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Keats, Incorporated: Social Authorship and the Making of a Brand

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ABSTRACT

Our essay extends recent criticism—that challenges the notion of Keats as a solitary genius unengaged with social life and politics—to the realms of literary marketing and bookmaking. Keats, we argue, was anything but uninterested in the business of literature, let alone irreparably wounded by savage treatment in the press. Our essay thus asks how *Endymion*'s reception informed Keats's and his circle's preparation of *Lamia*, *Isabella*, *The Eve of St. Agnes*, and *Other Poems* for the press. "Keats Incorporated" presents a practical-minded Keats who, with his team of editors and publishers, sought to market "the Author of *Endymion*" to audiences tired of partisan reviewing practices. Examining the 1820 volume's ordering of poems, newspaper advertisements, letters between members of Keats's team, and understudied paratexts from all three of Keats's published books, we show how the *Lamia* volume constructs a marketable authorial persona—one that emerges from that earlier maligned volume.

If the stories we tell about John Keats have changed over the past half-century, they have shifted strongly from chronicles of the progress of solitary genius to contextual accounts crossing a range of social registers. The spring 1986 issue of *Studies in Romanticism* on "Keats and Politics" celebrated one such sea-change, inaugurated by Jerome McGann on Keats and historical method (1979) and expanded via book-length studies by Marjorie Levinson (1988), Nicholas Roe (1997), and Jeffrey Cox (1998). Jonathan Mulrooney's more recent *Romanticism and Theatrical Experience* (2019) and the rich commentaries that have accompanied *The Keats Letters Project* (2016–20) have extended still further this vision of a lively and radical Keats, a poet who wrote sometimes collaboratively and always communally.

That Keats might have *needed* sociability, however—that it may even have been necessary to his art—strikes us as a more radical question. In rereading the biographies of Walter Jackson Bate, Robert Gittings, Andrew Motion, and Roe, the life episode that remains for us the most telling concerns Keats's first attempts at composing *Endymion*. Girding his loins to write his first long poem, Keats traveled to a cottage on the Isle of Wight on 14 April 1817 where he could commune in isolation with his muse. "Alone for the first time in many months," Roe notes, Keats arrived to discover a portrait of

Shakespeare in the hallway (*A New Life* 161). Excited and overwhelmed at the task before him, he hung the portrait over his stack of books in “a snug corner” (*Letters* 1: 130) and tried to settle into writing. By 17 April he had composed a new sonnet, which he transcribed into a letter to John Hamilton Reynolds. Continuing the next morning, Keats notes to Reynolds that he has opened his volume of Spenser at random for inspiration and, finding the lines auspicious, vows to “forthwith begin my *Endymion*” (*Letters* 1: 134). Six days later, he abandoned the venture, posting back to his brother Tom in Margate, having experienced something akin to a breakdown. To watch Keats’s over-determined experiment in isolation is to realize just how powerful myths of artistic autonomy had become during the late Regency, so much so that writing alone appeared to Keats a necessary condition of being a serious poet. A fortnight with Tom and he was fully himself again, writing lively letters to Benjamin Robert Haydon, Leigh Hunt, and his new publishers Taylor and Hessey. Keats wrote *Endymion*’s 4,000 lines steadily over the next months but never again renewed the experiment of solitary writing, instead always composing in the company of friends or family. Reviewing *Bright Star* in 2009 for the *New York Times*, A. O. Scott registers this social turn in our perception of Keats, placing his “genius” at the center of Jane Campion’s film but noting the sustaining presences of “a loyal coterie of literary friends” and Fanny Brawne. Our own students, expecting to find in him a poster-child of solitary genius, remain surprised by his need for community, though we’ve noticed the case for a social Keats has become easier in the time of Covid. Two hundred years since the publication of *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St. Agnes, and Other Poems* (1820), it appears that our own anxious and socially distanced times may finally have embraced this more connected, human version of him.

Still, we appear collectively to have retained at least one vestige of these assumptions about poetic unworldliness in spite of our sustained interest in more communal romanticisms. That Keats wasn’t adept at the business of literature—that he was either naive, inept, or uninterested in book-making and book-marketing—remains largely unchallenged in commentaries on his writings and life.¹ Having reconnected him to the Regency in all its social, historical, and political venality, we maintain an investment in keeping Keats comparatively innocent of the financial ways of the world and the nitty-gritty of book production. Unlike work on the care taken by William Wordsworth, Charlotte Smith, and even Samuel Coleridge in the design and packaging of their books, with Keats the tragic elements of the biography remain strong (Eilenberg 192–210; Gamer; Labbe vii–ix; and Harding 13–19). Writing his greatest poems in the face of encroaching illness and pronounced opposition, he remains perennially in debt and constitutionally unable to navigate the literary marketplace. Part of this impression derives from sales figures: that the 1817 *Poems* sold so few copies that Charles Ollier disclaimed responsibility for its publication; that of Taylor and Hessey lost money on *Endymion* because of poor sales (*Letters* 1: 138; Cox, *Keats’s Poetry and Prose* 144). Then there are the other, associated facts: Keats’s misjudged Preface to *Endymion*, apologizing for his own immaturity; his generous, disastrous loans to others; his careening in the face of growing debt between various career choices. Finally, there is the economic disadvantage of comparative youth. Unlike his older contemporaries, Keats didn’t have time to create a large corpus, let alone reissue or revise portions of it for resale. Putting forward a different narrative requires more than abandoning preconceptions or providing supplementary evidence; it means expanding our sense of a socially-authored Keats

to include the broader realms of literary production and the publishers, advisors, and friends who joined with him to produce his final, astonishing book.

If the episode on the Isle of Wight confirmed him to be a resolutely unsolitary writer, Keats's initial experiences with publication extended this lesson to other realms of literary production, particularly that of book-making. We thus revisit *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St. Agnes, and Other Poems* to make two claims about the collection. First, we show that, far from being a hasty endeavor thrown together just before Keats's untimely death, the volume constitutes a strategically arranged and carefully packaged *riposte* to *Endymion's* detractors. Second, we focus on its careful portrait of "John Keats, the Author of *Endymion*," which strategically produced for the world a version of Keats as a young, headstrong, unworldly, and injured poet. The arrangement of the collection corroborates this portrait, doubling down on the defining traits of *Endymion's* author. That Keats was too ill in the spring of 1820 always to approve final production decisions first-hand we do not deny; that there existed a team already assembled to oversee production, we argue, is precisely the point. In this sense, our essay extends the insights of Jack Stillinger's *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius* (1991) into the realms of social authorship and the marketing of poetry. Read closely, *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St. Agnes, and Other Poems* presents a book engineered to please and inspire. It also locates Keats's genius in the very taste and stylistic traits for which he had been attacked. In this, the volume constitutes a response to, and reworking of, controversial subjects and themes—a kind of re-collection of Keats's first two collections, *Poems* (1817) and *Endymion* (1818), which had already begun the process of narrativizing the poet's career. It also shows Keats working as a part of a business-savvy team whose collective decision to open the volume with the three longer romances and to close with *Hyperion* stands at the center of the volume's argument and the authorial persona it creates. Reading these poems alongside the broader correspondence of Keats, Incorporated, we believe, offers a rich portrait of the volume's making and architecture, while at the same time foregrounding the constructedness of the poetic persona its readers encounter.

