Despite their urban surroundings of the city of London during the nineteenth century, the Cockney poets maintained a deep connection to the natural world, finding solace and inspiration in its beauty, as it is common in the poems of the Romantic period. Whether through evocative descriptions of rural landscapes or reflections on the changing seasons, they sought to capture the sublime power of nature in their poetry. Moreover, they sought to convey the sensations arising from elements of the natural world. In particular, the Cockney poets sought to capture the beauty coming from episodes of everyday life, which are experienced in nature. A perfect example of this can be found in John Keats's ode, *To Autumn*[68]*,* in which he captures the essence of the harvest season. Through the details and vivid imagery, typical of the poets of the Cockney School, Keats transports the reader to an idyllic countryside. As the poem progresses, Keats' imagery becomes increasingly sensory, inviting the readers to immerse themselves in the sights, sounds, and smells of the season. Moreover, Keats' use of language in *To Autumn* is particular, as he employs a rich tapestry of sounds and rhythms to evoke the sensory experience. Through verses like "Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness"[69], Keats paints a visual picture of autumn's abundant landscape, while the sounds of hedge-crickets singing, and lambs bleating add sound to the scene. The taste of ripe fruit is evoked through "To bend with apples the moss'd cottage-trees"[70], while the touch of fading daylight on stubble-plains and the warmth of the sun on bees' cells create tactile sensations. Through these sensory details, Keats immerses the reader in the beauty and abundance of autumn, creating a deeply immersive experience. The musicality produced by rhetorical devices such as alliteration, assonance, and onomatopoeia, serves to enhance the poem's sensory impact. Similarly, Percy Bysshe Shelley's wrote many poems containing vivid descriptions of the natural world. An example is *Mont Blanc*[71], where he evokes the sublime greatness of the Alps with extreme clarity.

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[65] Percy Bysshe Shelley, “To the Moon”*, The Complete Works of P. B. Shelley,* Francesco Libri, 2010, p. 14260.

[66] Jeffrey N. Cox, *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School,* p. 17.

[67] Jerrold E. Hoogle, “Romanticism and the Schools of Criticism and Theory”, *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism,* Cambridge, 1993, pp. 2-4.

Furthermore, the Cockney poets saw the potential of individual imagination as a source of creativity and inspiration. They experimented with language, imagery, and symbolism to convey their inner thoughts and feelings. Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind*[72] exemplifies this ideal, as the poet gives his perspective on the wind as a symbol of poetic inspiration and renewal using imagery and metaphor to evoke the transformative power of the natural world. Shelley employs verses written in iambic pentameter and a three-line rhyme scheme, which gives the poem a flowing, harmonious rhythm. Throughout the poem, Shelley employs a wide range of imagery to evoke the power of the wind, as it sweeps across the landscape conveying the meaning of transformation. Moreover, Shelley's use of metaphor and symbolism in *Ode to the West Wind* is essential to amplify the exploration of themes such as regeneration, rebirth, and the eternal cycle of life[73]. The Cockney poets, as exemplified by Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind*, embraced the potential of creative expression. Through vivid imagery, metaphor, and symbolism, they present nature as a catalyst for inspiration and renewal.

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[68] Paul D. Sheats, "Keats and the Ode", *The Cambridge Companion to John Keats,* Cambridge, 2001, pp. 96-98.

[69] John Keats, "To Autumn", ed. John Barnard*, John Keats. The Complete Poems*, Penguin Classics, London, 1977, p. 834.

[70] *Ivi,* p. 834.

[71] Karen Weisman, "The Lyricist", *The Cambridge Companion to Shelley*, pp. 47-49.

[72] Paul Hamilton, "Literature and Philosophy", *The Cambridge Companion to Shelley*, p. 168.

Another feature that can be found in the poetry of the Cockney school is the intense sensibility and emotional depth of the verses, as the Cockney poets embraced a more passionate mode of expression. The Cockney poets dealt with topics such as love, melancholy, and joy, inviting readers to engage with the human experience. Despite their radical politics and social critique, the poets shared characteristics with the broader Romantic movement such as the celebration of nature, emotion, and the imagination[74]. In John Keats' *Ode to a Nightingale*, for example, the poet reflects on the fleeting nature of beauty and the transcendent power of art. Through his evocative language and imagery, Keats invites readers to contemplate the mysteries of existence and the profound connections between humanity and the natural world. Shelley, in his elegy written for John Keats after his death entitled *Adonais*[75], reveals a profound sense of grief and mourning for his friend's death, also giving a deep understanding of his major works. Additionally, the Cockney poets celebrated the power of the imagination and the faculty of fancy as indispensable tools for poetic creation. They embraced a romantic conception of the imagination as a source of inspiration and creativity, capable of transcending the limitations of rational thought and empirical observation. Leigh Hunt, in his seminal essay *On the Realities of Imagination*[76], praised imagination as the originator and catalyst of poetry, emphasizing its role in shaping the poet's perspective and enriching the poetic experience.

Central to the Cockney School's poetic philosophy was a spirit of experimentation and thematic innovation. Keats, for example, in the exploration of the sonnet form in *On First*

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[73] Paul Hamilton, "Literature and Philosophy", p. 168.
[74] Stuart Curran, "Romantic Poetry: Why and Wherefore?", *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism,* pp. 209-211.
[75] Karen Weisman, "The Lyricist", pp. 56-59.
[76] John Whale, "Non-Fictional Prose", *An Oxford Guide to Romanticism*, pp. 250-252.

Looking into Chapman's Homer[77], demonstrates a great ability in the use of language and rhythm, infusing the classical sonnet form with innovative features. With lines like “Much have I travell'd in the realms of gold”[78] and “Then felt I like some watcher of the skies”[79], Keats vividly portrays the profound impact of his discovery of Chapman’s translation of Homer’s works. Through language, he conveys the sense of awe and wonder inspired by this literary revelation. Keats expands the thematic scope of the sonnet form to encompass the beauty and power of literature, evoking the grandeur of the experience and showcasing the transformative power of artistic appreciation. Similarly, Shelley’s visionary poem *Prometheus Unbound*[80] reflects his audacious experimentation with form and genre, blending elements of lyric poetry, drama, and epic to create a work of great ambition and originality. Through their exploration of form and technique, the Cockney poets challenged readers to rethink their preconceived notions of poetry and to embrace other possibilities of artistic expression. Shelley’s *Ozymandias*[81] is an example of this experimentation, as the poet employs imagery and metaphor to explore the theme of the transience of power and the inevitable decay of empires. Through his innovative use of language, Shelley creates a portrait of human ambition and its futility.

The Cockney School gathered around a collective spirit, a sense of camaraderie and mutual support among its members. Despite their different and various backgrounds and artistic styles, these poets shared a common ambition to use their intellectual abilities as a tool for social critique and political engagement[82]. The collaborative nature of their work allowed for a free exchange of ideas and the exploration of shared themes and concerns. One of the key manifestations of the collective spirit of the Cockney School was the collaborative efforts of its members in various literary endeavours. The major example is *The Examiner*, which served as a platform for the publication of poems, essays, and reviews[83]. Through *The Examiner*, these poets were able to reach a wider audience and engage in public discourse on issues ranging from political reform to social justice. By providing a platform for dissent, the Cockney School demonstrated the transformative potential of art in confronting societal injustices and fostering a collective intellectual awakening. The socio-political agenda of the Cockney School was multifaceted, encompassing issues of freedom, individual rights, and critiques of authority. Hunt's editorial vision, which is evident in *The Examiner*, is characterized by a dedication to freedom of expression. This commitment to unrestricted expression became a driving force behind the group's exploration of societal issues, with each member contributing a personal perspective to the larger socio-political discourse.

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[77] Greg Kucich, “Keats and English Poetry”, *The Cambridge Companion to Keats,* Cambridge, 2001, pp. 186-187.

[78] John Keats, “On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer”, ed. John Barnard*, John Keats. The Complete Poems*, Penguin Classics, London, 1977, p. 118, v. 1.

[79] *Ivi*, p. 118, v. 9.

[80] Theresa Kelley, “Life and Biographies”, *The Cambridge Companion to Shelley*, pp. 30-31.

[81] Richard Cronin, “Formalism”, *An Oxford Guide to Romanticism,* pp. 262-263.

[82] *Ivi,* p. 65.

[83] *Ivi,* pp. 62-63.

Furthermore, the intellectual and personal relationships within the Cockney School are reflected in the collaboration for the publication of *The Liberal,* a journal promoted by Shelley, Hunt and Byron and published in London by John Hunt[84]. *The Liberal* was a political and literary journal founded in 1821. It was created to promote liberal ideas and advocate political and social reform. The journal featured articles, essays, poetry, and other writings that addressed issues such as freedom of speech, democracy, human rights, and the abolition of slavery. Shelley, Hunt, and Byron shared a commitment to progressive ideals so that they used *The Liberal* as a tool to express their views and challenge the conservative establishment of their time[85]. The journal was known for its provocative content, often critiquing the political authorities and advocating for greater individual liberties. However, *The Liberal* faced numerous challenges, including government censorship and financial difficulties. It struggled to attract a wide readership and ultimately ceased publication after just four numbers. Despite its short life, the journal remains an important historical document, reflecting the intellectual and political climate of the early nineteenth century.

On August 26, 1821, Percy Bysshe Shelley corresponded from Pisa to Leigh Hunt in London, detailing his recent visit to Ravenna to see Lord Byron. In the letter, Shelley conveyed Byron's decision to relocate to Pisa and proposed a joint literary endeavour to Hunt, suggesting that they share original compositions and profits in a periodical work to be conducted in Pisa. Meanwhile, the Shelleys resided at the Baths of Pisa until October 25 before moving to an apartment in the Tre Palazzi di Chiesa in Pisa itself. During this time, Shelley assisted in securing accommodation for Byron at the Palazzo Lanfranchi. The Hunts embarked on their voyage from Plymouth aboard The David Walter on May 13, 1822, reaching Genoa a month later, when Hunt informed Shelley of their arrival. Continuing their journey, they reached Leghorn on July 1, when Hunt set off to visit Byron at Monte Nero.

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[84] T. Morton, "Receptions", *The Cambridge Companion to Shelley*, p. 35.

[85] Jeffrey N. Cox, *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School,* pp. 47-48.

The inaugural issue of *The Liberal* featured Byron's controversial "Vision of Judgment". which even Hunt found contentious. However, the journal's disregard for societal norms and political affiliations met with widespread criticism, contributing to its eventual demise after just few issues. The untimely death of Shelley and Byron's eventual disengagement from the project further underscored its tumultuous trajectory. Ultimately, their collaboration on *The Liberal* marked a significant episode in their respective literary endeavours, characterized by tensions, compromises, and ultimately, a divergent path forward for both Byron and Hunt. Hunt busied himself with preparations for the second issue of *The Liberal*, aiming for a Christmas release. This edition was set to feature contributions from various literary figures, including Mary Shelley, Charles Armitage Brown, William Hazlitt, and Thomas Jefferson Hogg, alongside works from Byron, Shelley, and Hunt himself. However, financial constraints following the second issue extended the journal's reliance on Byron's support.

Byron's growing interest in Greek independence became evident by April 1822, leading to his departure for Greece in July 1823, signalling a significant shift from his involvement with *The Liberal*. The dynamics between Lord Byron and Leigh Hunt within the context of their collaboration on *The Liberal* reveal a personal friction and divergencies in professional aspirations. Byron's dissatisfaction with Hunt's conduct stemmed from his perception of Hunt's insensitivity to their social and intellectual disparities. Byron found Hunt's candidness often crossing into rudeness, particularly in their exchanges where Hunt presumed to express disagreeable opinions, mistaking bluntness for honesty. This discord was exacerbated by Hunt's failure to accommodate Byron's viewpoints and his penchant for emphasizing Byron's flaws, rather than his virtues. It was in this mood that they ended the collaboration for *The Liberal*.

The central political ideal of the Cockney School was a fervent belief in the principles of democracy and individual liberty. The Cockney poets used their works to describe the social inequalities and injustices of their time. Whether through descriptions of poverty, exploitation, or oppression, they sought to give voice to the marginalized. Even the Cockney circle itself was a marginalized group localized in Hampstead or even marginalized as sub-urban. In fact, the Cockney circle was perceived by its members as an oppositional model to established society[86]. Hence, it was comprised of writers, poets, and intellectuals primarily from working-class backgrounds or lower-middle-class origins, who often found themselves at odds with the elitism of the literary establishment. Their unconventional lifestyles and radical political views marked them as outsiders in a society that prized conformity and hierarchy. Despite their marginalization, however, the Cockney poets embraced their status as outsiders to challenge the status quo and advocate for social change.

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[86] Jeffrey N. Cox, *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School,* p. 12.

It is exactly for this reason that the Cockney writers faced censorship, persecution, and legal challenges for their radical views and outspoken activism. Despite these obstacles, they remained firm in their commitment to free speech and political dissent, using their works to challenge authority[87]. Hunt's dedication to the principles of free expression, as we have seen, is evident in his periodical *The Examiner*, where he defended the right of writers to express their opinions without fear of censorship or reprisal.

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[87] Jeffrey N. Cox, *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School,* pp. 19-20.

2. Leigh Hunt: The Examiner and the Formation of the Circle

2.1 Early Career

Leigh Hunt, born in London in 1784, began his literary career with publications such as *Juvenilia*, but his major contribution was *The Examiner*, the weekly journal that was vital for radical thinkers, poets and artists. During his lifetime Hunt experienced the consequences of his radical ideals and his unwillingness to come to terms with them. In fact, he was sent to prison, where he spent two years. Hunt occupied in the years between 1815 and 1820 a crucial position for the writers of the London radical left[1]. Hunt's relevance in the literary landscape of the early nineteenth century rests on the evidence that the Cockney School would not have been formed without his ability to bring together very different intellectuals based on his personal relationships with them. Hunt's profession as a journalist deeply intertwines with relevant events of his early life so that it is almost unimaginable to consider *The Examiner* without an account of them. His literary circle must be considered in the same prospect, as its members were also Hunt's closest friends and admirers.

Hunt' family background was relevant in defining his future trajectory. Hunt's father, Isaac Hunt, was born into a notable family in the West Indies. Seeking better opportunities, he established himself as a lawyer in Philadelphia[2], where he met and married Mary Shewell, the daughter of a prosperous merchant family. The outbreak of the American Revolutionary War in 1775 placed him in a precarious position. Loyal to the British Crown, he found himself at odds with the revolutionary sentiments sweeping through the colonies. His Loyalist stance made him a target for persecution by the American revolutionaries, forcing him to flee to England to avoid potential arrest and violence[3]. Once in England, Isaac Hunt transitioned from law to religion, taking holy orders in the Church of England. He quickly gained a reputation for his sermons, which drew considerable attention. However, despite his initial success, Isaac Hunt's career in the clergy was undermined by his personal instability, which might have involved financial mismanagement or personal misconduct, and by his theological views, which were considered unorthodox by the standards of the Church of England. In England, the Hunt family experienced both intellectual stimulation and financial instability, which would also be Leigh Hunt's trouble. Despite these challenges, they provided an environment that fostered Leigh Hunt's early interest in literature and the arts. This formative background, characterized by both cultural richness and professional adversity, significantly influenced Hunt's career.

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[1] Jeffrey N. Cox, *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998, p. 39.

[2] Nicholas Roe, Fiery Heart, The First Life of Leigh Hunt, Pimlico, London, 2005, p. 13.

[3] *Ivi,* pp. 17-18.

Leigh Hunt entered Christ's Hospital, a well-regarded charity school in London known for providing a rigorous education to boys from modest backgrounds. This time at Christ's Hospital had a strong impact on his intellectual development and literary tastes. During his years at Christ's Hospital, Hunt developed a deep admiration for the works of poets such as Thomas Gray and William Collins[4]. This admiration was not merely passive, as he actively engaged with their poetry, writing many verses in imitation of their style. His early poems were collected and published in 1801 under the title *Juvenilia; or a Collection of Poems*. *Juvenilia* represents Leigh Hunt's early entrance into poetry during his youth. This anthology was organised in sections dividing the poems based on their form. There were sonnets, elegies, pastorals, odes, and hymns, which offer readers a glimpse into the nascent talent of the poet, representing his imaginative explorations of various themes. Through *Juvenilia*, Hunt delves into the realms of nature, love, life reflections, and societal observations, demonstrating a wide range of interests and inspirations. While the poems may lack the refinement of his later works, they reveal the raw talent and potential that would later characterize his literary endeavours. This collection also served to enter the London's literary and theatrical circles[5]. In addition to writing poetry, Hunt began contributing articles to various newspapers, and a volume of theatrical criticisms was published in 1807. This and other works established him as a thoughtful critic, further solidifying his reputation in the literary world.

2.2 The Examiner and other Major Publications

In 1808, he became editor of *The Examiner*[6], founded by his brother John Hunt, the radical weekly newspaper that would serve as a publishing outlet for the Cockney School's ideas and writings[7]. It was a newspaper that offered weekly reports and editorial commentary from an independent perspective, and it was published and distributed on Sundays. The first number appeared on Sunday 3rd January 1808 and this first issue featured on the front page a political article by Hunt and theatrical reviews. *The Examiner* already showed freedom of thinking and speaking in its articles, and it was evident that it would have to face the government and censorship. The reputation of *The Examiner* grew week by week and the printed copies sales were rising. Now Hunt had a regular salary, and the journal was also read by teachers and scholars, among them by John Keats[8].

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[4] N. Roe, *Fiery Heart,* p. 43.

[5] *Ivi,* pp. 65-67.

[6] Leigh Hunt, *Autobiography with Reminiscences of Friends and Contemporaries*, Vol. II, Smith, Elder and co., London, 1850, p. 1.

[7] J. N. Cox, *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School of Poetry*, p. 42.

Hunt published his first poem of anti-war protest, sharpening his attacks on the corruption of English politics. Hunt was active in many literary and political circles of London. He was a member of the group that gathered at the residence near London of Thomas Hill, the proprietor of *The Monthly Mirror*. *The Monthly Mirror* was a periodical originally founded by Thomas Bellamy, which focused on theatre, in London and the provinces. Hunt contributed a *Memoir of Mr. James Henry Leigh Hunt. Written by Himself with an engraved portrait*, published on April 20, 1810. It was Hunt's first attempt at autobiographical writing, and it was the beginning of the *Autobiography* he would publish forty years later. The meetings of the group were also attended by the brothers James and Horace Smith[9] and it was on this occasions that Hunt's friendship with the two men begun.

In 1810 the brothers Hunt were planning a new magazine, *The Reflector*[10], which was to deal with politics and the fine arts. The purpose of *The Reflector* was to engage the reader in reflections about the age they were living in. Hunt's opinions emerging from the articles were exactly those that can be found in *The Examiner* but speaking with more freedom and openly asserting his will for reform. The first issue of the journal attracted Charles Lamb, who sent to Hunt three contributions under the pseudonym of Elia. Furthermore, Hunt's satirical piece *The Feats of the Poets* was published in *The Reflector.*[11]. *The Feast of the Poets* is Hunt's satirical critique of the literary scene of the early nineteenth century. Hunt takes aim at various poets and writers, showing their pretensions, affectations, and perceived shortcomings. In the poem, Hunt makes caricatures of the poets, portraying them in exaggerated and often absurd ways. Despite its humorous tone, the poem also serves as a reflection of Hunt's own views on the state of poetry and literature, highlighting his disillusionment with certain aspects of the literary establishment[12]. Through *The Feast of the Poets*, Hunt demonstrates his skill as a satirist, using humour as a tool to both entertain and critique the world of letters. *The Reflector* also includes Hunt's suggestive scene that was the prelude of *A Day by the Fire*, an essay in which he describes the simple pleasures of spending a winter's day indoors by the warmth of a fire. He describes the comfort of being wrapped in blankets, the pleasure of reading a good book or engaging in stimulating conversation with friends or family, and the effect of listening to music or playing games. In doing so he celebrates the simple joys of domestic life and finds beauty in the small moments of everyday existence. Among the contributors to *The Reflector* was also the painter Benjamin Haydon, whom Hunt first met in 1807, soon developing a strong friendship.

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[8] N. Roe, *Fiery Heart,* p. 103.

[9] L. Hunt, *Autobiography*, p. 35.

[10] *Ivi*, pp. 83-84.

[11] *Ivi*, p. 84.

Despite his literary success and political activism, Hunt faced numerous personal challenges such as financial difficulties. There was an issue dealing with inheritance[13], because the Hunts were cheated over their fortune by their American relatives, who stole their possessions in Philadelphia leaving them in severe financial straits. Another source of apprehension were Hunt's political views and his refusal to compromise his principles for the sake of financial gain. Also caused by Hunt's political ideals was his imprisonment for two years in 1813 for libelling the Prince Regent in *The Examiner*, a significant event that had profound implications for his personal and professional life[14]. The events leading to Hunt's imprisonment began with his editorial work for *The Examiner,* as Hunt's criticism of the ruling elite, including the Prince Regent, aroused the anger of the authorities, who viewed *The Examiner* as a threat to the status quo.

Hunt had already had troubles with censorship, notably with the publication of the poem *One Thousand Lashes!* in September 1810. The Hunt brothers republished this article from *The Stamford* newspaper, which criticized the army's practice of flogging soldiers. Written by John Scott, a journalist who harshly fought against these brutal acts, the article landed Scott and the Hunt brothers in trouble, charged with seditious libel[15]. The government's argument was that suggesting, as the article did, that soldiers in Napoleon's army were treated more humanely than British soldiers, was a problem for national security. The article detailed various instances of brutal floggings inflicted upon soldiers, highlighting the extreme severity of the punishment in contrast with the treatment of soldiers in Napoleon's army. While the article acknowledged the necessity of discipline in the military, it condemned the excessive cruelty of flogging and questioned its effectiveness in maintaining order. Although the article expressed patriotism and support for Britain's war efforts against France, it crossed a line by suggesting that men might prefer to serve in the French army due to the harsh treatment they faced in the British army. This assertion was deemed too subversive during a time of war, when maintaining morale and discipline within the ranks was of high importance.

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[12] N. Roe, *Fiery Heart,* pp. 126-127.
[13] *Ivi,* p. 122.
[14] L. Hunt, *Autobiography*, p. 117.
[15] N. Roe, *Fiery Heart,* p. 134.

The trial of the Hunt brothers took place in February 1811, with the prosecution arguing that the article constituted libel likely to incite military disaffection. The defence, led by the lawyer Henry Brougham[16], claimed the right to free discussion on public matters and criticized the brutality of flogging as a disciplinary measure. The jury acquitted the Hunt brothers, but the publisher of the original newspaper in Stamford was not as fortunate, facing conviction in a corresponding trial. The trial for seditious libel was a significant event in Hunt's life and career, highlighting the tension between government censorship and the right to free speech. The trial was discussed and reported throughout the country. Instead of silencing *The Examiner,* it made its editor a prominent national figure. Hunt was now known as a reformist, and he received many invitations from intellectuals. For example, he was invited for dinner at Holland House[17], the most fashionable political and literary Whig salon in London, but as he was afraid that the dinner at Holland House could compromise his cultural independence, he did not accept. Another invitation came in a letter dated 2 March 1811, the first letter he received by Percy Bysshe Shelley. Shelley congratulated Hunt on his declared ideals, and he caught the occasion to introduce himself. Shelley shows in the letter his admiration for Hunt as a political man, and he declares himself a man of liberty[18]. One of Shelley's aims was to have his works published in *The Examiner* to gain a larger audience. But in the end, he was disappointed because Hunt did not reply. The very first article written by Hunt about Shelley that appeared in *The Examiner* was published on 24 March 1811. It dealt with religious intellectual freedom in universities, and it was an obvious response to the expulsion of Shelley from Oxford, caused by Shelley's refusal to disavow his publication *The Necessity of Atheism.* Hunt's article was an assault on the bigotry that Shelley had experienced at Oxford[19], and it was the starting point of a literary and personal relationship between Hunt and Shelley that lasted for many years.

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[16] N. Roe, *Fiery Heart,* p. 176.
[17] L. Hunt, *Autobiography*, p. 107.
[18] T. Morton, "Receptions", *The Cambridge Companion to Shelley*, p. 21.

On 16 March 1812 Hunt accepted Charles Lamb's invitation to meet at his house. Lamb had already published the poem *The Triumph of the Whale* in the *Examiner* so that he wanted to celebrate with his friend. The poem was satirical and risky as they were once again mocking the Prince Regent. Lamb satirized the Prince Regent's physical appearance, his promiscuity, and the behaviour of his followers. While Lamb himself was not charged with libel, his poem may have contributed to the Hunts' legal troubles.

Io! Paean! Io! sing
To the funny people's King.
Not a mightier whale than this
In the vast Atlantic is;
Not a fatter fish than he
Flounders round the polar sea.
[…] Name or title what has he?
Is he Regent of the Sea?
From this difficulty free us,
Buffon, Banks or sage Linnaeus.
With his wondrous attributes
Say what appellation suits.
By his bulk, and by his size,
By his oily qualities,
This (or else my eyesight fails),
This should be the PRINCE OF WHALES.[20]

In fact, the troubles with the government did not end for Hunt. In March 1812, he published a satirical article in *The Examiner* criticizing the Prince Regent's extravagant lifestyle and accusing him of corruption and incompetence. The article, titled *The Prince on St. Patrick's Day,* highlights the widespread dissatisfaction and disillusionment with the Prince Regent's actions and character, mainly because there was the general expectation that he would support parliamentary reform and Catholic emancipation, which in fact he did not. Hunt and John mock the attempts by government-aligned newspapers to downplay public discontent, suggesting that their defence of the Prince Regent is motivated by self-interest and a desire to maintain political favour[21]. The article describes a public meeting, ostensibly for charitable purposes, organized on St. Patrick's Day[22]. While the King received enthusiastic applause, the Prince Regent met only with partial applause and loud hisses, indicating the audience's disdain. The article also criticizes the *Morning Post*, a newspaper known for its support of the monarchy, for its absurdly exaggerated praise of the Prince Regent, showing how it clashed with the reality of the Regent's behaviour, which included financial irresponsibility and amorality.

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[19] N. Roe, *Fiery Heart,* p. 141.

[20] *Ivi,* p. 159.

This article caused a fourth indictment for libel against *The Examiner*[23]. During the months preceding the trial, Hunt took every opportunity to leave the city with all its stress. Every time he was free to leave London, he went to rural Hampstead. Even though suburban life was more solitary and quieter, there were often friends to meet, and Hunt also increased his activity as a poet, which gave him the opportunity to escape the professional and personal crisis he was facing. The articles published in *The Examiner* during this year, 1812, are characterized by the juxtaposition of Hunt's two-faced writing, i.e. on the one side political pieces dealing with war and foreign affairs and on the other side poetry of domesticity, which celebrated the tranquillity of life, as in the sonnet *To Hampstead*.

Sweet upland, to whose walks, with fond repair,
Out of thy western slope I took my rise
Day after day, and on these feverish eyes
Met the moist fingers of the bathing air,—
If health, unearned of thee, I may not share,
Keep it, I pray thee, where my memory lies,
In thy green lanes, brown dells, and breezy skies,
Till I return, and find thee doubly fair.
Wait then my coming, on that lightsome land,
Health, and the Joy that out of nature springs,
And Freedom's air- blown locks;—but stay with me,
Friendship, frank entering with the cordial hand,
And Honour, and the Muse with growing wings,

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[21] N. Roe, *Fiery Heart,* p. 161.

[22] Louis Landré, "Leigh Hunt: His Contribution to English Romanticism", *Keats-Shelley Journal*, Vol.8, p. 136, online, https://www.jstor.org/stable/30213258.

