

## NOTES ON KEATS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS MILTON

By WATARU KIKUCHI

*Assistant Professor of English*

MILTON! thou shouldst be living at this hour:  
England hath need of thee: she is a fen  
Of stagnant waters: altar, sword, and pen,  
Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower,  
Have forfeited their ancient English dower  
Of inward happiness. We are selfish men;  
Oh! raise up us, return to us again;  
And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power.  
Thy soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart;  
Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea:  
Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free,  
So didst thou travel on life's common way,  
In cheerful godliness; and yet thy heart  
The lowliest duties on herself did lay.

Wordsworth's tribute in the foregoing sonnet represented the climate of the period, and to both him and other young poets, Milton was "the divine Milton."<sup>1</sup> On the twenty-third of January, 1818, Keats, one of the young poets, also expressed his admiration for Milton by sending an ode: *On seeing a Lock of Milton's Hair* to one of his friends, B. Bailey, "who had first roused his enthusiasm for *Paradise Lost* in the previous autumn (when Keats was twenty-two)."<sup>2</sup> One year earlier, the *Poems* contained a sonnet of much the same tone:

Yet feel I little of the cool bleak air,  
Or of the dead leaves rustling drearily,  
Or of those silver lamps that burn on high,  
Or of the distance from home's pleasant lair:  
For I am brimfull of the friendliness  
That in a little cottage I have found;  
Of fair-hair'd Milton's eloquent distress,  
And all his love for gentle Lycid drown'd;

<sup>1</sup> Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, I. 1. 250.

<sup>2</sup> Ed. Sélincourt, *The Poems of Keats*, p. 533.

To be sure, little need be said about the fact that at this period Keats was submitting himself to the influence of Milton. Keats' interests appeared not to be scattered but to be concentrated mainly on the great poets—Homer, Shakespeare, and Milton. In one of his letters, he wrote, "I long to feast upon old Homer as we have upon Shakespeare, and as I have lately upon Milton."<sup>3</sup> To my mind, the difference between the tone of "*we* have upon Shakespeare" and that of "*I* (both italics mine) have lately upon Milton" is distinct. In this case, the figure of Milton weighs as much with him as any other. The feeling of reverence was to last until at least August in 1819—"I am convinced more and more every day that (excepting the human friend Philosopher) a fine writer is the most genuine Being in the World. Shakespeare and the paradise (*sic*) Lost every day become greater wonders to me."<sup>4</sup> Probably, Keats had heard of the name, but the influences of Milton during these two years (1817–1819) must be regarded as decisive in the formative period of the poet and they can be said to have awakened his poetic genius. Am I mistaken if I state that almost always the Miltonic tone runs through most of his work? Indeed, scholars have already listed the Miltonic echoes and imitations in his work. However, it is not our present aim to consider the list in isolation. Here, what must concern us is how the Miltonic influences helped to form Keats' mind.

As Mr. Sélincourt points out, Keats' classical inspiration sprang from the great poets of the Renaissance in English literature, from Spenser to Milton.<sup>5</sup> His classicism was founded on the genuine tradition of English poetry. But before proceeding further, we must take up the problem of how Keats understood Milton. As already mentioned, to Wordsworth, Milton was the divine man, and Keats regarded Milton in much the same way. As Keats writes,—"there are none prepared to suffer in obscurity for their Country—the motives of our worst Men are interest and of our best Vanity —We have no Milton, no Algernon Sidney—Governors in these days loose (*sic*) the title of Man in exchange for that of Diplomat and Minister We breathe in a sort of Official Atmosphere,"<sup>6</sup> he takes Milton as the real 'man.' In this short passage, we can observe his conception or idea of what man should be. It may be that he believed it the most human way of living "to suffer in obscurity." This humble attitude can be found also in his view of poetry. In another place, he shows something of his notions concerning poetry—"Poetry should be great and unobtrusive, a thing which enters into one's soul, and does not startle it or amaze it with itself, but with its subject.—How beautiful are the retired flowers! how would they lose their beauty were they to throng into the highway crying out, 'admire me I am a violet!—dote upon me I am a primrose.'"<sup>7</sup>

Roughly it could be said that Keats thought both poetry and man should

<sup>3</sup> To J. H. Reynolds, Apr. 27, 1818.

<sup>4</sup> To B. Bailey, Aug. 14, 1819.

<sup>5</sup> *Ed. Sélincourt, op. cit.*, p. xlvi.

<sup>6</sup> To George & Georgiana Keats, Oct., 1818.