1. Fashioning *Poems* (1817) and *Endymion* (1818)

One of the longstanding concerns of scholars taking up the *Lamia* volume has been the problem of distinguishing the decisions of Keats from those of his publishers, editors, and printer.² That these concerns have extended to construing Keats's *intentions* should not be surprising given his worsening illness in the spring of 1820. Forced to remain at home and often in bed, Keats communicated with Taylor and Hessey indirectly, either by post or via Charles Brown, who acted as a kind of agent. The resulting lack of first-hand communication adds ambiguity to what we know about production processes, and the surviving manuscripts raise further questions, particularly regarding the position of *Hyperion* which closed the *Lamia* volume. On one drafted title page in Woodhouse's hand the poem appears second, and in another possible version appears to have been dropped altogether (Stillinger, *Poems* 737). Whether either of these alternative orderings originated in Keats's wishes is impossible to determine and equally impossible to ignore. (Taking up this temptation with characteristic shrewdness, Brian Rejack and Michael Theune close this special issue by asking what it would mean for *The Cap and Bells* to close the *Lamia* volume.) The resulting speculations—almost by necessity—bring with

them fundamental assumptions about poet-publisher relations, particularly about John Taylor and Richard Woodhouse. Tim Chilcott, for example, paints a picture of conflict over the volume's production, arguing that even "seemingly trifling disagreement[s]" between Keats and the firm of Taylor and Hessey were "in fact the focus of a far wider and more diffuse struggle" (43) over questions of audience and public taste. More recent accounts have softened this view while still assuming differences between publisher and poet. Roe's *John Keats: A New Life*, for example, paints a largely collegial portrait, with Keats sending fair copies via Brown and communicating through frequent correspondence. "Taylor and probably Woodhouse would have a role in determining what went into the forthcoming volume," Roe concludes, "although they would not necessarily be responsible for the final selection or the arrangement" (366). Most recently, R. S. White reconsiders the 1820 volume's composition through alternative orderings suggested in the manuscripts and correspondence. As with Rejack and Theune's essay in this issue, White's project at its core is speculative. Aligning Keats's desires with an assumed drive for thematic unity, he jettisons *Hyperion* and imagines a volume closing with "To Autumn" and "Ode on Melancholy" as more coherently sustaining a focus on melancholy and loss (23–32). Both studies share at least a willingness to imagine that poets and publishers might be able to resolve differences as well as have them. At the same time, their preoccupation with Keats's intentions reserves an authorial space for an idealized Keats outside of the palpable agendas inscribed in the *Lamia* volume. Our own essay asks similar questions about coherence and effect, but of the volume as it was published. As we hope to show, one of the difficulties in imagining a socially-authored Keats lies in the volumes themselves. If even socially minded commentators have found it difficult to jettison the biographical Keats entirely, it is because Keats's most famous collection of poems insists on that authorial figure's existence so convincingly.

That Keats exhibited an abiding interest in organizing and producing poetic collections is convincingly argued by John Barnard, who demonstrates that Keats not only financed his first book but also participated in its production (77–79). In selecting C. & J. Ollier as his publisher and Charles Richards as his printer, Keats had chosen newcomers to the trade like himself. Their collective inexperience shows at several points in the *Poems*; at the same time, it also allowed Keats to involve himself in the selection of key design features to create a distinct authorial persona (Figure 1).

Several bibliographic practices forged in *Poems, by John Keats* were to re-appear in *Endymion* and the *Lamia* volume. Others—the absence of a table of contents, the portrait of Shakespeare and epigraph from Spenser, the division of poems across the pages—disappeared when Keats moved to the more established firm of Taylor and Hessey. Nearly all point to a curatorial-mindedness extending to the arrangement of the poems as well. Beginning with "I stood tiptoe," "Specimen to an Induction of a Poem," and "Calidore: A Fragment," *Poems, by John Keats* (1817) opens with Keats's more ambitious works; each gestures to something larger but not yet realized. These progressively yield to lighter compositions, such as the verse epistles and the sonnets, which occupy the middle of the volume, before culminating with "Sleep and Poetry," the volume's longest and most ambitious poem. Among its sources, the *Poems*' organization draws heavily on Wordsworth's 1815 *Poems*, which included generic divisions and employed a similar logic within sections to represent the author's progression and development. Within

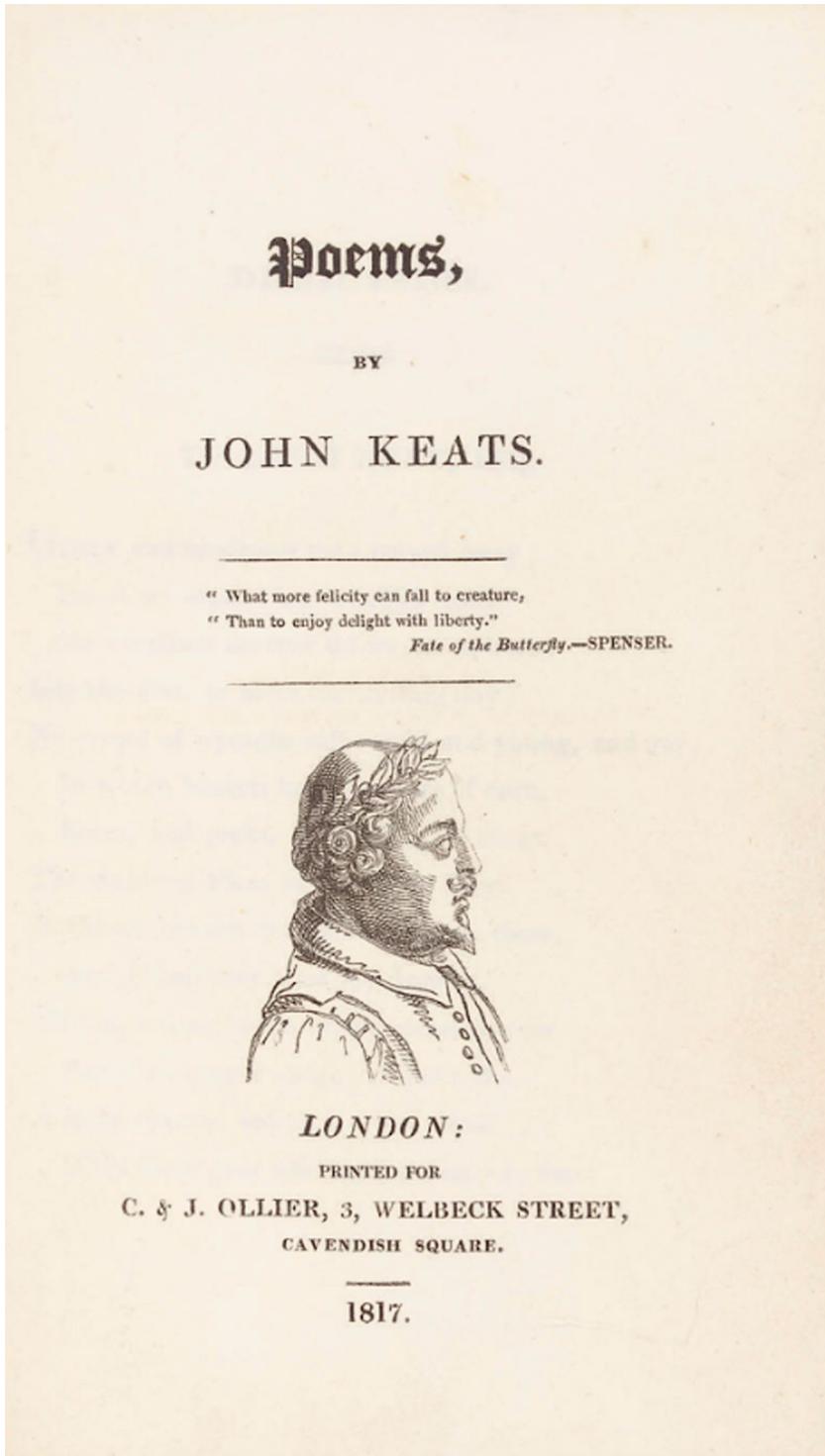


Figure 1. Title-page, *Poems*, by John Keats (1817), courtesy of the British Library, digitized by the Google Books project.

