

Reawakening Lycidas: Keats, Milton, and Epic

While Keats's fascination with Milton's *Paradise Lost* has long been established in critical studies, his reading of Milton's other works remains relatively underexplored. This article reveals a hitherto unrecognized facet of Keats's interest in Milton by examining his surprising response to *Lycidas* (1638) during his visit to Staffa in 1818. I argue that Keats's reimagining of *Lycidas* reveals his interest in understanding the painful personal processes through which Milton became the author of *Paradise Lost*. Analysing a selection of his poems and letters both before and during his walking tour of North Britain, I demonstrate that Keats's idea of Milton deepens during his journey, enabling him to see the vulnerable grieving poet of *Lycidas*, whose response to personal sorrow ultimately opens up his path to epic poetry, as integral to Milton's development. The poem Keats composed about seeing Fingal's Cave, 'Not Aladin magian', is in thoughtful dialogue with Milton's pastoral elegy, and provides a key to understanding Keats's approach to his own epic project. In *Hyperion* and *The Fall of Hyperion*, Keats would focus on a suffering that he saw as essential both to his own artistic transformation and a wider cultural renewal.

Writing to his brother, Tom, on 26 July 1818, John Keats expressed his excited amazement at seeing Fingal's Cave on the isle of Staffa in the Scottish Hebrides. After tentatively remarking the difficulty of capturing his impressions of the island ('I am puzzled how to give you an Idea of Staffa. It can only be represented by a first rate drawing—'), he conjures a rapid series of images in his prose description of the cave. As he speculates about its inception, gigantic figures from Greek mythology spring to life as its imagined makers:

One may compare the surface of the Island to a roof—this roof is supported by grand pillars of basalt standing together as thick as honey combs The finest thing is Fingal's Cave—it is entirely a hollowing out of Basalt Pillars. Suppose now the Giants who rebelled against Jove had taken a whole Mass of black Columns and bound them together like bunches of matches—and then with immense Axes had made a cavern in the body of these columns—of course the roof and floor must be composed of the broken ends of the Columns—such is fíngal's Cave, except that the Sea has done the work of excavations, and is continually dashing there—so that we walk along the sides of the cave on the pillars which are left as if for convenient Stairs.¹

From the roof of the island, with its suggestions of a domicile, to its formidable supporting structures, and the hollowed-out cavern at its heart, Fingal's Cave offers the young poet a new imaginative space. Even its disturbed interior seems to enhance the poet's impression of a galvanizing force that has taken hold of its raw materials and brought it into being. At first the basalt pillars 'standing together as thick as honey combs' evoke an image of pastoral plenty—the unified and harmonious labour of a hive of bees. But the image of rich natural productivity is quickly superseded in the poet's imagination by the rebellious energy of a race of Titan gods who cleave the gargantuan mass of rock into a cave—which is, in turn, moulded by the might of the sea. The displacement of pastoral comfort (honey-making) with strenuous epic endeavour and unruly natural forces in Keats's description aptly captures the symbolic significance of his visit to Fingal's Cave. Having published pastoral compositions such as 'I stood tip-toe upon a little hill' and 'Sleep and Poetry' in his first collection, *Poems* (1817), and *Endymion*, which appeared in April, in the summer of 1818 Keats was pursuing a path that he hoped would lead to his emergence as an epic poet. And what he saw and began to imagine at

Fingal's Cave enabled him to envisage the epic world of the fallen Titans that he began to write about that autumn.

Keats's exploration of Fingal's Cave became the starting point for his poetic response to it—first in 'Not Aladin magian', the playful poem of 57 lines that follows the description above in his letter-journal to Tom, and then more extensively in his unfinished epic poems, *Hyperion* and *The Fall of Hyperion*, composed between the autumns of 1818 and 1819. The Titans, glimpsed fleetingly above, would become the focus of *Hyperion* but they were not the subjects of his immediate poetic response. In 'Not Aladin magian', Keats imagines waking a sleeping figure inside Fingal's Cave and discovering that he is the eponymous hero of *Lycidas* (1638), the elegy that Milton composed in memory of his Cambridge friend, Edward King, who drowned, aged twenty-five, in August 1637. What was the appeal of finding *Lycidas* for a young Romantic poet travelling across Scotland nearly two centuries later? That King had also been a poet, who 'knew | Himself to sing, and build the lofty rhyme' and whose 'soft layes' were lost 'to Shepherds ear' as a result of his untimely death, offered scope for considering the tragic end of another Chatterton.² The permanent youth and thwarted potential of the seventeen-year-old suicide, Thomas Chatterton (1752-1770), made him an icon of neglected genius for many Romantic poets.³ Keats had lamented Chatterton's 'sad [...] fate' in his 'Sonnet to Chatterton' three years earlier, describing him as 'A half-blown flower, which cold blasts amate'; he expressed his continuing admiration by dedicating *Endymion* to him.⁴ If the premature death of a talented young poet was part of *Lycidas*'s imaginative appeal for Keats, a geographical coincidence provided another point of connection. On King's voyage to visit his family in Ireland, his ship had hit a rock and sunk in the Irish Sea, off the coast of Wales, and his body was never recovered. In his horrified imaginings about where his friend's body now lies, Milton's poetic speaker wonders whether *Lycidas*'s remains have been carried northwards by the Hebridean sea, making Fingal's Cave a plausible locus for his resting place.

This article examines the significance of Keats's imagined encounter with the long-lost *Lycidas* of Milton's elegy in shaping his approach to his own epic endeavours. In my reading, Keats's visit to Fingal's Cave is the key point on his Northern walking tour—a place which he himself recognizes as a symbolic site of transition, at which he begins to move his creative thought beyond the apprenticeship genre of the pastoral as he looks to explore the realm of the epic. Although Keats's walking tour has received valuable critical attention,⁵ 'Not Aladin magian' remains a little-discussed poem in Keats's oeuvre. That Keats himself did not give it a title or think of publishing it only increased the difficulty the poem's earliest transcribers had in interpreting it. It was published for the first time in 1836, long after Keats's death, and it has remained something of a puzzle.⁶ Meg Harris Williams's brief but evocative reading of the poem finds that 'Keats makes contact with the spirit of Milton' in the cave and the figure of Oceanus in the poem 'is Milton himself'.⁷ I suggest that, when examined closely as an exploratory response to Milton's pastoral elegy, it becomes clear that Fingal's Cave was a pivotal site of development for Keats. His reimagining of *Lycidas* in 'Not Aladin magian' not only presents a figurative way of reaching across time to intercept and interact with the work of one of his most revered poetic ancestors, Milton, but also seems to experiment with a poetics of self-encounter. That Keats confronts the fate of a young poet who had died before his prime and whose potential was forever lost, and reimagines him as a flexible and elusive figure, suggests both his attraction to, and deliberate refusal of, a serious elegiac mode at this moment in his career.

Instead of enshrining *Lycidas* as a lost tragic hero, Keats presents him as part of a living narrative. Keats's *Lycidas* is found not drowned, but asleep, and he asserts his vitality even as he acknowledges his fame 'in funeral Minstrelsey'.⁸ For Milton, the sea is the agent of

Lycidas's fate, whether as a destructive force, a power bidden to search for him, or the ruler of 'the monstrous world' beneath the 'whelming tide' (ll. 158, 157). By contrast, Keats's Lycidas speaks of himself as the 'Pontif priest' of Fingal's Cave, 'this Cathedral of the Sea', and of his working in harmony with the ancient sea gods, Oceanus and Proteus (*LJK*, I, 350).

Demonstrating his own Protean qualities, Keats's Lycidas emerges as a figure with a mysterious agency and life of his own, and the potential to participate in other kinds of narrative, beyond the pastoral or tragic. Just as Milton confronts his poetic vocation, asking whether it is better 'To sport with *Amaryllis* in the shade,' than to ply 'the homely slighted Shepherds trade, | And strictly meditate the thankles Muse', composing pastoral poetry in pursuit of 'Fame', so, in his response to *Lycidas*, Keats seems to consider his own past and present choices and his desire for new poetic paths (ll. 68, 66-7, 70). Figuratively and emotionally, the idea of reawakening Lycidas was creatively energising for Keats because it spoke to his own sense of arriving at a turning point.