[23] *Ivi*, p. 164.

And Love Domestic, smiling equably.[24]

With the trial set for June 1812, Hunt was prepared for the worst and drafted an article that was to be published the day after the sentence. But the sentence of the trial was suspended for some months leaving Hunt with a recurrence of the terrible anxiety attacks from which he had suffered in previous years. In August he started a tour near London, visiting Bath and Taunton, where he continued to publish articles for *The Examiner* and started the opening lines about Ravenna in *The Story of Rimini*, giving readers a description, through senses, closer to the English countryside than the Italian Adriatic coast[25]. In the meantime, he was also drafting the sections of the poem. At Taunton, Hunt experienced the climax of his illness, being overwhelmed by anxiety also caused by his debts and he was not able to publish the usual number of articles in *The Examiner.* Hunt in this period had a close relationship with his defender in the trial, Henry Brougham, as they were engaged in the same liberal political ideals.

At the end of September of the same year, Hunt found a cottage in Hampstead and moved there during the first day of October. It is interesting that later John Keats would visit frequently the place, as it was also the home of his fiancée, Fanny Browne. Hunt found solace during the days lived in Hampstead before the sentence. He was aware that the fourth accusation for libel would probably send him to prison, as the article provoked outrage among the government and the royal court. Henry Brougham attempted to defend the two brothers Hunt trying to focus the attention on the freedom of making commentaries on public affairs and stating that their intention was not to offend the Prince Regent[26] , but when the Court issued the sentence in February 1813, the Hunts were declared guilty of having published defamatory libel on the Prince Regent. They were sentenced to two years in prison and a fee of £500 each, which was Hunt's income of a year[27]. Not only was the imprisonment severe, but Hunt also found himself again in debt to pay the fee. John Hunt was sent to the Colbath-fields prison, which was known as the severest prison in Britain, whereas Leigh Hunt was sent to Horsemonger Lane, Southwark, a prison with degrading sanitary conditions. However, Hunt was able to live a decent life even though he was in prison, mainly because he bribed some jailers.

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[24] Leigh Hunt, "Sonnet to Hampstead", *The Examiner*, No. 296, 29 August 1813, online, https://archive.org/details/sim_examiner-a-weekly-paper-on-politics-literature-music_1813-08-22_295/mode/2up.

[25] N. Roe, *Fiery Heart,* p. 208-209.

[26] *Ivi,* p. 176-177.

[27] *Ivi*, p. 181.

Hunt's imprisonment became famous among liberal intellectuals and political activists, who viewed him as a martyr for the cause of free speech and the freedom of the press. His case attracted widespread attention, sparking debates about the limits of government's power and the importance of civil liberties in a democratic society. Among his supporters there were Shelley and Haydon. Hunt received gifts in prison such as books, paper to write, and some food. Shelley also wanted to pay his fee, but in that moment, he could not afford it. Almost immediately after Hunt's imprisonment Haydon sent him a letter, dated 12 February 1813, which shows his concern and affection for his friend.

> I am most anxious see you, but have been refused admittance, and was told yesterday you would write to your friends when you wished to see them. […] All your friends were affected, and all complained of the cruelty and severity of your sentence. […] I assure you, my dear Hunt, I think of you often, with the most melancholy and exquisite sensations. […] But I declare I felt a choking sensation when I rose to retire to rest after this waking abstraction. I have no doubt we shall talk over this part of our existence when we are a little advanced in life with excessive interest. Let misfortune confirm instead of shake your principles, and you will issue again into the world as invulnerable as you left it. Take care of your health; use as much exercise as you can. […] and believe me unalterably your faithful and attached friend,
>
> B. R. HAYDON.[28]

Despite the challenges, Hunt continued to write and publish articles from his prison cell and to advocate for political reform and social justice. His friends and collaborators within *The Examiner* continued to write and publish articles in the journal. Hunt was tormented by the thought that he would die in prison, but the many friends who came to visit and wrote to him gave him hope. During the first months in prison, Hunt wrote, probably because he was fearing death, a collection of memories, which would form the basis of his *Autobiography,* describing his past events and giving also hints of his life in prison. At the end of the first year of imprisonment Hunt was moved from the cell to an infirmary room and he had also the possibility of having walks in the garden of Horsemonger Lane[29].

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[28] R. H. Stoddard, editor, Benjamin R. Haydon, Letter "To Leigh Hunt in Prison for Libelling the Prince Regent", February 12, 1813, *Life, Letters and Table Talk,* Scribner, Armstrong and Company, New York, 1876, pp. 140-141, online, https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=PZsaAAAAYAAJ&pg=GBS.PP1&hl=it.

Besides Haydon, friends and supporters visited him during the time spent in prison, for example Charles and Mary Lamb, who visited Hunt frequently, but also William Hazlitt. Hazlitt was an intellectual and parliamentary reporter for *The Morning Chronicle,* raised in a family characterized by political ideals of dissent. He also had in common with Hunt the American background, as their fathers taught in Philadelphia in the same academy. The two met for the first time at Lamb's house and Hazlitt went to visit on different occasions Hunt in prison[30]. There began a strong friendship which would bring Hazlitt to leave his office in *The Morning Chronicle* to become a prominent figure of *The Examiner*. Among the visitors there was also Charles Cowden Clarke, who met Hunt shortly before his imprisonment. He was a reader of *The Examiner* and a great admirer of Hunt both as a man and as a writer. Cowden Clarke had the merit of reporting the conversations he had with Hunt to the young John Keats, inspiring his interest in Hunt's point of view about politics and poetry[31]. For Hunt the prison became a sort of second home as he had some comforts, and he received many visitors who enlightened his days. During this period Hunt's wife, Marian, could not visit him because of their son's fragile health. She went to spend some months to the seaside to try to heal their son's illness and Hunt did not see them for a while, keeping in touch only through correspondence. In the meantime, he was visited often by his wife's sister Bess and the two probably engaged in a secret relationship, revealing Hunt's tendency to sexual freedom. This sexual openness could be later seen in *The Story of Rimini* even if it is not clear if Hunt's personal life and the poem are connected.

Byron met Hunt during a visit arranged by a common friend, Tom Moore. Byron was already famous thanks to *Childe Harold* and Hunt had already reported his successes in *The Examiner.* Byron returned to visit Hunt three days later as he admired Hunt's integrity and spirit. Hunt and Byron continued their correspondence, but they would not meet again until Hunt's release in 1815. In the same summer of 1813 Hunt published three essays in *The Examiner* dealing about Poets Laureate[32], offering reflections on their lives and works. Hunt delved into the significance of the poet laureateship and examined various aspects of their role, such as its historical evolution, the responsibilities and expectations placed upon laureates, and the literary merit of their works. Hunt proposed the abolition of the Poet-Laureate and sketched a line of those he admired as independent poets, such as Dante, Petrarch, and Shakespeare. He also criticized poets who decided to renounce that independence to be appointed Laureate, such as Robert Southey. Hunt described Southey as a sort of renegade Jacobite.

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[29] L. Hunt, *Autobiography*, p. 141

[30] N. Roe, *Fiery Heart,* p. 191-192.

[31] *Ibidem.*

[32] *Ivi,* p. 199.

In 1813, James Cawthorn, a publisher, asked Hunt to complete an extended edition of *The Feast of the Poets,* previously published in *The Reflector*. Hence, in 1814 Hunt was preparing *The Feast of the Poets* for publication in expanded form with notes and a preface[33]. As we have said, in the poem Hunt employs satire to humorously depict some of his contemporaries, offering pointed commentary on their literary and personal characteristics. Wordsworth[34], for instance, is humorously portrayed as experiencing a second childhood, suggesting a regression in his intellectual faculties. Meanwhile, Coleridge is depicted as confused in his writing, perhaps alluding to his struggles with opium addiction and creative productivity. A notable scene in the poem involves Apollo hosting a gathering where certain poets are invited to dine with him. Thomas Moore, Walter Scott, Robert Southey, and Thomas Campbell are honoured with this invitation, symbolizing their esteemed status in the literary world. However, Samuel Rogers is relegated to having only tea, a humorous gesture that underscores his perceived lesser standing among the poets. Hunt's perspective on Wordsworth evolves from satire to admiration, acknowledging Wordsworth's intellect, describing him as "a great living poet" "at the head of a new and great age of poetry"[35].

Hunt's notes on the reputation of various poets, particularly within the context of British Romantic poetry, aimed to describe the developments in literary standards. Hunt demonstrated, with *The Feast of the Poets*, that he was a supporter of the pioneering efforts of British Romantic poets, especially those exemplified in works like *Lyrical Ballads,* published fifteen years earlier. Like Wordsworth, Hunt wanted to adopt a more vital and natural style and overturn the neoclassical rules emphasizing order and clarity, reflecting the intellectual and aesthetic ideals of the Enlightenment. For Wordsworth and Hunt poetry was a form of therapy, a more intimate and expressive form of verse. In his commentary, Hunt identified with Wordsworth's poetic principles, but he distanced himself from his notion that the solitary experience was an occasion for contemplation. Hunt, who experienced it during the years of prison, saw it instead as confinement, which painfully separated him from his affections and from Hampstead. Hazlitt, in his review of Wordsworth's *Excursion,* expanded on Hunt's ideas, particularly emphasizing the egotistical aspects of Wordsworth's contemplative style[36]. Although Byron's contributions were not extensively discussed in early editions of the poem, Hunt recognized his importance as a poet. In the 1815 edition, Byron was introduced with praise from Apollo, indicating a friendship between the two poets.

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[33] N. Roe, *Fiery Heart,* p. 201.
[34] *Ivi*, pp. 202-203.
[35] *Ivi,* p. 202.

The Feast of the Poets garnered contrasting reactions from the contemporary literary circles, with responses often reflecting the political inclinations of the reviewers. Among his friends and literary peers, including Byron and Thomas Moore, Hunt received favourable feedback. However, the reception was more contentious among other magazines, which were often divided along political lines. Critics from conservative publications such as the *British Critic*, *New Monthly Magazine*, and *The Satirist* condemned Hunt's poem as seditious. They argued that his satirical portrayal of contemporary poets, including Wordsworth and Coleridge, was essentially an attack on the established literary norms and societal values. Conversely, publications with liberal or radical leanings, such as *The Champion*, which featured a review by John Scott, stating that he was pleased that a political writer was also a brilliant poet, and *the Monthly Review*, praised Hunt's work for its wit and irreverence.

In February 1814, Hunt had already spent a year in prison, but the winter was harsh, and he had few visitors, almost only the Lambs: "The Lambs came to comfort me in all weathers, hail or sunshine, in daylight and in darkness, even in the dreadful frost and snow of the beginning of 1814"[37]. But in Spring the news of Napoleon's abdication arrived in London and the citizens showed enthusiastic patriotism. The summer of 1814 was characterized by grand festivities and a sense of jubilation following the end of conflict. However, divergent perspectives emerged regarding the significance of recent events. William Hazlitt, strong in his admiration for Napoleon and the ideals of the French Revolution, found himself at odds with others, including Lamb and Hunt, who maintained a more distant perspective, acknowledging Napoleon's downfall while also recognizing his potential for greatness. For

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[36] N. Roe, *Fiery Heart,* p. 203.
[37] L. Hunt, *Autobiography*, p. 153.

Hunt, the transition from Napoleon to the restored Bourbon dynasty signalled a shift in political dynamics, prompting reflection on the notion of freedom and governance. While Hunt viewed the return of the Bourbons sceptically, considering it a choice between two despotisms, he remained hopeful for the establishment of genuine freedom in France. Against this backdrop of political upheaval, Hunt's literary pursuits flourished, infused with poetic fervour. His *Ode for the Spring of 1814* captured the spirit of revival, celebrating the end of a tumultuous era, marked by the departure of a powerful figure whose rule brought upheaval and strife to the world. With his departure, the atmosphere shifts, and the world finds itself free from the oppressive grip of tyranny. At the heart of this transformation stands Liberty, the very essence of true existence, which with her presence fills the souls of joy and liberation.

> The vision then is past,
> That held the eyes of nations,
> Swept in his own careering blast,
> That shook the earth's foundations!
> […]
> O Liberty! O breath
> Of all that's true existence!
> Thou at whose touch the soul, at death.
> But leaps to joy and distance; […][38]

Ode for the Spring of 1814 was published in *The Examiner* in April and inspired other works on the same topic by Hunt’s friends. For example, Byron wrote *Ode on Napoleon Bonaparte* and Charles Cowden Clarke wrote a *Sonnet on Liberty*. John Keats, who was following the events published in *The Examiner,* wrote in the same period the sonnet *On Peace*[39]. The poem begins with an exclamation, expressing profound relief at the advent of peace after enduring a prolonged period of conflict. Through direct address, peace is personified, and Britain is portrayed as a “war-surrounded isle” giving the sense of the conflict prior to peace’s arrival. The rhetorical question further emphasizes the deference to peace, indicating a willingness to yield to its authority. Then, Keats evokes a tranquil natural scene, suggesting that humanity’s true potential can be realized through harmony with nature. By metaphorically uniting England with Europe, he suggests a shared experience of triumphant peace. In the poem's concluding lines, Keats turns his attention to Europe, worried of a possible resurgence of tyranny, and through imperative verbs, he highlights the sense of precariousness of peace. The metaphorical imagery of broken chains evokes the powerful symbolism of freedom, concluding the poem with a dual celebration of Europe's liberation.

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[38] Leigh Hunt, “Ode for The Spring 1814”, *The Examiner*, 17 April 1814, No. 329, online https://archive.org/details/sim_examiner-a-weekly-paper-on-politics-literature-music_1814-04-17_329/page/n9/mode/2up.

[39] N. Roe, *Fiery Heart,* p. 213.

> O Peace! and dost thou with thy presence bless
> The dwellings of this war-surrounded Isle;
> Soothing with placid brow our late distress,
> Making the triple kingdom brightly smile?
> Joyful I hail thy presence; and I hail
> The sweet companions that await on thee;
> Complete my joy let not my first wish fail,
> Let the sweet mountain nymph thy favourite be,
> With England's happiness proclaim Europa's Liberty.
> O Europe! let not sceptred tyrants see
> That thou must shelter in thy former state;
> Keep thy chains burst, and boldly say thou art free;
> Give thy kings law leave not uncurbed the great;
> So with the horrors past thou'lt win thy happier fate![40]

During the summer Hunt wrote in prison *The Descent of Liberty,* a masque which was later published in 1815[41]. Hunt states in the preface: "This piece was written partly to vary the hours of imprisonment, partly to indulge the imagination of the author during a season of public joy"[42]. The masque depicts a country cursed by an Enchanter, with shepherds hearing a herald of change. Ultimately, the Enchanter is defeated by fire from the clouds and by figures symbolizing Liberty, and Peace. It was accompanied by a preface detailing the origin and nature of masques as a compound production of drama, poetry, prose and music, from their origins in Italy, through their long neglect in Britain and then their rediscovery by Hunt. The masque, often associated with imaginative freedom, in *The Descent of Liberty* reflects the political climate of 1814 Britain, emphasizing the Liberty that he already expressed in *Ode for the Spring of 1814*. Critical responses to the masque varied. While

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[40] John Keats, "On Peace", *Keats. Sonetti*, Garzanti, Milano, 2000, p. 2.
[41] N. Roe, *Fiery Heart,* p. 215.
[42] Leigh Hunt, *The Descent of Liberty, A Mask*, Paternoster Row, London, 1815, Preface, p. IV.

Hunt's friend John Hamilton Reynolds enjoyed it, not all reviews were positive, with some critics dismissing it as vulgar and politically motivated.

But the summer of 1814 was not easy for Hunt, as the sanitary conditions in prison were awful. Illnesses such as cholera and typhoid spread in the muggy air of Horsemonger Lane and Hunt was longing even more for his return to Hampstead. His anxiety attacks grew, as the fear of his own death returned, mainly because his health was worsening. He described his conditions in the articles published in *The Examiner,* and he reported his state of health also in his *Autobiography,* where he wrote: "An illness of a long standing, which required very different treatment, had by this time been burnt in upon me […]"[43]. Byron was concerned with Hunt's declining health, which he learned about through *The Examiner,* but also Haydon was worried, and they both wrote or visited him in prison. So did Charles Cowden Clarke, who did not stop his visits and, when *The Descent of Liberty* was printed, in December, was among the first to read it together with Byron. By the end of the year Hunt had new plans for *The Examiner,* expressing his project for a future series of articles of *Miscellaneous Interest, Literature, Manners, &c.*[44] This choice influenced the journalism perspective of the period, and we can see a direct example in John Scott.

John Scott, who on some occasions visited Hunt in prison, was a notable British journalist and editor, who began his career in journalism as an editor for the *Stamford News*. His work gained significant attention, and he later became involved with *The London Magazine*, which he transformed into a leading literary periodical. When launching the London version of the popular regional weekly newspaper *Drakard's Stamford News*, John Scott recognized an important predecessor in *The Examiner*[45]. He envisioned his newspaper focusing on political events while also achieving a broader scope by dedicating attention to subjects like moral and manners, which were often excluded by other newspapers, except for *The Examiner*. Scott's decision reflected the blend of literary and political content that Hunt had supported in his publications.

Hunt's approach to *The Examiner* became unique as it combined the immediacy of a weekly newspaper with the depth typically found in quarterly reviews, providing a personal touch to publications. Hunt's style was inspired by the intimate periodical writing of Addison and Steele, and it successfully blended literary and political commentary, fostering a sense of intimacy with readers that the quarterlies could not offer. Scott admired *The Examiner* for its ability to engage with current events while also exploring broader cultural topics in a reflective way. The weekly format of *The Examiner* allowed for a continuous engagement with topics of public interest, making it a sort of developing scene of contemporary life. William Cobbett, another prominent writer of the period, criticized Hunt's blending of literary and political writing, accusing him of diluting the political impact of *The Examiner* with sentimental and literary content. Cobbett argued that Hunt's shift towards a more literary style, especially following his imprisonment from 1813 to 1815, weakened the paper's political effectiveness[46]. Despite Cobbett's criticisms, Hunt believed that combining literary and political writing was not only innovative but also effective in engaging a broader audience, as this strategy was able to attract readers with literary interests, who might not otherwise be interested in political discourse. This approach was revolutionary, blending the personal with the political and literary, thus setting a precedent for future periodicals.

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[43] L. Hunt, *Autobiography*, p. 158.
[44] N. Roe, *Fiery Heart,* p. 219.
[45] David Stewart, "Filling the Newspaper Gap: Leigh Hunt, *Blackwood's* and the Development of the Miscellany", *Victorian Periodicals Review*, John Hopkins University Press, 2009, Vol. 42, No.2, p. 158, online, https://www.jstor.org/stable/27760218.

Towards the final days of his imprisonment, Hunt introduced in *The Examiner The Round Table* essays, which represented a collaborative effort between him, Hazlitt and his brother John[47]. The notion of the round table was symbolically significant to Hunt, coming from the legendary court of King Arthur. Although Hunt acknowledged that King Arthur was a mythical figure created by poets, he valued the idea for its inspiration. The Arthurian round table, associated with chivalry, equality, and noble quests, served as a metaphor for Hunt's vision of literary and moral reform. He believed that the ideal of King Arthur could attract and motivate people of great ability and character, much as he aimed to do with his writings in *The Examiner*. The essays in *The Round Table* were a series of literary and conversational pieces meant to reflect a free-flowing dialogue. Hunt described them as a "stream of conversation"[48] and this approach was intended to evoke a sense of spontaneity and intellectual freedom. In *The Round Table*, the Hunts engaged with a series of topics, ranging from literary criticism and analysis of contemporary works to discussions on political events and social issues. Drawing on their combined intellect, they provided readers with incisive insights into the prevailing trends in literature, offering both praise and critique. One notable aspect of *The Round Table* is its conversational tone and accessibility, which aimed to engage a broad readership in matters of literature and politics. The essays are characterized by their clarity of expression, and humour, making them both informative and entertaining to read.

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[46] D. Stewart, "Filling the Newspaper Gap: Leigh Hunt, *Blackwood's* and the Development of the Miscellany", p. 161.
[47] N. Roe, *Fiery Heart,* pp. 291-292.
[48] *Ivi*, p. 221.

On 3 February 1815 Hunt was released. Seeing the landscape of Hampstead made him feel at peace, but instead of just happiness from his release, he also felt a sense of disorientation, as he found himself in a world different from the one that he had left. He expressed these feelings in the fourteenth chapter of his *Autobiography*.

> The bitterest evil I suffered was in consequence of having been confined so long in one spot. The habit stuck me in my return home, in a very extraordinary manner […]. I have never thoroughly recovered the shock given my constitution. […] I enjoyed, after all, such happy moments with my friends, even in prison, that in the midst of beautiful climate which I afterwards visited, I was sometimes in doubt whether I would not rather have been in jail than in Italy.[49]

Despite having endured considerable physical and emotional hardships during his time in prison, Hunt emerged from the experience with his principles intact, continuing to write and publish articles that challenged the prevailing elite. After the release he was already the leading figure for a new generation of young liberal-minded writers and artists: Haydon, Shelley, Smith, Lamb, Byron, Cowden Clarke, Hazlitt, Reynold and later John Keats. After prison Hunt moved to Edgware Road, near his brother John's house. For the rest of the year Hunt wrote no more theatrical pieces, assigning the job to Hazlitt; instead, he continued the political publications, the essays for *The Round Table*, and *The Story of Rimini*. In this period the news that Napoleon had left his exile in Elba and had returned to France was vehemently discussed in Hunt's circle of friends and numerous articles dealing with this topic were published between March and June in *The Examiner*.

In April 1815, a significant cultural exchange unfolded when Leigh Hunt received an unexpected parcel: a presentation copy of William Wordsworth's new two-volume edition of *Poems*. Hunt, a fervent admirer of Wordsworth's poetry despite their political differences, reciprocated by sending his *Descent of Liberty*[50]. This gesture initiated a respectful correspondence between the two poets. Byron, who, upon his return to London, actively participated in the management of Drury Lane Theatre, extended generous invitations to Hunt and, despite his frequent illnesses, Hunt sometimes accepted. The news of the Battle of Waterloo provoked mixed reactions. Hunt, committed to liberty and truth, expressed revulsion at the carnage and war. In contrast, Haydon celebrated Britain's victory with fervent patriotism, reflecting the divergent responses within their circle. The aftermath of Waterloo permeated their work and conversations, with Hazlitt, a staunch Bonapartist, deeply mourning Napoleon's defeat, while others like Wordsworth and Southey produced patriotic odes. Hunt in his article *Victory of Waterloo,* published in *The Examiner*, gave an account of the consequences of the Battle of Waterloo. Among these events, Hunt's philosophical reflections grew more profound, particularly his views on good and evil and the origin of human actions. He embraced a deist perspective, finding solace in the belief that sorrow in one world was necessary for happiness in another. These ideas resonated with younger poets like John Keats. Hunt's *Examiner* articles on Waterloo were essential reading for Keats, shaping his vision of life's trials as a necessary part of a grander system of salvation.

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[49] L. Hunt, *Autobiography*, p. 158-159.
[50] N. Roe, *Fiery Heart,* p. 231.

During the summer of 1815, released from prison and in financial troubles, Hunt faced chaotic business arrangements and mounting debts. Despite these challenges, he continued his literary pursuits, including the ambitious *Story of Rimini*. In October, Hunt moved to the Vale of Health, a modest cottage that became a hub for his literary activities. Surrounded by his family and a small cluster of buildings, Hunt found solace in this new setting, despite ongoing financial pressures. In his letter to Hunt dated October 22nd, 1815, Byron offered a mixed assessment of Hunt's work, praising its originality and overall conception while pointing out its shortcomings in terms of style and execution. He tactfully suggested areas for improvement, particularly in terms of clarity and avoiding eccentricities in language. Hunt's response to Byron's feedback demonstrates his willingness to defend his artistic choices while also acknowledging the need for improvement. In his letter dated 30 October 1815, Hunt expressed gratitude for Byron's observations and outlined his approach to the criticism, nevertheless he defended his stylistic experiments, emphasizing the importance of an idiomatic poetical voice challenging for the 'nativeness of feeling and language'[51] in poetry.

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[51] N. Roe, *Fiery Heart,* p. 244.

By the end of the year Hunt was searching for a publisher for *The Story of Rimini*, and in the intricate negotiations between Hunt and John Murray, Byron's intervention played an essential role. Initially, Hunt sought an advance of £450–£500 for *The Story of Rimini*. However, Murray proposed a trial edition consisting of 500–750 copies, with profits to be shared and the copyright reverting to Hunt after the first edition[52]. This pragmatic approach aimed to mitigate Murray's risk while offering Hunt the opportunity for future gains if the poem proved successful. Despite his initial disappointment, Hunt accepted Murray's terms, acknowledging their fairness and Murray's belief in the poem's potential. Murray, who knew Hunt's financial vulnerabilities and poetic aspirations, strategically balanced Hunt's needs with the commercial considerations of publishing, securing a deal that satisfied both parties. Murray's decision to publish the poem in an edition of 750 copies reflected his confidence in the literary merit of the poem and its commercial viability.

Hunt, as we have said, began *The Story of Rimini* during the years of confinement and it was then published in 1816. The poem draws inspiration from Dante's Inferno, depicting the tragic love affair between Paolo and Francesca, leading to their untimely deaths caused by societal constraints and familial obligations. Hunt's work explores the themes of love, betrayal, and the consequences of forbidden passion, set against the backdrop of medieval Italian aristocratic society. Hunt's retelling of this classic tale captures the emotional intensity and tragedy of the original narrative while adding Hunt's own poetic taste.

Hunt's stylistic choices play a crucial role in shaping the poem's impact. By loosening traditional rhyming structures and incorporating colloquial language, he infuses the narrative with a sense of immediacy and authenticity which invites readers to acknowledge the complexities of human nature and emotions. Moreover, Hunt pays close attention to sensory details, describing the sights, sounds, and sensations of the characters' surroundings. This helps to bring the setting of medieval Italy to life and immerse the reader in the story. For example, the opening canto gives readers a sensational picture of landscape in Ravenna, setting the stage for the drama of political intrigue and personal conflict. Subsequent cantos delve into the complexities of the characters' emotions and relationships, revealing layers of societal expectations and personal desires. Hunt's narrative skilfully switches from lively descriptions of scenes to profound explorations of human psychology, drawing readers into the intricacies of the story.

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[52] N. Roe, *Fiery Heart,* p. 245-246.

The Story of Rimini inspired John Keats, whose poetic path had already crossed Hunt's. In 1815 Keats was a student at Guy's Hospital and during summer he wrote some sentimental verses. Keats' poem on solitude, dated November 1815 and signed 'JK' attracted Hunt's attention[53] and appeared in *The Examiner* on 5 May 1816. This was Keats' first published poem and for Hunt it was a promising debut. Hunt decided to publish the sonnet mainly because he admired the Petrarchan form and its Italian associations, and he was delighted that Keats' solitude did not follow the Wordsworthian model but was instead a populated scene of meetings and conversations with friends. Hunt published the poem, but he did not know yet who 'JK' was. He inserted the poem *O Solitude* between pieces of political discussion, and it was the sign that in periods of troubles it was the solitude described by Keats that should be taken as an example. During the year Hunt published more of his own poems in *The Examiner*, which contributed to form a circle of community.[54]. Many of the poems dealt with the landscape of Hampstead, identifying himself as a suburban poet whose poetry developed from experiencing city and country life in proximity.