Poems, by John Keats the effect is hierarchical, with the most important poems framing the volume and lesser ones nearer its center. Like Wordsworth, Keats points to specific groupings of poems as less mature. “The Short Pieces in the middle of the Book,” he notes, “as well as some of the Sonnets, were written at an earlier period” (n.p.). This editorial note constructs a developmental narrative for its author, asking readers to justly appraise the progress of the compositions as they move from ambitious introductory poems to more youthful ones, and then back out to the more fully realized “Sleep and Poetry.”

If we insist on this point a bit strongly, it is because both *Poems*, by John Keats and later *Endymion* so insistently craft a developmental arc for their author—one that in turn has shaped our collective sense of his career. Conferring degrees of maturity on different groupings in the *Poems*, Keats inscribes a temporal element into the volume. To read from interior to exterior is to read in some degree chronologically, from apprenticeship to more fully realized works. *Endymion* also deploys this narrative of development. The use of gothic letter in its subtitle, “A Poetic Romance,” forges stylistic unity between it and the title page of the previous volume, which employed similar lettering for the title. Like *Poems*, *Endymion* also has a dedication, but this time it is not to Hunt but rather to a deceased writer, Chatterton (Figure 2). The shift at once invites

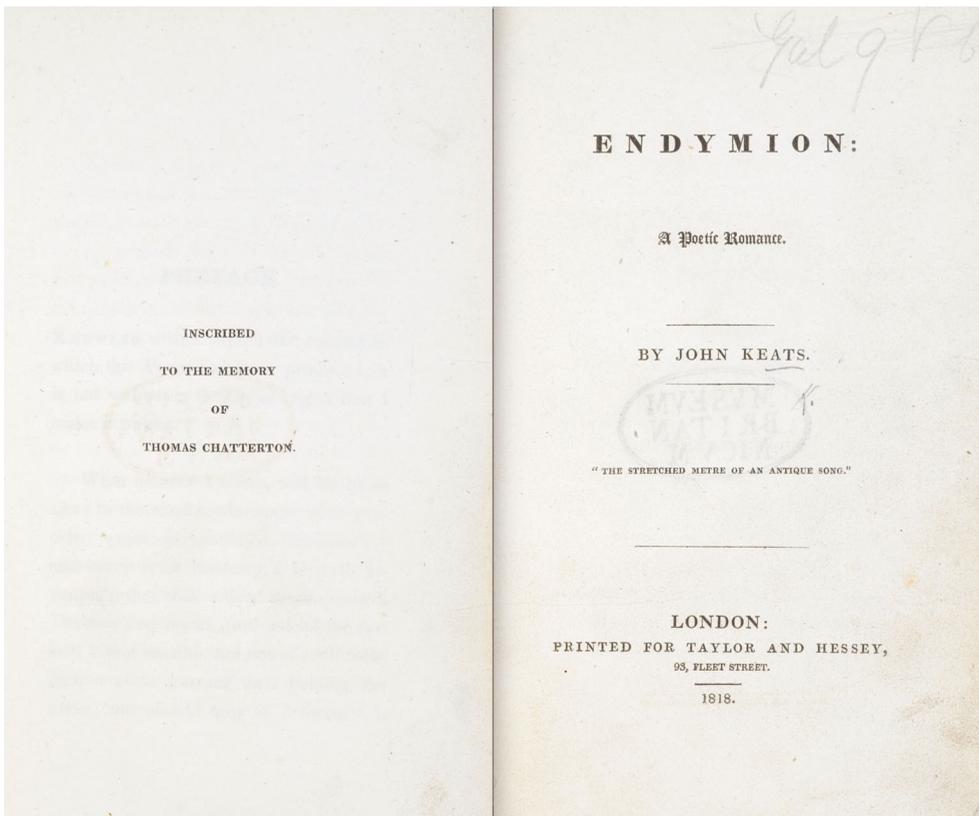


Figure 2. *Endymion*, British Library Digital Manuscripts, courtesy of the British Library, digitized by the Google Books project (<https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/first-edition-of-keats-endymion>).

comparison between the poet who famously committed suicide and the similarly young Keats while at the same time showing a more independent Keats no longer in need of a living patron. Alongside the move to Taylor and Hessey, this shift effectively announces the end of Keats as apprentice-poet while still insisting on his relative youth and lingering immaturity.

As Stillinger and others have observed, both volumes also directly take up the question of whether its author can be a poet, asking readers to look beyond present blemishes to future promise (Stillinger, “The Order of Poems” 92–101; Cox, *Keats’s Poetry and Prose* 19). This message is reinforced paratextually, not just in the prefatory note in *Poems* but also in *Endymion’s* Preface, which describes the poem as “a feverish attempt, rather than a deed accomplished” (vii) and makes explicit the narrative of poetic growth implied in the organization of the *Poems*. Calling attention to the writer’s “great inexperience” and “immaturity,” Keats goes so far as to claim that “[t]he two first books, and indeed the two last”—the entire work, in other words—should not have “pass[ed] the press” (vii). While we have tended to take Keats at face value, his implied argument—that age improves artistry—establishes the developmental framework by which he asks readers to judge *Endymion*. Located in “the space of life between” the “healthy” imagination of a boy and the “mature” (ix) imagination of a man, *Endymion* embodies an awkward middle stage between the early promise of the *Poems* and what is to come.

If we have tended to evaluate *Endymion* in these terms, it is hardly surprising; the Preface asks us to do so, insisting that the voice we encounter is truly that of John Keats. Driven by “I” statements (“I make it public” [vii], “I feel sensible” [vii], “I have to conciliate” [viii]), *Endymion’s* Preface does more than present the illusion of a living being speaking to readers directly—“fitting myself for verses fit to live” (viii) in a specific place and moment, (“Teignmouth, April 10, 1818” [ix]). This temporal dimension grounds both Preface and poem in a moment of lived experience, one in which the author cannot help but betray his own anxieties about his future. At the same time, the place- and date-stamp remind us that *Endymion’s* author preexists his text and will continue to live after its publication. The Preface thus places *Endymion* within a larger narrative whose arc will stretch across multiple volumes; the real story, it contends, is one of development over time.