By situating the visit to Staffa as part of Keats's Northern walking tour of 1818 and tracing his thinking about Milton in the weeks leading up to his arrival at Fingal's Cave—as well as examining his engagement with *Lycidas* at Staffa itself—we begin to see a different facet of Milton's significance for Keats. Keats's great admiration for *Paradise Lost* and his use of Miltonic tropes in the 'Hyperion' poems have been richly explored by critics who include Walter Jackson Bate, Jonathan Bate, Lucy Newlyn, Beth Lau, Jonathon Shears, and Henry Weinfield.⁹ As I will demonstrate, however, it was not only Milton's formidable achievement in *Paradise Lost* that spurred Keats on with his epic ambitions, but also his interest in Milton's response to personal grief and the difficulty of developing a more mature poetic voice. Building on a rich body of scholarship on Keats's reading of *Paradise Lost*, I suggest that Keats's reimagining of *Lycidas* reveals his interest in understanding the painful personal processes through which Milton became the author of *Paradise Lost*. For Keats, Milton's elegy, with its highly self-conscious effort to move from pastoral to epic 'Pastures new' (l. 193), seems to have offered a new way of understanding Milton's growth as an epic poet and contributed to his increasing belief that it was necessary for a poet to grapple with feelings of vulnerability and uncertainty in order to gain in maturity. Keats's response to *Lycidas* was thus intricately bound up with his understanding of his own ongoing poetic development and ambitions, and his intricate imagining of Milton's inner life.

I. Epic Poets: Milton, Wordsworth, and the Human Heart

Having completed his training and work as a surgeon at Guy's Hospital in London the previous year, Keats had decided against a medical career and committed to making a living from his poetry. His walking tour of North Britain with his friend Charles Brown was, he felt, integral to his development as a poet. They left London on 22 June, expecting to be away for four months. After saying goodbye to Keats's brother, George, and his sister-in-law, Georgiana, who were setting sail from Liverpool for their new life in America, the two friends planned to walk from Lancaster through the Lake District, calling on Wordsworth at Rydal Mount, before making an excursion into Northern Ireland to visit the Giant's Causeway. They hoped to wind through Burns's country in the Scottish Lowlands, into the Hebrides, the Highlands, and all the way up to John o'Groat's on the North-East Scottish coast. In the event, however, the Irish segment of their trip was curtailed at Belfast, and their shared journey cut short at Inverness. After reaching the summit of Ben Nevis on 2 August, Keats grew ill and was forced to return to London, leaving Brown to continue to the Highlands alone. Nevertheless, the six weeks of their expedition, during which they walked for up to thirty or more miles a day, dramatically

expanded Keats's life experience and intensified his world view, enabling him to draw poetic inspiration from a host of memories for many months to come.

The principal purpose of the journey was, as Keats explained to Benjamin Bailey in a letter from Inveraray on 18 July, to extend his poetic powers:

—I should not have consented to myself these four Months tramping in the highlands but that I thought it would give me more experience, rub off more Prejudice, use [me] to more hardship, identify finer scenes load me with grander Mountains, and strengthen more my reach in Poetry, than would stopping at home among Books even though I should reach Homer—

(*LJK*, I, 342)

Just as Keats had earlier characterized himself as a traveller through Homer's 'realms of gold' in his sonnet, 'On First Looking into Chapman's Homer' (1816), so when he describes the physical act of travelling in the passage above, it is with a keen sense of its symbiotic relationship to reading (l. 1). He now seeks to strengthen his 'reach in Poetry' by not only ranging imaginatively and making discoveries as a reader, but also physically traversing new ground.

Keats's choice of reading in preparation for and during the walking tour suggests his growing appetite for an epic tradition: 'I long to feast upon old Homer as we have upon Shakespeare. and as I have lately upon Milton', he wrote to J. H. Reynolds at the end of April (*LJK*, I, 274). From Scotland, he assured Bailey: 'You say I must study Dante—well the only Books I have with me are those three little Volumes' (*LJK*, I, 343). In his knapsack, Keats carried the three 'minute volumes' of *The Vision* (1814), Henry Francis Cary's translation of Dante's *Comedia*, recently brought out by his own publishers, Taylor and Hessey (*LJK*, I, 294). His allusion to Minos, the infernal judge in the second circle of Dante's Hell, in his sonnet 'On Visiting the Tomb of Robert Burns', indicates that he had read several cantos of Dante's epic by the time he reached Dumfries on 1 July (*LJK*, I, 308). His ambitions in the epic genre also prompted him to consider other poets' choices. On seeing Burns's native Ayrshire, 'richly meadowed, wooded, heathed and rivuleted—with a grand Sea view terminated by the black Mountains of the isle of Annan [Arran]', he instinctively wondered: 'How is it they did not beckon Burns to some grand attempt at Epic' (*LJK*, I, 331). His companion, Brown, carried a volume of Milton in his knapsack, and read aloud from *Samson Agonistes* on the first day of their walk.¹⁰ Keats's imaginative engagement with Milton during his walking tour was thus part of his ongoing thinking about what constituted great poetry, what kind of poet he wanted to be, and what he needed to do in order to realize his ambitions.

Keats had read some of Milton's poetry in his youth before 'feast[ing]' upon it with Bailey's encouragement after visiting him in Oxford in September 1817.¹¹ His enormous admiration for Milton is captured at the start of 1818 in his 'Lines on Seeing a Lock of Milton's Hair', composed on 21 January when Leigh Hunt surprised him with a glimpse of the relic. Addressing the 'Chief of organic numbers!', a spirit who 'never slumbers, | But rolls about our ears | For ever, and for ever', Keats positions himself as a young poet with aspirations to celebrate and follow the great Milton, but a long way to go in order to shed his immaturity (ll. 1, 3-5):

When every childish fashion
Has vanish'd from my rhyme,
Will I, grey-gone in passion,

Leave to an after time
 Hymning and harmony
 Of thee, and of thy works, and of thy life;
 But vain is now the burning, and the strife,
 Pangs are in vain—until I grow high-rife
 With old philosophy
 And mad with glimpses at futurity!
 (ll. 22-31)

Inspired by Milton's poetic longevity, the young poet is impatient for his own development—both convinced of his future promise and pained by his premature awareness of it. His fear of being cut off before he can realize his potential is expressed in another sonnet ten days later: 'When I have fears that I may cease to be | Before my pen has glean'd my teeming brain' (ll. 1-2). His dedication of *Endymion* to Chatterton two months later suggests that he continued to worry about the possibility of dying before he had attempted to achieve poetic immortality.

Attending Hazlitt's Lectures on the English Poets, delivered weekly at the Surrey Institution in London between 13 January and 3 March, can only have heightened Keats's impression of Milton as one of the 'giant-sons of genius [who] stand indeed upon the earth, but [...] tower above their fellows'.¹² For Hazlitt, the four greatest English poets were Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton—with Milton exemplifying the genius of epic poetry. Hazlitt's account of Milton's character and achievements presents a poet of immense ambition and life-long dedication, involved in tireless scholarly labour. Even Milton's internal conflicts are noble: 'The spirit of the poet, the patriot, and the prophet, vied with each other in his breast', his works similarly high-minded; with 'the mighty models of antiquity always present to his thoughts,' Milton 'determined to raise a monument of equal height and glory [...] for the delight and wonder of posterity' (57). Quoting from Milton's account of his youthful 'labour and intense study' in the Preface to the second volume of *The Reason of Church-Government* (1642), Hazlitt emphasizes how Milton 'girded himself up, and as it were, sanctified his genius' to the service of this ambition from his youth (57). The mature Milton thus emerges as a poet who:

did not write from casual impulse, but after a severe examination of his own strength, and with a resolution to leave nothing undone which it was in his power to do ... He adorns and dignifies his subject to the utmost: he surrounds it with every possible association of beauty or grandeur, whether moral, intellectual, or physical. (58)

There was limited scope for Keats to find affinity with such a formidable forefather. Milton's solemn approach to his poetic labour and the grandeur of his efforts, as Hazlitt describes them, are quite unlike the intense pleasure that Keats found in creating poetry and his habit of often composing poems spontaneously and sociably, in letters or in playful competitions with friends. Hazlitt's portrait of Milton overlooks the aspects of his identity that would have interested Keats most in 1818; the transition between the early and mature phases of Milton's poetic career remain a mystery, and there is no discussion of the beliefs that motivated Milton's efforts to create a mighty poetry for the wonder of posterity.