During the summer of 1816 Hunt's problems as debtor and his public publishing arrangements were becoming more and more complicated. In March, Hunt sought financial assistance from Murray, requesting £50 against the sales of *The Story of Rimini*. Murray responded promptly, detailing the number of copies on hand and the potential profit Hunt stood to gain. Despite Murray's calculation indicating £42 was owed to Hunt, he made up the difference to reach £50. However, financial problems persisted as Hunt attempted to negotiate the copyright of *The Story of Rimini* in April, hoping for an advance of £450, which Murray hesitated to provide[55]. The situation worsened after the *Quarterly*'s negative review of the poem.

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[53] N. Roe, *Fiery Heart,* p. 259.
[54] *Ivi,* p. 261.
[55] *Ivi,* pp. 263-264.

2.3 The Story of Rimini: Criticism

Upon its publication, *The Story of Rimini* received contrasting reviews, with some critics praising its originality and emotional depth while others criticized its perceived vulgarity. *The Blackwood's Magazine* began to publish a series of attacks, the first being published in October 1817. Hunt is described as a man of limited education, unfamiliar with classical languages, and possessing a superficial understanding of Italian and French literature[56]. The article is a bitter critique of Hunt and the Cockney School of Poetry, which Lockhart defines as a "sect"[57], condemning them for their lack of true poetic merit and labelling them as vulgar, tasteless, and morally depraved. The critique extends to Hunt's poetry, particularly to his work *The Story of Rimini*, which is acknowledged for some tolerable passages but condemned for its overall bad taste and referred to as disgusting. The criticism also extends to Hunt's personal life and social standing, and his supposed indecency and immorality are condemned.

The second attack, in November 1817, entirely focuses on *The Story of Rimini*. Lockhart touches on different themes giving a denigrating image of the work and of Hunt's respectability. He takes issue with Hunt's treatment of the theme of incest suggesting that Hunt's handling of it is inappropriate and lacking the gravity that such a theme demands[58], having treated it with "ill-timed levity"[59]. He states that due to such frivolity, the reader is encouraged to feel a sense of disgust.

In the number of July 1818, Lockhart accuses Hunt of having a tendency to the lowest passions of which he himself is the representative in his circle. Hunt is portrayed as morally corrupted, with a "loathsome vulgarity" and an "irritable temper"[60]. Lockhart presents himself as the one who has the strength to denounce this immoral man and his circle of "capricious friendships"[61]. Furthermore, he presents serious accusations against Hunt, such as being a tyrant in the family, having a wife described as the most abject of slaves, being devoted to gratifying passions and engaging in improper relations with his wife's sister. Lockhart also affirms that the content of *The Story of Rimini* leads the public to speculations and charges on Hunt's family life and to the identification of Hunt with the poem's main character.

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[56] E. L. De Montluzin, "Killing the Cockneys", p. 91.

[57] J. G. Lockhart, "On the Cockney School of Poetry. No. I", *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, Vol. 2, No. 7, October 1817, p. 39, online, https://lordbyron.org/doc.php?&choose=JoLockh.1817.Cockney1.xml.

[58] J. G. Lockhart, "On the Cockney School of Poetry. No. II", *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, Vol. 2, No. 8, November 1817, p. 194, online, https://lordbyron.org/doc.php?&choose=JoLockh.1817.Cockney2.xml.

[59] *Ibidem.*

[60] J. G. Lockhart, "On the Cockney School of Poetry. No. III", *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, Vol. 3, No. 16, July 1818, p. 453, online, https://lordbyron.org/doc.php?&choose=JoLockh.1818.Cockney3.xml.

[61] *Ibidem.*

In the article dated April 1819, the author delves into an analysis of the Cockney School of Poetry, focusing primarily on Keats and Hunt, but giving general attributes to the whole group. The Cockney poets are harshly criticized for their excessive self-centeredness, with specific emphasis on Hunt's egotism. Lockhart argues that none of the Cockneys are men of genius. He specifically mentions three prominent Cockneys: Leigh Hunt, referred to as the "Cockney Homer", William Hazlitt, called the "Cockney Aristotle", and Benjamin Haydon, dubbed the "Cockney Raphael"[62]. Leigh Hunt is portrayed as the most amusing of the Cockney egotists, suggesting that he constantly published works on the *Examiner* that are dedicated to himself, regardless of the subject matter.

The article published in October 1819 humorously critiques Hunt's portrayal of social scenes and his association with fellow Cockneys, emphasizing the absurdity of their activities and interactions, focusing on his friendships with fellow writers like John Keats and Charles Lamb, and their propensity for tea-drinking gatherings. For Lockhart, these gatherings are characterized by lack of genuine sociality. He states that Hunt wants the company of others only for his own enjoyment. The criticism also underscores the perception of Hunt as a literary opportunist who thrives on the ideas of others. Afterwards, Lockhart dissects Hunt's love for the countryside as expressed in his poetry, portraying him as a suburban poet whose understanding of nature is limited to the outskirts of Hampstead. Hunt is also criticized for never venturing beyond his familiar environment and for lacking a genuine appreciation for nature, implying that he approaches it with a "Cockney's eye"[63] rather than a poet's eye.

The following article, published in December 1822, presents an assessment of Hunt's character, labelling him a fool. This insult is delivered with finality, emphasizing Z.'s disdain for Hunt's actions and writing. This is an open attack on Hunt's character, intellect, and literary endeavours, portraying him as an arrogant, inept, and subservient individual unworthy of respect or admiration. It reflects the critic's animosity towards Hunt and the Cockneys. Hunt is described as the "Cockney Monarch"[64] of his circle. Lockhart continues the critique of Leigh Hunt and his Cockney associates, mocking their literary pretensions, clumsy attempts at poetry, and perceived inadequacies.

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[62] J. G. Lockhart, "On the Cockney School of Poetry. No. V", *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, Vol. 5, No. 25, April 1819, p. 97, online, https://lordbyron.org/doc.php?&choose=JoLockh.1819.Cockney5.xml.

[63] J. G. Lockhart, "On the Cockney School of Poetry. No. VI", *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, Vol. 6, No. 31, October 1819, p.74, online, https://lordbyron.org/doc.php?&choose=JoLockh.1819.Cockney6.xml.

The Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine published in July 1825 the last article of the series "On the Cockney School of Poetry". In this instalment, Lockhart focuses on Hunt's lifestyle and dietary habits, and he states that despite the many efforts of contrasting the Cockney School, Hunt's "Cockneyisms"[65] persists. The critique accuses Hunt of having attempted to gain public interest in his dietary choices by frequently including information about the state of his own health in his articles in *The Examiner*. In doing so, Lockhart derides Hunt's public declarations about his dietary choices and paints a humorous picture of his exaggerated self-importance, suggesting that he made his health issues a matter of public concern.

The articles "On the Cockney School of Poetry" published in *The Blackwood's Magazine* offer a critical perspective that is deeply rooted in the cultural and literary context of the time. Lockhart adopts a satirical tone when discussing the Cockney School of Poetry, employing sarcasm, mockery and disdain to criticize the literary movement. While satire can be an effective tool for highlighting shortcomings or absurdities, it can also risk oversimplifying or caricaturing the subject matter. In the case of the Cockney School, the satirical tone may overshadow nuanced analysis, potentially dismissing the movement's contributions or underlying complexities. *The Blackwood's Magazine* was known for its conservative stance, and this bias is evident in the articles on the Cockney School. It's essential to consider the historical context in which these articles were written. The early nineteenth century witnessed significant shifts in literary taste and cultural attitudes, with emerging movements. *The Blackwood's Magazine*, as a product of its time, reflects the conservative milieu against perceived literary radicalism.

The criticism of the Cockney poets often reflects traditional literary values and elitist attitudes prevalent among the magazine's contributors. Some of the criticism levelled against the Cockney poets in *Blackwood's Magazine* exhibit intellectual snobbery, portraying the movement's writers as inferior or unworthy of serious consideration. This attitude can be exclusionary, disregarding the diversity of voices and perspectives within the literary landscape. By denigrating the Cockney poets based on their social background or unconventional style, the articles may perpetuate this classism, limiting the depth of understanding and preventing readers from appreciating the Cockney poets' innovations or contributions to the literary field. While these critiques contribute to the ongoing discourse on literary history, they should be approached with a critical eye, recognizing the limitations of their perspective and the need for a more nuanced understanding of the Cockney poets and their contributions.

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[64] J. G. Lockhart, "On the Cockney School of Poetry. No. VII", *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, Vol. 12, No. 71, December 1822, p. 781, online, https://lordbyron.org/doc.php?&choose=JoLockh.1822.Cockney7.xml.

[65] J. G. Lockhart, "On the Cockney School of Poetry. No. VIII", *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, Vol. 18, No. 102, July 1825, p. 155, online, https://lordbyron.org/doc.php?&choose=JoLockh.1825.Cockney8.xml.

The Quarterly Review published a critique written by John Wilson Croker in January 1816. Crocker began his review by acknowledging that a considerable part of *The Story of Rimini* was written while Hunt was confined in Newgate prison for a libel offense related to his newspaper, so Croker started by criticizing aspects of Hunt's personal life. The review then critiqued Hunt's attempt to establish new principles of poetry and criticism and it questioned Hunt's definition of freedom of versification, accusing him of promoting an inaccurate style under the appearance of free expression. The review analysed Hunt's writing style, pointing out what it perceived as grammatical errors, vulgarity, and chaotic language.

> […] Full of mere vulgarities and fugitive phrases and in every page the language is not only the actual, existing language, but an ungrammatical, unauthorised chaotic jargon […][66]

In the reviewer's point of view, Hunt's attempt to assert his own versification and language as superior has failed, and the poem lacks in comparison to other literary works. Furthermore, the conclusion mocks Hunt's dedication of the poem to Lord Byron, ridiculing his pompous language and attempts to align himself with the aristocracy.

> TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE LORD BYRON.
>
> MY DEAR BYRON,
>
> You see what you have brought yourself to by liking my verses. It is taking you unawares, I allow; but you yourself have set example now-a-days of

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[66] John Wilson Croker, "The Story of Rimini, a Poem by Leigh Hunt", *The Quarterly Review*, Vol. XIV, John Murray, London, January 1816, p. 477, online, https://lordbyron.org/doc.php?choose=JoCroke.1816.Hunt.xml.

> poet's dedicating to poet; and it is under that nobler title, as well as the still nobler one of friend, that I now address you. […][67]

Hunt's friend, Charles Cowden Clarke, responded to this negative review publishing an article titled *Address to that Quarterly Reviewer who touched upon Mr. Leigh Hunt's 'Story of Rimini'*[68]. Clarke, outraged by the review, defends Hunt's work and character. His article criticizes Croker's inaccuracies and malicious intent, beginning with the false claim that Hunt was imprisoned in Newgate instead of Horsemonger Lane prison. Clarke also argues that the *Quarterly* reviewer's focus on Hunt's imprisonment is irrelevant to the poem's merit and highlights the unjust nature of such personal attacks. Furthermore, he asserts that the critic's objections to Hunt's grammar, word choice, and poetic style are unfounded as Croker did not understand these features due to either ignorance or deliberate misquotation. Clarke also accuses the reviewer of selecting passages that portray the poem unfavourably while ignoring its better parts. He then criticizes the broader practice of literary reviewing, suggesting that reviewers often base their comments on prejudice, envy, or monetary motives rather than on a genuine evaluation of literary quality[69]. In doing so he accuses *The Quarterly Review* and similar journals of being an obstacle to true literary appreciation and fairness. From this response we understand how the relationship between Hunt and Cowden Clarke was founded on esteem and support, which constituted also the crucial characteristic that united different members in Hunt's circle.

2.4 Hunt, Keats and Shelley

Charles Cowden Clarke has also the merit of having presented the young John Keats to Hunt. Despite having already shown a talent for poetry with the publication of the sonnet *O Solitude* in *The Examiner*, Keats had not yet decided whether to pursue a medical career or a literary one. Through his acquaintance with Hunt, Keats entered his politically engaged literary circle of artists and intellectuals. Keats and Clarke, who were only eight years apart, had long been close friends, with Clarke consistently encouraging Keats' literary pursuits. In the months between September and October 1816, Keats' desire to meet Hunt was strong, despite Charles Cowden Clarke's initial hesitance to arrange an introduction. Keats cleverly employed a letter addressed to Clarke to express his admiration for Hunt's work while subtly underplaying his own poetic abilities.

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[67] Leigh Hunt, *The Story of Rimini, a Poem by Leigh Hunt*, Whitefriars publisher, London, 1816, pp. V-VI.
[68] Charles Cowden Clarke, *Address to that Quarterly Reviewer who Touched upon Mr. Leigh Hunt's 'Story of Rimini'*, R. Jennings, 1816, pp. 1-24, online, https://lordbyron.org/doc.php?choose=ChClark.1816.Address.xml.
[69] *Ibidem.*

> The busy time has now gone by, and I can now devote any time you may mention to the pleasure of seeing Mr Hunt -'t will be an Era in my existence – I am anxious to see the Author of the Sonnet to the Sun, for it is no mean gratification to become acquainted with Men who in their admiration of Poetry do not jumble together Shakespeare and Darwin - I have copied out a sheet or two of Verses which I composed some time ago, and find much to blame worst in them that the best part will go into the fire […][70]

When the meeting finally occurred at the end of October 1816, Hunt was immediately impressed by Keats' poetic voice. He recognized in Keats a kindred spirit with a refreshing approach to classical themes. The encounter marked the beginning of a mutual admiration between the two poets, with Hunt extending an open invitation to Keats to visit the Vale. Keats, in turn, commemorated their meetings through reflective sonnets and poems, capturing the essence of their discussions and the stimulating atmosphere of Hunt's home. Notably, in his poem *Sleep and Poetry*, Keats vividly described Hunt's library and the creative atmosphere it fostered, which greatly influenced his poetic ambitions.

He also wrote the sonnet *On Leigh Hunt's Poem, The 'Story Of Rimini'* to express admiration for Hunt's work, inviting readers to immerse themselves in Hunt's poetic narrative, finding solace in natural settings. He suggests that those who take pleasure in these simple delights and are inclined to reflect on life will discover a personal refuge in Hunt's verses. From the moment of the encounter with Hunt, Keats began his immersion in the rich cultural milieu typical of the Hunt's circle, where artistic inspiration and intellectual discourse flourished, profoundly influencing his own creative journey and literary career. This also led to Keats forming significant relationships with other poets and artists, such as Benjamin Haydon, who immediately recognized Keats' talent and sought to mentor him while trying to keep him away from Hunt's influence. Some days later Haydon invited at the Vale another young poet, John Hamilton Reynolds.

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[70] John Keats, "Letter dated 9 October 1816 to Charles Cowden Clarke", *John Keats' Selected Letters,* ed. John Barnard, Penguin, London, 2014, pp. 10-11.

In the same period Keats' sonnet *On First Looking into Chapman's Homer*, inspired by an evening spent reading Chapman's translation of Homer with Charles Cowden Clarke, was published in Hunt's *Examiner*[71]. This publication marked a significant moment for Keats, as it revealed his developing poetic voice. The sonnet captured his youthful enthusiasm and appreciation for Chapman's translation style.

Despite the supportive environment, tensions and rivalries were present, which undermined for some time the dynamics within the circle. Charles Cowden Clarke was initially hesitant to introduce Keats to Hunt, fearing competition for Hunt's attention. Additionally, Haydon's desire to cultivate his own circle of followers sometimes clashed with Hunt's established group. These undercurrents of rivalry were not uncommon in such vibrant intellectual circles. The broader political context also influenced the dynamics within Hunt's community. After the Battle of Waterloo, the political climate in Britain became increasingly repressive. Hunt's circle, with its radical associations and connections to progressive publications like *The Examiner,* was viewed with suspicion by conservative forces. *The Examiner* documented the widespread suffering through an increasing list of bankruptcies, and Hunt devoted multiple 'Political Examiners' to the crisis, reporting on urban riots, and rural hardships.

In the meantime, Hunt highlighted a new wave of poets: Shelley, Reynolds, and Keats, portraying them as the youthful vanguard of a literary revolution. In the 1 December 1816 issue of The Examiner, an article titled *Young Poets*[72] explored the rise of a new school of poetry that aimed to displace the French-influenced style dominant since the reign of Charles II. This new movement, initially marked by excessive enthusiasm typical of many revolutions, had evolved to embrace a more genuine pursuit of natural beauty and original creativity, reminiscent of the golden age of English poetry. The article introduced three young poets who exemplify this emerging literary trend. The first is Percy Bysshe Shelley, whose work *Alastor, or the Spirit of Solitude* is described as striking and original. The second poet is John Henry Reynolds, known for his tale *Safie*, which imitated Lord Byron's style, and his collection of poems including *The Naiad*. Reynolds' work is noted for its detailed and amiable nature, though Hunt critiques his style as somewhat artificial and overly focused on detail. Nevertheless, he is recognized as a true poet with considerable potential. The youngest of them, John Keats, is valued for his works, particularly the already published sonnet *On First Looking into Chapman's Homer*[73]. Hunt praises this sonnet for its ambition and natural engagement with profound themes. The article concludes by emphasizing the potential of these young poets to restore the love of nature and profound thought to English poetry.

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[71] N. Roe, *Fiery Heart*, p. 270.
[72] J. N. Cox, *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School*, p. 23.

> We have spoken with the less scruple of these poetical promises, because we really are not in the habit of lavishing praises and announcements, and because we have no fear of any pettier vanity on the part of young men, who promise to understand human nature so well.[74]

The Examiner expresses confidence that these poets, who demonstrate a deep understanding of human nature, will contribute significantly to the literary landscape, moving beyond mere versifying to create works of genuine substance and beauty.

Against the backdrop of political unrest and societal upheaval following Waterloo, the Vale of Health provided a haven for these young poets to explore their skills and contemplate the changing currents of their time. On 1 December 1816, Hunt sent a letter to Shelley, bearing news of his favourable reception, thanks to the article on *Young Poets* published in *The Examiner*. Shelley, recognizing Hunt's fundamental role in his literary success, promptly dispatched £50 along with a heartfelt letter detailing his own hardships. In subsequent correspondence, Hunt extended sympathy and kindness, offering publication in *The Examiner* and enclosing £5 as a symbol of gratitude for Shelley's financial assistance[75]. Shelley deeply appreciated Hunt's support, recognizing its importance. While Hunt had effectively combined politics and poetry to engage liberal and intellectual readers, Shelley had faced challenges in connecting with his audience. Hunt's commitment to publish Shelley's work in *The Examiner* marked a turning point for him, finally granting him access to the readership he had been striving for. But few months later, the tragic discovery of Harriet Westbrook's suicide, Shelley's abandoned wife, filled him with guilt and grief. He found only in Hunt the support he needed. With Hunt's assistance, they endeavoured to trace Harriet's children and understand the circumstances leading to her death. In the end,

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[73] N. Roe, *Fiery Heart,* p. 278.

[74] Leigh Hunt, "Young Poets", *The Examiner*, No. 466, 1 December 1816, p.762, online, https://lordbyron.org/doc.php?choose=LeHunt.1816.Poets.xml.

[75] N. Roe, *Fiery Heart,* p. 279.

Shelley's marriage to Mary Godwin and subsequent departure marked the culmination of a tumultuous period.

During this period, Hunt found himself at the centre of a complex web of personal and political dynamics. During the gatherings of the circle some frictions occurred between Hunt and the various members, particularly Haydon. Keats was initially wary of Hunt's closeness with Shelley. Meanwhile, Haydon's jealousy of Hunt's fame and intimate relationships with women fuelled a bitter resentment, exposing the tensions within their circle. Hunt's views on art and literature, infused with Romantic sensibility and a fervent belief in the power of creativity to effect social change, often clashed with Haydon's more traditional notions of artistic expression. Haydon, deeply invested in his own artistic vision and seeking recognition in the competitive world of London's art scene, viewed Hunt's literary achievements with a mix of admiration and envy. Keats, on the other hand, occupied a somewhat ambivalent position within the group. While he shared Hunt's Romantic ideals and political sympathies, he also harboured reservations about Hunt's close association with Shelley, whose radical views and unconventional lifestyle sometimes clashed with Keats' own sensibilities. Nevertheless, Keats found himself drawn to Hunt's circle, recognizing in it an opportunity for intellectual growth and creative inspiration.

Poems, by John Keats was published by Charles Ollier in 1817 with Keats' heartfelt dedication to Hunt[76], which mirrored the profound admiration and respect he held for him. But Keats began to face the weight of criticism, as Hunt's review of *Poems, by John Keats* in *The Examiner*, though largely positive, revealed a nuanced evaluation tinged with reservations. While Hunt recognized Keats' sensitivity and imagination, he also noted the discords in Keats' versification, suggesting a divergence in their poetic sensibilities, and marking the beginning of complex dynamics in their relationship[77].

In the same year, 1817, the Hunts arrived in Marlow with the Shelleys. Marianne, much like Mary Shelley, was experiencing health issues, brought on by her pregnancy. Upon arriving at Albion House in Marlow, Hunt found a stark contrast to the enclosed atmosphere of the Vale. As spring progressed, Hunt took delight in the landscape, finding inspiration for his new poem, *The Nymphs*. Throughout their time in Marlow, Hunt lived a troubled period as he was engaged with personal and societal issues, including Marianne's health, financial concerns, and the political climate. Their collaborative efforts were consistent, as excerpts from Shelley's newly published work, *Laon and Cythna*, found space in *The Examiner*. However, the burden of financial troubles and the strains within his family grew heavier and despite Shelley's invitation to Italy (where Shelley moved in 1818), offering companionship and solidarity, Hunt found himself anchored by the practical obligations and responsibilities at home.

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[76] N. Roe, *Fiery Heart,* pp. 283, 293.
[77] *Ivi,* p. 294.

England saw in 1819 a moment of tumult, as revolutionary movements formed. Hunt was aware of the nation's unrest and his publications during the year reflected the sentiment of the time and the spirit of a nation on the brink of transformation, highlighting the growing calls for universal suffrage and the struggle for liberty of conscience. He reviewed works with an eye for societal commentary, praising Hazlitt's pamphlets for their incisive truth. His own creative output included the poems *Hero and Leander, Bacchus and Ariadne,* and *The Panther*, which reworked classical stories into expressions of love and freedom. In 1819, Shelley wrote the sonnet *England in 1819*[78], which portrayed the nation's despair under a corrupt and decaying leadership, conveying an urgent desire for reform. In the summer of 1819, Shelley endured a profound personal tragedy with the death of his young son, William. The news deeply affected Hunt, who offered solace through philosophical musings rather than conventional condolences in his correspondence. During this time, Shelley dedicated his new play, *The Cenci*, to Hunt[79], a gesture that Hunt received with great honour. *The Cenci*, a harrowing depiction of familial and political tyranny, stood in stark contrast to Shelley's earlier, more idealistic works, presenting a grim portrait of reality.

> MY DEAR FRIEND,
>
> I inscribe with your name, from a distant country, and after an absence whose months have seemed years, this the latest of my literary efforts. […] The drama which I now present to you is a sad reality. […] Had I known a person more highly endowed than your- self with all that it becomes a man to possess, I had solicited for this work the ornament of his name. One more gentle, honourable, innocent and brave; one of more exalted toleration for all who do and think evil, and yet himself more free from evil; one who knows better how to receive, and how to confer a benefit though he must ever confer far more than he can receive; one of simpler,

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[78] N. Roe, *Fiery Heart,* p. 315.
[79] Percy B. Shelley, "Dedication to Leigh Hunt", *The Cenci*, Reeves and Turner, London, 1886, p. 1.

> and, in the highest sense of the word, of purer life and manners I never knew and I had already been fortunate in friendships when your name was added to the list. […]
>
> Your affectionate friend, PERCY B. SHELLEY.[80]

At the end of 1819, the risks of prosecution for sedition increased dramatically with the enactment of the Six Acts by the Tory government, which aimed to suppress any conspiracy to subvert the Constitution by strengthening laws on sedition, limiting public meetings, and increasing taxes on newspapers and pamphlets. This oppressive atmosphere forced many radicals to cease their activities or adopt more subtle methods of expression. Hunt and Shelley perceived these acts as leading England towards a tyranny and realized the severe consequences of further convictions for seditious libel. Hunt, deeply concerned for his family's welfare in this political situation was cautious. He chose not to publish Shelley's response to the Peterloo Massacre, *The Masque of Anarchy*[81], in the *Examiner*, fearing it would be misinterpreted and lead to severe repercussions. In the middle of this turmoil, Hunt launched *The Indicator*, a new bi-weekly periodical featuring an eclectic mix of essays, poetry, and criticism, which became an instant success among Hunt's friends. As he wrote in his *Autobiography*: "Let me console myself by remembering how much Hazlitt and Lamb, and others, were pleased with *The Indicator*"[82]. The major focus of *The Indicator* was literary criticism, as Hunt used the periodical as a platform to review new publications, including books, plays, and poetry. His reviews were known for their depth of analysis, providing readers with insights into the themes, style, and significance of the works under review. In addition to literary criticism, *The Indicator* featured essays on a wide range of topics, exploring issues related to politics, society, culture, and philosophy.

Friends like Keats contributed to the journal, with essays or poem such as *La Belle Dame sans Merci,* published in *The Indicator*[83] on 10 May 1820. Hunt's vision for *The Indicator* extended beyond mere entertainment as it was a space where readers could engage with a diverse array of topics and contemporary issues. Through the pages of *The Indicator*, Hunt fostered a sense of community among like-minded individuals, inviting them to engage with him in critiques of societal hypocrisy and injustice, particularly in matters of gender and sexuality, reflecting a deeply held belief in the equality of all individuals. Through his writings, Hunt sought to provoke thought in his readers and inspire action. Hunt's essays in *The Indicator* were characterized by wit and humour. He had a tendency to blend serious commentary with humour and satire, making his writing both engaging and entertaining. *The Indicator* was also notable for its contributions to the promotion of emerging writers and lesser-known works.

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[80] Percy B. Shelley, "Dedication to Leigh Hunt", p.1.

[81] N. Roe, *Fiery Heart,* p. 323-324.

[82] L. Hunt, *Autobiography*, p. 215.

[83] *Ivi*, p. 216.

Despite Hunt's efforts, the relentless deadlines and stress had an impact on his health, and he eventually had to discontinue *The Indicator* in early 1821. During this period, Keats, suffering from tuberculosis, found temporary refuge with Hunt, who provided care and companionship until Keats' departure for Italy in a last effort to recover. The departure and future loss of his dear friend cast a shadow over Hunt's final days with *The Indicator*. The sense of loss felt by all Keats' friends and admirers, who recognized his genius, is perceivable in Hunt's heartfelt farewell to Keats in the pages of the journal, which despite the friend's departure to Italy for his illness, shows Hunt's hope for his return.