Both *Poems by John Keats* and *Endymion* present themselves less as fully realized works than as placeholders, inviting readers almost to “Watch this Space” for future developments. Their paratexts and ordering seek at once to modulate the standard of evaluation against which we judge the poet’s work and to keep us wanting more. In this sense, the vignette of Shakespeare in *Poems*, crowned with laurels and placed under the Spenserian epigraph, does not so much invite a comparison between Keats and those giants as point aspirationally to models by which future comparisons might be made—a bold move for a debuting writer. The same can be said of the epigraph to *Endymion* from Shakespeare’s “Sonnet XVII” (“Who will believe my verse in time to come”), where “The stretched metre of an antique song” points at once to the poem’s overheated state and Keats’s own long-term aspirations. In both cases, we are presented with a poet in the first stages of a career arc that, each text assures us, will eventually see him on shelves among the great dead poets invoked on their title-pages.

Amid so much posture and promise, it is worth remembering that Keats was hardly alone in the venture. Backed by a growing cadre of supporters including Leigh Hunt

and John Hamilton Reynolds, both of whom supplied favorable reviews, he had reasons to hope for success, or at least to break even. As Barnard notes, George Keats's involvement in the aftermath of publication confirms the degree to which "John Keats" was a familial as well as a cooperative venture (83). At the very least, his request to the Olliers to explain the volume's lack of success—and the Olliers' defensive response, quoted below—suggest unrealized, if not sanguine, ambitions for the volume:

Sir,—We regret that your brother ever requested us to publish his book, or that our opinion of its talent should have led us to acquiesce in undertaking it. ... We shall take means without delay for ascertaining the number of copies on hand, and you shall be informed accordingly. Your most, &c. C. & J. Ollier. (*Athenaeum* 725)

In the face of such disappointing sales, it is easy to imagine the relief of John and George Keats—not to mention that of Hunt, Reynolds, and other well-wishers—when the established firm of Taylor and Hessey agreed to publish Keats's next work.³ The firm's capital and willingness to advance funds did much to shore up the financial exposure of the Keats collective. It also promised to extend Keats's literary acquaintances beyond the Hunt circle. As one of the first authors to publish with the Olliers, Keats had dedicated his *Poems* to Hunt and the volume appeared alongside works by William Hazlitt and Percy Shelley, an exclusive but small company. With Taylor and Hessey's more diverse list of authors and connections, the situation would be different. *Endymion* would appear in 1818 alongside at least twenty other titles, including Hazlitt's *Lectures on the English Poets*, Jane Taylor's *Display*, Morris Birkbeck's *Letters from Illinois*, Robert Castlereagh's *Letter addressed to the Right Honourable Lord Viscount Castlereagh*, and John Kendall's *An Elucidation of the Principles of English Architecture*.

The change in publishers also provided another essential missing element: in-house counsel. Fairly early in their relationship, Taylor introduced Keats to Richard Woodhouse, legal and literary advisor to the firm. Woodhouse soon became an eloquent advocate of Keats's work, crafting durable narratives of Keats's brilliance and future promise. "Such a genius ... has not appeared since Shakspeare & Milton," he noted in an October 1818 letter to his cousin Mary Frogley:

[I]f his *Endymion* be compared with Shakespeare's earliest work (his *Venus & Adonis*) written about the same age, Keats's poem will be found to contain more beauties, more poetry (and of a higher order), less conceit & bad taste and in a word much more promise of excellence. ... His faults will wear away—his fire will be chastened—and then eyes will do homage to his brilliancy. But genius is wayward, trembling, easily daunted. And shall we not excuse the errors, the luxuriancies of youth? are we to expect that poets are to be given to the world, as our first parents were, in a state of maturity? are they to have no season of Childhood? are they to have no room to try their wings before the steadiness & strength of their flight are finally judged of? So says Mr. Gifford of the *Quarterly* ... So said the *Edinburgh Review* of Ld Byron—So said the *Monthly* of Kirke White—So said Horace Walpole of Chatterton. And how are such critics execrated for their cruel injustice. (Rollins 1: 54–55)

Here, earlier materials such as the bust of Shakespeare—not in his maturity but rather via the youthful *Venus and Adonis*—are reassembled by Woodhouse to create a vision of poetic development. Fueled by genius, Keats's potential is framed as nearly limitless; but here "genius" is also immature and adolescent, "wayward, trembling, and easily daunted." It is an impressive feat of personification, where both the poem (*Endymion*)

and what inspires it (genius) are anthropomorphized into a trembling genius whose beauties are more than a match for the competition (*Venus and Adonis*). The famously pugnacious Keats disappears to be replaced by a series of youths savaged by reviewers: first an eighteen-year old Lord Byron, next Henry Kirke White, and finally Thomas Chatterton, to whom *Endymion* was dedicated (Figure 2). Woodhouse's letter is, of course, only one commentary among many over Keats's lifetime. We quote it to showcase his skill in creating an enduring poetic persona out of the materials of Keats's own works. If nothing else, the missive anticipates just how carefully the team at Taylor and Hessey would reassemble particular details of earlier texts to create the specific figure of Keats the Poet.

2. "John Keats, Author of *Endymion*"

That the immediate reception of *Endymion* was marked by controversy is more than merely a commonplace in commentaries on Keats's poetry. For Keats's contemporaries, it was a key episode of its day: an opportunity to declare allegiances and choose sides, an inky preamble of the class violence that was to come in subsequent years. Having seen *Endymion* into print that spring, Keats traveled north with Brown for a summer walking tour. Stopping near Rydal, he had hoped to call on Wordsworth—but found him occupied in campaigning for the Tories in the upcoming election:

"I enquired of the waiter for Wordsworth—he said ... that he had been here a few days ago, canvassing for the Lowthers. What think you of that—Wordsworth versus Brougham!! Sad-sad-sad—and yet the family has been his friend always. What can we say?" (*Letters* 1: 299)

Alongside Keats's real disappointment is a sense that Wordsworth has crossed a line: that, even allowing for the longstanding friendship between the Wordsworths and the Lowthers, "Wordsworth versus Brougham" is a phrase that cannot be unsaid. Relating the afternoon's journey to Windermere a paragraph later, Keats cannot help one backwards reference to "Lord Wordsworth" in "his house full ... of fashionable visitors" (1: 299). A day begun without divisions thus closes with lines drawn—and Keats surprised to find himself on one side of a divide and Wordsworth on the other, now irrevocably aligned with the Lowthers and the Tory press.

Reviews of *Endymion* in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, *The British Critic*, and the *Quarterly Review* would soon confirm such divisions as real. Keats would write to George and Georgiana Keats in late October 1818 that the reviews, both good and bad, were "a mere matter of the moment—I think I shall be among the English Poets after my death ... [I]t is a common expression among book men 'I wonder the Quarterly should cut its own throat'" (*Letters* 1: 393–94). The letter nicely captures the ambivalence of *Endymion*'s reception: that the poem had both detractors and admirers, and that their divisions were magnified in the post-Waterloo climate into something like open warfare. It also shows Keats thinking deeply about reception and its long-term effects on reputation and fame. Certainly the sheer amount of space he devoted to performing stoic indifference shows just how much the reviews were on his mind (1: 373–74, 386–88, 414, 2: 4–26, 58–108). These same months also witnessed momentous events in Keats's personal life, including the death of his brother Tom, his budding relationship with Fanny Brawne, and his own worsening health and increasing financial distress.