In his Preface to *Endymion*, Keats had reflected painfully on his immaturity as a poet. With remarkable candour, he anticipated that his readers, especially 'men who [...] look with a zealous eye, to the honour of English literature', would 'perceive great inexperience, immaturity, and every error denoting a feverish attempt, rather than a deed accomplished' in

his poem.¹³ While he hopes to return to ‘the beautiful mythology of Greece’ in his future poetry, he emphasizes his liminal position:

The imagination of a boy is healthy, and the mature imagination of a man is healthy; but there is a space of life between, in which the soul is in a ferment, the character undecided, the way of life uncertain, the ambition thick-sighted: thence proceeds mawkishness, and all the thousand bitters which those men I speak of must necessarily taste in going over the following pages.

(102-103)

Hazlitt’s confident celebration of Milton’s stoic determination from his boyhood onwards allows for no such period of poetic adolescence and uncertainty. His selected quotations from Milton’s autobiographical Preface do not address its most intriguing feature—the fact that, having composed works such as *Comus* and *Lycidas* in the 1630s, Milton could, in effect, announce himself as a national poet in 1642 and set out his plan of creating an epic, a tragedy, and hymns—long before he had composed any of the great works that would secure his fame.

Hazlitt shows no interest in the ideas Milton expresses in the rest of his Preface that poetry is the inspired gift of God and should be used for virtuous ends, principally to glorify God and country, and the language of the poet’s country used to make poetry truly national. Instead, he emphasizes the poet’s hard work, determination, and achievements—aspects which also feature prominently in Elijah Fenton’s brief ‘Life of Mr John Milton’ (1725) in the 1807 edition of *Paradise Lost* that Keats owned.¹⁴ Fenton’s biography similarly sheds no light on Milton’s poetic growth. A few years after his studies in Cambridge, Milton’s European tour is said to have taken him to Rome, Genoa, and Florence, where his poetic compositions attracted the admiration of eminent poets and scholars and he first ‘conceived of writing an Epic Poem’.¹⁵ Fenton has nothing to say about the personal significance of the ‘interval of above twenty years’ between the composition of *Comus*, *Lycidas*, *L’Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* and the creation of *Paradise Lost*, *Samson Agonistes* and *Paradise Regain’d*.¹⁶ Milton had, of course, been active in one of the most politically uncertain periods of British history during this ‘interval’—serving as a champion of the Puritan and Parliamentary causes in the interregnum and Commonwealth—events which, as Ralph A. Haug points out, he could not have foreseen interrupting his plans as a poet at the outset of the English Civil war.¹⁷ Like Fenton, Hazlitt entertains no possibility of Milton having to overcome self-doubt about his work in order to fulfil his epic ambitions. In an earlier essay, ‘On Milton’s *Lycidas*’, in *The Round Table* (1817), Hazlitt admires the musical and aesthetic effects of the poem, especially in the description of the flowers that are to adorn the imaginary ‘Laureat Herse’ of the dead poet, but does not consider the living poet’s concerns about the futility of his poetic vocation (*Lycidas*, l. 151).

In the light of Hazlitt’s and Fenton’s accounts, it is easy to see why Keats saw Milton as destined for greatness. Starting on the half title-page of his copy of *Paradise Lost*, his annotations begin: ‘The Genius of Milton, more particularly in respect to its span in immensity, calculated him, by a sort of birthright, for such an ‘argument’ as the paradise lost’.¹⁸ At the same time, developments in Keats’s family life in 1818 help to explain why this model of a fully-formed and self-assured epic poet may have been increasingly dissatisfying to Keats—for whom close friendships and family bonds were an essential source of emotional stability and support for his creativity. As Denise Gigante and Richard Cronin have explored, Keats was profoundly affected by the parting of his siblings that year.¹⁹ George’s departure for America in June was a particular blow. Keats reflected that George was ‘more than a brother to me, he has been my greatest friend’ (*LJK*, I, 358), a protector who ‘always stood between me and any

dealings with the world’ and without whom ‘I find I must buffet it—I must take my stand upon some vantage ground and begin to fight’ (*LJK*, II, 113). Their younger sister, Fanny, remained in London, but was kept away from the brothers, under the watchful eye of her guardian, Richard Abbey, whose restrictive control Keats resented. Most tragically, Tom, who had been ill for several years, had been showing the signs of pulmonary tuberculosis since January and died in December, nursed to the end by Keats.²⁰ The erosion of these familial (and especially fraternal) mainstays, I suggest, had a direct bearing on Keats’s reading of *Lycidas*.

In making his case for Milton as an exemplary epic poet, Hazlitt had confidently declared that the objects of epic poetry ‘affect us through the medium of the imagination, by magnitude and distance, by their permanence and universality’—rather than ‘by sympathy, by their nearness to ourselves’, which is, he argued, the property of dramatic poetry (52). As becomes clear in the subsequent months, Keats does not entirely share Hazlitt’s view of epic poetry as affecting us ‘by magnitude and distance’ rather than emotional proximity. In a letter to Reynolds on 3 May, some weeks before setting off for the North, Keats seems to be contemplating the merits of an epic poetry which is deeply engaged with human feeling when he compares the work of Wordsworth and Milton. Writing from Teighmouth in Devon, where he and George had taken Tom in the hope of alleviating his ominous symptoms, Keats discusses with Reynolds how ‘an extensive knowledge’ might help to ameliorate significant adversities in life. Faced with Tom’s terminal illness and worsening condition, Keats seems to be reaching for a knowledge which ‘takes away the heat and fever; and helps, by widening speculation, to ease the Burden of the Mystery’ (*LJK*, I, 277). He implicitly seeks a poetry which speaks to the human need for consolation in the face of inexplicable suffering.

Turning to Wordsworth’s insights as a great living poet, Keats considers his ‘genius’ in relation to that of Milton, ‘in the manner of gold being the meridian Line of worldly wealth’. The comparison enables him to identify Wordsworth’s deep concern for human feeling as his particular poetic strength, but it also raises ‘an uncertainty’ as to:

whether Miltons apparently less anxiety for Humanity proceeds from his seeing further or no than Wordsworth: And whether Wordsworth has in truth epic passion<s>, and martyrs himself to the human heart, the main region of his song—In regard to his genius alone—we find what he says true as far as we have experienced and we can judge no further but by larger experience—for axioms in philosophy are not axioms until they are proved upon our pulses: We read fine—things but never feel them to thee [sic] full until we have gone the same steps as the Author.

(*LJK*, I, 278-9)

Keats considers two different kinds of epic poet here, alluding to Wordsworth’s epic project, *The Recluse*, when he refers to the human heart as ‘the main region of his song’. In his Preface to *The Excursion; Being a Portion of The Recluse, A Poem* (1814), Wordsworth had announced his long-term plan ‘to compose a philosophical Poem, containing views of Man, Nature, and Society’, and included a passage from *The Recluse* as ‘a kind of *Prospectus* of the design and scope of the whole Poem’.²¹ Wordsworth would need ‘a greater Muse’ than that of Milton, he explained, because of the ambitious nature of his subject, which was nothing less than the human mind itself:

*Not Chaos, not
The darkest pit of lowest Erebus,
Nor aught of blinder vacancy—scooped out
By help of dreams, can breed such fear and awe*

*As fall upon us often when we look
Into our Minds, into the Mind of Man,
My haunt, and the main region of my Song.*²²

Keats seems both respectful and persuaded of Wordsworth's desire to look 'into the Mind of Man'. In fact, Wordsworth's poetic vision seems to him the more searching, difficult, and courageous of the two because it involves examining humankind's deepest thoughts and fears. It is not so much Wordsworth's claim to being an epic poet, or his choice of subject, that Keats appears to be questioning when he wonders whether Wordsworth has 'in truth epic passion<s>', but rather the potential hazards of examining human emotions introspectively with a view to communicating their universal implications on an 'epic' scale. For how could the poet distinguish between the truths of the individual 'self' and broader—more philosophical—insights about human experience?

Underlying Keats's reference to his inability to judge the truth of Wordsworth's insights into 'the human heart' more fully 'but by larger experience', is surely a powerful unspoken awareness of his own darkest fears. As his sad allusions to Tom's being 'overburdened with fever' and his own 'gloom' at the start of this letter suggest, he was increasingly seeing and feeling the effects of his eighteen-year-old brother's demise (*LJK*, I, 276). Keats could not have known how quickly Tom's illness would progress, and continued to hope that it would not prove fatal. Nevertheless, his deep anxieties about the terminal nature of Tom's illness seem to inform his thinking about the ways in which poetry, among other forms of knowledge, might help to make sense of the vicissitudes of life. Beneath his comment that he is glad of 'not having given away my medical books', since 'Every department of knowledge' contributes to 'a great whole', is a growing awareness that he was likely to acquire a devastating burden of knowledge in the months or years to come—a personal loss that would profoundly change his adult understanding of sorrow (*LJK*, I, 277). He appears to assimilate this prospect into his ideas about the beneficial broadening of human understanding through one's increasing life experience and maturity. Only by 'feel[ing] to thee [sic] full' as individuals can we begin to grasp the collective meaning of pain and sorrow.