<sup>7</sup> To J. H. Reynolds, Feb. 3, 1818.

be "unobstrusive" and "great." And does this not suggest that he believed that both poetry and man should be unobstrusive in order to be great? In brief, the unobstrusive greatness creates full maturity and leads on to potential exuberance. Thus, poetry, the product of the real man, enters into one's soul, and need not startle with itself. When one reads such poetry, one is startled with its subject. Now, a difficult question presents itself—what is its "subject"? There is little doubt that it means the matter of poetry. Then, what should the matter of poetry be? The subject must be life, as Mr. Murry says, and poetry must be composed with pregnant images obtained from actual realities of life. When one reads Keats' letters and poems, what strikes one most is his earnest endeavour always to educate himself to the humble end. Accordingly, his poetry utters a music that issues from the very core of his being, and though this is not the main point here, such education can fairly be said to form part of his humanism, which, as scholars point out, was not completed on account of truncated life. We have strayed from the main point. Milton the man was an ideal and an object of reverence to the early Keats. The next question is how much influence Milton the poet had over Keats. If, before considering the question in detail, I may be admitted to jump to a conclusion, it seems likely that the early Keats was fascinated by Milton the poet, and was therefore closely modelled on him. To me it seems undeniable that the poet played an important part in the process of formation of Keats' genius.

Now, we have come to an important part. For a while, we must examine Miltonic influences over him. The early Keats, who already had had poetical experiences, was not yet confident of the meaning of poetry. In other words, the real poet in Keats did not yet appear. When he composed *On seeing a Lock of Milton's Hair* quoted above, was it not the crucial turning-point in his poetic career? Mr. N. F. Ford explains the circumstances as follows: "...he (=Keats) was so "startled" by the sight of Milton's lock of hair that:

I thought I had beheld it from the flood.

This apparent annihilation of time during a moment of rapture is not an uncommon human experience, but such *moments éternels* were rather frequent with Keats.<sup>8</sup> In the ode, we can see one of his poetic characters. For one of the actual examples, we have the Grecian Urn ode. Furthermore, an essential character was formed by reading *Paradise Lost*. "The Imagination may be compared to Adam's dream—he awoke and found it truth. I am the more zealous in this affaire, because I have never yet been able to perceive how any thing can be known for truth by consecutive reasoning—and yet it must be.—Adam's dream will do here and seems to be a conviction that Imagination and its empyreal reflection is the same as human Life and its Spiritual repetition."<sup>9</sup> His conviction,

<sup>8</sup> Newell F. Ford, *The Prefigurative Imagination of John Keats* (Stanford Univ. Pr., 1951), pp. 112-3.

<sup>9</sup> To B. Bailey, Nov. 22, 1817.

thus supported by Milton, is to continue to be a mainstay and does not waver to the last, and his masterpieces illustrate the conviction. There is hardly any ground to say that only Milton contributed towards formation of Keats' notion of imagination, but we must admit that the Miltonic contribution plays a great part. In the case of Keats' art, it is not an exaggeration to say that "moments éternels" and "imagination" are both constructive essentials. (Subsequently, I hope to consider Keats' view of art at length.) To sum up so far, the early Keats was overwhelmed by Milton's "exquisite passion for...poetical luxury, ...the Elysian fields of (his) verse,"<sup>10</sup> and "an aim which Keats also strove for, as shown in his *Lines on seeing a Lock of Milton's Hair*" corresponds with "one of Milton's aims, as he declared in *Il Penseroso*," which "was to 'attain / To something like Prophetic strain' (ll. 173-4)."<sup>11</sup> It is a rough outline of Milton's position in the formative period when Keats was developing into the genuine poet.

Now, we are here concerned with the Miltonic influence over Keats' work. It is not to be denied that as Milton was guide, as already mentioned, so he was also master to the making of poetry. Though we cannot estimate accurately how far Keats could appreciate Milton, Milton's technique was closely modelled on. But, concerning technical influence, we must call attention to the curious fact "that the influence of Milton (more especially in the early poems) whilst it is as prominent as that of any other author, is shown far more in allusion and reminiscence of Miltonic cadence, than by the borrowing of definitely Miltonic words."<sup>12</sup> A lack of definiteness is always noticeable in young and immature poets. Especially, poetry demands geometrical exactness, and the greatness of all arts depends upon definiteness. (Here, we must remind ourselves of the difference between the mysterious and the vague.) In these points, the early Keats was very fortunate to be a follower of Milton. Without doubt, Milton was one of the greatest masters in both definiteness and exactness. In the early poems of Keats, this vagueness is rather distinct. But Keats' being a zealous follower of Milton probably helped "to throw off this early vice, as well as to discover where the abstract can be used with really telling poetic effect."<sup>13</sup> The actual examples of Miltonic inversions, vocabulary, and reminiscence or intonation are examined and mentioned at length by Mr. Sélincourt,<sup>14</sup> but the allusion and reminiscence of Miltonic cadence assume more importance, for the scrupulous imitation of Miltonic words is not conducive to the making of a genuine poet. We are greatly interested in how Keats assimilates the influences of Milton and makes them his own. If we are to mention a few examples illustrating how Keats makes use of Miltonic cadence, the following will suffice. (Much of the following explanation is derived from the brilliant appreciation of Mr. Sélincourt.<sup>15</sup>)