It is within this charged context that Keats wrote the poems that would comprise *Lamia*, *Isabella*, *The Eve of St. Agnes*, and *Other Poems*. Biographers rightly marvel at his productivity. Equally remarkable, though, is the steadiness of Keats's team of publishers and editors in the face of his periodic contrariness, particularly their willingness to oppose what they saw as acts of self-sabotage from a business perspective. Faced with Keats's sudden resolve not to publish "Isabella" because of its supposed "mawkish[ness]," Woodhouse disagreed strongly and pushed for publication (*Keats Circle* 1: 89–95). Confronted with Keats's revisions to *The Eve of St. Agnes*—which rendered its sex scene explicit rather than hazily ambiguous—Taylor firmly blocked them on the grounds that they would both estrange a female reading audience and enflame reviewers, expressing his exasperation to Woodhouse in a 25 September 1819 letter:

This Folly of Keats is the most stupid piece of Folly I can conceive.—He does not bear the ill opinion of the World calmly, and yet he will not allow it to form a good Opinion of him and his Writings. He repented of this Conduct when *Endymion* was published as much as a Man can repent, who shews by the accidental Expression of Disappointment, Mortification and Disgust that he has met with a Result different from that which he had anticipated—Yet he will again challenge the same Neglect or Censure, and again ... be vexed at the Reception he has prepared for himself. (1: 96)

As with the first Preface to *Endymion*—rejected as too defensive and self-lacerating—Woodhouse and Taylor eventually carried their points. What is clear from the above letter and others is that Keats's team was as intensely interested in questions of reception and reputation as Keats himself. Their correspondence over the next months shows considerable give-and-take, as Keats, Brown, Woodhouse, and Taylor weigh different poems for inclusion and moot various arrangements of poems. At one point *The Eve of St. Agnes* is to begin the collection, at another *Lamia* (Bate 643; Blunden 72; Stillinger, *Poems* 737). By the early summer of 1820 the ordering was fixed, leading with *Lamia* and closing with *Hyperion*, and the volume advertised as soon to be published. As we hope to show, the marketing plan they conceived for it was both daring and remarkable.

That Tory attacks on *Endymion* might ultimately—and counterintuitively—prove a benefit had dawned on Keats and his supporters as early as mid-October of 1818. "[E]ven as a Matter of present interest the attempt to crush me in the Quarterly has only brought me more into notice" (*Letters* 1: 394), he wrote to George and Georgiana. Negative press, he reasoned, was better than none at all. The same sentiment motivates John Hamilton Reynolds's advice to publish *Isabella* immediately, "for its completeness will be a full answer to all the ignorant malevolence of cold lying Scotchmen and stupid Englishmen . . . [L]et us have the Tale put forth, now that an interest is aroused" (*Keats Circle* 1: 43). Soon after, Hessey wrote to Taylor reporting improved sales of *Endymion* thanks to the attacks:

I have much pleasure in saying that *Endymion* begins to move at last—6 Copies have just been ordered by Simpkin and Marshall and one or two have been sold singly in the Shop—there is nothing like making a Stir for it—the papers have said so much about it many persons will doubtless be curious to see what it does contain. . . . I have sent it also to several other papers to turn the tide against the Quarterly. (1: 52–53)

The "Stir" also created other benefits, as Keats noted in an end-of-year letter to George and Georgiana: *entrée* "among several *Sets*" of new readers and a widening social circle,

not to mention “the present of a £25 note ... anonymously sent” (*Letters* 2: 9). These developments in turn impact Keats’s thinking about the stakes of literary fame, which in these months takes on increasing nuance, evidenced in his poem on “the double immortality of poets” (“Bards of Passion and of Mirth”) and in two sonnets (both entitled “On Fame”): all composed in the months when his name was most conspicuous in the periodical press (2: 25–26, 104–05).

All of this helps to explain why in the spring of 1820, Keats’s publishers and advisors welcomed a revival of the *Endymion* controversy as a preamble to the publication of Keats’s next volume. This took the form of a review published in the *London Magazine*, revived in January of 1820 by John Scott. Scott had been the editor of *The Champion* when Keats wrote theatrical reviews for that paper, and they shared several friends in common. He also had a fondness for literary brawling: his comments on Byron’s separation in 1816 had led Leigh Hunt to break with him, and his sustained attacks on *Blackwood’s*—particularly on “Z” [John Gibson Lockhart], who had authored the attack on Keats—eventually cost him his life in an 1821 duel. Scott would launch his first direct attack on “Z” in the May 1820 issue, but for the April 1820 *Endymion* review he chose Peter George Patmore, a journalist and close friend of Hazlitt, Lamb, and Hunt. Scott’s choice would prove symbolically apt, since a year later Patmore would serve as Scott’s second in the duel that resulted from the *Blackwood’s* attacks.

Patmore’s review is remarkable for its marshalling of materials and tropes that recall Woodhouse’s letter (quoted earlier) to Mary Frogley:

[*Endymion* is] richer in promise than any other works that we are acquainted with, except those of Chatterton It is an ecstatic dream of poetry—a flush—a fever—a burning light—an involuntary out-pouring of the spirit of poetry—that will not be controlled. Its movements are the starts and boundings of the young horse before it has felt the bitt— . . . that exuberant spirit of youth,—that transport of imagination, fancy, and sensibility—which gushes forth from every part, in a glittering shower of words The poet offers himself up a willing sacrifice to the power which he serves: not fretting under, but exulting and glorying in his bondage. He plunges into the ocean of Poetry before he has learned to stem and grapple with the waves. (Patmore 388, 381, 388)

Taking its cue from *Endymion’s* dedication, the review deploys Chatterton as an organizing metaphor in a narrative of poetic maturation that by now will be familiar. In Patmore’s rendering, *Endymion* is less a mature work than a poem in embryo. “[R]icher in promise” than in realization, it displays the essence and spirit of genius rather than its fully realized embodiment. This “exuberant spirit of youth,” he concludes, should be encouraged rather than chastised; and if the “public press” is currently held in “a feeling much stronger than that of contempt,” it is because

of certain attempts of modern criticism to blight and wither the maturity of genius; or—still worse—to change its youthful enthusiasm into despair, and thus tempt it to commit suicide To feel that all this has been attempted, and most of it effected, by modern criticism, we need only pronounce to ourselves the names of Chatterton and Kirke White among the dead, of Montgomery, and Keats, and Wordsworth among the living. (380)

To read Patmore’s review next to Woodhouse’s earlier letter is to witness the same arguments being deployed, as if from a playbook, for battle. It is not just that *Endymion*

should be judged as a chapter in Keats's artistic development; it is that Keats himself must be grouped with other wronged geniuses to be appreciated. Carefully assembling a mixed cadre of writers—including Wordsworth, favorite of *Blackwood's* and perpetual target of the *Edinburgh*—the review strives to maintain the appearance of political neutrality even as it targets the Tory journals that had attacked *Endymion*. Here we also find the germ of the popular story of Keats killed by a review, as Patmore worries of “youthful enthusiasm” driven to suicide: “strangle[d],” as Chatterton was, “in the first bloom and beauty of its childhood” (380). To pervert criticism into “a means of depressing true genius,” he concludes, “is gratuitously wicked” (380–81)—leading to the early deaths of promising poets.