These intertwined lines of thinking—about the need both for direct experience of the capacities of 'the human heart' and a far-reaching 'anxiety for Humanity' in order to create a poetry that addresses human confusion, mortality, and suffering—lead Keats to formulate his simile of human life as 'a large Mansion of Many Apartments' in the same letter. In comparing his poetry and philosophy with that of Wordsworth ('to show you how tall I stand by the giant'), Keats compares life to 'a large Mansion of Many Apartments' in which we progress from an 'infant [...] Chamber' where 'we remain as long as we do not think' to a 'Chamber of Maiden-Thought', where 'we see nothing but pleasant wonders', until our vision becomes sharpened into 'the <head> and nature of Man' (*LJK*, I, 280, 281). As we gradually become aware of pain and misery in the world, the room becomes darkened and we are shown many doors 'all leading to dark passages' and feel the full uncertainty of the way ahead: 'We see not the ballance of good and evil. We are in a Mist—' (*LJK*, I, 281). To this point, Keats recognizes with admiration, Wordsworth had come when he composed his 'Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey' some twenty years earlier; he aspires to follow Wordsworth's example by exploring 'those dark passages' in his future poetry. But it was unclear to Keats whether Wordsworth had progressed further in his understanding, and he was unsure if or how Milton's epic visions related to this model of philosophical, emotional, and empirical enquiry.

Keats feels convinced at this point that 'Wordsworth is deeper than Milton', though he sees this as the result of 'the general and gregarious advance of intellect' rather 'than individual

greatness of Mind' (*LJK*, I, 281). According to his progressive view of history at this time, human understanding developed in phases as part of a 'grand march of intellect' (*LJK*, I, 282).²³ In contrast to Wordsworth's willingness to explore the mysterious reaches of human affliction, Milton's ideas appear relatively straightforward to him:

From the *Paradise Lost* and the other Works of Milton, I hope it is not too presuming, even between ourselves to say, his Philosophy, human and divine, may be tolerably understood by one not much advanced in years, In his time englishmen were just emancipated from a great superstition—and Men had got hold of certain points and resting places in reasoning which were too newly born to be doubted ... who could gainsay his ideas on virtue, vice, and Chastity in *Comus*, just at the time of the dismissal of Cod-pieces and a hundred other disgraces?

(*LJK*, I, 281-2)

Regarding Milton through an Enlightenment stadial model of progress, Keats places him at the vanguard of an earlier and inferior stage of post-Reformation thought, restricted by the 'reasoning' of his day. In this light, Wordsworth's close engagement with the intricate complexity of human feelings appeared more philosophically sophisticated. Thus, in early May, Keats admires Milton's poetic powers but expresses concerns about his limitations: 'He did not think his way into the human heart, as Wordsworth has done' (*LJK*, I, 282). During his walk North, however, Keats's perception of Milton appears to develop significantly. The idea of Milton as a distant forefather appears to be gradually overtaken in Keats's mind by the idea of a younger and less certain Milton, striving to shed his poetic immaturity, as Keats himself was trying to do.

II. Milton: Probing at the Fragility of the Pastoral

The notion of going 'the same steps as the Author' becomes at once metaphorical and physical on the walking tour; Keats was pleasantly conscious of following in the footsteps of Wordsworth in the Lake District and Burns in Ayrshire. His pursuit of Milton is visible in the annotated copy of *Paradise Lost* which he appears to have read avidly in the spring of 1818 and re-read, in parts if not entirely, several times between 1818-1819, rather than a geographical pilgrimage.²⁴ However, three instances of Miltonic allusion in Keats's letters (two from *Paradise Lost* and one from *Comus*) in the run up to his composition of 'Not Aladin magian' suggest his awakening interest in pivotal moments in Milton's poetry—in which the poet explores a fine line between pastoral stability and tragic possibility. The first occurs when Keats describes the waterfall at Ambleside through a Miltonic lens 'with "mazy error over pendant shades"' (*LJK*, I, 300), recalling Milton's description of the large wandering river, divided into four streams, which runs through Paradise. The second appears when he longs to revisit a particular passage; writing to Bailey, he looks forward to 'read[ing] that about Milton and Ceres and Prosperine' (*LJK*, I, 340), referring to another passage in Book IV of *Paradise Lost*, celebrating the 'eternal spring' of Eden.²⁵ Ideas about different kinds of sources are thus embedded in the landscape Keats describes—sources of life and energetic renewal in the courses of the water and the flourishing of the season (raw source material for the poet), but also, powerful poetic sources of inspiration from Milton and Ovid. By pursuing these allusions, we can see Keats's thematic interest in Milton's probing at the fragility of the pastoral world and pressing at its relationship to tragedy—a thread which leads him back to *Lycidas*.

Strikingly, both of Keats's allusions to *Paradise Lost* refer to a pivotal scene—the episode on Satan's journey when he surveys the pastoral perfection of Eden from the top of the

Tree of Life, the highest vantage point in God's garden. Milton's description of Satan's panoramic view of Eden carefully builds towards a shift from serene pastoral perfection to dangerous vulnerability, playing on the reader's awareness of the eternal sorrow that will ultimately follow. At this point, life and death, joy and grief, pastoral innocence and tragic catastrophe are held together in close and precarious proximity. Perching on the Tree of Life, Satan pauses to gaze across Eden, 'but sat devising death | To them who lived' (*PL*, IV.197-8). He goes on to see Adam and Eve for the first time and will later be found attempting to infiltrate her dream, but for now he surveys the topography of Eden. Keats appears to be thinking of this Janus-faced scene, in which 'With mazy error under pendant shades | Ran nectar,' which quenches the thirst of the flowers of Paradise while hinting at a hidden threat (*PL*, IV.239-40). As Christopher Ricks comments, the word 'error' in Milton's description of the 'mazy error' both conveys the undulating movement of the river and anticipates the 'guilty error' of the Fall; similarly, Alastair Fowler notices the ominous import of the impending shadows or 'pendant shades'.²⁶

In the same extended description of the 'eternal spring' of Eden which is led on a dance by Pan, Milton again imbues the site of pastoral innocence with the potential for terrifying darkness when he recalls Proserpine's sudden abduction to the underworld by Dis, leaving her mother desperately searching for her:

Prosérpin gathering flowers
Herself a fairer flower by gloomy Dis
Was gathered, which cost Ceres all that pain
To seek her through the world;
(*PL*, IV.269-72)

Milton's allusion to the story from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* at this point in his poem simultaneously develops the sinister idea of Satan, Dis-like, plotting destruction, and, as Ricks points out, anticipates Satan's seduction of Eve.²⁷ Keats's close attention to this passage is borne out in his copy of *Paradise Lost* in which he underlined the passage from line 265 onwards, marking especially lines 271-2 (included in the quotation above). Underscoring the phrase 'all that pain' with double lines, he comments in the margins that it is one of 'two specimens of a very extraordinary beauty' in the poem which exemplify an 'exclusively Miltonic' pathos, quite unlike the 'brief pathos' of Dante or the work of any other poet.²⁸ The other 'specimen' Keats admires concerns Calliope, the bereft mother of the poet Orpheus, and muse of epic poetry: 'nor could the Muse defend | Her son' (*PL*, VII.37-8). Milton had also recalled Orpheus in *Lycidas* when the grieving poet-speaker recognizes that 'the Muse her self that *Orpheus* bore' was unable to save her son from violent destruction at the hands of the Bacchanal 'rout that made the hideous roar' despite his extraordinary poetic gifts and her own powers (*Lycidas*, ll. 58, 61). In both cases, Keats is struck by Milton's description of helpless grieving mothers who are parted from their offspring through brutal acts of violence.