> Ah, dear friend, as valued a one as thou art a poet,—John Keats,—we cannot, after all, find it in our hearts to be glad, now thou art gone away with the swallows to seek a kindlier clime. The rains began to fall heavily, the moment thou wast to go;—we do not say, poet-like, for thy departure. […] The little cage thou didst sometime share with us, looks as deficient without thee, as thy present one may do without us; but—farewell for awhile: thy heart is in our fields: and thou wilt soon be back to rejoin it.[84]

2.5 The Project of The Liberal: Hunt, Shelley and Byron

The subsequent part of Hunt's life is characterized by further collaborations, for example he established with Shelley and Byron a quarterly magazine that would promote liberal opinions free from censorship and prosecution, *The Liberal*[85]. On August 26, 1821, Percy Bysshe Shelley wrote from Pisa to Leigh Hunt in London, detailing his recent visit to Ravenna to see Lord Byron. During this visit, Byron decided to move to Pisa[86] and proposed a collaborative literary project. Byron’s idea, which Shelley was to convey to Hunt, was to start a periodical work where each of them would contribute their original compositions and share the profits. The proposal eventually materialized into the four issues of *The Liberal, Verse and Prose from the South*, published from October 1822 to July 1823. The first issue sold over 4,000 copies and was initially deemed a success. However, Byron soon became disenchanted with the project, describing it as a bad business and claiming that he had opposed it from the start. The sudden death of Shelley shortly after Hunt’s arrival, in July 1822, cast a dark shadow on the prospects of the magazine, even before the publication of the first number. Hunt found himself dependent on Byron, who, burdened with Hunt’s large family (which by then comprised six children) and criticized by his friends, became increasingly unpleasant. In September 1822, Hunt, Byron, Mary Shelley, and their families left Pisa for Albaro, near Genoa, where they shared a large villa. This arrangement, however, was characterized by tensions, soon exacerbated by financial difficulties. Although Byron had supported Hunt financially following Shelley’s death, his exasperation grew, and his complaints about Hunt were widely circulated in London. By 1823, the two men were barely on speaking terms, although Byron continued to provide some financial support.

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[84] Leigh Hunt, "Farewell to Keats", *The Indicator*, No. 50, London, 20 September 1820, pp. 399-400, online, https://lordbyron.org/doc.php?&choose=LeHunt.1820.Keats.xml.

[85] N. Roe, *Fiery Heart,* p. 344.

[86] L. Landré, "Leigh Hunt: His Contribution to English Romanticism", pp. 133-134.

The Hunt family’s struggles continued, with Marianne Hunt's health deteriorating. A physician recommended pregnancy to save her, so that her seventh son was born on June 9, 1823, with Mary Shelley assisting at the birth. The following month, Byron left for Greece, and Mary Shelley returned to England with her son, Percy. The project of *The Liberal* ended when Byron departed for Greece in 1823, leaving Hunt in Genoa[87]. The Hunts remained in Albaro for the summer before moving to Florence and then to Maiano, where they lived in difficult conditions through a harsh winter. Hunt’s financial struggles led to a quarrel with his brother John over payments for articles.

2.6 Later Works

By the end of 1824, Hunt contemplated returning to England. Warned by Mary Novello about the changes in London, he nevertheless made the journey with his family in the autumn of 1825. Back in England, Hunt faced new challenges but continued his literary endeavours. In 1828, he published *Lord Byron and Some of His Contemporaries*, a work reflecting his complex feelings about Byron and their time in Italy[88]. The book, often dismissed as scandalous and ungrateful, revealed Hunt’s deep disappointment and turmoil. By the time Hunt returned to England, he had outlived his younger contemporaries Keats, Shelley, and Byron. His autobiography reflects on these relationships and the places associated with his lost friends. Despite feeling that a part of him had died with them, Hunt found new resources and admirers in the years that followed, marking the beginning of a second life.

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[87] J. N. Cox, *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School*, pp. 47-48.

[88] *Ivi*, p. 79.

Despite his relentless effort, Hunt's subsequent ventures struggled. *The Tatler* (1830-1832) and *The London Journal* (1834-1835) failed due to lack of subscribers. His tenure as editor of the *Monthly Repository* (1837-1838) was also unsuccessful. In 1832, Hunt’s poems were collected and published by subscription, attracting support from many former adversaries. In 1853 he published *The Religion of the Heart* (1853). Hunt's financial situation improved in 1840 with the successful staging of his play *Legend of Florence* at Covent Garden. Hunt’s later years, marked by improved circumstances, saw the publication of several delightful volumes. *Imagination and Fancy* (1844) and *Wit and Humour* (1846) showed his refined critical abilities, particularly with Spenser and old English dramatists. His *Autobiography, with Reminiscences of Friends and Contemporaries* (1850) offered a detailed self-portrait, highlighting key periods of his life, including his education, imprisonment, and Italian sojourn.

Hunt passed away in Putney, London, on August 28, 1859, and was laid to rest at Kensal Green Cemetery. In recognition of his legacy, Christ’s Hospital dedicated one of its houses to him in September 1966. Additionally, a residential street in Southgate, his birthplace, has been named Leigh Hunt Drive in his honour.

3. John Keats and Hunt's Circle

John Keats' journey into the literary world was marked by personal and professional challenges from the beginning. Born in 1795, in London, Keats faced considerable hardship during his childhood. His father died in a riding accident when Keats was just eight years old, and his mother died from tuberculosis when he was fourteen. Despite these tragedies, Keats found relief in literature and poetry, excelling at Enfield Academy, where he was first introduced to the works of classical authors[1].

Keats found both inspiration and friendships within Hunt's literary circle. He was inspired by the rich discussions and the collaborative environment that defined their gatherings. Hunt played a pivotal role in the development of Keats' poetic career, mainly involving Keats in *The Examiner*, which made him gain visibility. Keats' first published poem, *O Solitude! if I must with thee dwell*, appeared in *The Examiner* in May 1816[2]. The publication of Keats' *Poems,* in 1817, marked a turning point in his career.

Despite the nurturing environment provided by Hunt's circle, Keats faced harsh criticism for his early works, particularly *Endymion*. Published in 1818, *Endymion* was ambitious in scope and imaginative in its execution, embodying the Romantic ideal of beauty and nature. However, it received scathing reviews from conservative critics[3], who mocked its elaborate language and perceived lack of coherence. John Gibson Lockhart's review in the *Blackwood's Magazine*[4] dismissed Keats as part of the Cockney School of Poetry[5], attacking both his social standing and poetic ability. Another similar denigrating review was written by John Croker and published in the *Quarterly Review*[6]. Such critiques affected Keats deeply, though they did not deter him from pursuing his poetic vision. Following Hunt's Review of *Poems*, and the *Blackwood's* attacks, Keats decided to give a more independent path to his poetry, distancing himself from Hunt's circle for a few years.

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[1] Nicholas Roe, *John Keats: A New Life*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2012, p. 22.
[2] J. N. Cox, *Poetry and Politics in The Cockney School*, p. 86.
[3] *Ivi,* p. 82.
[4] John Gibson Lockhart, "On The Cockney School of Poetry No. IV", *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, Vol. III, No. XVII, August 1819, pp. 519-524.
[5] J. N. Cox, *Poetry and Politics in The Cockney School*, p. 37.
[6] John Wilson Crocker, "Keats's Endymion", *The Quarterly Review*, Vol. 19 No. 37, April 1818, pp. 204-208.

Keats' major works, including *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* and the odes, such as *Ode to a Nightingale,* and *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, reveal a more mature poetic style, characterized by rich imagery and profound themes. These works, written in 1819, are celebrated for their exploration of beauty, transience, and the interplay between the real and the ideal. In 1820 the friendship with Hunt was revived, but Keats' illness revealed to be fatal. Despite his untimely death at the age of twenty-five, Keats' legacy endures, with his later works regarded as masterpieces of English literature.

3.1 Keats' First Encounters with *The Examiner*

The events during the first years of Keats' life are not certain, but it is known that he was born on October 29 or 31 1795 in Craven Street, London[7]. At the beginning of the nineteenth century Craven Street was a border between the London expanding suburbs and the open fields. Keats, raised in this environment characterized by the proximity of city and rural England, would later be recognized as a suburban poet[8]. The suburbs of London were, in fact, the place where his desire to be a poet began. John Keats had two brothers, Thomas and George, with whom he joined the Enfield School in 1803, and a beloved little sister, Fanny. The landscape of Enfield would inspire some of his poems and would be crucial to the formation of Keats' genius. At school he learned to read and write, French and Latin and, among all, the dissenting tradition, with John Milton as head representative. For the students Enfield was an environment where new ideas and opinions were welcome and where the liberal point of view was prevailing. While Keats was a child, Hunt was a young writer, who had already published *Juvenilia* and gained a place in the London literary circles[9]. At the time Hunt worked at the War Office with John Scott, who would later become an influential journalist. In 1805 Hunt would contribute theatrical reviews to the new journal founded by his brother John, *The News,* and from 1808 he would work on his independent weekly journal, *The Examiner,* which would influence Keats' ideas and future career as a poet.

During childhood, Keats experienced loss, as his father died when he was eight years old. During the third year at Enfield, Keats made some friends and among them Charles Cowden Clarke, the schoolmaster's son. Charles Cowden Clarke was eight years older than Keats and he was an assistant teacher, who would encourage Keats' talent. He had a decisive influence on Keats' literary tastes, as he encouraged him to read Spenser, Chaucer and Chapman's translation of Homer, which would prove fundamental for his career[10].

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[7] N. Roe, *John Keats: A New Life,* p. 10.
[8] *Ivi,* p. 13.
[9] N. Roe, *Fiery Heart*, p. 52.

The first number of *The Examiner*, which appeared on 3 January 1808[11], impressed Cowden Clarke for its advocation of liberty and he subscribed to it. From that moment every Sunday a copy of *The Examiner* arrived in Enfield School and was read by teachers and scholars, including John Keats. Another occasion for Keats, when he was thirteen, to come in touch with the masterpieces of the literature of dissent was the discovery of the Enfield library, where he could find Milton's works, the copies of *The Examiner*, John Lemprière's *Bibliotheca Classica* and William Godwin's publications. The love for liberty was growing thanks to the numbers of *The Examiner* and to the climate of his school.

The years of Keats' youth are marked by numerous losses and financial instability, which led to the decision of starting Keats on a medical career, but his true interests were soon manifest. Cowden Clarke suggested Keats should translate Virgil's *Aeneid*[12] to distract him from all the pain he was experiencing at the time. This enterprise would occupy Keats for a long time, and it is now considered his first great literary achievement. He would later also use the *Aeneid* as a model for the structure of his long poem *Endymion*.

In 1811 Keats was sent to Edmonton to become apprentice to Doctor Thomas Hammond[13]. During this period, Keats and Cowden Clarke remained in constant contact and met frequently. Clarke already knew that Keats' medical career was not chosen by him and did not correspond to his aspirations, but it was a respectable job, and it provided a good income. Keats began an apprenticeship while he was also working on his translation of the *Aeneid*. He had to do five years of apprenticeship, but soon Keats and Hammond's personalities began to clash. Their arguments led Keats to put an end to his apprenticeship in autumn 1812, only one year after starting it. Despite this, Keats continued his studies in the medical field, as he could attend lectures at St. Thomas and Guy's Hospital in the years between 1813 and 1815[14], before he formally began his course of study as a physician.

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[10] N. Roe, *John Keats: A New Life,* p. 31.
[11] N. Roe, *Fiery Heart*, p. 94.
[12] N. Roe, *John Keats: A New Life,* p. 42.
[13] *Ivi,* p. 47.
[14] *Ivi,* p. 56.

Keats visited Cowden Clarke several times a month when his friend was not teaching. They exchanged ideas, read Keats' translated parts of the *Aeneid* and the recent issues on *The Examiner*, including the articles *One Thousand Lashes!*[15]*,* and *The Prince on St. Patrick's Day*[16]*,* which led Hunt to another indictment for libel. Despite Harry Brougham's defence, John and Leigh Hunt were declared guilty and sent to prison for two years. Cowden Clark met Hunt during the months between the indictment and the trial and during the years he spent in prison, recounting the meetings to Keats, who was already hoping to accompany Clarke on one of his visits, but the latter did not extend the invitation. During 1812 and 1813 Cowden Clarke, aware of Keats' passion for poetry, gave him the opportunity to learn about and read Spenser's volumes, including *Faerie Queen*, Milton's *Paradise Lost,* and Shakespeare's plays. Clarke also influenced Keats with his ideals of freedom and religious tolerance. Hunt was marking the beginning of a coterie of poets[17], who gathered around the ideal of liberty.

3.2 Early Influence of Hunt's Works

In 1814 Keats moved to London, where he attended lectures and started to make hospital experience, but he also continued his arduous translation of the *Aeneid*. It is during the years 1814-1816, which preceded the registration at Guy's, that Keats' first surviving poems were written. The first poem, titled *Imitation of Spenser*, owes much to Spenser and Milton, Shakespeare and Virgil, and it shows an individual attitude. The first poems written in London mirrored present historical events that were to find their way in the pages of Hunt's *Examiner*. The year 1814 saw Napoleon's abdication with the Treaty of Fontainebleau, and from prison Hunt published articles dealing with the celebrations in London. Keats, resenting this general euphoria, wrote the sonnet *On Peace,* which echoed *The Examiner's* recent publications. This sonnet expresses a longing for peace amidst the turmoil of war, advocating the liberation of Europe from tyrannical rule[18].

> O PEACE! and dost thou with thy presence bless
> The dwellings of this war-surrounded Isle;

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[15] N. Roe, *Fiery Heart*, p. 133.
[16] *Ivi,* p. 161.
[17] N. Roe, *John Keats: A New Life,* p. 63.
[18] N. Roe, *Fiery Heart,* p. 213.

Soothing with placid brow our late distress,
Making the triple kingdom brightly smile?
Joyful I hail thy presence; and I hail
The sweet companions that await on thee;
Complete my joy let not my first wish fail,
Let the sweet mountain nymph thy favourite be,
With England's happiness proclaim Europa's Liberty.
O Europe! let not sceptred tyrants see
That thou must shelter in thy former state;
Keep thy chains burst, and boldly say thou art free;
Give thy kings law leave not uncurbed the great;
So with the horrors past thou'lt win thy happier fate![19]

The poet finds solace in the idea of peace bringing tranquillity to a war-torn island and its inhabitants. The imagery of peace descending upon the land evokes a serene vision, providing a stark contrast to the surrounding chaos and destruction. The poem’s hopeful tone contrasts with the period’s political unrest, reflecting a deep desire for stability and freedom in a time of widespread conflict and uncertainty. While Keats is known for his lush descriptions and complex emotional explorations, this sonnet adopts a more immediate approach. Another poem written in February 1815 shows another theme, which would be frequent in Keats’ works, i.e. melancholy and despair. The poem *To Hope* reflects Keats’ misfortunes and frequent losses in his early life.

When by my solitary hearth I sit,
And hateful thoughts enwrap my soul in gloom;
When no fair dreams before my "mind's eye" flit,
And the bare heath of life presents no bloom;
Sweet Hope, ethereal balm upon me shed,
And wave thy silver pinions o'er my head! […][20]

To Hope can be seen as a precursor to Keats’ later, more complex odes of 1819, where he explores themes of melancholy, psyche, and other abstract concepts. The poem suggests that writing about hope is not in vain, as poetry itself can act as a talisman to alter the poet’s perception of despair. This early work underscores Keats' belief in the power of poetry to invoke change, not in the external world, but in the poet's own mindset.

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[19] John Keats, “On Peace”, *The Complete Poems*, ed. John Barnard Penguin Classics, London, 1977, p. 33.
[20] John Keats, “To Hope”, *The Complete Poems,* ed. John Barnard, Penguin Classics, London, 1977, p. 46.

In the meantime, Cowden Clarke continued his visits to see Hunt in jail, receiving from him a copy of *The Descent of Liberty*, which had not yet been published. Hunt was released in February 1815, and Keats was determined to meet him, if not through the common acquaintance of Cowden Clarke, then by capturing Hunt's attention with a poem. Keats wrote a sonnet to celebrate Hunt's freedom titled *Written on the Day Mr. Hunt Left Prison,* hoping that it would be published in *The Examiner*[21].

> What though, for showing truth to flatter'd state,
> Kind Hunt was shut in prison, yet has he,
> In his immortal spirit, been as free
> As the sky-searching lark, and as elate.
> Minion of grandeur! think you he did wait?
> Think you he nought but prison-walls did see,
> Till, so unwilling, thou unturn'dst the key?
> Ah, no! far happier, nobler was his fate!
> In Spenser's halls he stray'd, and bowers fair,
> Culling enchanted flowers; and he flew
> With daring Milton through the fields of air:
> To regions of his own his genius true
> Took happy flights. Who shall his fame impair
> When thou art dead, and all thy wretched crew?[22]

The sonnet celebrates Hunt's creativity and resilience. Despite his incarceration, Hunt's spirit remained unbound, finding refuge in the world of literature. Keats compares Hunt to a lark, liberated and soaring high regardless of its physical captivity. Through his imagination, Hunt transcended the prison's confines, delving into the fantastical realms crafted by Spenser and Milton. In contrast to his captors, who will be forgotten, Hunt's genius will persist, demonstrating the ability of art to overcome hardship. This poem highlights the victory of imagination and personal freedom over societal restrictions.

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[21] J. N. Cox, *Poetry and Politics in The Cockney School*, p. 86.

[22] John Keats, "Written on the Day Mr. Hunt Left Prison", *The Complete Poems,* ed. John Barnard, Penguin Classics, London, 1977, p. 44.

Keats wrote the sonnet based on the general information he gathered from Cowden Clarke and from the issues of *The Examiner*, as he was not aware of the specific situation Hunt was experiencing in prison. Keats hoped to provoke a reaction in Hunt, leading to an introduction to him, but this would happen only if Cowden Clarke read it and consigned it to Hunt. Clarke's possible envy of Keats' first attempts at poetry can explain why he was vague, and we are not sure if he handed the poem to Hunt[23]. Keats and Cowden Clarke would not meet again for some time and Keats would have to wait to encounter Leigh Hunt, the first meeting being in October 1816. So, Keats continued his internship at Guy's Hospital, and he started a friendship with George Felton Mathew, an acquaintance of Keats' brothers. They had different political views, but they shared an interest in poetry, creating a small cultural circle[24]. Keats also made the acquaintance of Joseph Severn, a young painter, and of Vincent Novello, a talented musician, including them in his circle and later introducing them to Hunt's coterie. While continuing his studies and practice, Keats wrote a sonnet, which would change his career as a poet, *To Solitude*.

> O Solitude! if I must with thee dwell,
> Let it not be among the jumbled heap
> Of murky buildings; climb with me the steep,—
> Nature's observatory—whence the dell,
> Its flowery slopes, its river's crystal swell,
> May seem a span; let me thy vigils keep
> 'Mongst boughs pavillion'd, where the deer's swift leap
> Startles the wild bee from the fox-glove bell.
> But though I'll gladly trace these scenes with thee,
> Yet the sweet converse of an innocent mind,
> Whose words are images of thoughts refin'd,
> Is my soul's pleasure; and it sure must be
> Almost the highest bliss of human-kind,
> When to thy haunts two kindred spirits flee.[25]

This sonnet conveys the poet's longing for solitude amidst the tranquillity of nature, presenting a stark contrast to the chaos and confinement of city life. Keats envisions an idyllic scene where he climbs a hill accompanied by Solitude, personified as a serene and comforting presence. From this elevated vantage point, he can survey the natural world below, finding peace and inspiration in the beauty of the landscape. However, the poet's ideal experience of solitude is, paradoxically, not solitary, as he desires the companionship of another like-minded individual, suggesting that while solitude can be enriching, it is more fulfilling when shared with someone who possesses a similar appreciation of the natural world and introspective thought.

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[23] N. Roe, *John Keats: A New Life,* p. 66.

[24] *Ivi,* p. 71.

[25] John Keats, "O Solitude. If I Must with Thee Dwell", *The Complete Poems,* ed. John Barnard, Penguin Classics, London, 1977, p. 66.

He cherishes the "sweet converse" of a pure and refined mind, where words become "images of thoughts refined". This juxtaposition highlights the complexity of human experience, wherein solitude and companionship both hold significant meaning. In the final lines, Keats reflects on the ultimate bliss of shared solitude: "When to thy haunts two kindred spirits flee". Here, Keats celebrates the rare and profound connection that can be forged between individuals who seek solace and communion amidst nature. It is in these moments of shared solitude that Keats finds the "highest bliss of human-kind". The themes of solitude and companionship explored in the sonnet are reflective of the Romantic era's emphasis on individual experience, emotion, and the sublime beauty of nature. Keats' desire to escape the oppressive and often suffocating atmosphere of the city to seek solace and rejuvenation in the natural world is a common motif in Romantic literature. However, Keats' experience of solitude is not equal to poets like William Wordsworth.

In contrast to Keats', Wordsworth's exploration of solitude is deeply rooted in his reverence for nature and the transformative power of the natural world. In poems such as *Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey* Wordsworth portrays solitude as a sacred communion with the landscape, a moment of transcendence where the individual merges with the universal spirit of nature. For Wordsworth, solitude is not merely a physical state but a spiritual journey[26]. In *Tintern Abbey*, Wordsworth reflects on the restorative power of nature, finding solace in the memory of past experiences and the timeless beauty of the landscape.

> These beauteous forms,
> Through a long absence, have not been to me
> As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:
> But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din

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[26] N. Roe, *Fiery Heart,* pp. 259-260.

Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;
And passing even into my purer mind,
With tranquil restoration: feelings too
Of unremembered pleasure: such, perhaps,
As have no slight or trivial influence
On that best portion of a good man's life,
His little, nameless, unremembered, acts
Of kindness and of love. […][27]

To Solitude was published in *The Examiner* in the number of 5 May 1816[28]. Hunt found himself aligned with Keats' idea of solitude typical of the suburban poet. However, Keats and Hunt would not meet until late October.

In February 1816 Hunt had already published *The Story of Rimini*[29] and for Keats this poem was an inspiration, as Hunt set as model for Keats' achievement. Keats was particularly drawn to Hunt's ability to evoke strong emotional responses and to his innovative use of descriptive language. Hunt's influence inspired Keats to pursue his own poetic projects, despite the demanding nature of his medical training. Hunt's third canto in *The Story of Rimini*, where Paolo and Francesca's love is revealed through their reading of the story about Lancelot, impressed Keats with its ability to leave much to the reader's imagination. Keats adopted a similar approach in his own later works, especially in *The Eve of St. Agnes,* where he shifts from the lovers' consummation to external imagery, allowing space for the reader's interpretation.

As Keats prepared to begin his role as a dresser at Guy's Hospital, he remained determined to embark on a new poetic endeavour. Inspired by Hunt's *Story of Rimini*, Keats wrote with the ambition to create works of similar impact. In his early attempt to craft a tale of chivalry, Keats sought to blend lush, descriptive language with the dramatic emotional depth characteristic of medieval romance. Between 1814 and 1817, Keats' time at Guy's Hospital was a period marked by significant personal and professional growth, characterized by his dedication to both medical training and his literary ambitions[30]. He succeeded the completion of the apothecary examination, despite irregularities in his formal education. His knowledge of Latin, crucial for his medical qualifications, also enriched his poetic language, allowing him to draw parallels between medical terminology and poetic expression. He wrote *Specimen of an Induction* and began *Calidore. A Fragment*. *Calidore* drew inspiration from Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* and was infused with pastoral imagery reminiscent of Keats' own childhood experiences in Edmonton[31]. His poetic style showed the influence of Hunt, particularly in his use of couplets and impressionistic language.

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[27] William Wordsworth, Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, Grapevine India, Dehli, 2023.
[28] Leigh Hunt, *The Examiner*, No. 436, 5 May 1816, p. 282, online, https://archive.org/details/sim_examiner-a-weekly-paper-on-politics-literature-music_1816-05-05_436/page/n7/mode/2up.
[29] N. Roe, *Fiery Heart*, p. 243.

Upon passing his examination to practice as an apothecary, Keats went to the sea with his brother Tom. Keats' time by the sea inspired him to compose a sonnet for his brother George, celebrating the wonders of the sea and sky, a theme that would recur in his later works[32]. Keats' poem, framed by the imagery of the sun and moon, reflected his fascination with celestial bodies, and seasonal cycles. His experience also influenced his thoughts on the Endymion myth, leading to his later work, the poetic romance *Endymion*. Despite being far from London, Keats' summer reading kept him connected to the city's literary scene.

In the poem *To My Brother George*, Keats invites readers to immerse themselves in the beauty of the natural world. The poem opens with a declared admiration for the wonders of the landscape. The personification of the sun as it "kisses away the tears"[33] of morning evokes a sense of tenderness and warmth. The description of "laurelled peers" leaning from the "feathery gold of evening"[34] transports the reader to a scene of beauty, where the elements of nature are adorned.

> Many the wonders I this day have seen:
> The sun, when first he kissed away the tears
> That filled the eyes of Morn the laurelled peers
> Who from the feathery gold of evening lean;[35]

Moreover, the ocean emerges in the poem as a symbol of both the unknown and the eternal. Its "vastness" and "blue green" hues evoke a sense of awe. Keats intertwines the elements of nature with human emotion and thought, inviting readers to ponder the mysteries of existence. Central to the poem is the dedication to Keats' brother, George. Through this dedication, Keats not only celebrates the beauty of nature but also underscores the importance of companionship and shared experiences[36]. The mention of "Cynthia"[37], a poetic reference to the moon, further enhances its sense of wonder and enchantment and this name would be central in the story of *Endymion*.

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[30] N. Roe, *John Keats: A New Life,* p. 81.
[31] *Ivi,* pp. 88, 95.
[32] J. N. Cox, *Poetry and Politics in The Cockney School*, p. 99.
[33] John Keats, "To My Brother George", *The Complete Poems,* ed. John Barnard, Penguin Classics, London, 1977, p. 99, v. 2.
[34] *Ivi*, p. 99, v. 4.
[35] *Ivi*, p. 99, vv. 1-4.

E'en now, dear George, while this for you I write,
Cynthia is from her silken curtains peeping
So scantly, that it seems her bridal night,
And she her half-discovered revels keeping.[38]

Determined to contact Charles Cowden Clarke, in September 1816, Keats began a verse letter to his former mentor, expressing both admiration and a deep desire to reconnect. He invokes William Cowper, whose elegiac lines mirrored Keats' own feelings of uncertainty and creative struggle. This reference also subtly reminds Clarke of their shared literary past and the evenings spent reading together at Enfield. Keats acknowledges that he did not write much for Clarke lately, perhaps due to his medical duties. Moreover, Keats' first success *To Solitude*, which was published in *The Examiner*, might have created a distance between them, as Clarke had shared his poems with Hunt, only to see none of them published. With these verses Keats seeks to mend their friendship and acknowledges Clarke's critical role in his poetic education[39]. Keats crafts his epistle to remind Clarke of their shared experiences and the paths they walked together, both literally and figuratively:

One, who, of late, had ta'en sweet forest walks
With him who elegantly chats, and talks-[40]

He recalls how Clarke introduced him to the great poets, from Spenser to Milton, and how those teachings had shaped his literary ambitions[41]:

Nor should I now, but that I've known you long;
That you first taught me all the sweets of song:

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[36] J. N. Cox, *Poetry and Politics in The Cockney School*, p. 99.
[37] John Keats, "To My Brother George", p. 99, v. 10.
[38] *Ivi,* p. 99, vv. 9-12.
[39] N. Roe, *John Keats: A New Life,* p. 99.
[40] John Keats, "Letter To Charles Cowden Clarke", 16 September 1816, *Selected Letters*, ed. John Barnard, Penguin Classics, London, 2014, p. 7, vv. 42-44.
[41] J. N. Cox, *Poetry and Politics in The Cockney School*, p. 100.