<sup>10</sup> Ford, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

<sup>11</sup> *Ib.*, p. 92, footnote 12.

<sup>12</sup> *Ed. Sélincourt, op. cit.*, p. 608.

<sup>13</sup> *Ib.*, p. 600.

<sup>14</sup> *Ib.*, p. 492.

<sup>15</sup> *Ib.*, p. 456; p. 479.

When Keats read *Paradise Lost*, he seemed to be peculiarly impressed by the phrase—*at shut of Evening Flours* (IX, l. 278). How is the phrase put to use and modified by Keats? This will show his poetical power and technique. The phrase is reproduced in *Hyperion* and *Sonnet xxix* (numbered by Mr. Sélincourt):

...: like a dismal cirque  
Of Druid stones, upon a forlorn moor,  
When the chill rain begins *at shut of eve*,  
In dull November, and their chancel vault,  
The Heaven itself, is blinded throughout night.  
(II, 11. 33-7) (italics mine)

Vanish'd unseasonably *at shut of eve*,  
When the dusk holiday—or holineight  
Of fragrant-curtain'd love begins to weave  
The woof of darkness thick, for hid delight;  
(11. 9-12) (italics mine)

In fact, the phrase, *at shut of eve*, derives from Milton, but it dissolves itself into the poems, and to the picture of the poems is added a peculiar touch characteristic of Keats. Compared with the original, Keats' phrase is simpler, but it seems to acquire its own in its way. And another like example can be found in *Lamia*:

It was the custom then to bring away  
The bride from home *at blushing shut of day*,  
Veil'd, in a chariot, heralded along  
By strewn flowers, torches, and a marriage song,  
With other pageants:

(II, 11. 106-10) (italics mine)

In this example, contrary to the excerpts just quoted, the modified phrase, touched with a sensuous tone ("blushing"), gets a different nuance. This sensuous nuance matches the picture. Such kind of poetic ability will be noticeable in another part in the same poem:

*Now on the moth-time of that evening dim*  
He would return that way, as well she knew,  
To Corinth from the shore:

(I, 11. 220-2) (italics mine)

Here, the original line of Milton is changed into something quite different, and we can feel only the faint Miltonic cadence. Without the help of an eminent scholar, we could not even trace the original. So the variation develops into

Keats' own method, and dignified sensuousness is added. As for the Miltonic influence over the metre, we have a few examples which are apt to escape our notice. His lines to Georgiana Augusta Wylie, afterwards Mrs. George Keats, are written in the four-accent metre, which is said to be a common form since Chaucer. But Mr. Sélincourt says that in the lines the tone suggests Milton rather than Chaucer. In *Fancy*, which was composed in the same metre, *L'Allegro* is said perhaps to be its original, but both the style and the cadence of the verse are perfectly independent.

His original perfect technique was not acquired easily. It was a result of his earnest endeavour and labour in writing poems. Although the four-accent metre is not suited to his genius, he was successful with it when he wrote *The Eve of St. Mark*. "But of the lyrics written in this measure *Fancy* is certainly the most charming, the treatment of the Season is felicitous throughout and the language is nowhere marred (except perhaps in the use of "so" in 76) by the peculiar faults of Keats's style."<sup>16</sup> His perfect style and measure might not have been attained, if he had never read Milton. Considering the circumstances, the Miltonic elements form a fairly large proportion of his work. Of all his work, the poem most under the influence of Milton will be *Hyperion* and *The Fall of Hyperion*. In these two poems, Keats continued to be very conscious of the presence of Milton. Why, then, did he wish to set to the Miltonic work? There may be various reasons for it, but the likeliest explanation may be that by changing from the romantic world of *Endymion* to the strict and severe realm of Milton, he wished to impart classical character to his work and to learn "artistic concentration."<sup>17</sup> The enthusiasm of two friends, Bailey and Severn, had turned Keats' attention to *Paradise Lost*, and early in 1818 he began to be fascinated by Milton and to make him his chief study. There is no need to say that before this, the short masterpieces of Milton had been known to Keats, and accordingly, signs of Miltonic influence had already appeared in *Endymion*, especially in the later books. According to the examination of Mr. Sélincourt, the poem of Milton, which is most influential upon *Endymion* is *Paradise Lost*, and the Miltonic influence is limited exclusively to this. It is not our present object to examine Miltonic influence over *Endymion*. Here, the established fact interests us more that the poems written under the influence of Milton and always very evident of his presence, are *Hyperion* and *The Fall of Hyperion*.