It is prescient that on this journey, Keats, who was seeking to re-position himself from pastoral to epic poetry, was drawn instinctively to moments in Milton's poetry which press at the potential for pastoral peace and safety to turn into hellish loss and sorrow. That the poetic transition he sought was, he sensed, soon to be forced upon him by his own fraternal grief made these precious weeks of travelling, thinking, and learning all the more poignant. In 'Sleep and Poetry', he had wished for ten years in which to realize the full scope of his poetic ambitions, enjoying the sensuous pleasures of 'the realm ... | Of Flora, and old Pan', before turning his attention to 'the agonies, the strife | Of human hearts' (ll. 101-2, 124-5). But now, writing home to Tom, who lay in his sick bed, and fearing that he must inevitably face his

brother's death from the same disease that had killed their mother, the agonies and strife of the human heart were closing their distance. Anxious that his own time on earth may be running out, and the possibility of achieving poetic immortality slipping from his reach, for Keats there was a fresh urgency in his accelerated desire to make the momentous leap to epic poetry.

Keats's final allusion to Milton, before arriving at Fingal's Cave, comes from another key scene—this time from *Comus* (1637), the straightforward morality of which he had dismissed in his letter to Reynolds two months earlier. In this masque, the challenges imposed on the heroine serve to affirm her chastity and spiritual principles, but, crucially, they also reveal a violent undertow to a mythical world of sensuous pleasure. When Keats confesses to Bailey his complicated feelings about women and the subject of marriage, he playfully resolves to cure his disgruntled feelings “with backward mutters of dissevering Power” (*LJK*, I, 342).²⁹ He employs the words of the Attendant Spirit, describing *Comus*, in the scene where he directs the rescue of the virtuous Lady from *Comus*'s base designs—a rescue which averts a tragic denouement and secures a return to pastoral tranquillity.

Cumulatively, these allusions to Milton's work suggest that in the weeks leading up to their visit to Staffa, Keats is thinking about Milton's depictions of the fragility of the pastoral genre and its ominous potential to descend into a world of pain and sorrow. From within the pastoral work itself, the virtuous heroine of *Comus* narrowly escapes sexual violation. When the pastoral serenity of Eden is viewed from within an epic poem, we see that next to the Tree of Life, ‘Our death the tree of knowledge grew fast by’ (*PL*, IV.221). No Christian or classical figure is safe from the insidious advances of malevolent forces. The very turns of the rivers of Eden foretell the impending tragedy of mankind's fall from grace by serpentine designs. Most painfully for Milton, no classical deity or Christian God, no store of poetic virtue, nor qualities of youth, innocence or moral virtue had saved Lycidas from the waves. The absence of any guiding authority, teleological purpose, or transformative myth by which to understand or make sense of his friend's death is one of the most harrowing aspects with which the poet grapples in *Lycidas*. In Donald Friedman's seminal reading, Milton explores the limitations of the pastoral mode in *Lycidas*, and concludes by rehearsing a new epic voice, with which he sings *Paradise Lost*.³⁰ As we will see, Keats seems to find an imaginative renewal through his projection of *Lycidas*, with which he ultimately brings forth his ‘Hyperion’ poems.

III. Keats at Fingal's Cave: A Cultural Palimpsest

Visitors to Fingal's Cave in Keats's day were well aware of its associations with the Celtic mythology on which James Macpherson based his Ossianic “translations”, and its role in ongoing debates about Scotland's national identity. Brought to fame by Sir Joseph Banks's influential account of his visit there, published in Thomas Pennant's *A Tour in Scotland and Voyage to the Hebrides in 1772* (1774), Fingal's Cave had most likely derived its name from Macpherson's epic poem, *Fingal* (1762) and had since become a much-contested cultural space. Fiona Stafford explains the poignancy of Macpherson's efforts to reclaim an ancient heroic culture for Scotland at a time when Highland communities were witnessing the vanishing of their inherited social structures, property, and traditions.³¹ The Act of Proscription of 1746 and the Highland Clearances between 1760 and 1815 saw the erosion of land holdings and the banishment of fundamental features of Highland life, including the clan system, clan tartans, and kilts. In this context, many eighteenth-century visitors saw Fingal's Cave as a place that authenticated Macpherson's Ossianic epics, establishing Scotland's sophisticated cultural heritage and complicating the post-Union agenda to modernize Scotland. Fingal's Cave thus provided, Nigel Leask argues, ‘a focus for cultural resistance to the imperatives of economic

modernisation and a rallying cry for Gaelic language and culture'.³² Leask considers how Fingal's Cave was written and re-written into various postcolonial and nationalist narratives in the European cultural imagination by a range of eighteenth and early nineteenth-century travel-writers—from antiquarians in search of Fingalian locations and bardic fragments, to sceptics such as Dr Johnson, and map-makers. Neither Keats nor Brown mentions the Highland Clearances that were resumed in the late 1810s. Yet the continuing preoccupation with the effacement and recovery of a lost national epic that was native to Britain was a dominant part of the broader cultural context of their Scottish tour and surely fed Keats's interest in creating a new kind of epic.

Keats's response to Fingal's Cave is also palimpsestic. As Stafford demonstrates, his depiction of the Titans owes much to Milton's fallen angels and Macpherson's ancient Celts, and the desolate mood and setting of the 'Hyperion' poems strongly derives from the Ossianic epics.³³ Two features of Macpherson's work—the figure of the elegiac poet and the formidable heroes he recalls—are especially pertinent to Keats's preoccupations with shared loss and former glory in *Hyperion*, and the poet's role in *The Fall of Hyperion*. Just as the third-century epic poet Ossian is characterized by his grief as the sole survivor of his race and the lone conduit of a lost heroic past in *Fragments of Ancient Poetry* (1760), so the Titan goddess of memory, now 'The pale Omega of a wither'd race', Moneta, reveals the demise of her brethren in *The Fall of Hyperion* (l.288). By its nature, however, an epic poem could not be written on the move, and thus the fruit of this thinking—in the form of Keats's own modern epic—would emerge some months later, as he nursed his dying brother in their lodgings in Hampstead. His immediate response to Fingal's Cave was much more unexpected, recalling a young poet who had disappeared into the sea.

On the shores of Staffa, various poetic ideas and influences converged. As they approached by boat and the cave loomed into view, Keats could physically see the landscape of epic poetry for the first time. Like a microcosm of his desired poetic development, the mixed associations of pastoral refuge and epic labour in his prose description imply that he glimpses the subject and setting of his future epic project at Staffa. The primitive grandeur of the massy edifice of 'grand pillars of basalt' offers a reassuring sense of strength and unity, 'standing together as thick as honey combs'. But as honey comb is also intricate and fragile, both in texture and in its dependence on continuous communal activity to sustain it, so the idea of collective labour transforms into the dramatic image of a group of Titan revolutionaries cleaving the rocky pillars to create the cavern he now enters.

Keats's exploration of Fingal's Cave gives rise to a formidable architecture of the mind and a reverence for the strength of the sea—whose might as a revelatory and creative force seems to build up and burst forth in his description and poem. The exploration begins quietly. As Keats and Brown proceed along the walls of the cave, internal structures seem to appear, the pillars becoming 'convenient Stairs' and the arched entrance and roof morphing into a Gothic cathedral. In contrast to Piranesi's *Carceri d'Invenzione* (1750-1761), here, the poet's imagination suggests and reveals his path, rather than impeding or enclosing him. The familiarity implied by the staircase of columns is simultaneously unsettled by the exhilarating scale of the cave. With its roof 'arched somewhat gothic wise', soaring pillars, shadowiness within, and the sublime view of the sea, Fingal's Cave seems to Keats to exceed a man-made religious place of worship, and invite a different kind of veneration, bound up with classical mythology and natural forces: 'For solemnity and grandeur it far surpasses the finest Cathedral' (*LJK*, I, 349). Within the known dimensions of the cave (the side pillars being 80 feet tall and the length of the cave 120 feet, in his estimation), he finds hidden capacities of space and sound: 'At the extremity of the Cave there is a small perforation into another cave, at

which the waters meeting and buffetting [sic] each other there is sometimes produced a report as of a cannon heard as far as Iona which must be 12 Miles'. Describing the sound of the turbulent waters transports him imaginatively outside the cave and back to his first sight of it:

As we approached in the boat there was such a fine swell of sea that the pillars
appeared rising immediately out of the crystal—But it is impossible to describe it—
(*LJK*, I, 349)

This becomes the informal preface for 'Not Aladin magian', a poem which explores ideas of poetic transformation and survival.