> The grand, the sweet, the Terse, the free, the Fine;
> What swell'd with Pathos, and what right divine;
> Spenserian vowels, that elope with ease,
> And float along like Birds o'er summer Seas;
> Miltonian Storms, and more, Miltonian tenderness;[42]

He reminisces about the walks between Enfield and Edmonton, highlighting the literary discussions between Charles Cowden Clarke and Hunt:

> The wrong'd Libertas,—who has told you stories
> Of laurel chaplets, and Apollo's glories;
> Of troops chivalrous prancing through a city,
> And tearful ladies made for love, and pity:
> With many else which I have never known.[43]

Keats' reference to Hunt, whom they both admired, was a strategic move. He wanted to prompt Clarke to organize an introduction to Hunt, knowing that Clarke's support would be essential in advancing his literary career. By closing the letter with a strong, hopeful handshake in verse, Keats expresses his determination to rekindle their friendship and secure Clarke's help in meeting Hunt. "Again I shake your hand:– Friend Charles/ Good Night!"[44]. Cowden Clarke replied affirming that he would arrange a meeting with Hunt. In another letter dated October 9, 1816, once again addressed to Cowden Clarke, Keats declares that he was at the moment free from medical duties, and he was able to meet Hunt. Furthermore, in the letter he shares his thoughts on poetry, his aspirations as a writer, and his admiration for fellow poets. The letter begins with an acknowledgment of the passing of a busy period, setting the stage for his eagerness to meet with Hunt, whom he regards with deep respect. He describes the prospect of meeting Hunt as an "Era in my existence", underscoring the significance he attributes to the opportunity to engage with him.

> The busy time has just gone by, and I can now devote any time you may mention to the pleasure of seeing Mr Hunt-'t will be an Era in my existence.[45]

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[42] John Keats, "Letter To Charles Cowden Clarke", 16 September 1816, p. 8, vv. 52-58.

[43] *Ivi,* p. 7, vv. 37-48.

[44] *Ivi,* p. 10, v. 132.

[45] John Keats, "Letter To Charles Cowden Clarke", 9 October 1816, *Selected Letters*, ed. John Barnard, Penguin Classics, London, 2014, p. 11.

Keats then confesses to Clarke his dissatisfaction with certain verses he has composed, acknowledging his tendency to be self-critical and discerning: "I have copied out a sheet or two of Verses which I composed some time ago, and find so much to blame in them that the best/worst part will go into the fire"[46]. Despite his reservations, Keats reveals his willingness to share some of his poems with Hunt. The meeting was organized and on October 19, 1816, Hunt's birthday, John Keats's encounter with Leigh Hunt marked a transformative moment in his life[47]. Cowden Clarke's familiarity with Hunt's manners, characterized by easy eloquence, made the atmosphere welcoming for Keats, who often felt reserved in company. Despite the chaotic surroundings of Hunt's home, Keats found himself at ease. Hunt's ability to converse on a variety of topics created an environment where conversation flowed freely.

Among the notable guests at Hunt's birthday celebration was Benjamin Haydon, already known for his ambitious historical paintings. Haydon's personality and grandiose ambitions captured the attention of many, including Wordsworth and Hunt himself, who esteemed him alongside the great Master of Art History. Despite his artistic genius, Haydon's life was marked by tumultuous highs and lows, driven by his relentless pursuit of artistic perfection and recognition. His obsessive dedication to his craft, coupled with his bipolar tendencies, created a complex and often volatile personality[48].

Keats' introduction to Hunt and Haydon marked a significant turning point in his life. In Hunt, he found a mentor and friend who welcomed him into literary circles and encouraged his poetic aspirations. Haydon offered Keats a glimpse into the world of high art and lofty ambitions. Despite their differing personalities and approaches, both men saw potential in Keats and sought to nurture his talent. This fateful encounter set the stage for Keats' immersion into the world of poetry and art, shaping the course of his literary career in the years to come[49].

3.3 First Published Poems

On 19 October 1816, Keats experienced a transformative moment in his young poetical life. Shortly after visiting Hunt, Keats and Cowden Clarke organized a meeting for the evening of Friday, October 25. This gathering was inspired by Clarke's access to Chapman's folio of Homer's works, which Hunt had recently borrowed from his friend Thomas Alsager and praised in *The Examiner*[50]. During this convivial evening, Keats and Clarke explored some of Chapman's most famous passages and the vigorous cadence of his couplets. Early the next morning, Keats walked back to Southwark, inspired by the poetic discoveries he had made. He quickly composed a sonnet, *On First Looking into Chapman's Homer*, which captured his enthusiasm.

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[46] John Keats, "Letter To Charles Cowden Clarke", 9 October 1816, p. 11.
[47] N. Roe, *John Keats: A New Life,* p. 105.
[48] *Ivi,* p. 104.
[49] *Ivi*, p. 105.

> Much have I travell'd in the Realms of Gold,
> And many goodly states and kingdoms seen;
> Round many Western islands have I been
> Which Bards in fealty to Apollo hold.
> Oft of one wide expanse had I been told
> That deep-brow'd Homer ruled as his demesne;
> Yet did I never breathe its pure serene
> Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold:
> Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
> When a new planet swims into his ken;
> Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes
> He star'd at the Pacific—and all his men
> Look'd at each other with a wild surmise—
> Silent, upon a peak in Darien.[51]

Keats then promptly sent the sonnet to Cowden Clarke. This sonnet marked Keats' poetic coming of age, symbolizing his readiness to embark on a future characterized by literary exploration. The poem itself gazes back at his literary influences and forward to new discoveries. It transforms an inner-city experience into a journey through the "Realms of Gold". This imagery suggests that Keats was trying a newly discovered poetic.

Keats prepared for a social engagement in Hampstead. On October 27, he met Haydon and John Hamilton Reynolds, the latter being a year older and a promising writer with a background in editing and publishing. Reynolds, known for his precocious talent and friendly disposition despite recurrent illnesses, had already made significant literary connections and achievements. His works, such as *Safie, an Eastern Tale* and *The Naiad*, had garnered favourable attention, positioning him as an influential figure in Hunt's circle[52]. Through Reynolds, Keats was introduced to other notable individuals, including James Rice and Benjamin Bailey, both of whom would become important friends and supporters. Despite his growing social and literary engagements, Keats remained committed to his responsibilities at Guy's Hospital.

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[50] N. Roe, *John Keats: A New Life,* p. 108.
[51] John Keats, "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer", *The Complete Poems,* ed. John Barnard, Penguin Classics, London, 1977, p. 118.

Keats' sonnet *On First Looking into Chapman's Homer* was published in *The Examiner*, in the article entitled "Young Poets" on 1 December 1816, where Hunt introduced Keats as part of a new school of poetry alongside Percy Bysshe Shelley and John Henry Reynolds[53]. In the article, Hunt praises Keats' ambition and his intense engagement with nature, noting the authenticity of his poetic aspirations. What emerges from the comment is admiration, despite a minor flaw in rhyme and some vagueness in phrasing. The concluding six lines of the sonnet received particular acclaim for their powerful and serene imagery, with the word "swims"[54] described as particularly evocative. This early recognition by *The Examiner* served to position Keats as a significant new voice in the revival of natural poetry. This piece marked Keats' dedication to poetry and his public connection to Hunt's political and poetic ideologies[55].

Hunt's article not only gratified Keats by recognizing his potential but also positioned him within an emerging movement of young poets. This new school of poetry, supported by Hunt, embraced the themes of nature, truth, and justice, resonating with the reformist fervour of the time. Keats' association with this group was initially empowering, though it would later bring challenges. In this period, Keats met Shelley at Hunt's home. Shelley's radical past and complex personal life, including his estrangement from his wife Harriet, and her tragical suicide[56], added a dramatic context to his involvement with Hunt and the poetic circle.

During his time at Guy's Hospital, John Keats dedicated his spare hours to the composition of a significant poem: *Sleep and Poetry*[57], that will be later published in *Poems by John Keats*. Finding the exact timing of the composition has proven challenging, as no manuscript of *Sleep and Poetry* has survived. The final lines of *Sleep and Poetry* were written around December 1816[58]. The poem begins with a pastoral tone, with Keats musing on the gentleness of summer winds and swiftly transitioning to dream-visions and the contrasting realms of poetry. It starts by highlighting sleep's virtues, describing it as gentler, and more tranquil than various elements of nature. Sleep is personified as "Soft closer of our eyes"[59], "Low murmurer of tender lullabies"[60], and a "Light hoverer around our happy pillows"[61]. Keats then transitions to discussing poetry, asking rhetorical questions. Poetry is depicted as possessing an unparalleled glory, capable of inspiring awe and holiness, as seen in the lines, "The thought thereof is awful, sweet, and holy, / Chasing away all worldliness and folly"[62]. Poetry is likened to divine inspiration, sometimes arriving like "fearful claps of thunder"[63] and other times as a "gentle whispering"[64], illustrating its varied and profound impact. In the following verses Keats reflects on his own aspirations and dedication to poetry, expressing a longing to fully immerse in its creative power. This dedication is shown through the lines, "O Poesy! for thee I grasp my pen / That am not yet a glorious denizen / Of thy wide heaven"[65].

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[52] N. Roe, *John Keats: A New Life,* p. 110.
[53] J. N. Cox, *Poetry and Politics in The Cockney School*, p. 23.
[54] Leigh Hunt, "Young Poets", *The Examiner*, No. 466, 1 December 1816, pp. 761.
[55] N. Roe, *John Keats: A New Life,* p. 125.
[56] N. Roe, *Fiery Heart*, p. 125.
[57] N. Roe, *John Keats: A New Life,* p. 115.

Keats also emphasizes the potential of poetry to reveal deep truths and elevate the human spirit. The poet speaks of capturing the essence of beauty and mystery of life, aiming to "Write on my tablets all that was permitted, / All that was for our human senses fitted"[66]. The ambition is to seize the world's events and transform them into immortal verse, believing that "life is but a day"[67] and should be cherished and expressed through poetry. He acknowledges the struggle involved in this artistic pursuit, comparing it to an arduous journey across a vast ocean. In the conclusion the poet reflects on the supportive community of fellow poets and friends, valuing their companionship and shared passion. This camaraderie is celebrated with images of collaborative creativity and mutual encouragement, seen in "The hearty grasp that sends a pleasant sonnet / Into the brain ere one can think upon it”[68]. The final lines represent the aspiration of leaving a sign with poetry, “And up I rose refresh’d, and glad, and gay, / Resolving to begin that very day / These lines; and howsoever they be done, / I leave them as a father does his son”[69]. The comparison to a father leaving his son implies a blend of affection, and release. The poet cares deeply about his work but understands that once it is created, it takes on its own existence.

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[58] N. Roe, *John Keats: A New Life,* p. 128.
[59] John Keats, "Sleep and Poetry", *The Complete Poems,* ed. John Barnard, Penguin Classics, London, 1977, p. 145, v. 11.
[60] *Ivi,* p. 145, v. 12.
[61] *Ivi,* p. 145, v. 13.
[62] *Ivi*, p. 146, vv. 25-26.
[63] *Ivi,* p. 146, v. 27.
[64] *Ivi,* p. 146, v. 29.
[65] *Ivi*, p. 147, vv. 53-55.
[66] *Ivi,* p. 148, vv. 79-80.
[67] *Ivi,* p. 149, v. 85.

In *Sleep and Poetry*, Keats delves deeply into the personal conflicting emotions and challenges he faces as a poet driven by an intense desire for artistic greatness. Despite the poem’s initially joyous tone, Keats repeatedly acknowledges the profound psychic compulsion that afflicts him[70], revealing his inner struggles and aspirations with remarkable strength. Throughout the poem, Keats struggles with the arduous path to poetic achievement, acknowledging the difficulty of the task. Keats also reflects on the role of friendship and mentorship in his poetic journey, acknowledging the guidance and encouragement he received from figures like Charles Cowden Clarke and George Felton Mathew. He finds solace and inspiration in their companionship, recognizing the importance of surrounding himself with like-minded individuals who share his passion for poetry. However, Keats also struggles with the dangers of overstimulation and the need to find balance between intensity and relaxation. He understands the importance of quietude and restful silence in fostering true poetic inspiration, often seeking refuge in changes of scenery and moments of tranquillity. Sleep, soft sounds, and silence are not only emblematic of his longing for tranquillity and serenity but also serve as catalysts for poetic inspiration[71]. The absence of adequate sleep creates in Keats a detrimental cycle that impedes his ability to produce poetry. Despite occasional contemplations of death as an escape, Keats seeks alternative avenues, such as cultivating new friendships and changing his environment, to disrupt this cycle.

Over the weekend of December 1814-15, Keats visited Haydon, where Reynolds was also present. During this visit, Haydon took a life mask of Keats[72], which, along with other portraits, contributes to the visual record of Keats. This gathering at Haydon’s was also significant as Keats, inspired by his meeting with influential literary figures, may have used the occasion to announce his decision to become a full-time poet. This decision was likely influenced by his interactions with other poets and publishers, as well as the festive spirit of Saturnalia, a time of merriment, which he celebrated on December 17[73] with friends and family. Keats' determination to pursue poetry was further reinforced during a subsequent visit to Hunt, where he discussed his plans to publish a volume of poems. Despite financial risks, Keats remained resolute in his decision to publish, illustrating his commitment and belief in his poetic vocation.

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[68] John Keats, “Sleep and Poetry”, p. 160, vv. 319-320.
[69] *Ivi,* p. 164, vv. 401-404.
[70] George Jost, “The Poetic Drive in Early Keats”, *Texas Studied in Literature and Language*, Vol. V, No. IV, 1964, p. 557.
[71] *Ivi,* p. 559.
[72] Stephen Hebron, *John Keats*, The British Library, London, 2002, p. 29.

In the weeks following Saturnalia, Keats financed the publication of his first book of poems through the Olliers[74], retaining the copyright until 1820. Keats' meticulous preparation involved transcribing poems and collaborating with his brother Tom, who helped arrange the manuscript. His latest sonnet, *Written in Disgust of Vulgar Superstition*[75], composed on 22 December 1816, and other poems were organized, reflecting his methodical approach derived from his medical studies. In early 1817, Keats experienced a period of silence and introspection, with no surviving letters between January 1 and March 9[76]. This absence of correspondence, coinciding with a harsh winter, suggests a deep personal and creative preoccupation. The presence of his literary circle, including Hunt, Shelley, and their involvement in the bitter legal battle over custody of Shelley's children, likely influenced Keats' mood. The case, reminiscent of Keats' own troubled family history and legal troubles, could have caused the emergence of painful memories of his father's death and subsequent familial struggles.

In January 1817, Keats' manuscript was sent to the printer, and his visits to the Vale of Health began. During these visits, Keats often encountered Mary and Percy Shelley, who were frequently traveling between Hampstead and the court for legal proceedings. On February 15, Keats arrived at the Vale to find a house in turmoil due to internal conflicts and the consequences of Shelley's ex-wife's suicide[77]. This chaotic environment, combined with tensions in Hunt's household, brought Keats to consider distancing himself from the group, although he did not do it immediately.

In March Keats received the finished copy of his book and immediately began distributing presentation copies to his friends. Keats' poetry was shared among Hunt's circle receiving high praise. However, Keats' book, *Poems*, lacked a contents page and proper sectioning. Despite this issue, Keats included a dedication sonnet to Hunt, acknowledging Hunt's influence. Keats found Hunt returning from *The Examiner* office. As they were walking in the garden, Hunt spontaneously crafted two laurel wreaths from garden sprigs, crowning himself and Keats in a playful yet solemn homage to their poetic aspirations[78]. On Monday, 3 March, a letter arrived from Haydon, inviting Keats to meet with Cowden Clarke and Reynolds that evening[79]. *The Morning Chronicle* featured an advertisement for Keats' upcoming publication, *Poems by John Keats*, to be released the following Monday.

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[73] N. Roe, *John Keats: A New Life,* p. 131.
[74] *Ivi,* p. 133.
[75] *Ivi,* p. 134.
[76] *Ivi,* p. 140.
[77] N. Roe, *Fiery Heart*, p. 280-281.

Reviews soon appeared, with Reynolds praising Keats' natural versification in *The Champion*[80], and George Felton Mathew offering a more critical perspective in the *European Magazine*. Keats stayed near London, moving with his brothers to Hampstead. His agreement with Taylor and Hessey to publish his next book was a promising development. Encouraged by his brothers, Keats embarked on a new venture with the aim to begin his ambitious work, *Endymion*[81]. Keats began to expand the story into a grand narrative and in April, he began his task. He left Southampton for the Isle of Wight[82], where he experienced a period marked by poetic inspiration, personal reflection, and physical exhaustion. He composed the initial lines of *Endymion*, seeing it as a test of his abilities[83]. Despite financial difficulties and the Olliers' criticism of his first book, Keats remained determined, viewing his long poem as a personal challenge.

Meanwhile, Hunt chose to embark, in *The Examiner* review on 6 July, on a meticulous dissection of Keats' *Poems,* and in particular of what Hunt perceived as Keats' poetical faults, many of which were attributed to the influence of Hunt himself[84]. But Hunt also identified Keats' essential qualities. The review was fraught with unexpected delays and confusion, leading to speculation about Hunt's motives and capabilities as an editor. While Reynolds's review in the *Champion* promptly appeared on 9 March, Hunt's review lingered in obscurity for weeks[85]. The publication of Hunt's review in July was met with surprise and resentment from Keats himself. The delay, coupled with the somewhat critical tone of Hunt's review, strained the relationship between the two men. Keats, already annoyed by previous incidents involving Hunt, felt further alienated by the review's unexpected timing and content. Hunt's actions can be viewed through the lens of his broader struggles, including editorial responsibilities. His genuine desire to support emerging poets like Keats clashed with the harsh realities of literary criticism and editorial constraints. Despite Hunt's sincere efforts to support Keats amidst his own personal and financial challenges, the outcome fell short of expectations, leaving a sense of disappointment and resentment[86]. This occasion would lead Keats to distance himself from Hunt and his circle and to try to discover his own potential for poetry without the external influence from Hunt.

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[78] N. Roe, *Fiery Heart,* p. 147.

[79] *Ivi,* p. 153.

[80] Joseph C. Grigely, "Leigh Hunt and The Examiner Review of Keats' Poems, 1817", *Keats-Shelley Journal*, Vol. 33, 1984, p. 30.

[81] S. Hebron, *John Keats*, p. 35.

[82] *Ivi*, p. 38.

[83] N. Roe, *John Keats: A New Life,* p. 161.

[84] *Ivi,* p. 173.

[85] J. C. Grigely, "Leigh Hunt and The Examiner Review of Keats' Poems, 1817", p. 30.

The first year of Keats and Hunt's friendship was marked by intimacy and harmony. Hunt, known for his extraordinary ability to form friendships, had a tendency to idealize them. In his *Autobiography*, Hunt reflects on their relationship, stating that except for one circumstance, "Keats and I might have been taken for friends of the old stamp, between whom there is no such thing even as obligation, except the pleasure of it"[87]. This assessment might well describe their friendship during the year following the spring of 1816. During this time, Keats frequently visited Hunt's cottage, where they would read together and compete in poetry writing contests. The sonnet *On the Grasshopper and Cricket*, emerged from these friendly competitions. Keats also dedicated a sonnet to Hunt in his first book, *Poems by John Keats*. The last lines of this sonnet express Keats' gratitude and admiration for Hunt:

> And I shall ever bless my destiny,
> That in a time, when under pleasant trees
> Pan is no longer sought, I feel a free,
> A leafy luxury, seeing I could please
> With these poor offerings, a man like thee[88].

However, the idea of needing more independence from Hunt started to grow in Keats. Keats' return to Hampstead bore witness to a significant shift in his health, a matter that warranted his attention in subsequent letters to confidants like Bailey. In his correspondence,

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[86] J. C. Grigely, "Leigh Hunt and The Examiner Review of Keats' Poems, 1817", p. 34.
[87] Leigh Hunt, *Autobiography,* p. 206.
[88] John Keats, "To Leigh Hunt, Esq.", *The Complete Poems,* ed. John Barnard, Penguin Classics, London, 1977, p. 178.

Keats relayed that the “little Mercury”[89] he had taken had proven efficacious in correcting the perceived poison in his system and improving his health. The use of mercury as a treatment for various ailments, particularly venereal diseases like syphilis, was not uncommon in the early nineteenth century. Beyond venereal illnesses, it is possible, considering Keats’ proximity to his consumptive brother Tom, that he was starting contracting tuberculosis.

Despite these issues, Keats found solace in the company of friends like James Rice and Reynolds. Their camaraderie, exemplified by walks and convivial gatherings, offered Keats moments of respite from his personal troubles. Seeking solace from the chaos of urban life, Keats embarked on a journey of self-discovery amidst the landscapes of the South of England, finding inspiration in the natural world that surrounded him. In these idyllic landscapes, Keats sought to draw his epic poem *Endymion* to its conclusion[90]. As the year was ending, Keats returned to London, bearing with him the fruits of his labour: the manuscript of *Endymion*.

Back in London, December 1817 was for Keats a month of social engagements after a period of meditation to write *Endymion*. The most significant event came with news from Haydon that William Wordsworth was in town[91] and they arranged a meeting. In the same period, Keats wrote a letter dated 21 December 1817 to his brothers, where he offers an intimate view of his daily life and social engagements. One of the most profound elements of Keats’ letter is his introduction of the concept of Negative Capability. He describes this as the writer’s ability to accept “uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason”[92]. Keats believed that this quality was essential for great literary achievement, as it allows the artist to remain open to the complexities and ambiguities of human experience without being constrained by the need for logical resolution or factual certainty. This capacity enables writers to create works that are rich in emotional depth and beauty, capable of evoking profound responses from readers. Keats saw this trait exemplified in Shakespeare, whose works often embrace multiple interpretations and resist definitive conclusions. This belief is evident in Keats’ own poetic works, where he often explores themes of transience, beauty, and existential uncertainty without offering definitive answers. Embracing Negative Capability means accepting that not all questions have answers and that the mysteries of existence are integral to the human condition. This acceptance allows individuals to engage more deeply with the world, cultivating a sense of wonder and curiosity that can lead to more innovative and insightful thinking.

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[89] John Keats, “Letter To Benjamin Bailey”, 9 October 1816, *Selected Letters,* ed. John Barnard, Penguin Classics, London, 2014, p. 58.
[90] N. Roe, *John Keats: A New Life,* p. 194.
[91] S. Hebron, *John Keats*, p. 47.
[92] John Keats, “Letter To George and Tom Keats”, 21 December 1817, *Selected Letters,* ed. John Barnard, Penguin Classics, London, 2014, p. 79.

Amidst moments of introspection and preoccupations for his brother Tom, Keats confronted the fragility of life and the fleeting nature of artistic legacy. Contemplating his own mortality in the face of illness and uncertainty, Keats channelled his fears and desires into verses that capture the essence of human longing and existential angst. Keats wrote the poem *When I Have Fears that I May Cease to Be* between 22 and 31 January 1818[93]. In the sonnet the poet expresses profound anxiety about dying, before transforming the many thoughts in his mind into poetry.

> When I have fears that I may cease to be
> Before my pen has gleaned my teeming brain,
> Before high-pilèd books, in charactery,
> Hold like rich garners the full ripened grain;
> When I behold, upon the night's starred face,
> Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance,
> And think that I may never live to trace
> Their shadows with the magic hand of chance;
> And when I feel, fair creature of an hour,
> That I shall never look upon thee more,
> Never have relish in the faery power
> Of unreflecting love—then on the shore
> Of the wide world I stand alone, and think
> Till love and fame to nothingness do sink.[94]

For Keats, writing poetry is like harvesting crops, his mind is teeming with potential that he longs to convert into lasting works. This metaphor underscores his urgent desire to achieve literary immortality through his writings before death can cease his life. The poem takes a more intimate turn when Keats addresses the prospect of losing his beloved. The phrase “fair creature of an hour” captures the brevity of life and the transient nature of love. Keats laments the possibility of never again experiencing the spontaneous, pure love he cherishes. As Keats contemplates these fears, he experiences a profound sense of isolation. The image of standing alone on a vast seashore evokes feelings of solitude and insignificance. For Keats, the inevitability of death renders the pursuits of love and fame ultimately meaningless, as they “to nothingness do sink”. This realization reflects his existential understanding that, in the face of mortality, human achievements and relationships may seem ephemeral.

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[93] John Keats, "Letter To George and Tom Keats", 21 December 1817, p. 209-210.

[94] John Keats, "When I Have Fears", *The Complete Poems,* ed. John Barnard, Penguin Classics, London, 1977, p. 423.

Keats was also preparing *Endymion* for publication. Between January and March, he revised and copied the poem for the press, finding the task tedious. In the meantime, he was engaged with a new project, *Hyperion*, based on a Greek legend about the struggle between the Titans and the Olympians, focusing on Hyperion’s overthrow by Apollo, the god of the sun and poetry. Unlike the loosely romantic *Endymion*, Keats envisioned *Hyperion* as a more classical and tightly structured work[95]. The task of preparing *Endymion* for publication was not the only distraction for Keats. His brother Tom’s declining health was a growing concern. Since December, Tom had been living with their brother George in Teignmouth, hoping for an improvement in his condition.

Keats joined them on March 6, only to find Tom gravely ill, as he was suffering from tuberculosis. As Keats and his brother Tom prepared to leave Teignmouth, their journey back to London was fraught with difficulty due to Tom’s deteriorating health[96]. In London Keats wrote a preface for *Endymion*, acknowledging its faults but expressing his desire to move on. “Knowing within myself the manner in which this Poem has been produced, it is not without a feeling of regret that I make it public. What manner I mean, will be quite clear to the reader, who must soon perceive great inexperience, immaturity, and every error denoting a feverish attempt, rather than a deed accomplished.”[97]. *Endymion* was finally published in April 1818.

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[95] S. Hebron, *John Keats*, p. 54.

[96] *Ivi,* p. 56.

[97] John Keats, “Preface to Endymion”, *The Complete Poems,* ed. John Barnard, Penguin Classics, London, 1977, p. 962.

3.4 *Endymion*

Even though *Endymion* has not always received high praise from critics, Keats scholars have maintained a lively and enduring interest in the poem. This is largely due to the significant place *Endymion* holds in Keats' development as a poet. Keats himself regarded *Endymion* as a test and exercise of his growing poetic prowess. Within its pages, Keats articulates ideas and attitudes that would later become central themes in his poetry. Whether viewed as an exploration of idealized beauty or as a celebration of earthly love, *Endymion* offers valuable insights into Keats' artistic vision and philosophical inquiries.

In Keats' *Endymion*, the exploration of love is rich and multifaceted, transcending mere physical desire to encompass higher realms of emotion and spiritual fulfilment. The poem delves into the complexities of love through the experiences of its protagonist, Endymion, whose journey from selfish desire to selfless devotion unfolds across its four books. Keats portrays love as a force that elevates and transforms, leading Endymion from a state of sensual indulgence to a deeper understanding of compassion and empathy. At its core, *Endymion* presents love as a way to happiness, with Endymion seeking the highest form of fulfilment through his relationships with various female figures. The poem juxtaposes different types of love, from the purely physical to the profoundly spiritual, highlighting the evolution of Endymion's understanding and experience of love.[98]

The first book of *Endymion* introduces the theme of love as a source of happiness, emphasizing the interconnectedness between love and the supernatural world[99]. However, the initial encounters with love in the poem, particularly Endymion's liaison with the nymph goddess and his meeting with the Indian Maid, are characterized by a selfish pursuit of physical gratification. The opening stanza sets the tone with an elaborate ode to beauty, employing metaphors such as "an endless fountain of immortal drink" to convey the poet's belief in the eternal nature of beauty[100]. This stanza establishes a central theme of the poem: the contrast between mortality and immortality, which is further explored through the protagonist's quest for the immortal goddess Cynthia.

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[98] Bruce E. Miller, "On the Meaning of Keats's Endymion*", Keats-Shelley Journal*, Vol. 14, 1965, p. 34, online, https://www.jstor.org/stable/30212654.

[99] *Ivi,* p. 41.

[100] *Ivi,* p. 40.