After Scott's death in 1821, the editorship of the *London Magazine* was taken up by John Taylor. No direct evidence exists that Taylor commissioned or requested Patmore's review, although Taylor and Hessey's close ties to the journal and its core group of writers makes it more than possible. Certainly Hessey's earlier vow to Taylor to lobby “several other papers to turn the tide against the Quarterly” (*Keats Circle* 1: 53) shows the firm's willingness to defend its writers against hostile attacks. One suggestive piece of correspondence relating to the *London Magazine* defense of *Endymion* comes via a 6 April 1820 letter to Richard Woodhouse from his cousin Nan, in which she reports, somewhat cryptically, “The Review shall be taken care of and returned when I see you—in your opinion of the Critique of Keats I perfectly coincide” (1: 108). Presumably, Woodhouse sent the review to his cousin in hopes that it might provide her with ammunition against her circle of acquaintance, whom she reports are “prejudiced ... against the whole of [Keats's] writings” (1: 108). The timing of the correspondence is also telling. With the *London Magazine* coming out at the beginning of April, Woodhouse would need either to have had an advance copy or to have read the review immediately on publication before sending it on with instructions to his cousin.

If nothing else, the letter shows just how quickly Woodhouse seized on Patmore's arguments as vehicles for promoting *Endymion* and Keats's future works. Most of these were to find their ways into print in the months that followed, beginning with the boldly strategic decision to advertise Keats's new collection of verse with the tag, “Author of ‘Endymion’” (Figure 3). The advertisement is provocative on a number of counts. First, there is the juxtaposition of the *Lamia* volume with Francis Hodgson's

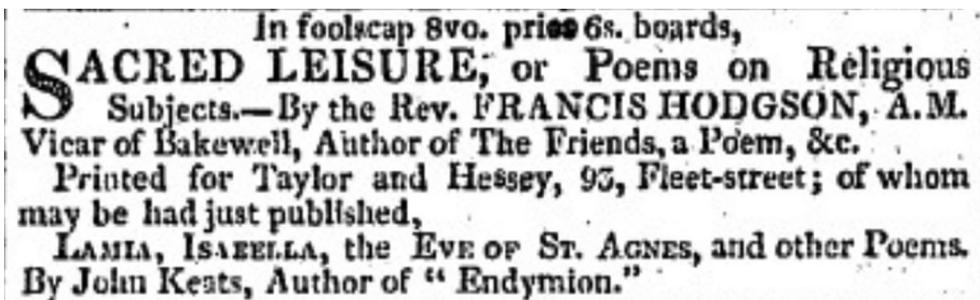


Figure 3. Advertisement for *Sacred Leisure* and for *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St. Agnes, and Other Poems*. *Morning Chronicle* 15963 (26 June 1820): 2. Courtesy of the British Library, digitized by the British Newspaper Archive.

Sacred Leisure, or Poems on Religious Subjects—perhaps merely accidental or a cost-saving device, though the joint advertisement’s periodic recurrence in the *Morning Chronicle* points to something more like a strategy.⁴ Sharing the same genre (poetry), format (ottavo), and price (six shillings) as *Sacred Leisure*, Keats’s new volume, the ad implies, will appeal to similar readers. Their association confers (at least potentially) a sort of metonymic respectability designed to short-circuit any whiff of Keatsian indelicacy that might hamper sales. More striking, however, is the decision to couple authors to their previous works—an outlier from an advertisement perspective. Within the field of publishers’ notices that comprise page two of the 26 June 1820 *Morning Chronicle*—some thirty books—only one other announcement links an author to a previous work. That Taylor and Hessey do so for both books of verse suggests it to be a broader strategy; and in the case of *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St. Agnes, and Other Poems*, the firm deploy the tactic aggressively. “By John Keats, Author ‘Endymion’” appears on the *Lamia* volume’s title-page and on all advertisements concerning it—whether promoted on its own or with other books, whether published in the daily papers or in the end papers of other Taylor and Hessey publications.⁵ The phrasing even appears where it is manifestly *not* needed, in advertisements promoting both *Endymion* and *Lamia* together. There, the presence of both titles under the name “John Keats” removes any need for the epithet “the Author of ‘Endymion’”—the combined phrase becoming a sort of brand.

At the very least, the phrase’s recurrence marks a strategy aimed at turning attacks on *Endymion*—and subsequent defenses like those published in the *London Magazine* or, later, the *Edinburgh Review*—into a reason to buy. Here, the 2 November 1820 *Morning Chronicle* advertisement of the *Lamia* volume is especially bold, printing excerpts from the *Quarterly* and *Edinburgh* reviews next to one another for dramatic effect. Taylor and Hessey’s sustained practice of joining Keats’s name and “*Endymion*” is made all the more piquant by the presence of the *Quarterly*’s excerpt. It was, after all, the *Quarterly* that famously called attention to Keats’s name in the first place, doubting, with a sneer, “if Mr. Keats ... be his real name, for we almost doubt that any man in his senses would put his real name to such a rhapsody” (Croker 204). As the advertisement illustrates, the response of Keats, Incorporated was to double down on every aspect of the *Quarterly*’s critique, touting Keats’s name in capital letters and pointing to *Endymion* and the attacks on it at every opportunity (Figure 4). Thanks to canny excerpting and shrewd juxtaposition, the *Quarterly* reviewer’s own words become at once a plaudit to already-existing Keats readers and a challenge to prospective buyers. “If any one should be bold enough to purchase this Poetic Romance,” the excerpt states, “we shall then return to the task ... and endeavour to make all due amends to Mr. Keats and to our readers” (“Advertisement for *Lamia*” 2). Purchasing *Endymion* or the *Lamia* volume thus takes on additional significance, becoming something like a political act through its power to right earlier wrongs and restore a balance of justice. In addition, it brings the added bonus of serving as a means to assert one’s boldness as a reader. The extract from the *Edinburgh Review* corroborates this interpretation: that the volume, though requiring “all the indulgence that can be claimed for a first attempt,” is nevertheless “impossible to resist.”

Considered *en masse*, the advertisements show the sustained efforts of Keats’s team to create a marketable authorial persona. To borrow the phrasing of political

KEATS'S POEMS.

LAMIA, ISEBELLA, The EVE of St. AGNES, and other POEMS.—By JOHN KEATS, Author of “Endymion,” Foolscap 8vo. price 7s. 6d. boards.

ENDYMION: A Poetic Romance.—By John Keats, handsomely printed in 8vo, price 9s. boards.

(Extract from the Quarterly Review, No. 37.)

“If any one 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; we shall then return to the task which we now abandon in despair, and endeavour to make all due amends to Mr. Keats and to our readers.”

(Extract from the Edinburgh Review, No. 67.)

“We had never happened to see either of these volumes till very lately, and have been exceedingly struck with the genius they display, and the spirit of poetry which breathes through all their extravagance. That imitation of our older writers, and especially of our older dramatists, to which we cannot help flattering ourselves that we have somewhat contributed, has brought on, as it were, a second spring in our poetry;—and few of its blossoms are either more profuse of sweetness, or richer in promise, than this which is now before us. Mr. Keats, we understand, is still a very young man; and his whole works, indeed, bear evidence enough of the fact. They manifestly require, therefore, all the indulgence that can be claimed for a first attempt;—but we think it no less plain that they deserve it; for they are flushed all over with the rich lights of fancy, and so coloured and bestrown with the flowers of poetry, that even while perplexed and bewildered in their labyrinths, it is impossible to resist the intoxication of their sweetness, or to shut our hearts to the enchantments they so lavishly present.”

Printed for Taylor and Hessey, 95, Fleet-street.