IV. Keats's Poetic response to Milton's *Lycidas*

Instead of offering a homage to the 'ancient' bard, Ossian, his father, Fingal, or their author, Macpherson, as one might expect, Keats finds the muse of another epic poet occupying his thoughts. Writing to Tom, he remembers the brother poet whom Milton had described as 'nurst upon the self-same hill' as himself, feeding the same flock, sharing his youthful pursuits and droving with him (*Lycidas*, l. 23). Keats's remarkably strange, playful, and mesmerising poem is quietly but persistently preoccupied with authorship—the question of what this otherworldly place is and who created it. It begins by whimsically suggesting and rejecting several possible creators of the cave, starting with Aladdin, or perhaps the magician who introduced him to the cave of treasure, in the story from the *Arabian Nights*:³⁴

Not Aladin magian
Ever such a work began,
Not the Wizard of the dee
Ever such dream could see
Not St John in Patmos isle
In the passion of his toil
When he saw the churches seven
Golden aisled built up in heaven
Gazed at such a rugged wonder.³⁵

Playfully but surely, the references to 'Aladin magian' and 'the Wizard of the dee' introduce ideas of supernatural experimentation and creativity, drawn from Oriental and Celtic stories. Milton, who similarly interweaves mythologies—Celtic, classical, and biblical—in a British landscape in *Lycidas*, also refers to the River Dee between North Wales and Chester as the place where the legendary Celtic river goddess, 'Deva spreads her wisard stream' (l. 55). If Miriam Allott is right that 'the Wizard of the dee' of whom Keats writes is Merlin, his reference to Arthurian legend may knowingly allude to Milton's first idea of King Arthur as the subject for his epic poem.³⁶

Keats's references to the visionary experiences of St John, author of the book of Revelation, during his exile on the Greek island of Patmos, evoke a mode of religious experience or prophetic vision. In the biblical account, the isolated apostle has a vision of seven candlesticks surrounding Christ, who instructs him to 'Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter'.³⁷ Implicitly, the Keatsian poet-speaker is also inspired by an epiphany:

As I stood its roofing under

By the great Oceanus
 Here his mighty waters play
 Hollow Organs all the day
 Here by turns his dolphins all
 Finny palmer's great and small
 Come to pay devotion due—
 Each a mouth of pea[r]ls must strew

Whereas Milton has (among other classical deities) Neptune, the Olympian god of the sea, summoned to answer for his role in Lycidas's death, for Keats, the creative force of his Titan predecessor, 'the great Oceanus', is supreme. Perhaps, Keats speculates, Oceanus has moulded the cave into being—not in anger or rebellion, as he first supposed, but as a place of music, pleasure, and devotion. His Lycidas is its living guardian.

Although, Keats's Lycidas explains, he has served as the 'Pontif priest' of this 'Cathedral of the Sea', thereby implicitly becoming 'the Genius of the shore' eventually projected by Milton's 'uncouth Swain', he does not protect 'all that wander in that perilous flood' in the style of the Christian guardian spirit that Milton imagines (*Lycidas*, ll. 183, 186, 185). Instead, Keats's Lycidas directs his efforts to preserving 'the magic of the place' from the prying eyes of humankind:

Many a Mortal of these days
 Dares to pass our sacred ways
 Dares to touch audaciously
 This Cathedral of the Sea—
 I have been the Pontif priest
 Where the Waters never rest
 Where a fledgy sea bird choir
 Soars for ever—holy fire
 I have hid from Mortal Man.
 <Old> Proteus is my Sacristan.

The natural phenomenon, Fingal's Cave, takes precedence over its mortal visitors. The 'sea bird choir', the devout dolphins, the restless waves, holy fire, and the efforts of Lycidas and Proteus all serve Oceanus's creation—and it is Oceanus who will later re-appear in Keats's first epic fragment, *Hyperion*.

Keats's engagement with Milton's *Lycidas* in this poem and at this moment in his career is bound up with his yearning to make the momentous transition from the apprenticeship mode of the pastoral to the highest form of the epic. In Sonnet IX in *Poems* (1817), Keats had referred complacently to 'fair-hair'd Milton's eloquent distress, | And all his love for gentle Lycid drown'd' as a comforting reminder of the companionship of other poets and their work (ll. 11-12). But his reimagining of Lycidas at Fingal's Cave suggests that he now found something more pertinent to his own situation in the poem. Milton's pastoral elegy speaks precisely to the situation of a bard who must find a new key in which to sing. In addition to the personal sorrow of losing his friend, 'dead ere his prime', Milton confronts his own untimely summoning (l. 8). In the opening lines, he reluctantly takes up laurels which are not yet matured, to 'pluck your Berries harsh and crude, | And with forc'd fingers rude, | Shatter your leaves before the mellowing year'—composing an elegy he feels himself too green a poet to attempt (ll. 3-5). The poet's apology may be a conventional modesty, but *Lycidas* is perhaps

the only poem in which Milton explicitly dramatizes his early anxieties about his poetic vocation.

Although *Lycidas* is firmly rooted in the pastoral tradition of Theocritus and Virgil, as James Hanford and others have demonstrated, Milton's dialogue with his predecessors only enhances the troubling personal questions he raises about his poetic vocation.³⁸ In J. Martin Evans's and Nicholas McDowell's readings, the pointless death of the virtuous Edward King makes a cloistered life seem futile and throws into question Milton's own future direction.³⁹ '*Lycidas* is a pivotal work in Milton's career', Evans argues, in which the poet of the pastoral eclogue is eventually displaced by the future poet of the Christian epic.⁴⁰ Friedman laid the foundations of this reading, suggesting that the transformation of Milton's poetic identity is captured in the dramatic shift in the last eight lines of the poem—which move suddenly from the Miltonic first-person voice to an anonymous third person who describes the departure of the 'uncouth Swain' who sang the preceding '*Dorick lay*' (l. 189).

For Friedman, there is a 'process of self-education' at the centre of *Lycidas* which provides 'the key to Milton's renovation of the conventional epic beginning' in *Paradise Lost*.⁴¹ This process of spiritual enlightenment enables the swain who has begun the poem as a shepherd 'only by virtue of literary convention'—in keeping with the archaic characters of pastoral elegy—to end it 'as a true shepherd' in the sense of being ready to become a poet-priest or pastoral guide.⁴² 'Milton does not tell us *how* that change is accomplished;' but 'shows us the results of the change'; thus, St Peter's reminder that the flocks are hungry leads implicitly to an awakening in the grieving poet's mind that the role of the poet is to provide spiritual comfort and instruction to his flock.⁴³ The poet-speaker is finally able to see that *Lycidas*, 'Sunk though he be beneath the watry floar' is 'mounted high | Through the dear might of him that walk'd the waves' in 'the blest Kingdoms meek of joy and love' (ll. 167, 173, 178). This elevated understanding and acceptance of *Lycidas*'s heavenly afterlife enables the poet to close his song with a consoling vision and a final farewell:

Now *Lycidas* the Shepherds weep no more;
Hence forth thou art the Genius of the shore,
In thy large recompense, and shalt be good
To all that wander in that perilous flood.
(ll. 182-5)

A symbolic passing of time occurs between the poet's farewell above and the final stanza in which a new third-person voice intervenes to describe a poet who has gained a new sense of purpose by the close of day. Just as the sun has set but will rise again, so *Lycidas* is 'sunk low, but mounted high' (l. 172), and the departing poet, though still bereft, is now prepared to occupy a higher ground:

Thus sang the uncouth Swain to th'Okes and rills,
While the still morn went out with Sandals gray,
He touch'd the tender stops of various Quills,
With eager thought warbling his *Dorick lay*:
And now the Sun had stretch'd out all the hills,
And now was dropt into the Western bay;
At last he rose, and twitch'd his Mantle blew:
To morrow to fresh Woods, and Pastures new.
(ll. 186-93)

The elegy for King in some sense becomes Milton's elegy for himself—a farewell to his youthful stay in pastoral pastures and a life of simple pleasures, which is necessary in order for him to begin a more purposeful and edifying poetic life.⁴⁴ The irregular stanzas, modelled on Italian *canzone*, in the preceding parts of the poem are now replaced by the *ottava rima* of epics by Tasso and Ariosto.⁴⁵ If we read the poem in this way, the last line, 'To morrow to fresh Woods, and Pastures new', can be seen as a starting point for Milton's progress into the higher realms of epic poetry.