A thing of beauty is a joy for ever:
Its loveliness increases; it will never
Pass into nothingness; but still will keep
A bower quiet for us, and a sleep
Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing.
Therefore, on every morrow, are we wreathing
A flowery band to bind us to the earth,
Spite of despondence, of the inhuman dearth
Of noble natures, of the gloomy days,
Of all the unhealthy and o'er-darkened ways
Made for our searching: yes, in spite of all,
Some shape of beauty moves away the pall
From our dark spirits. […][101]

Endymion, the shepherd-prince of Latmos, is introduced as a character plagued by inner turmoil despite the joyous festivities surrounding him. His sister Peona serves as both a companion and confidante, offering him solace and support. Their relationship highlights themes of dependence and intimacy, as Endymion relies on Peona for comfort and guidance.

Wherein lies happiness? In that which becks
Our ready minds to fellowship divine,
A fellowship with essence; till we shine,
Full alchemiz'd, and free of space.[102]

Endymion's encounter with the goddess Cynthia in a dream becomes the catalyst for his journey. The dream sequence is infused with sensual imagery, illustrating the protagonist's passionate longing for the divine beauty represented by Cynthia. His pursuit for Cynthia symbolizes a quest for the highest form of beauty, transcending earthly pleasures and mortality[103]. Endymion's reliance on both Cynthia and Peona reflects a deeper yearning for spiritual and physical fulfilment. Scholars have interpreted Endymion's journey as an allegory for the poet's quest for beauty and immortality through his work. In this interpretation, poetry becomes a means of immortalizing beauty and transcending the limitations of mortal existence.

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[101] John Keats, "Endymion", Book I, *The Complete Poems,* ed. John Barnard, Penguin Classics, London, 1977, p. 209, vv. 1-13.

[102] John Keats, "Endymion", Book I, p. 246, vv 777-780.

[103] B. E. Miller, "On the Meaning of Keats's Endymion*,* p. 46.

The second book explores the consequences of lust and selfish desire, highlighting the emptiness and disillusionment that accompany such pursuits. Through his experiences with the nymph goddess and the Venus and Adonis[104] episode, Endymion learns that true happiness cannot be found in physical pleasure alone but requires a deeper connection rooted in empathy and selflessness. Here, Keats delves deeper into themes of love, dependence, and the contrast between mortality and immortality through the intertwining romances of Adonis and Venus, and Alpheus and Arethusa.

In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Adonis is described as an extraordinarily handsome young man. Venus, the goddess of love, falls deeply in love with him after being struck by one of Cupid's arrows. Venus is deeply concerned about Adonis' passion for hunting, fearing that he might encounter dangerous wild beasts. Unfortunately, Venus' fears are realized. One day, while hunting, Adonis is mortally wounded by a wild boar. Hearing his cries of pain, Venus rushes to his aid and tries to heal his wounds, but it is too late. After Adonis dies, a flower, the anemone, springs from the ground soaked with his blood, and roses bloom from the tears shed by Venus.

Arethusa was a nymph known across Greece for her beauty and was raised since her young age by Artemis, the goddess of the hunt and young girls. One day, after a long run through the woods, Arethusa decided to refresh herself in a beautiful stream. She undressed and bathed in the water. Suddenly, she heard noises and, frightened, she quickly got out and started running. A voice told her to stop, it was Alpheus, the deity of the stream, who had been struck by her beauty. Alpheus began to chase her, and when Arethusa could no longer run, she called out to Artemis for help. Artemis enveloped Arethusa in a cloud and blew it towards Sicily to protect her. When the cloud reached Ortigia, it began to dissipate, and Arethusa metamorphosed into a freshwater spring. Alpheus, in love with Arethusa and determined to reach her, asked his father Oceanus for help. Oceanus opened the waters of the Ionian Sea, allowing Alpheus to reach Sicily. Convinced by Alpheus' persistent love, Arethusa eventually yielded to his advances. To seal their love, Artemis created a cave under the spring, so the waters of Arethusa and Alpheus could flow together forever.

These supporting narratives serve not only to enrich the storyline but also to illustrate Endymion's growth and development as a character. The relationship between Adonis and

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[104] B. E. Miller, "On the Meaning of Keats's Endymion", p. 43.

Venus epitomizes the concept of male dependence on a woman, as Adonis relies on Venus to bring him back to life from his seasonal slumber. This literal depiction of dependence underscores the theme of mortality and immortality, suggesting that immortality may come with its own burdens and consequences.

> Adonis something mutter'd,
> The while one hand, that erst upon his thigh
> Lay dormant, mov'd convuls'd and gradually
> Up to his forehead. Then there was a hum
> Of sudden voices, echoing, "Come! come!
> Arise! awake! Clear summer has forth walk'd
> Unto the clover-sward, and she has talk'd
> Full soothingly to every nested finch:
> Rise, Cupids! or we'll give the blue-bell pinch
> To your dimpled arms. Once more sweet life begin!"
> At this, from every side they hurried in,
> Rubbing their sleepy eyes with lazy wrists,
> And doubling overhead their little fists
> In backward yawns. But all were soon alive[105]

Adonis, who had been in a state of dormancy or unconsciousness, starts to show signs of life. He mutters something, and his hand, previously lying inactive on his thigh, moves convulsively and slowly up to his forehead, indicating a gradual awakening. As Adonis begins to stir, he hears a hum of sudden voices calling to him, urging him to arise and awake. Similarly, the figurative dependence of Alpheus on Arethusa highlights the emotional entanglements of love and longing. Endymion's empathy for Alpheus and Arethusa reflects his own capacity for compassion, marking a significant shift from his earlier self-centred perspective.

> Such power to madden thee? And is it true—
> Away, away, or I shall dearly rue
> My very thoughts: in mercy then away,
> Kindest Alpheus for should I obey
> My own dear will, 'twould be a deadly bane."—

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[105] John Keats, "Endymion", Book II, *The Complete Poems,* ed. John Barnard, Penguin Classics, London, 1977, p. 282, vv. 497-505.

> “O, Oread-Queen! would that thou hadst a pain
> Like this of mine, then would I fearless turn
> And be a criminal.”—“Alas, I burn,
> I shudder—gentle river, get thee hence.
> Alpheus! thou enchanter! every sense
> Of mine was once made perfect in these woods.[106]

The imagery employed in the depiction of Alpheus and Arethusa serves to evoke a sense of desperation and passion. The crashing waters and breathless intensity of their pursuit create a mood of overwhelming emotion, mirroring the passion and loss experienced by Endymion and other characters throughout the poem.

The third book further develops the theme of love, portraying friendship and sympathy as essential components of genuine love. Endymion’s rescue of Glaucus and Scylla from the curse of Circe exemplifies the transformative power of empathy and compassion,[107] leading to a deeper understanding of love as a force for altruism and benevolence. Keats uses a classic myth: according to Hyginus and Ovid, Scylla was a beautiful nymph who lived in Calabria and often bathed at the beach in Zancle. One evening, she saw Glaucus, a sea god who was once mortal, emerging from the waves. Terrified, she fled to a mountain. Glaucus, in love with her, asked Circe for a love potion. Circe, who desired Glaucus, was angered by his rejection and sought revenge. She created a potion and poured it into the sea where Scylla bathed. As a result, Scylla was transformed into a monstrous creature with serpentine legs and multiple dog heads around her waist. Horrified, Scylla threw herself into the sea and lived in a rocky cavern. Keats introduces the character of Glaucus, whose tale serves as a parallel to Endymion’s own journey of love and redemption. Glaucus’s dependence on Scylla and Circe mirrors Endymion’s own dependency on Cynthia, highlighting the seduction of immortal beauty and the illusions it can create. The sensuous language used to describe both Cynthia and Circe emphasizes their otherworldly charm, drawing Endymion and Glaucus into a lovesick trance from which they struggle to awaken. This underscores the idea that mortal men are often ensnared by the enchanting power of immoral beings, seeking fulfilment and happiness in their ephemeral embrace.

> “Young lover, I must weep—such hellish spite

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[106] John Keats, “Endymion”, Book II, p. 304, vv. 956-961.
[107] B. E. Miller, “On the Meaning of Keats’s Endymion*,* p. 46.

> With dry cheek who can tell? While thus my might
> Proving upon this element, dismay'd,
> Upon a dead thing's face my hand I laid;
> I look'd—'twas Scylla! Cursed, cursed Circe!
> O vulture-witch, hast never heard of mercy?
> Could not thy harshest vengeance be content,
> But thou must nip this tender innocent
> Because I lov'd her?—Cold, O cold indeed
> Were her fair limbs, and like a common weed
> The sea-swell took her hair. Dead as she was
> I clung about her waist, nor ceas'd to pass
> Fleet as an arrow through unfathom'd brine,
> Until there shone a fabric crystalline,
> Ribb'd and inlaid with coral, pebble, and pearl.[108]

Glaucus encounters a lifeless body and, upon closer inspection, recognizes it as Scylla. He curses Circe, the enchantress who transformed Scylla into a monster. Calling Circe a "vulture-witch" he accuses her of mercilessness, lamenting her lack of compassion and the harshness of her vengeance. Endymion questions why Circe's vengeance could not be satisfied without destroying an innocent being. He mourns the fate of his beloved, who has been turned into a cold, lifeless form.

However, Glaucus' story also serves as a cautionary tale, demonstrating the dangers of succumbing to the allure of immortality at the expense of human connection. Glaucus' pursuit of Circe leads to his transformation into an old man and a thousand years of solitude, highlighting the tragic consequences of prioritizing superficial beauty over genuine human relationships. Endymion's response to Glaucus' plight marks a significant moment of growth and realization for the shepherd-prince. Moved by compassion and empathy, Endymion offers his assistance to Glaucus, forging a friendship based on mutual understanding and solidarity. This act of selfless compassion contrasts with Endymion's earlier self-centred pursuit of immortal beauty, suggesting a shift in his priorities and values.

> Two copious tear-drops instant fell
> From the God's large eyes; he smil'd delectable,

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[108] John Keats, "Endymion", Book III, *The Complete Poems,* ed. John Barnard, Penguin Classics, London, 1977, p. 337, vv. 615- 629.

> And over Glaucus held his blessing hands.—
> “Endymion! Ah! still wandering in the bands
> Of love? Now this is cruel. Since the hour
> I met thee in earth’s bosom, all my power
> Have I put forth to serve thee.[109]

Glaucus expresses concern for Endymion’s continued involvement in love, suggesting that it may hinder his progress or fulfilment. Despite this, the god reaffirms his unwavering support and dedication to Endymion, emphasizing the divine assistance and guidance that Endymion has received since their initial meeting. This interaction highlights themes of divine intervention, guidance, and the complexities of love’s influence on mortal lives.

Finally, in the fourth book, Endymion’s love for the Indian Maid evolves into a more profound and selfless devotion, transcending mere physical attraction. Keats depicts Endymion’s inner conflict between his love for the Maid and his yearning for a higher, more spiritual union represented by Cynthia, the moon goddess[110]. Ultimately, Endymion’s journey culminates in a vision of love that encompasses both physical passion and spiritual transcendence, symbolizing the synthesis of earthly and divine love. Endymion’s romance with the Indian Maiden symbolizes his acceptance of mortality and his recognition of the beauty and value of earthly love. Unlike his encounters with Cynthia, which occur in the realm of dreams, his connection with the Maiden is rooted in the physical world. This shift signifies Endymion’s evolving understanding of love and desire, as he learns to appreciate the tangible joys and sorrows of mortal existence. The Indian Maiden serves as a catalyst for Endymion’s transformation, prompting him to confront his own mortality and the limitations of his quest for divine love. His declaration of love to the Maiden represents a pivotal moment of realization, as he acknowledges the transient nature of human life and embraces the possibility of earthly fulfilment. Endymion’s decision to abandon his pursuit of immortality in favour of a mortal romance reflects his growing maturity and wisdom.

But Endymion’s pursuit of the Indian maid is hindered by societal barriers, including her noble status and his own humble origins. Additionally, their love is complicated by political turmoil and conflicts within her kingdom. Despite Endymion’s earnest efforts to win her affection, their relationship faces numerous obstacles. As the poem progresses, the Indian maid becomes increasingly entangled in the political machinations of her realm. She is forced to navigate treacherous alliances and betrayals, leading to her eventual downfall. Tragically, her life is characterized by the tumultuous events surrounding her, and she meets a premature and untimely end. The Indian Maid's fate serves as a poignant reminder of the transient nature of human existence and the fragility of love in the face of external forces. Her tragic story underscores the themes of love thwarted by societal constraints and the impermanence of earthly pursuits.

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[109] John Keats, “Endymion”, Book III, p. 352, vv. 900-906.
[110] B. E. Miller, “On the Meaning of Keats’s Endymion*,* p. 46.

Endymion's journey is also marked by moments of confusion and conflict. His wavering between the Indian Maiden and Cynthia symbolizes his ongoing struggle to reconcile his mortal longings with his yearning for divine perfection. This inner conflict underscores the complexity of human desire and the difficulty of finding true fulfilment in a world marked by impermanence and uncertainty[111]. *Endymion* ends with a sense of transformation and spiritual enlightenment for the protagonist. Endymion, having undergone numerous trials and adventures, ultimately ascends to the realm of the divine, leaving behind his mortal existence. The poem concludes with a vision of the protagonist being united with his beloved, Cynthia, in a celestial embrace. This final scene symbolizes Endymion's attainment of spiritual fulfilment and eternal bliss, transcending the earthly realm and embracing divine love.

> Her lucid bow, continuing thus; "Drear, drear
> Has our delaying been; but foolish fear
> Withheld me first; and then decrees of fate;
> And then 'twas fit that from this mortal state
> Thou shouldst, my love, by some unlook'd for change
> Be spiritualiz'd.[112]

Moreover, the transformation of the Indian Maid into Cynthia signifies the integration of the natural and supernatural, suggesting that true fulfilment lies in embracing both realms harmoniously[113]. As Cynthia speaks, a profound physical transformation occurs. Her appearance changes dramatically: her dark hair turns golden, her eyes become brighter and filled with love, and she radiates light and joy. The transformation represents the culmination of Endymion's spiritual journey and his union with the celestial forces he has long admired and sought. Cynthia explains that it was destined for Endymion to be spiritualized and united with her. This transformation marks the fulfilment of their destiny and the resolution of the obstacles that had kept them apart. The transformation of the Indian maid into Cynthia symbolizes the transcendence of earthly constraints and the attainment of spiritual enlightenment and union with the divine.

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[111] B. E. Miller, "On the Meaning of Keats's Endymion*,* p. 53.

[112] John Keats, "Endymion", Book IV, *The Complete Poems,* ed. John Barnard, Penguin Classics, London, 1977, p. 409, vv. 988-993.

[113] B. E. Miller, "On the Meaning of Keats's Endymion*,* p. 45.

Even after *Endymion,* his ambitious retelling of the classical myth of Endymion and Cynthia, Keats frequently incorporated Greek mythology into his poetry. Works like *The Fall of Hyperion* and *Ode on a Grecian Urn* demonstrate his continuing engagement with Greek themes and characters[114]. Through his works, Keats contributed to the Romantic fascination with Greek mythology, offering his own interpretations and reimagining's of classical tales. This engagement with Greek culture reflected the broader Romantic impulse to explore the depths of human experience through classical myths.

In the same period in 1818, Keats began to work with Reynolds on the translation of Boccaccio's *Decameron*[115]*,* starting from the tale of Isabella, and planned a walking tour with his friend Charles Brown through northern England and Scotland, hoping it would provide a needed respite and inspiration. In June 1818, Keats and Brown started their tour. Meanwhile, Keats finished his poem, *Isabella, or the Pot of Basil*[116]. In Scotland, Keats wrote the sonnet *To Ailsa Rock* and a sonnet in tribute to Burns[117], celebrating his lasting influence on literature, *On Visiting the Tomb of Burns*. The journey was physically challenging at some point. In August, they arrived in Inverness, where Keats' health began to deteriorate[118], compounded by a persistent sore throat and exhaustion from the journey. The advice of a physician in Inverness compelled Keats to reconsider his plans. Thus, he made the difficult decision to return to London by sea, concluding their remarkable journey through the Scottish landscape.

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[114] J. N. Cox, *Poetry and Politics in The Cockney School*, pp. 164-165.
[115] N. Roe, *John Keats: A New Life,* p. 221.
[116] S. Hebron, *John Keats*, p. 58.
[117] *Ivi*, p. 61.
[118] *Ivi,* p. 67.

3.5 *Endymion* Reviews

Keats arrived in London at the end of August. However, upon his return, he was met with distressing news of his brother Tom's deteriorating health due to tuberculosis. He devoted himself to Tom's care despite his own declining health, plagued by sore throat and toothache. Despite his physical and emotional exhaustion, Keats found solace in writing, using poetry as a means to escape the constant presence of Tom's illness.

As September arrived, the reviews of Keats' *Endymion* began to be published, and they were merciless. The attacks, particularly from *Blackwood's Magazine* and the *Quarterly Review*, not only criticized his work but also his association with Leigh Hunt and questioned his suitability as a poet[119]. Keats, though expecting criticism, was deeply affected by the severity of the reviews. However, he refused to be deterred by the harsh judgments, recognizing that true artistic growth comes from experience.

The critique of the Cockney School of Poetry, attributed to Lockhart under the pseudonym of Z., caused insecurities in Keats' aspirations for fame and literary independence. Keats, who had been associated with Hunt and the Cockney School of Poetry, found himself caught in the crossfire of this literary feud. Lockhart's review hinted at Keats' affiliation with Hunt and suggested that his own poetry would likely be subjected to similar scrutiny. Indeed, in the August 1818 issue of *Blackwood's*, Keats faced insults from Lockhart, who advised him to abandon writing altogether and return to his medical studies. *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, in its August 1818 issue, presented a critique of John Keats and the broader Cockney School of Poetry. Lockhart's critique of Keats in *Blackwood's Magazine* was an extensive attack on the poet's work, character, and aspirations. Lockhart employed a tone of derision and mockery throughout the review, seeking to undermine Keats' reputation as a poet.

One of the central points of Lockhart's critique was his portrayal of Keats as a young man whose talent had been wasted by an obsession with poetry. Lockhart suggested that Keats' decision to pursue poetry instead of a more practical profession, such as medicine –for which he had been apprenticed to an apothecary– was indicative of a decline in mental faculties[120]. Lockhart likened Keats' poetic ambition to a form of madness, implying that he was mislaid by his literary aspirations. Lockhart begins by discussing what he calls the "Metromanie"[121], a condition characterized by an overwhelming craze for poetry. Keats, portrayed as a tragic figure, emerges as a prime example of this "disease". The article suggests that Keats abandoned a promising career in medicine to pursue the uncertain road to become a poet.

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[119] J. N. Cox, *Poetry and Politics in The Cockney School*, p. 82.

[120] John G. Lockhart, "On the Cockney School of Poetry IV", *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine,* Vol. 3 No. 17, August 1818, p. 519.

> To witness the disease of any human understanding, however feeble, is distressing, but the spectacle of an able mind reduced to a state of insanity is of course ten times more afflicting.[122]

A significant portion of *Blackwood's* critique focuses on Keats' association with Leigh Hunt and the Cockney School of Poetry. Lockhart discredited Hunt as "the most worthless and affected of all the versifiers of our time", suggesting that Keats' admiration for Hunt and other poets reflected poorly on his own judgment and taste. He accuses Keats of succumbing to Hunt' influence, adopting the same affected style and misguided principles. Lockhart portrays Hunt as a particularly harmful figure, whose praise and admiration misled Keats into believing his own poetic abilities were greater than they actually were.

> One of these turned out, by and by, to be no other than Mr John Keats. This precocious adulation confirmed the wavering apprentice in his desire to quit the gallipots, and at the same time excited in his too susceptible mind a fatal admiration for the character and talents of the most worthless and affected of all the versifiers of our time.[123]

The magazine also offers a detailed critique of Keats' poetry, taking into consideration his sonnets and, most notably, his work *Endymion* for harsh scrutiny. Lockhart derided the poem for its perceived lack of coherence, its loose versification, and its departure from classical mythology. Lockhart accused Keats of misappropriating classical themes and characters, transforming them into what he described as "Cockney rhymes" devoid of depth and sophistication. This appropriation of classical myth, in Lockhart's perspective, results in poems that are vulgar and lacking in depth. *Endymion* is described as a failed attempt to romanticize Greek mythology, with the magazine dismissing it as a naive effort unworthy of serious consideration:

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[121] John G. Lockhart, "On the Cockney School of Poetry IV", p. 519.

[122] *Ibidem.*

[123] *Ibidem.*

> His Endymion is 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.[124]

Lockhart's critique extended to Keats' romantic inclinations, mocking his portrayal of love and passion in *Endymion* as unconvincing. He highlights passages from the poem to illustrate what he saw as Keats' inability to capture genuine emotion or convey meaningful themes. Towards the conclusion of its critique, the article ventures into political commentary, accusing Keats and his fellow Cockney poets of promoting sedition and aligning themselves with dubious political causes. The magazine suggests that their association with *The Examiner* newspaper is evidence of their subversive tendencies. Lockhart mocks their attempts to elevate themselves to the level of political and literary luminaries, portraying them as pretentious in their aspirations.

With this issue of the *Blackwood's Magazine*, Lockhart sought to undermine Keats' reputation as a poet and discourage further literary endeavours, portraying him as a talentless young man who should abandon his poetic ambitions and return to his previous occupation as a pharmacist. Lockhart's attacks on Keats continued in subsequent issues of *Blackwood's*. The relentless denigration from *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, while partly motivated by political allegiances, also extended to Keats' personal life, who struggled to separate himself from the shadow of Hunt and the Cockney poets[125].

A similar critique was published in *The Quarterly Review* in April 1818, written by John Wilson Croker. This review not only denigrates Keats' poetic talents but also reflects the broader cultural clash between conservative and liberal ideologies of the time. Croker begins his review with an unusual confession: he did not finish reading *Endymion*. "We have not read his work"[126] Croker admits, setting a dismissive tone that implies the poem is too incoherent and laborious to gain full attention. He continues, "with the fullest stretch of our perseverance, we are forced to confess that we have not been able to struggle beyond the first of the four books"[127]. By acknowledging his inability to get beyond the first of the four books, Croker counters in advance any defence Keats might offer against his criticism.

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[124] John G. Lockhart, "On the Cockney School of Poetry IV", p. 522.

[125] S. Hebron, *John Keats*, p. 70.

[126] John W. Croker, "Keats's Endymion", *The Quarterly Review*, Vol. 19 No. 37, April 1818, p. 204.

[127] *Ibidem.*

Croker concedes that Keats possesses “powers of language, rays of fancy, and gleams of genius”[128], yet he quickly undercuts this praise by condemning Keats’ adherence to Cockney poetry. This derogatory label associates again Keats with Hunt’s circle, known for its liberal and reformist leanings, both politically and stylistically. Croker mocks Hunt’s poetry and self-complacency, extending this disdain to Keats, whom he describes as an even less coherent and more absurd imitator of Hunt. “This author is a copyist of Mr. Hunt; but he is more unintelligible, almost as rugged, twice as diffuse, and ten times more tiresome and absurd than his prototype”[129]. Central to Croker’s critique is the accusation that *Endymion* is devoid of clear meaning. He claims the poem’s structure and language lack coherence, suggesting that Keats allows rhymes to dictate the poem’s direction rather than logical progression of thought. “There is hardly a complete couplet inclosing a complete idea in the whole book”[130]. This leads, according to Croker, to verses that are nonsensical and disjointed. He illustrates this by quoting passages where he believes Keats prioritizes rhyme over reason, resulting in a random composition. Croker further derides Keats’ inventive use of language, particularly his creation of new words and unconventional verb formations. He sees these linguistic innovations as further evidence of Keats’ incompetence and deviation from established poetic norms[131].

Croker’s review is not merely a critique of a literary work, it is also a defence of the conservative aesthetic values championed by the Tory establishment. The Cockney School of poetry, with which Keats and Hunt were associated, was often attacked for its liberal political associations as much as for its literary style. Croker’s harsh critique of *Endymion* thus serves to uphold traditional Tory values against what he perceives as the radical intrusions of liberal reformist poetics[132]. “Mr. Keats...is unhappily a disciple of the new school of what has been somewhere called Cockney poetry, which may be defined to consist of the most incongruous ideas in the most uncouth language”[133], Croker asserts, framing his literary judgment within a broader political context.

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[128] John W. Croker, “Keats’s Endymion”, p.204.

[129] *Ivi*, p. 205.

[130] *Ivi*, p. 206.

[131] William Keach, “Cockney Couplets: Keats and the Politics of Style*”, Studies in Romanticism*, Vol. 25, No. 2, 1986, p. 183.

[132] *Ivi*, p. 184.

[133] John W. Croker, “Keats’s Endymion”, p. 205.

By mocking Keats' deviations from conventional forms, Croker implicitly defends the ideals of Augustan poetry epitomized by figures like Alexander Pope and Samuel Johnson[134]. These poets were celebrated for their balanced couplets and clear diction, which Croker holds as the standard against which Keats' work is judged and found wanting. The review underscores a broader cultural resistance to the innovations introduced by Romantic poets, who sought to expand the boundaries of poetic expression. Croker sarcastically concludes "If anyone should be bold enough to purchase this 'Poetic Romance', and so much more patient than ourselves, as to get beyond the first book, and so much more fortunate as to find a meaning, we entreat him to make us acquainted with his success"[135], reinforcing his dismissal of Keats' work as devoid of merit.

Despite its harshness, the review inadvertently highlights the innovative aspects of Keats' style that would later be celebrated. Within a week, a letter defending Keats against the *Quarterly Review's* critique was published in the *Morning Chronicle*, likely penned by John Scott, followed by another letter containing excerpts from *Endymion* to save Keats' reputation. Reynolds also contributed to the defence, publishing a favourable review of *Endymion* in *The Alfred*, praising Keats' skill in revitalizing pagan mythology[136]. By October 2, Keats, overwhelmed by despair, sought solace from his dear friend Charles Cowden Clarke, who responded with unwavering support. Clarke's presence provided a temporary relief, but Keats' inner turmoil persisted. With the help of Clarke's companionship, Keats summoned the strength to confront his critics once more, reaffirming his dedication to his craft and asserting his independence as a poet.

3.6 Keats' Distance from Hunt

Keats' poetic aspirations and ambitions contributed significantly to the strain in the friendship between him and Hunt between 1817 and 1820. Several issues occurred as Keats came to dislike Hunt's poetic style and received criticism of his own epic poem *Endymion*, which he wrote in autumn 1817. Keats was also determined in this period about not being perceived as Hunt's follower as he felt that Hunt's influence somehow compromised his aesthetic sensibilities.

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[134] William Keach, "Cockney Couplets: Keats and the Politics of Style*",* p. 184.
[135] John W. Croker, "Keats's Endymion", p. 208.
[136] N. Roe, *John Keats: A New Life,* p. 188.

Keats' correspondence reveals his concerns. Regarding Hunt's critique of *Endymion*, he wrote to his brother, "he allows it not much merit as a whole; says it is unnatural and made ten objections to it in the mere skimming over"[137]. Keats also expressed frustration about Hunt and Shelley's reactions, stating, "they appear much disposed to dissect and anatomize, any trip or slip I may have made"[138]. Keats' desire for independence from Hunt's influence is evident in a previous letter to Benjamin Bailey, where he lamented being seen as Hunt's pupil. He wrote, "His corrections and amputations will by the knowing ones be traced in this Poem"[139].

Moreover, Keats articulated his preference for associating himself with literary giants like Shakespeare and Milton rather than being perceived alongside Hunt and Wordsworth. In a journal letter to his brother George and his wife during December 1818 and early January 1819, Keats criticized Hunt, stating, "Hunt does one harm by making fine things petty and beautiful things hateful"[140]. This period marked a significant decline in Keats' admiration for Hunt, reflecting his disillusionment with Hunt's influence on his literary development.