Figure 4. “Advertisement for *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St. Agnes, and Other Poems.*” *Morning Chronicle* 16074 (2 Nov. 1820): 2. Courtesy of the British Library, digitized by the British Newspaper Archive.

campaigns, every notice is “on message” and every published defense reiterates, as if from a script, both the fact of Keats’s developing genius and the need for readers to allow for the exuberance of youth and unrestrained fancy. In this light, the inclusion of the *Edinburgh Review*’s praise of Keats’s “imitation of our older writers”—which

promises in their account to bring forth “a second spring in our poetry”—is doubly significant. On the one hand, it balances, and gives the lie to, the defamatory rhetoric of the *Quarterly*. On the other hand, the *Edinburgh* excerpt enables Keats’s team to invoke that other notorious abuser, “Z” [John Gibson Lockhart] in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*. In his fourth essay “On the Cockney School of Poetry,” “Z” had condemned the *Poems’s* bust of Shakespeare and epigraph from Spenser as so much Cockney presumption (520), and *Endymion’s* very existence as an insult to classical learning: “Mr Keats has thoroughly appropriated the character, if not the name. His Endymion is not a Greek shepherd, loved by a Grecian goddess; he is merely a young Cockney rhymester ... [who] knows Homer only from Chapman” (521–22). As if responding to Z’s accusations concerning the appropriation of classical “character[s]” and “name[s],” the *Morning Chronicle* advertisement prints “JOHN KEATS” and “ENDYMION” in capital letters, privileging both and tying them to one another through shared typography.

The *Lamia* volume extends this strategy, its title-page (Figure 5) emblazoning Keats’s name and previous work in an all-caps font evoking ancient Roman monuments.⁶ At once moniker and declaration, “JOHN KEATS, AUTHOR OF ENDYMION” voices its association with, and commitment to, the wronged volume it invokes. In the process, it declares connections to classical myth and romance, continuing the project of affiliation with older writers and forms. The volume’s starker typography jettisons the mixed display of *Poems* and *Endymion* to project an artist no longer requiring ornamentation. This minimalism extends to the volume’s paratexts, which consist only of the advertisement about *Hyperion*, written in the voice of the editors so that “John Keats” speaks only through the poems themselves. This question of prefatory materials provides an additional glimpse into the collaborative workings of Keats, Incorporated on the *Lamia* volume. From the surviving correspondence and notebooks, we know that Keats, Woodhouse, and Taylor were genuinely divided on the question of whether the new collection should have a preface. Taylor even considered publishing a direct response to the *Quarterly’s* attack on *Endymion* at the beginning of the *Lamia* volume (Blunden 72). As early as March 1820, Keats had been against the idea, and it is uncertain to what degree he ever approved the note that was eventually published in June. Possibly, he considered the signature “Author of *Endymion*” preface enough. As a statement of ownership by the author “John Keats,” it confirmed the writer’s pride in his offspring and commitment to metrical romance and its roots. And as a statement of support by Taylor and Hessey, it marked the firm’s unqualified support both of *Endymion* and of the new work.

Beyond shoring up support for the *Lamia* volume’s author, “John Keats, Author of Endymion” invites readers to consider the new collection as part of a larger corpus. The poems currently in their hands, it suggests, constitute the next installment of the poet’s vision and an extension of *Endymion’s* aesthetic commitments. If the new work is bolder and less apologetic, the reason lies in the artist’s continuing growth, which allows for both continuity with, and departure from, previous selves. And if all this is implied in the title page, it is corroborated by the “Advertisement” for the volume:

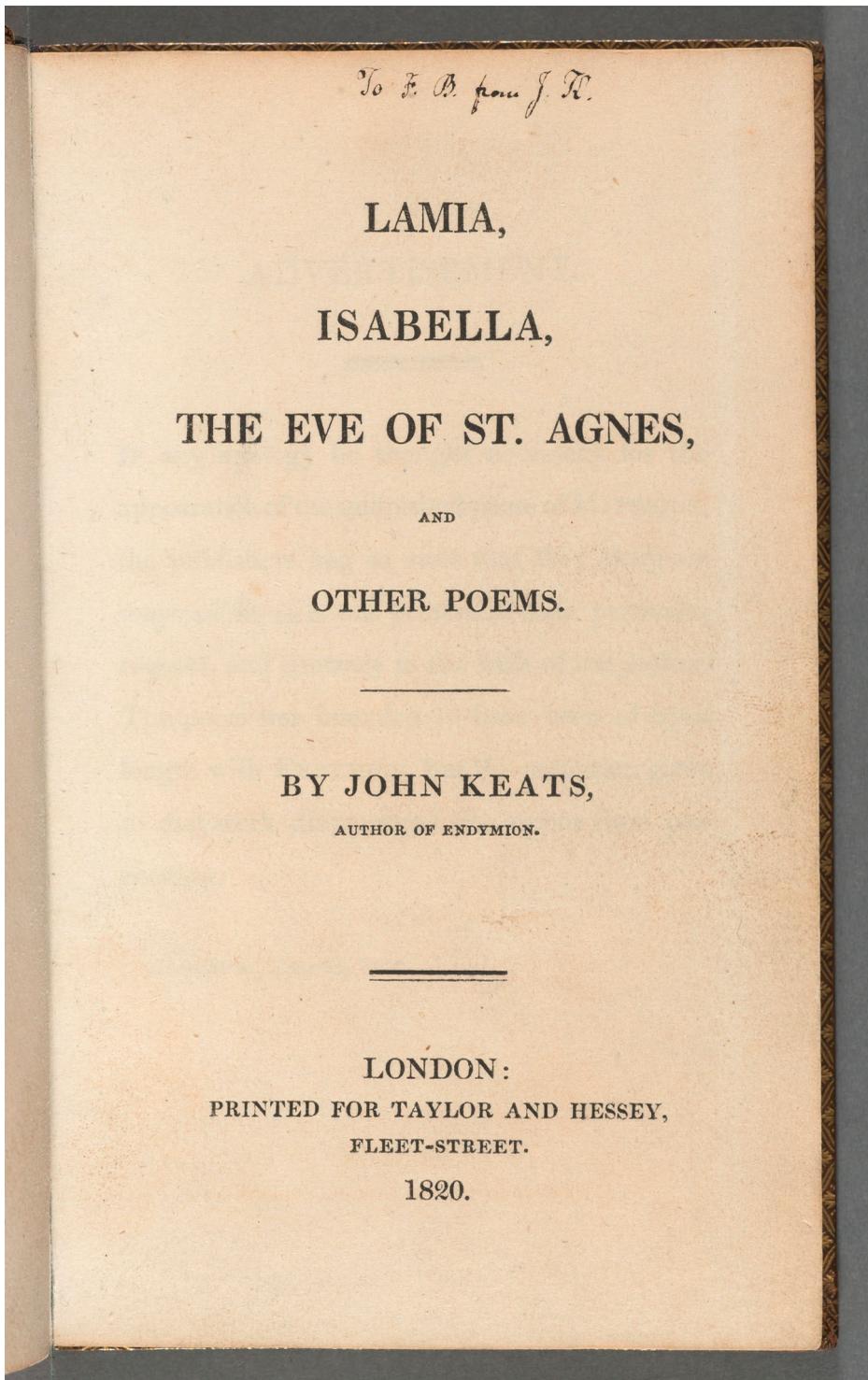


Figure 5. *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St. Agnes, and Other Poems* (1820), courtesy of Houghton Library, Harvard University (Call no. Keats EC8.K2262.820I [F]).