Having left the realm 'Of Flora, and old Pan' to pursue 'a nobler life', Keats was also seeking a transformation. How could he begin to make the formidable world of the epic that Fingal's Cave represented his own? In many ways, the starting point for 'Not Aladin magian' is the consoling vision of Lycidas as the 'Genius of the shore' at the end of Milton's elegy. But Keats's poem ends with no clear sense of direction. In a characteristically playful swerve, he breaks off in a comically territorial way, with a desire to preserve the sacred site of epic poetry from unworthy visitors—in this case, the Regency tourists whose trivial tastes threatened to erode the visionariness of Fingal's Cave. Keats's Lycidas unravels 'the magic of the place' and takes it with him, declaring:

But the stupid eye of Mortal
Hath pass'd beyond the Rocky portal
So for ever will I leave
Such a taint and soon unweave
All the magic of the place—
'T is now free to stupid face
To cutters and to fashion boats
To cravats and to Petticoats.
The great Sea shall war it down
For its fame shall not be blow{n}
At every farthing quadrille dance.

Having imaginatively reawakened Milton's muse, Keats has Lycidas escape at what should be the crowning moment of the poet-speaker's ascension in wisdom. With a proactive leap, Lycidas disappears:

So saying with a Spirits glance
He dived—

The unfinished line leaves us uncertain whether he will surface on another island, or never reappear. Brown remarked that he never could get Keats to finish the poem.⁴⁶

If the end of *Lycidas* paves the way for Milton's progress to epic realms, 'Not Aladin magian' leaves us in suspense about the future of both the poet-speaker and his runaway muse. At this point Keats rejects a serious tragic or elegiac mode, but, like Milton's poetic speaker, he knew that he must face devastating loss as he progressed towards the difficult next stage of his poetic life. What had emerged in his spontaneous response to Fingal's Cave was the importance of Milton's representation of himself and King as young poets in shaping Keats's understanding of Milton's career and the painful but essential experiences through which he too would gain his poetic maturity. As he now recognized, *Lycidas* formed a bridge between Milton's early and mature work, setting the author on a path after accepting the need to part from his younger self and refocus his aspirations, and concentrating his vision on becoming the poet who would create his great work, *Paradise Lost*. Thus, in *Lycidas*, Keats had found a way

of understanding Milton not solely as the wise and authoritative national poet whom Wordsworth had invoked in ‘London, 1802’—‘Milton! thou should’st be living at this hour: | England hath need of thee’—but as a poet who had faced personal bereavement and been forced to question himself, his chosen life and his future path before he could begin to realise his full poetic power and potential.⁴⁷ This new idea of Milton not only lent force to the spirit with which Keats’s approached his task in *Hyperion*, but also shaped his exploration of his anxieties about the poet’s role in *The Fall of Hyperion*.

In contrast to the ease of finding Lycidas at Fingal’s Cave, Keats confronted the difficulty of writing an epic poem at his own crisis moment. On 21 September, he felt compelled to compose the lines which became the opening passage of *Hyperion* in order to alleviate the intense anxiety brought on by weeks of caring for Tom.⁴⁸ Despite having given up his medical career, he confided to Richard Woodhouse on 27 October that he remained ‘ambitious of doing the world some good’, and to this end, he was striving ‘to reach to as high a summit in Poetry as the nerve bestowed upon me will suffer’ (*LJK*, I, 387). He continued to compose *Hyperion* over the following weeks. It was not enough, Keats felt, to seek comfort or relief in poetry; duty and self-respect demanded the fulfilment of a more difficult and world-related poetic task. Beginning with the dormant figure of Saturn, ‘Deep in the shady sadness of a vale | Far sunken from the healthy breath of morn’ (I.1-2), *Hyperion* introduces us to the fallen Titans, no longer cleaving basalt columns as he had first imagined them, but incarcerated in a craggy ‘nest of woe’ and struggling to come to terms with the loss of their immortality (II.14). With his ‘nerveless’ right hand and ‘realmless eyes’, Saturn seems unable govern his own body (I.18, 19); when he speaks, it is to express the loss of his core identity. Thus Keats’s epic begins to address the suffering that is intrinsic to the human condition. At the end of Book I, when Hyperion goes in quest of the other Titans, he descends through the air much as Lycidas disappeared at the end of ‘Not Aladin magian’: ‘Like to a diver in the pearly seas, | Forward he stoop’d over the airy shore, And plung’d all noiseless into the deep night’ (I.355-7). This time, however, the diver’s disappearance signals a new beginning; Keats goes on to explore the Titans’ experience from a range of viewpoints.

It is Oceanus, the ‘architect’ of Fingal’s Cave from ‘Not Aladin magian’, rather than Lycidas, who addresses the problem of loss and rupture in *Hyperion*, offering a philosophical view of their condition which demonstrates a higher state of understanding and acceptance of their decline than any of his kin. The dispossessed god of the sea explains that the Titans have fallen ‘by course of Nature’s law, not force | Of thunder, or of Jove’ because they and their Olympian successors are inextricably connected as part of the revolutions of the natural world (II.181-2). As the trees of the forest nurture the birds that shelter in their boughs, so the Titans have bred the ‘eagles golden-feather’d, who do tower | Above us in their beauty, and must reign | In right thereof’ (II.226-8). As one race of gods gives way to another, more perfect than the last, each participates in a longer legacy, advancing the Golden Age even as they fall away. The ascendant young Olympian, Apollo, too, must ‘with fierce convulse | Die into life’ in order to assume his new identity as god of the sun, poetry, and healing (III.129-30).

By April 1819, Keats considered suffering vital to the growth of the human heart. The world seemed to him a “vale of Soul-making”, in which each individual soul or intelligence is taught to read the human heart by its own experiences: ‘Do you not see how necessary a World of Pains and troubles is to school an Intelligence and make it a soul?’ (*LJK*, II, 102). *The Fall of Hyperion*, composed between April and September 1819, boldly questions the purpose of poetry. Keats explores his anxieties about the possible futility of poetry and confronts the idea that the poet must suffer in order to create a poetry that is meaningful to the world. By placing the first-person poet-narrator in what appears to be Milton’s Eden, he makes Milton’s

precarious pastoral the starting ground for the poet's journey, before dramatizing his progress to the Titan realm through a Dantean dream vision. Only when the poet-narrator has endured and struggled to escape the 'palsied chill' of death as he strives to mount the steps of Satan's temple can he debate the role of the poet with Moneta and articulate his belief in the poet's healing power: 'sure a poet is a sage; | A humanist, physician to all men' (l.189-90). Moneta reveals the Titan vale of sorrow by showing the poet her memories. But it was Milton's memories of himself and King as young shepherds, and their loss, rebirth and journey to pastures new that had first enabled Keats to envisage himself among the Titans. His final epic fragment resists the finality of elegy while probing unflinchingly at the value of loss.

¹ *The Letters of John Keats*, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins, 2 vols (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), I, 348-9. Hereafter, *LJK*.

² Milton, *Lycidas*, in *The Complete Works of John Milton*, Vol. 3: *The Shorter Poems*, ed. Barbara Kiefer Lewalski and Estelle Haan (Oxford, 2012), 50-8, ll. 10-11, 44, 49. Subsequent quotations from *Lycidas* are taken from this edition and line numbers given in parentheses.

³ See Nick Groom (ed.), *Thomas Chatterton and Romantic Culture* (Basingstoke, 1999), and Daniel Cook, *Thomas Chatterton and Neglected Genius, 1760-1830* (Basingstoke, 2013).

⁴ *The Poems of John Keats*, ed. Jack Stillinger (London, 1978), ll. 1, 8. With the exception of 'Not Aladin magian', quotations from Keats's poems are taken from Stillinger's edition and references given in parentheses. For Keats and Chatterton, see Robert Gittings, *The Mask of John Keats* (London, 1956), 88-97, and Beth Lau, 'Class and Politics in Keats's Admiration of Chatterton', *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 53 (2004), 25-38.

⁵ Since the pioneering work of Nelson Sherwin Bushnell in *A Walk After John Keats* (New York, 1936) and Carol Kyros Walker in *Walking North with Keats* (New Haven, 1992), critical discussions of Keats's walking tour have included: Robin Jarvis, *Romantic Writing and Pedestrian Travel* (Basingstoke, 1997), 196-203, Richard Marggraf Turley, *Keats's Boyish Imagination* (London, 2004), 73-103, Fiona Stafford, *Local Attachments: The Province of Poetry* (Oxford, 2010), 224-71, Jeffrey C. Robinson, 'Travel', in Michael O'Neill (ed.), *John Keats in Context* (Cambridge, 2017), 56-65, and essays by Meiko O'Halloran, Alexandra Paterson, and Heidi Thompson in Richard Marggraf Turley (ed.), *Keats's Places* (Basingstoke, 2018).