As a result of these tensions and disappointments, Keats withdrew from Hunt's company, though there is no indication that Hunt reciprocated this dissatisfaction as some of Keats' works continued to be published in Hunt's periodicals. However, Keats repeatedly expressed weariness and dissatisfaction in his letters, remarking that he was tired of conversations with Hunt and no longer found value in their interactions. He lamented that "Conversation is not a search after knowledge, but an endeavour at effect"[141]. Keats' disillusionment also extended to Hunt's liberal principles, which he no longer admired as he once had. This period of strained relations marked a turning point in Keats' personal and artistic development, as he sought to establish his own literary identity.

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[137] John Keats, "Letter To George and Tom Keats", 23 January 1818, *Selected Letters,* ed. John Barnard, Penguin Classics, London, 2014, p. 97.

[138] *Ibidem.*

[139] John Keats, "Letter To Benjamin Bailey", 8 October 1817, *Selected Letters,* ed. John Barnard, Penguin Classics, London, 2014, p. 58.

[140] John Keats, "Letter To George and Georgiana Keats", December 1818, *Selected Letters,* ed. John Barnard, Penguin Classics, London, 2014, p. 276.

[141] John Keats, "Letter To B. R. Haydon", 8 March 1819, *Selected Letters,* ed. John Barnard, Penguin Classics, London, 2014, p. 316.

Despite the turmoil caused by the reviews, Keats remained resolute in his dedication to poetry. He recognized the faults in *Endymion* but viewed it as a necessary step in his artistic journey. Keats then embarked on a new poetic endeavour with *Hyperion*, displaying a newfound maturity and confidence in his craft. The controlled rhythm and imagery of the poem marked a departure from the style of *Endymion*, signalling Keats' growth as a poet[142]. During the time Keats spent caring for Tom and diligently working on *Hyperion*, his life was confined to a routine of nursing duties and solitary artistic pursuit. In autumn, Keats had a significant meeting when the Brawne family moved nearby. Fanny, the eldest daughter, would eventually become a central figure in Keats' life, though at this point he maintained a belief in the solitary nature of the poet's existence. As Tom's health declined throughout the autumn and into winter, Keats faced the impending loss with a heavy heart. In November Tom passed away, marking a moment of grief and reflection for Keats and his closest friends[143]. After Tom's death, Brown extended an invitation to Keats to reside at Wentworth Place, in an attempt to provide him with solace away from the memories tied to Well Walk. Keats, in his painful state, accepted the offer, seeking refuge in friends who tried to alleviate his grief through social engagements, such as dinners and theatrical outings.

Despite his initial reluctance, Keats eventually agreed to visit Chichester, where he formed a positive relationship with his hosts, the Dilkes[144]. The tranquil atmosphere of the city, coupled with the company of friends, inspired Keats to embark on the creation of *The Eve of St. Agnes*[145]. Upon his return to Wentworth Place, Keats continued to find inspiration, beginning another poem, *The Eve of St. Mark*[146]. However, as February and March unfolded, Keats succumbed to a period of despondency, marked by inactivity and a sense of boredom. Keats' spirits lifted in April, when he continued to produce remarkable works, including the hauntingly beautiful *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*[147] published in the 10 May 1820 edition of Hunt's *Indicator*. *La Belle Dame sans Merci* is a melancholic ballad that depicts the tragic story of a knight who has been bewitched and abandoned by a mysterious, enchanting woman. Keats weaves the concept of the sublime into the poem, blending beauty and terror to evoke powerful emotions and explore profound themes. The desolate landscape, where "the sedge has withered from the lake" and "no birds sing", sets a haunting backdrop that underscores nature's vast, indifferent power and the knight's isolation. The knight, who is described as standing "alone and palely loitering", recounts his encounter with a woman of extraordinary beauty and ethereal presence.

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[142] S. Hebron, *John Keats*, p. 72.
[143] *Ivi*, p. 75.
[144] *Ivi*, p. 78.
[145] *Ivi*, p. 78.
[146] *Ivi*, p. 79.
[147] N. Roe, *John Keats: A New Life,* p. 312.

He describes how he fell in love with her and made her "a garland for her head, and bracelets too, and fragrant zone", believing her to be "a faery's child". The woman, seemingly reciprocating his affection, led him to her cave where she lulled him to sleep. However, in his dream, the knight saw "pale kings and princes too, / Pale warriors, death-pale were they all", who warned him that he had fallen into the trap of La Belle Dame sans Merci. These spectral figures, who were previous victims of the lady's enchantment, revealed that they, like him, were left to languish in a state of eternal longing. Upon waking, the knight found himself "on the cold hill's side", unable to move on from his obsession with the beautiful lady. The poem explores themes of love, obsession, and the blurring of fantasy and reality, illustrating how the knight's infatuation has led to his spiritual and emotional demise. His inability to escape the memory of the lady leaves him trapped in a lifeless existence. The narrative serves as a cautionary tale about the dangers of intense, obsessive love and its potential to lead to a kind of living death:

> I saw pale kings and princes too,
> Pale warriors, death-pale were they all;
> They cried—'La Belle Dame sans Merci
> Thee hath in thrall!'
> I saw their starved lips in the gloam,
> With horrid warning gapèd wide,
> And I awoke and found me here,
> On the cold hill's side.
> And this is why I sojourn here,
> Alone and palely loitering,
> Though the sedge is withered from the lake,
> And no birds sing.[148]

In May, Keats experienced a remarkable period of creative ferment, giving rise to some of his most iconic works: *Ode to a Nightingale*, *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, and *Ode on*

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[148] John Keats, "La Belle Dame Sans Merci", *The Complete Poems,* ed. John Barnard, Penguin Classics, London, 1977, p. 677, vv. 37-48.

Melancholy[149]. This creative spirit was nurtured by the serene environment of Wentworth Place, where Keats found solace in the verdant gardens and atmosphere. Residing in the bucolic setting alongside his close friend Brown, while the Brawnes occupied another part of the house, Keats devoted himself to profound introspection and artistic exploration.

Ode to a Nightingale, believed to have been composed under the canopy of a tree in the garden, delves into profound existential themes. This ode, infused with Keats' personal grief over the recent loss of his brother Tom, is a deep and melancholic meditation on the human condition, the fleeting nature of happiness, and the transcendent beauty of the natural world, all the while grappling with the inescapable awareness of time and mortality. Keats contrasts the nightingale's seemingly immortal song with human mortality, pondering how the bird's melody has echoed through the ages, untouched by the ravages of time that afflict humanity[150]. Throughout the poem, Keats expresses a longing to escape the burdens of consciousness, considering intoxication as a means to dull the pain of existence. "That I might drink, and leave the world unseen, / And with thee fade away into the forest dim"[151]. However, he turns to the power of poetry, hoping it will bring him closer to the nightingale's pure and effortless beauty: "Away! away! for I will fly to thee, / Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards, / But on the viewless wings of Poesy"[152]. Despite this, the speaker remains trapped within his own consciousness, unable to fully escape the isolating confines of human awareness. As the poem progresses, Keats' mood darkens, and he begins to romanticize death as a release from suffering.

> Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
> To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
> While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
> In such an ecstasy![153]

However, he realizes that death would silence his ability to perceive beauty, underscoring the bittersweet nature of human consciousness, which allows the appreciation of beauty but also brings awareness of its impermanence. Yet, as the nightingale flies away, the speaker is left feeling isolated and unsure if the entire experience was real or a waking dream: "Was it a vision, or a waking dream? / Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep?”.[154] In exploring the relationship between art and nature, the speaker initially considers poetry as a means to match the nightingale’s natural beauty. However, he perceives human art as limited, and transient compared to the pure, effortless creation of nature: “Forlorn! the very word is like a bell / To toll me back from thee to my sole self”[155]. This realization leaves Keats feeling that human endeavours, no matter how beautiful, are always overshadowed by the eternal and unchanging beauty of the natural world.

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[149] S. Hebron, *John Keats*, p. 87.
[150] *Ivi*, pp. 87-88
[151] John Keats, "Ode to a Nightingale", *The Complete Poems,* ed. John Barnard, Penguin Classics, London, 1977, p. 704, vv. 19-20.
[152] *Ivi,* p. 705, vv. 31-33.
[153] *Ivi,* p. 706, vv. 55-58.

Likewise, *Ode on a Grecian Urn* immerses the reader in a timeless meditation on the tension between the transient nature of human life and the immutable beauty captured in classical art[156]. Keats directly addresses the urn: “Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness, / Thou foster-child of Silence and slow Time”[157]. The urn is a historian of rural scenes, and the poet wonders what stories are being told by the images on the urn, whether the figures it depicts are human beings or gods, and which part of Greece they are in. “What men or gods are these? What maidens loth? / What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?”[158]. He then focuses on a scene that depicts two young lovers. Though they are nearly kissing, their lips can never meet. The speaker tells them not to be upset, however: though the kiss will never happen, the man and woman will always love one another, and the woman will always be beautiful.

> Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
> Though winning near the goal—yet, do not grieve;
> She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
> For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair![159]

To Keats, the urn seems to offer a temporary respite from thought, in the same way that eternity does: “Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought / As doth eternity”[160]. But this respite seems inhuman or false, leading the poet to call the urn “Cold Pastoral!”[161]. Inspired by this sentiment, he notes that, when everyone in their generation has died, the urn will still be around: “When old age shall this generation waste, / Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe”[162]. It will become an object of contemplation for people with different problems than his generation. To them, the urn will say that beauty and truth are one and the same: “Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know”[163].

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[154] John Keats, “Ode to a Nightingale”, p. 708, vv. 79-80.
[155] *Ivi*, p. 707, vv. 71-72.
[156] J. N. Cox, *Poetry and Politics in The Cockney School*, p. 149.
[157] John Keats, “Ode on a Grecian Urn”, *The Complete Poems,* ed. John Barnard, Penguin Classics, London, 1977, p. 700, vv. 1-2.
[158] *Ivi,* p. 700, vv. 8-9.
[159] *Ivi,* p. 701, vv. 17-20.
[160] *Ivi,* p. 702, vv. 44-45.
[161] *Ivi,* p. 702, v. 45.

Finally, *Ode on Melancholy* offers a profound exploration of the interplay between joy and sorrow, contemplating the complexities of the human psyche with unparalleled insight and sensitivity. These odes represent the culmination of Keats’ poetic achievement.

But Keats’ had concerns, as Brown was planning to rent out his portion of Wentworth Place for the summer, which meant Keats needed to secure alternative accommodation urgently. When an invitation arrived from James Rice to spend the summer on the Isle of Wight, the location where Keats had begun *Endymion*, he readily accepted, viewing it as a welcome respite from his mounting worries. Keats sought advice from Charles Brown, who suggested that Keats appeal to friends who owed him money for settlements and even encouraged Keats to consider returning to press work. With a clear objective of focusing on his literary pursuits, Keats embarked for the Isle of Wight, intending to collaborate with Brown on a play, *Otho the Great*, during their stay[164].

Upon his arrival, Keats wasted no time immersing himself in writing. Despite suffering from a feverish cold and sore throat, he penned passionate letters to Fanny Brawne, revealing the depth of his affection for her. Although financial constraints precluded marriage, there existed an implicit understanding between them. Over the ensuing weeks, Keats’ completed the first act of *Otho the Great* and made significant progress on a new poem, *Lamia*, inspired by Robert Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy*[165]. Brown’s arrival provided relief, as Keats’ health began to improve. Together, they continued to work on *Otho the Great* while Keats also was completing *Lamia*, recognizing its potential for public acclaim and financial gain. As autumn approached, Keats and Brown departed for Winchester, where Keats hoped to find the resources necessary to conclude *Lamia*. His musings on the transformative qualities of autumn culminated in his final great poem, *To Autumn*[166], a great reflection on the fleeting nature of life and the inexorable passage of time.

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[162] J. Keats, “Ode on a Grecian Urn”, p. 702, vv. 46-47.
[163] *Ivi,* p. 702, vv. 49-50.
[164] S. Hebron, *John Keats*, p. 94.
[165] *Ivi*, p. 96
[166] S. Hebron, *John Keats*, p. 99.

During 1819, Keats dealt with his complex emotions for Fanny Brawne. Despite recognizing the intensity of his emotions, Keats struggled with insecurity, fearing the overwhelming passion and its potential to overshadow his poetic aspirations. However, Keats' aspirations and plans were disrupted by a grave turn of events. A severe cold contracted during a journey to London resulted in a series of debilitating haemorrhages, signalling the contraction of tuberculosis[167], a disease that had claimed the lives of his mother and brother. Confined to his sickbed, Keats confronted mortality with resignation, finding solace in nature's beauty and reflecting on his legacy as a poet.

3.7 Re-established Friendship and Death

In the summer of 1820, Keats' friendship with Hunt was revived under significant circumstances. Stricken with tuberculosis, Keats had been residing with his friend Charles Brown during his illness. When Brown departed for his annual summer journey through the Hebrides, Keats relocated to a house near Hunt's residence in Kentish Town. In June he moved in with the Hunts, where he found solace and care during his illness.

Shortly after, Keats departed for Italy. His departure was marked by an *Adieu to Keats* in the *Indicator*, which optimistically stated that he would soon be back. As his health declined, Keats' thoughts turned to Italy, with a climate deemed more conducive to his recovery. Despite initial reluctance, Keats accepted an invitation from Percy Shelley to join him in Italy, a decision further influenced by Joseph Severn's willingness to accompany him[168], setting sail for Italy. Keats' journey to Italy aboard the Maria Crowther[169] in late 1820 was fraught with hardship and suffering, mirroring the poet's own declining health.

Keats and Severn settled in Rome, where the poet's health continued to decline[170]. Severn's companionship provided some comfort, but Keats remained haunted by existential questions and the relentless progression of his illness. As Keats' condition worsened, he expressed a desire for death, finding solace in the prospect of release from his suffering. On

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[167] S. Hebron, *John Keats,* p. 106.

[168] *Ivi*, p. 111.

[169] N. Roe, *John Keats: A New Life,* p. 382.

[170] *Ivi,* p. 388.

February 23, 1821, John Keats passed away, his final moments marked by acceptance and resignation.

Keats' burial in the Protestant Cemetery in Rome marked the end of a brief yet extraordinary life, leaving a sign in English literature through his timeless poetry and the enduring friendships he forged. Today, Keats' words continue to be read worldwide, the words of a poet whose name was "writ in water". The epitaph for John Keats, written by the poet himself, is a sign of his profound sense of disillusionment and resignation in the face of his own mortality[171]. Keats, on his deathbed, expressed his final wish for these words to be inscribed upon his tombstone: "This grave contains all that was mortal, of a young English poet, who, on his death bed, in the bitterness of his heart, at the malicious power of his enemies, desired these words to be engraved on his tomb stone, Here lies One Whose Name was writ in Water". This mirrors Keats' profound sense of transience and the fleeting nature of human existence. Despite the adversities he faced during his brief life, Keats refused to bow to the pressures of his defamers, choosing instead to embrace his own vulnerability and acknowledging the fragility of human achievement. The words "Writ in Water" are also a reminder of the impermanence of fame and the inevitability of oblivion. Yet, Keats' name was not forgotten.

Hunt's friendship was marked by mutual respect and a shared passion for poetry. Even after Keats' death, Hunt remained a devoted friend, honouring Keats with heartfelt reminiscences and unwavering defence of his artistic contributions[172]. Hunt in his *Autobiography, with Reminiscences of Friends and Contemporaries* wrote about Keats' disease and subsequent death:

> Keats had felt that his disease was mortal, two or three years before he died. He had a constitutional tendency to consumption; a close attendance on the deathbed of a beloved brother, when he ought to have been nursing himself in bed, gave it a blow which he felt for months. Despairing love added its hourly torment; and, mean- while, the hostile critics came up, and roused an indignation in him, both against them and himself, which on so many accounts he could ill afford to endure.[173]

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[171] S. Hebron, *John Keats*, p. 118.

[172] Leigh Hunt, *Autobiography with Reminiscences of Friends and Contemporaries*, Vol. II, Smith, Elder and co., London, 1850, p. 201.

[173] *Ivi*, p. 209.

Several works were composed in response to Keats' death. One of the most prominent tributes to Keats is Shelley's *Adonais: An Elegy on the Death of John Keats*[174]. In this elegy, Shelley mourns the loss of his fellow poet, depicting Keats as the mythological figure Adonais.

> I weep for Adonais—he is dead!
> Oh, weep for Adonais! though our tears
> Thaw not the frost which binds so dear a head!
> And thou, sad Hour, selected from all years
> To mourn our loss, rouse thy obscure compeers,
> And teach them thine own sorrow, say: "With me
> Died Adonais; till the Future dares
> Forget the Past, his fate and fame shall be
> An echo and a light unto eternity!"[175]

The choice of the name Adonais, derived from the Greek Adonis, carries layers of significance. Adonis, traditionally associated with beauty and youth, symbolizes the idealized form of the deceased Keats. This transformation allows Shelley to focus on the purity of Keats' artistic spirit and the tragedy of his untimely demise. Shelley's elegy emerges as a response to Keats' tragic end, which the poet attributes, at least in part, to the harsh criticisms levelled against him by anonymous reviewers. The brutal attacks on Keats' poetry, such as those in the *Quarterly Review* and in the *Blackwood's Magazine*, are seen as contributing to his deteriorating health and eventual death from tuberculosis. Shelley's grief for Keats is palpable throughout the poem, serving as both a lamentation for the loss of a fellow poet and a condemnation of literary criticism that can destroy artists.

Throughout *Adonais*, Shelley personifies abstract concepts such as Time and Death, giving them agency and emotion. The personification of the Hour of Keats' death as a mournful witness to his tragic fate underscores the sense of loss and injustice surrounding the poet's untimely demise. The closing stanzas of *Adonais* offer a poignant reflection on the eternal nature of Keats' fame and the futility of mourning his passing. Yet, even in death, Keats' poetic voice continues to be alive, offering inspiration to future poets.

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[174] S. Hebron, *John Keats*, p. 119.
[175] *Ivi*, p. 119.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this dissertation has provided a comprehensive analysis of the Cockney School, a literary movement that emerged in early-nineteenth-century London around the influential figure of Leigh Hunt. By delving into the origins, key members, and ideology of this movement, the study has illuminated the Cockney School's significant contribution to Romantic literature. This work has also explored the broader historical and cultural context in which the Cockney School operated, focusing on the crucial role that the early-nineteenth-century periodical press played in shaping public opinion and literary tastes. By examining the interaction between the Cockney poets and the periodical press, this study has highlighted the dynamic relationship between literature and its contemporary reception. The Cockney School's engagement with political and social issues through their literary works reflects their commitment to using poetry and the periodical press as a tool for social change. Furthermore, the dissertation has addressed the personal relationships and intellectual exchanges that defined the Cockney School. The camaraderie and mutual support among its members, particularly between Hunt and Keats, underscored the movement's collaborative spirit. The influence of other figures, such as Charles Cowden Clarke, Percy Shelley and William Hazlitt, further enriched the movement's intellectual landscape, contributing to its diverse and multifaceted nature.

Leigh Hunt was the one who shaped the Cockney School. His work as an editor, critic, and poet not only provided a platform for the movement's ideas but also connected various voices within the literary community. Hunt's efforts through *The Examiner* and other publications fostered a collaborative heterogeneous environment where radical and innovative ideas could flourish. His editorial prowess was instrumental in bringing together a diverse group of writers and thinkers, including John Keats, Percy Shelley, William Hazlitt, and Charles Lamb, among others.

Through *The Examiner*, Hunt provided a space where the Cockney poets could publish their works and engage in intellectual discourse. This journal became the centre of the movement, allowing its members to express their ideas on literature, politics, and society. Hunt's own contributions to *The Examiner* and his other works demonstrated his commitment to using literature as a means of expression and freedom of speech.

John Keats exemplified the movement's spirit through his poetic works and intellectual engagements. Keats' early interactions with Hunt and other Cockney poets significantly influenced his development as a poet. His contributions to *The Examiner* and the subsequent publication of his works, such as *O Solitude* and *On First Looking into Chapman's Homer,* highlight the interconnectedness of the Cockney School members and their shared literary ambitions. Despite facing severe criticism from established literary newspapers such as the *Blackwood's Magazine* and the *Quarterly Review*, both for his association to the Cockney School and for his poem *Endymion*, Keats' poetry has endured, celebrated for its innovative language, emotional depth, and rich imagery.

The critical reception of the Cockney School was a mixed one, and reviews played a significant role in shaping its legacy. *The Blackwood's Magazine* and *The Quarterly Review* were particularly harsh in their criticism, often attacking the personal lives and social origins of the Cockney poets more than their literary works. These reviews accused Hunt and his circle of vulgarity and lack of poetic sophistication, reflecting the class biases and conservative tastes of the reviewers. Such critiques aimed to undermine the credibility of the Cockney School, branding it as a lower-class movement unworthy of serious consideration. However, despite these disparaging reviews, the Cockney School found defenders among other literary critics and contemporaries. Positive reviews highlighted the innovative spirit and emotional authenticity of the Cockney poets, praising their contributions to the evolution of Romantic poetry.

The Cockney School represents a significant chapter in the history of Romantic literature. This dissertation has aimed to provide a thorough understanding of the Cockney School's genesis, key figures, and ideological foundations, shedding light on its enduring impact on the literary world. By examining the interplay between artistic creativity, political dissent, and social engagement, this study has underscored the importance of the Cockney School in the broader context of Romanticism, showing that, despite controversies and criticism, the movement's emphasis on emotional depth and the social impact of poetry has left a lasting mark on the literary world.

Selected Original Pictures

The pictures in this section were personally taken in the Keats-Shelley House in Rome.

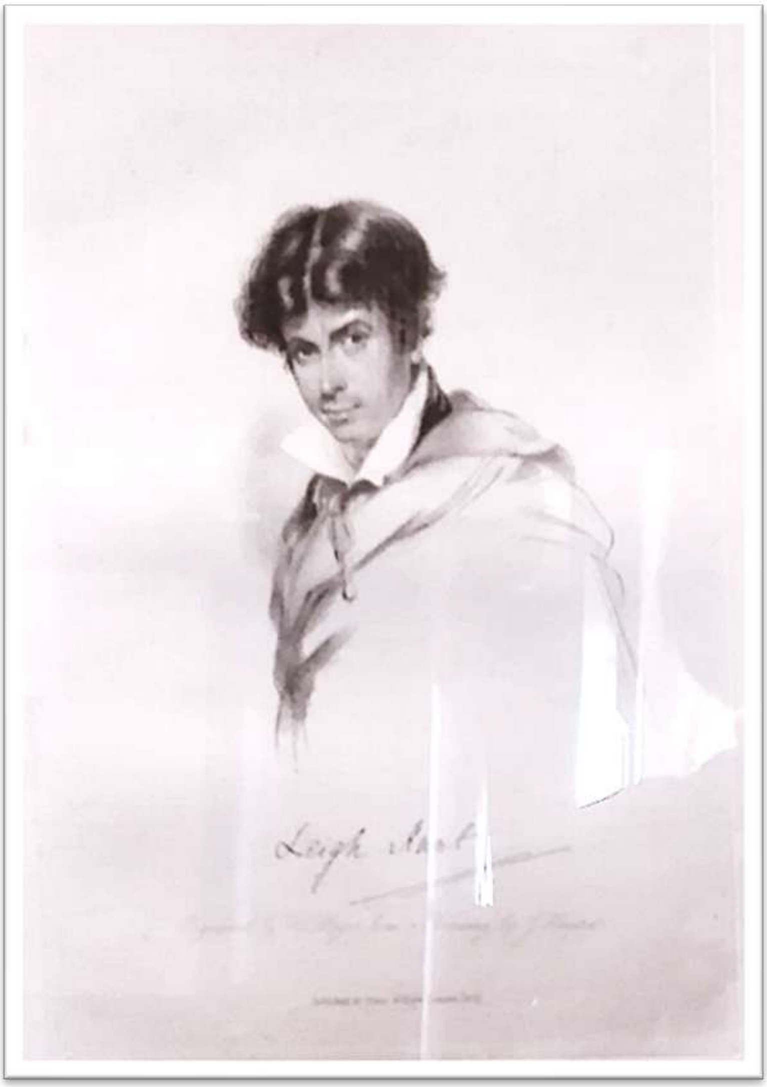
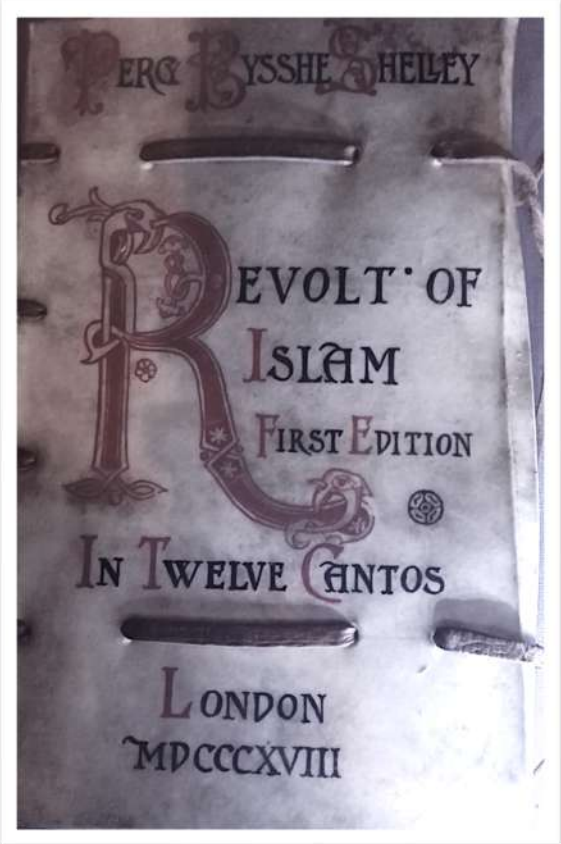


Figure 1. Portrait of Leigh Hunt, engraved by H. Meyer, based on the drawing by J. Hayter, Keats-Shelley House, Rome, 2018.



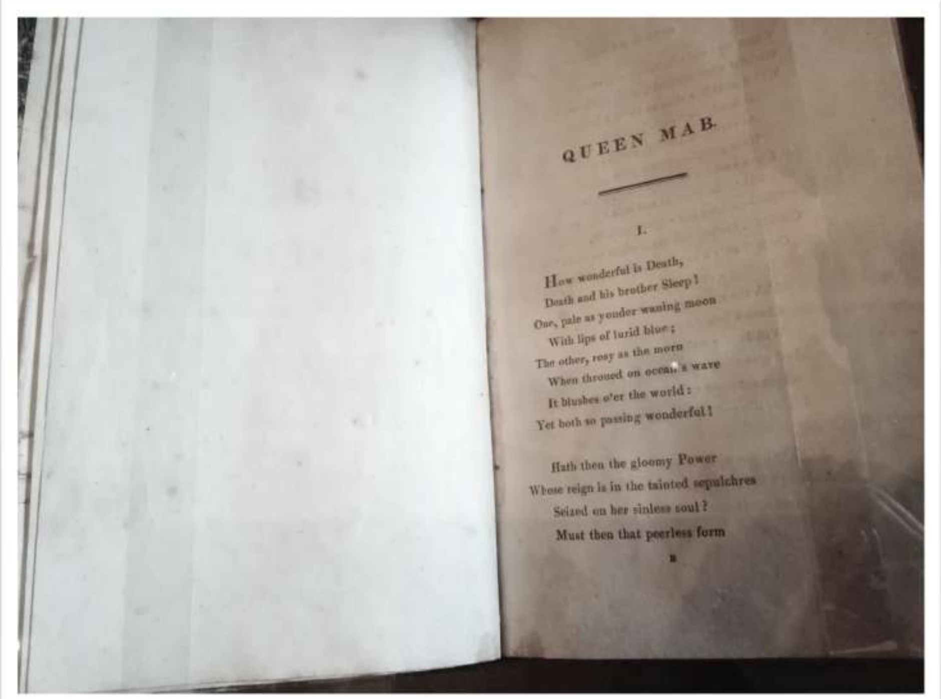
PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

REVOLT·OF
ISLAM
FIRST EDITION

IN TWELVE CANTOS

LONDON
MDCCCXVIII

Figure 2. First Edition of Shelley's The Revolt of Islam,
Keats-Shelley House, Rome, 2018.