If any apology be thought necessary for the appearance of the unfinished poem of HYPERION, the publishers beg to state that they alone are responsible, as it was printed at their particular request, and contrary to the wish of the author. The poem was intended to have been of equal length with ENDYMION, but the reception given to that work discouraged the author from proceeding. (*Fleet Street, 26 June, 1820* [n.p.]

Drafted by Woodhouse though perhaps finished by Taylor (*Keats Circle* 1: 115–16; *Letters* 2: 277n4), the Advertisement is the one part of *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St. Agnes, and Other Poems* for which there exists evidence of Keats’s disapproval. In the copy he presented to Burridge Davenport, Keats crossed it out, noting “This is none of my doing. I w[as] ill at the time”; he rejected the final sentence on *Endymion*’s reception even more strongly, writing next to it, “This is a lie” (Stillinger, *Poems* 737).⁷ As a result, commentators understandably have discounted the Advertisement when considering the *Lamia* collection. Yet to do so is to ignore the very real work that it performs. Appearing prior to any of the poems and pointing to the volume’s closing work *Hyperion*, the Advertisement creates a frame for the publication. Considered alongside the collection’s ungainly title, it calls on readers to give special attention to four poems—*Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St. Agnes* at its opening, and *Hyperion, a Fragment* at its close—as presumably the most noteworthy of the volume.

While ostentatiously apologizing for the unfinished state of *Hyperion*, the “Advertisement” also calls attention to that poem’s relation to *Endymion*, which it most resembles in terms of classical content and projected length. We might read this merely as another defense similar to “John Keats, Author of *Endymion*,” were it not for the “Advertisement” making two further associated, compelling arguments. First, in binding the fate of the two works together—so that the discouraging reception of one poem leads to the abandonment of the other—the “Advertisement” seizes on the press’s portrayal of Keats as an injured writer and corroborates that portrait as true. In this way, the stories of the *London Magazine* and other pro-Keats periodicals about the effects of *Endymion*’s reception become part of the *Lamia* volume’s story, incorporated into it as a sort of mythos whose tangible effects stand visible in the form of the unfinished poem closing the collection. Readers are invited to imagine two collections, one actual and one ideal: the former containing the “Advertisement” and the *Hyperion* fragment, the latter containing neither, with the completed *Hyperion* published as a stand-alone poem. This split between reality and possibility is echoed in the disagreement staged by the “Advertisement” between a wounded poet and his more worldly publishers. Readers might at once thank the latter for including *Hyperion* even as they try to imagine that poem in its completed state. The net effect is to produce an author-figure who is at once the creator of the assembled poems while still standing—at least in part—outside of the published volume.

The most crucial piece of packaging, however, is the final ordering of the poems themselves. Among the Keats team, it was the question debated most often and openly, with different partisans supporting different poems to open and close the volume.⁸ Given the history of Keats’s canonization, the most obvious point remains the most striking: the absence of the Odes from the volume’s marketing materials and title, and from positions of privilege within the ordering of the poems themselves. This is not to say the Odes aren’t accorded relative prestige within the *Lamia* volume’s contents. Gathered into two small clusters, they appear second and second-to-last, after *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St. Agnes*, and before *Hyperion, a Fragment*. As in the 1817 *Poems*, placement

confers value; here again the hierarchies of prestige work from the outside in, with more important poems framing and shielding more playful, mid-volume compositions like “Fancy,” “Lines on the Mermaid Tavern,” and “Robin Hood.”

The other obvious—and for the purposes of this essay, final—point resides in the placement of the three long poems that give *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St. Agnes, and Other Poems* its title. Cox argues that by fronting the volume with these poems, “Keats and his publishers sought to present him as a narrative poet on a literary scene dominated by popular writers of romances, such as Scott and Byron” (*Keats’s Poetry and Prose* 53). Heather Jackson echoes this assessment when, comparing the contents of our own anthologies to poetry sales during the Regency, she reminds us of the relative prestige accorded to longer poems for most of the Romantic period (50–62). What has been less noticed is just how provocative a gesture it was to open with these three poems—all of which were romances, and all set either in antique Greece or medieval and early modern Italy. In giving them pride of place, the *Lamia* volume does more than insist on “romance” as a defining rubric; rejecting earlier criticisms and especially the mockery of “Z” in *Blackwood’s*, it resolutely claims the writings “of our older writers” as a chosen demesne. Where Keats might reasonably have retreated from ancient Greece after *Endymion’s* reviews, *Lamia* instead sees him boldly returning to it and writing in the same heroic couplets as had the “Author of *Endymion*.” As defiant responses go, this opening salvo is one of Romanticism’s best. “To all those reviewers who found fault with both the subject and the loosened couplets of *Endymion*,” Keats intimates, “I hereby give you ‘Lamia’; and for those of you finding fault in my imitations of ‘older writers’, I give you an adaptation from Boccaccio and something in Spenserian stanza smacking of *Romeo and Juliet*.” Put another way, the decision to lead with the three romances constitutes a near-perfect expression of the collaborative, sociable venture that was Keats, Incorporated: providing a commercial draw for the volume, aligning Keats with popular romance and canonical writers, and insisting on the very subjects and forms with which critics had found fault in *Endymion*. Occupying the most conspicuous places in the volume, *Lamia* and its bookend *Hyperion* also serve to remind readers of a final point: that Keats had fulfilled his promise in *Endymion’s* preface to “try once more” the “beautiful mythology of Greece” (ix). Here, the promise of “try[ing] once more” is not just kept but doubly so; read alongside the volume’s marketing, it becomes the natural response of an author either unwilling or unable to back down. In this sense, the volume’s close repeats this gesture of turning failure into triumph. Readers perusing the volume to its end would have discovered not a short fragment in *Hyperion*, but rather (at fifty-two pages) the longest and most sustained work of the volume: one that showed that social creation, “John Keats, Author of *Endymion*,” several steps further on his journey, drawing now on both romance and epic.

Notes

1. This is especially, and understandably, true of the biographies. See Bate (303–06, and 643); Gittings (531–32); Gigante (69–70, 246–47); and Roe, *John Keats* (114, 134).
2. For the purposes of this essay, we refer to the former as Keats the writer and the latter as the body that (including Keats) collaboratively produced the authorial persona “John Keats” and later “John Keats, Author of *Endymion*.”

3. See Gigante, who stresses George's role in negotiating with Taylor and Hessey (69–70).
4. See, for example, *Morning Chronicle* (hereafter *MC*) 15975 (10 July 1820): 2. At other points, such as *MC* 15974 (8 July 1820) and 16074 (2 November 1820), the volume is advertised on its own.
5. See *MC* 15963 (26 June 1820), 15974 (8 July 1820), 15975 (10 July 1820), 16074 (2 November 1820), and 16181 (28 February 1821). See also Jane Taylor, *Essays in Rhyme on Morals and Manners* (London: Taylor and Hessey, 1820), n.p. (back matter).
6. Taylor and Hessey use a “Serif Transitional” font, likely Perpetua, which features a higher center of gravity and greater contrast of thick and thin within lowercase letters and oblique serifs. Their decision to use all caps suggests a strategy to link the volume with classical antiquity. See Kinross (27–31) and Tselentis (10–12, 52–55).
7. Copy held in the Houghton Library (EC8.K2262.820L).
8. Woodhouse's notebook (Harvard MS notebook W1) records other possible orderings, and testifies to the seriousness with which Keats and his publishers approached the collection's ordering.

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