⁶ Stillinger explains the textual history of the poem in *The Poems of John Keats*, 615-6.

⁷ Meg Harris Williams, *Inspiration in Milton and Keats* (Totowa, 1982), 114-6 (116, 115).

⁸ References are to the poem as it appears in the letter-journal to Tom Keats, dated 23, 26 July 1818, in *LJK*, I, 349-51 (350).

⁹ W. J. Bate, *John Keats* (Cambridge, Mass., 1964), 392-417, Jonathan Bate, 'Keats's Two *Hyperions* and the Problem of Milton', in Robert Brinkley and Keith Hanley (eds), *Romantic Revisions* (Cambridge, 1992), 321-8, Lucy Newlyn, *Paradise Lost and the Romantic Reader* (Oxford, 1993), Beth Lau, *Keats's Paradise Lost* (Gainesville, 1998), Jonathon Shears, *The Romantic Legacy of Paradise Lost: Reading Against the Grain* (Farnham, 2009), and Henry Weinfield, *The Blank-Verse Tradition from Milton to Stevens* (Cambridge, 2012).

¹⁰ Charles Brown, *Walks in the North* (1840), reproduced by Rollins in *LJK*, I, 421-42 (422).

¹¹ The second volume of Keats's schoolbook edition of *Paradise Lost*, ed. Thomas Newton, 2 vols, 8th edn (London, 1775), containing his signature and the date 1810, is in the collection at Keats House, Hampstead. R. D. Havens finds allusions to a range of Milton's poetry in Keats's early poems as well as the rest of his oeuvre, in *The Influence of Milton on English Poetry* (Cambridge, Mass., 1922), 620-4. For Keats's references to Milton in his poetry and letters, see J. A. Wittreich, *The Romantics on Milton* (Cleveland, 1970), 545-65.

¹² 'Lecture III: On Shakespeare and Milton', in *Lectures on the English Poets*, in *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P. P. Howe, 21 vols (London, 1930-1934), V. 45. Hereafter page references are given in parentheses. Keats attended all the lectures except Lecture II on Chaucer and Spenser.

¹³ Preface to *Endymion*, in *The Poems of John Keats*, ed. Stillinger, 102.

¹⁴ A digital copy of Keats's two-volume pocket edition of *Paradise Lost* (Edinburgh, 1807), in the collection at Keats House, Hampstead, is hosted online by the University of Notre Dame: <<http://keatslibrary.org/paradise-lost/>> accessed 16 January 2019.

¹⁵ Elijah Fenton, 'The Life of Mr John Milton', in *Paradise Lost* (1807), v-xiii (vii).

¹⁶ Fenton, x.

¹⁷ Ralph A. Haug, introduction to *The Reason of Church-Government*, in *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, ed. Don M. Wolfe, Vol. 1 (New Haven, 1953), 736-44 (742).

¹⁸ *Keats's Paradise Lost*, ed. Lau, 71. See Keats's annotations on the half-title page of his copy in *Keats's Paradise Lost: a Digital Edition* (pubd online July 2018): <<https://curate.nd.edu/downloads/8c97kp81664.jpg>> accessed 16 January 2019.

¹⁹ See Denise Gigante, *The Keats Brothers: The Life of John and George* (Cambridge, Mass., 2011). I would like to thank Richard Cronin for sharing a copy of his lecture, 'Keats in 1818', delivered at the Keats Foundation Conference in Hampstead (May 2017); Cronin's discussion of Keats's knowledge of Tom's condition and his decision to go to Scotland has helped to shape my thinking in this article.

²⁰ See Nicholas Roe, *John Keats: A New Life* (New Haven, 2012), 204, 209.

²¹ Wordsworth, Preface to *The Excursion*, ed. Sally Bushell, James A. Butler, and Michael C. Jaye (Ithaca and London, 2007), 38-41 (38, 39).

²² Prospectus to *The Recluse*, in Preface to *The Excursion*, 39, 40 (ll. 26, 35-41).

²³ For discussion of the 'grand march of intellect', see Porscha Fermanis, *John Keats and the Ideas of the Enlightenment* (Edinburgh, 2009), Chapter 1.

²⁴ Lau considers the possibilities for dating Keats's *Paradise Lost* marginalia at various points between 1818 and 1819 in her edition of *Keats's Paradise Lost* (23-35), concluding that 'the bulk of evidence suggests early 1818 for Keats's reading and marking of *Paradise Lost*' and finding it likely that he 'returned to particular sections of the work to record fresh responses as his interests or preoccupations shifted' (35).

²⁵ *Milton: Paradise Lost*, ed. Alastair Fowler, 2nd edn (Harlow, 2007), IV.268. Subsequent quotations from *Paradise Lost* are from this edition and references given in parentheses.

²⁶ *Paradise Lost*, ed. Christopher Ricks (Harmondsworth, 1989), 85n.; *Milton: Paradise Lost*, ed. Fowler, 232n. 239.

²⁷ *Paradise Lost*, ed. Ricks, 86n.

²⁸ *Keats's Paradise Lost*, 112. For the relevant pages in Keats's copy, see *Keats's Paradise Lost: a Digital Edition*: <<https://curate.nd.edu/downloads/gh93gx44h8b.jpg>> accessed 16 January 2019.

²⁹ Keats quotes from *Comus*, l. 816.

³⁰ Donald M. Friedman, 'Lycidas: The Swain's Paideia', in C. A. Patrides (ed.), *Milton's Lycidas: The Tradition and the Poem*, rev. edn (Columbia, 1983), 280-302.

³¹ Stafford, *The Sublime Savage: A Study of James Macpherson and the Poems of Ossian* (Edinburgh, 1988).

³² Nigel Leask, 'Fingalian Topographies: Ossian and the Highland Tour, 1760-1805', in *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 39 (2016), 183-96 (184).

³³ Stafford, 'Fingal and the Fallen Angels: Macpherson, Milton and Romantic Titanism', in Fiona Stafford and Howard Gaskill (eds), *From Gaelic to Romantic: Ossianic Translations* (Amsterdam, 1998), 163-82.

³⁴ 'The Story of Aladdin, or the Wonderful Lamp' first appeared in Antoine Galland's *Mille et une nuits* (1704-1717). Miriam Allott suggests Keats's familiarity with the *Arabian Nights* through Henry Weber's *Tales of the East*, 3 vols (Edinburgh and London, 1812) in *The Poems of John Keats*, 5th edn (London, 1980), 614, 117.

³⁵ In this final section of my discussion, 'Not Aladin magian' is quoted in its entirety from *LJK*, I, 349-51.

³⁶ *The Poems of John Keats*, ed. Allott, 373. Fenton mentions Milton's intention 'to fix on King Arthur for his hero' when he first 'conceived of writing an Epic Poem' in Italy, vii. For Milton's interest in King Arthur, see Helen Cooper, 'Milton's King Arthur', *RES*, 65 (2014), 252-65.

³⁷ Revelation 1: 9-20 (20), King James Version.

³⁸ James H. Hanford, 'The Pastoral Elegy and Milton's *Lycidas*', in *PMLA*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (1910), 403-47.

³⁹ See Nicholas McDowell, 'Lycidas' and the Influence of Anxiety', in Nicholas McDowell and Nigel Smith (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Milton* (Oxford, 2011), 112-35.

⁴⁰ J. Martin Evans, 'Lycidas', in Dennis Danielson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Milton*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 2006), 39-53 (52).

⁴¹ Friedman, 300.

⁴² Friedman, 301.

⁴³ Friedman, 296.

⁴⁴ Evans quotes E. M. W. Tillyard's view that King is 'but the nominal subject' of a poem which 'concerns Milton himself', and suggests that if '*Lycidas* is about Milton's anxieties concerning the possibility of his own premature death', it is comparable to Keats's 'When I have fears that I may cease to be'. See Evans, 40.

⁴⁵ Evans, 52.

⁴⁶ Charles Brown, 'Life of John Keats', in *The Keats Circle: Letters and Papers, 1816-1878*, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins, 2 vols, 2nd edn (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), 2. 52-97 (63).

⁴⁷ Wordsworth, 'London, 1802', *Poems, in Two Volumes, 1800-1807*, ed. Jared Curtis (New York, 1983), ll. 1-2.

⁴⁸ Roe, 269.