QUEEN MAB.

I.

How wonderful is Death,
Death and his brother Sleep!
One, pale as yonder waning moon
With lips of lurid blue;
The other, rosy as the morn
When throned on ocean's wave
It blushes o'er the world:
Yet both so passing wonderful!

Hath then the gloomy Power
Whose reign is in the tainted sepulchres
Seized on her sinless soul?
Must then that peerless form

B

Figure 3. First Printed Edition of Shelley's Queen Mab, Keats-Shelley House, Rome, 2018.

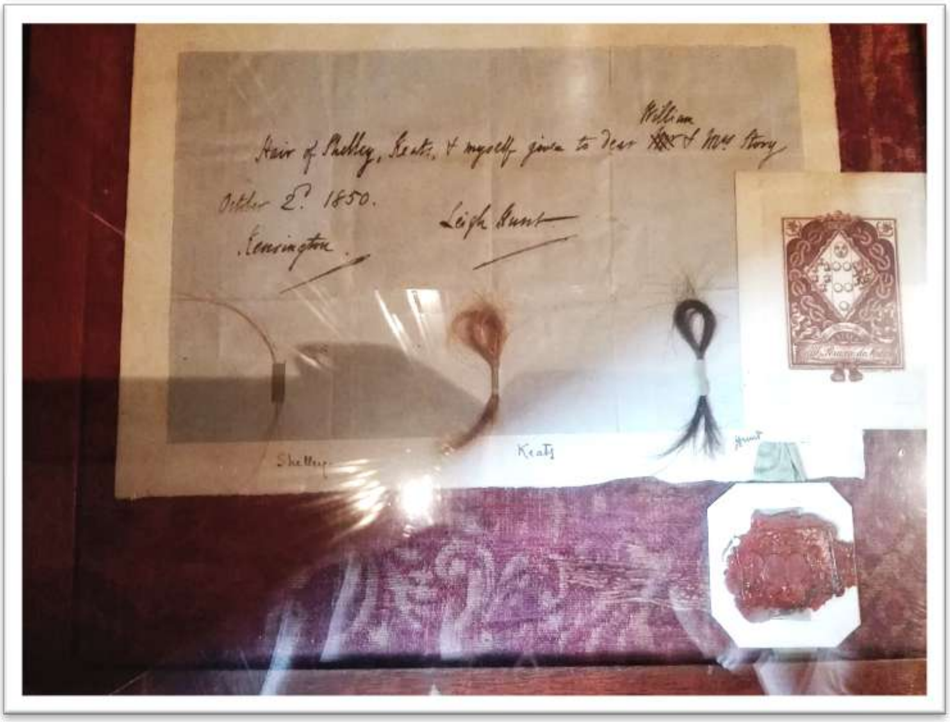

William
Hair of Shelley, Keats, & myself given to dear ~~Mr~~ & Mrs Story
October 2d. 1850.
Leigh Hunt
Kensington.
Shelley
Keats
Hunt

Figure 4. Locks of hair of John Keats, Percy Shelley and Leigh Hunt, Keats-Shelley House, Rome, 2018.

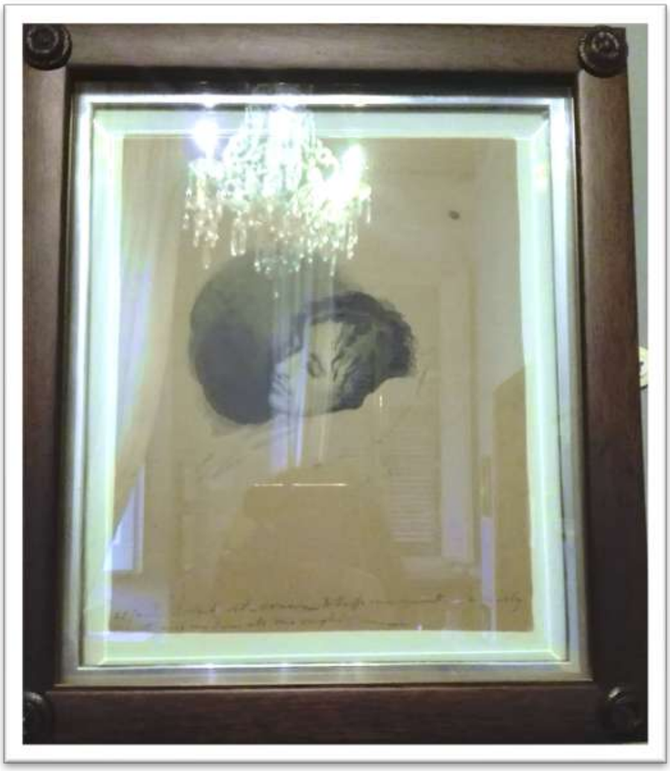


Figure 5. Joseph Severn John Keats' Deathbed portrait, 1821, Keats-Shelley House, Rome, 2018.

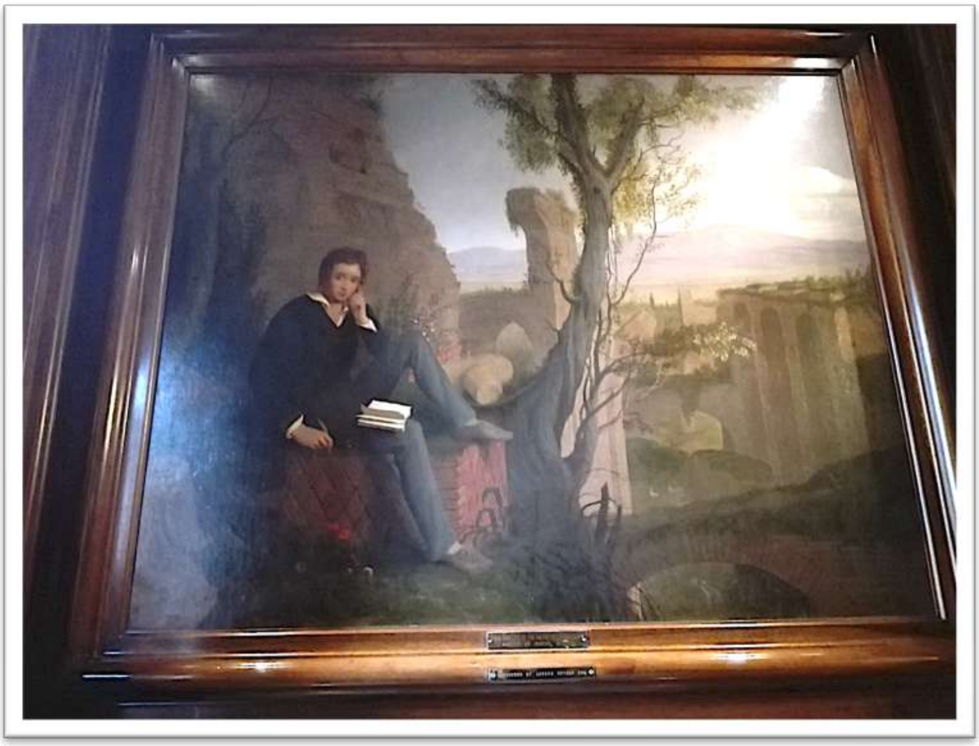


Figure 6. Joseph Severn, Shelley Composing 'Prometheus Unbound' in the Baths of Caracalla, Keats-Shelley House, Rome, 2018.

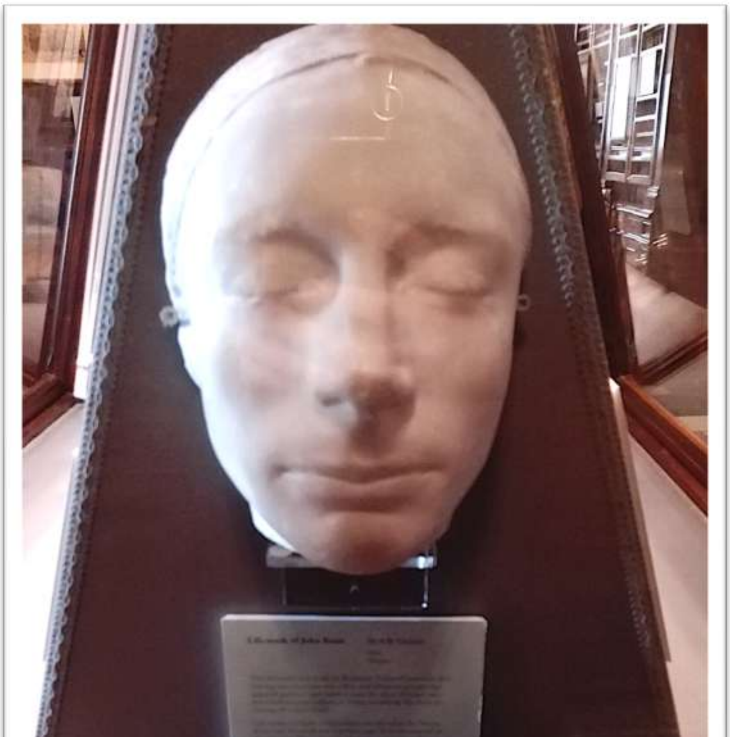


Figure 7. Robert Benjamin Haydon, Keats' Life-Mask, 1816, Keats-Shelley House, Rome, 2018.

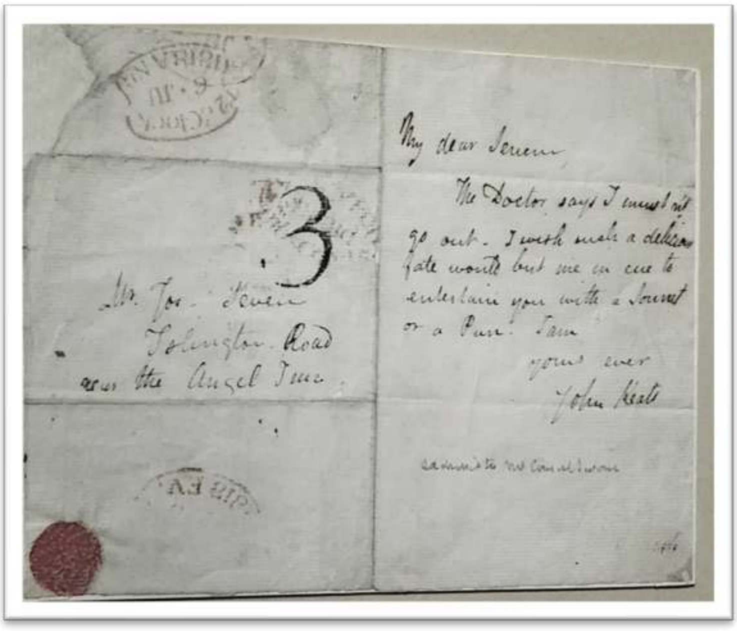
John Hamilton Reynolds
(1794–1852)

By Emery Walker
after Joseph Severn
Lithograph

Keats described John Hamilton Reynolds as 'the playfullest' of his friends, 'slovenly in dress', 'inspired by Mercury', a man who 'makes you laugh and not think'. But Reynolds was also a poet, someone with whom Keats could share his most profound thoughts about writing and poetry: 'Upon my soul', Keats once told him, 'I have been getting more and more close to you every day, ever since I knew you.'

After Keats's death Reynolds continued to write, and was a regular contributor to the *London Magazine*. Although he lost touch with most of his old acquaintances in Keats's circle over the years, his friendship with the poet remained the high point of his life. His gravestone reads: 'In Memory of John Hamilton Reynolds who died November 15th, 1852. Aged 58 years. The friend of Keats.'

Figure 8. Joseph Severn, Portrait of John Hamilton Reynolds, Keats-Shelley House, Rome, 2018.

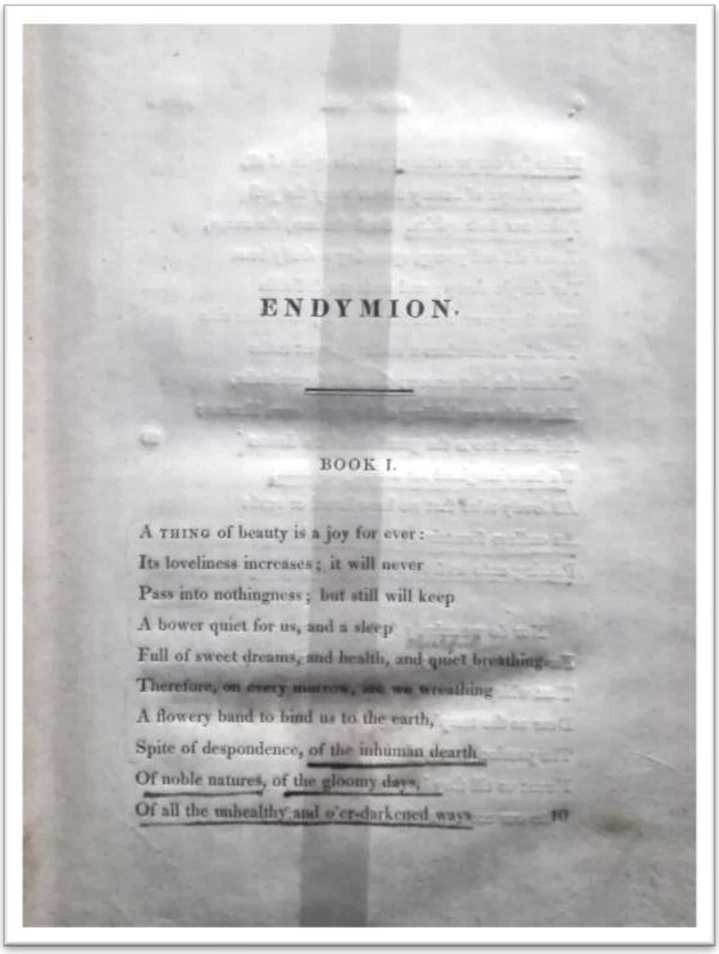

3

Mr. Jos. Severn
Islington Road
near the Angel Inn

My dear Severn

The Doctor says I must n't go out. I wish such a delicious fate would put me in cue to entertain you with a Sonnet or a Pun! I am
yours ever
John Keats

Figure 9. Letter from John Keats to Joseph Severn, 1818, Keats-Shelley House, 2018.

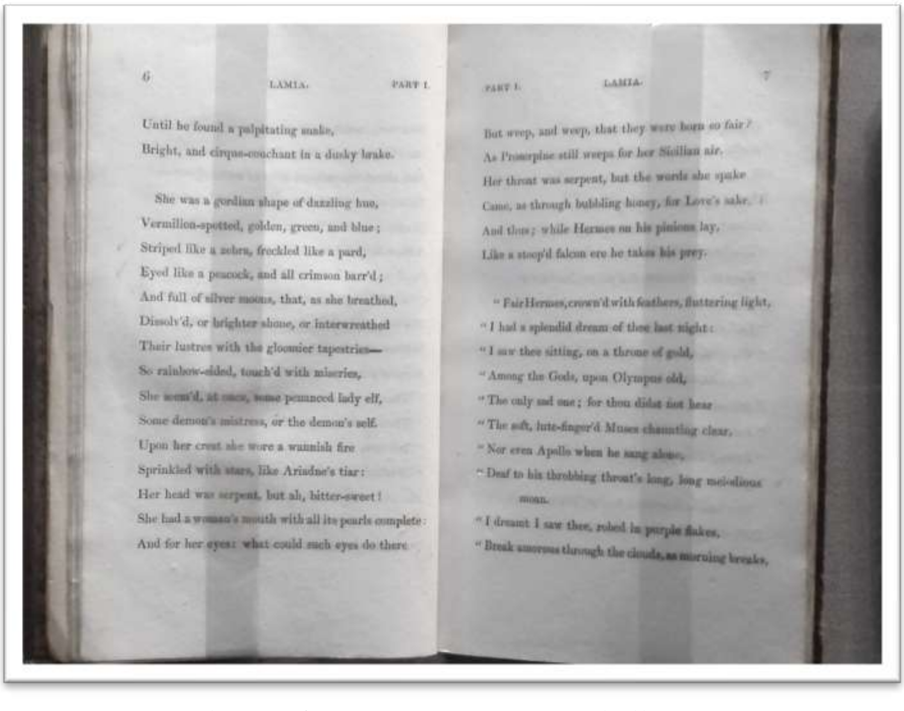


ENDYMION.

BOOK I.

A THING of beauty is a joy for ever:
Its loveliness increases; it will never
Pass into nothingness; but still will keep
A bower quiet for us, and a sleep
Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing.
Therefore, on every morrow, are we wreathing
A flowery band to bind us to the earth,
Spite of despondence, of the inhuman dearth
Of noble natures, of the gloomy days,
Of all the unhealthy and o'er-darkened ways

Figure 10. First Edition of Keats' Endymion, Keats-Shelley House, Rome, 2018.



6 LAMIA. PART I.

Until he found a palpitating snake,
Bright, and cirque-couchant in a dusky brake.

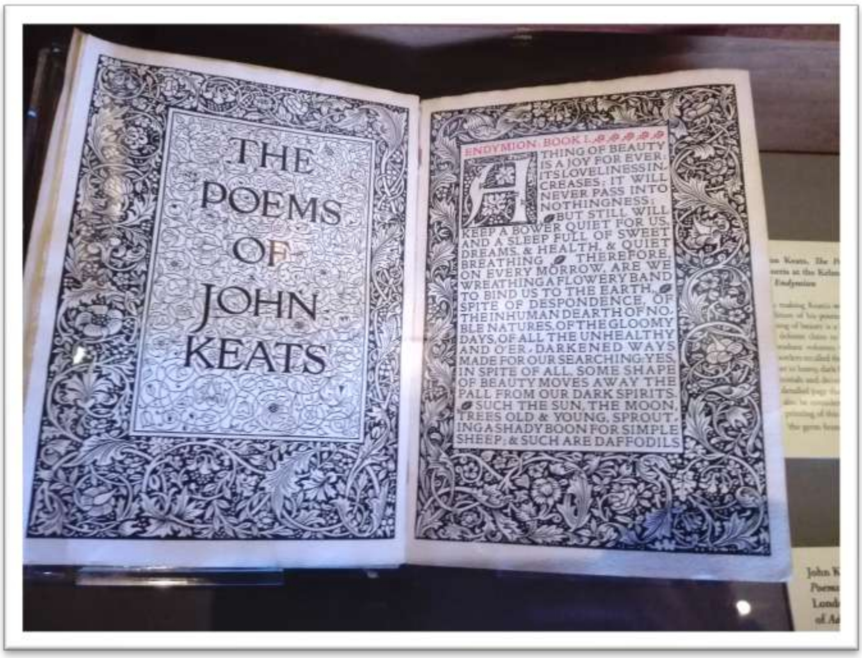
She was a gordian shape of dazzling hue,
Vermilion-spotted, golden, green, and blue;
Striped like a zebra, freckled like a pard,
Eyed like a peacock, and all crimson barr'd;
And full of silver moons, that, as she breathed,
Dissolv'd, or brighter shone, or interwreathed
Their lustres with the gloomier tapestries—
So rainbow-sided, touch'd with miseries,
She seem'd, at once, some penanced lady elf,
Some demon's mistress, or the demon's self.
Upon her crest she wore a wannish fire
Sprinkled with stars, like Ariadne's tiar:
Her head was serpent, but ah, bitter-sweet!
She had a woman's mouth with all its pearls complete:
And for her eyes: what could such eyes do there

PART I. LAMIA. 7

But weep, and weep, that they were born so fair?
As Proserpine still weeps for her Sicilian air.
Her throat was serpent, but the words she spake
Came, as through bubbling honey, for Love's sake,
And thus; while Hermes on his pinions lay,
Like a stoop'd falcon ere he takes his prey.

"Fair Hermes, crown'd with feathers, fluttering light,
"I had a splendid dream of thee last night:
"I saw thee sitting, on a throne of gold,
"Among the Gods, upon Olympus old,
"The only sad one; for thou didst not hear
"The soft, lute-finger'd Muses chaunting clear,
"Nor even Apollo when he sang alone,
"Deaf to his throbbing throat's long, long melodious
moan.
"I dreamt I saw thee, robed in purple flakes,
"Break amorous through the clouds, as morning breaks,

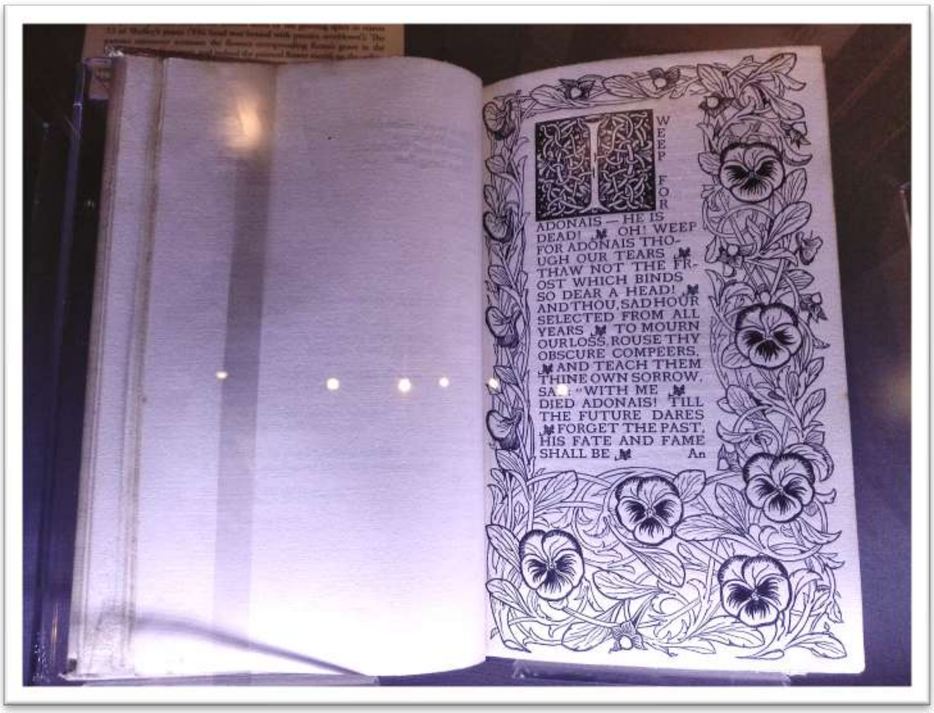
Figure 11. First Edition of Keats' Lamia, Keats-Shelley House, Rome, 2018.



THE
POEMS
OF
JOHN
KEATS

ENDYMION: BOOK I.
A THING OF BEAUTY
IS A JOY FOR EVER:
ITS LOVELINESS IN-
CREASES; IT WILL
NEVER PASS INTO
NOTHINGNESS;
BUT STILL WILL
KEEP A BOWER QUIET FOR US,
AND A SLEEP FULL OF SWEET
DREAMS, & HEALTH, & QUIET
BREATHING. THEREFORE,
ON EVERY MORROW, ARE WE
WREATHING A FLOWERY BAND
TO BIND US TO THE EARTH,
SPITE OF DESPONDENCE, OF
THE INHUMAN DEARTH OF NO-
BLE NATURES, OF THE GLOOMY
DAYS, OF ALL THE UNHEALTHY
AND O'ER-DARKENED WAYS
MADE FOR OUR SEARCHING: YES,
IN SPITE OF ALL, SOME SHAPE
OF BEAUTY MOVES AWAY THE
PALL FROM OUR DARK SPIRITS.
SUCH THE SUN, THE MOON,
TREES OLD & YOUNG, SPROUT-
ING A SHADY BOON FOR SIMPLE
SHEEP; & SUCH ARE DAFFODILS

Figure 12. Keats' Poems, Edition by William Morris and the Kelmscott Press, 1894, Keats-Shelley House, Rome, 2018.



I WEEP FOR
ADONAIS—HE IS
DEAD! OH! WEEP
FOR ADONAIS THO-
UGH OUR TEARS
THAW NOT THE FR-
OST WHICH BINDS
SO DEAR A HEAD!
AND THOU, SAD HOUR
SELECTED FROM ALL
YEARS TO MOURN
OUR LOSS, ROUSE THY
OBSCURE COMPEERS,
AND TEACH THEM
THINE OWN SORROW,
SA[illegible] "WITH ME
DIED ADONAIS! TILL
THE FUTURE DARES
FORGET THE PAST,
HIS FATE AND FAME
SHALL BE An

Figure 13. Percy Shelley's Adonais, Edition by William Morris and the Kelmscott Press, Keats-Shelley House, Rome 2018.

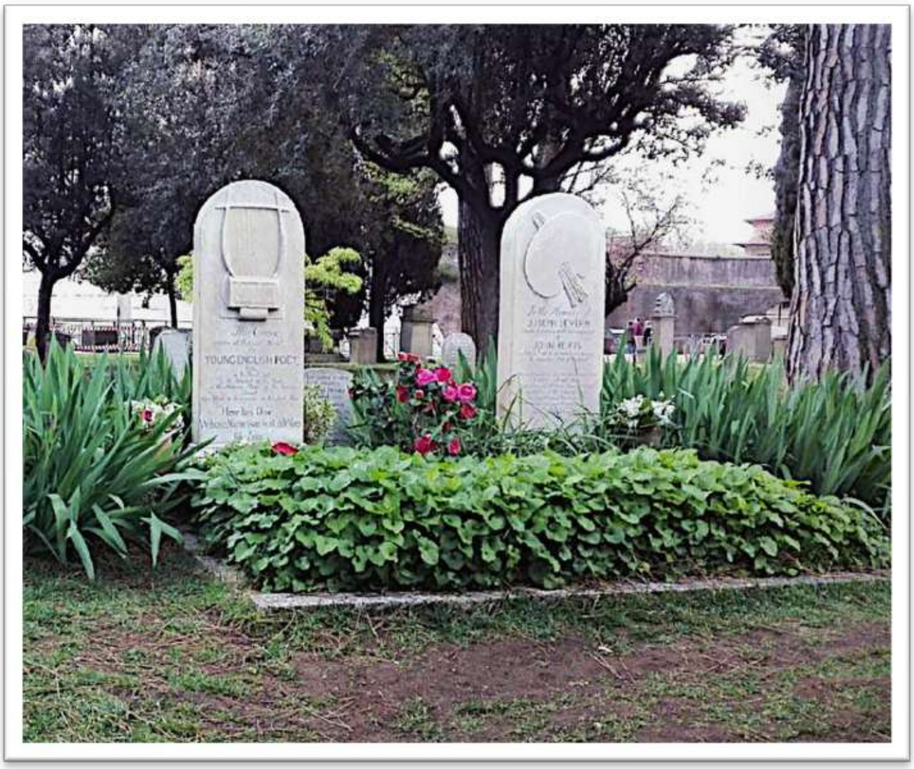


Figure 14. Tombstones of John Keats and Joseph Severn in the Non-Catholic Cemetery in Rome, 2018.

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