In the first place, let us consider *Hyperion*. When did the idea of writing *Hyperion* occur to him? Though frequent references to Milton are clearly seen during the period between April, 1818 and August, 1819, much earlier than that, we can find the suggestion of the conception of *Hyperion*. Soon after finishing *Endymion*, writing to B. R. Haydon (Jan. 23, 1818), he says that "I have a complete fellow-feeling with you in this business—so much so that it would be as well to wait for a choice out of *Hyperion*—when that poem is done there will be

<sup>16</sup> *Ed. Sélincourt, op. cit.*, p. 480.

<sup>17</sup> *Ib.*, p. 1.

a wide range for you—in *Endymion* I think you may have many bits of the deep and sentimental cast—the nature of *Hyperion* will lead me to treat it in a more naked and Grecian manner—and the march of passion and endeavour will be undeviating—and one great contrast between them will be—that the Hero of the written tale being mortal is led on, like Buonaparte, by circumstance; whereas the Apollo in *Hyperion* being a fore-seeing God will shape his actions like one.” But this suggestion leads us back to *Endymion*, in whose preface the plan of *Hyperion* is already in embryo: “I hope I have not in too late a day touched the beautiful mythology of Greece, and dulled its brightness: for I wish to try once more, before I bid it farewell.” In view of these circumstances, it must be said that while he was writing *Endymion*, *Hyperion* was taking shape side by side. Hence, *Hyperion*, an attempt at a Miltonic epic based on Greek mythology, was his ambition. Though he set to it energetically in September (or in October), 1818, the attempt in the different “range” took very much of his labour. And what we must not forget is that he was writing the poem while nursing his dear brother, Tom. Under the circumstances, it is a natural thing that the poem assumes a melancholy tone and “has nothing to do with love,”<sup>18</sup> which might seem to him even frivolous. However, in spite of such a mood, the figure of Fanny Brawne, for whom his love already had begun, might be often remembered and “the inflowing warmth and rapture of the opening of Book III”<sup>19</sup> might be recognized. He had struggled with *Hyperion* until perhaps April of the next year, but he left it a fragment. Apart from the matter of which he treated, what is it that he mainly attempted to achieve in the new range? He wished to assimilate Milton’s architectural and sculptural splendours into his work. To put it in another way, his wish was to produce his own epic or narrative poem possessing Milton’s architectural dignity. Was this wish of his fulfilled? The answer must, to our regret, be in the negative. Then, must we regard the poem as an utter failure? It may appear to be a failure as a whole, but it cannot be easily concluded that it is an absolute failure. In spite of apparent failure, it has its own charms and values. These matters must become our next object of consideration. In the incomparable opening of the poem, the dignified quiet effect of the scene is made perfect by “the marked recurrence here of certain long vowels and diphthongs,”<sup>20</sup> and attains the Miltonic height:

Deep in the shady sadness of a vale  
*Far* sunken from the healthy breath of *morn*,  
*Far* from the *fiery* noon, and eve’s one *star*,  
 Sat *gray-haired* Saturn, quiet as a stone,  
 Still as the silence round about his *lair*;  
 Forest on forest hung above his head

<sup>18</sup> E. C. Pettet, *On the Poetry of Keats* (Cambridge, 1957), p. 207.

<sup>19</sup> *Ib.*, pp. 207–8.

<sup>20</sup> *Ib.*, p. 118.

Like cloud on cloud. No *stir* of *air* was *there*...  
 (Italics Pettet's)

Here we must notice the monotonous atmosphere created by the music. In the next place, we may mention the following parts (11. 72-7):

As when, upon a tranced summer-night,  
 Those green-rob'd senators of mighty woods,  
 Tall oaks, branch-charmed by the earnest stars,  
 Dream, and so dream all night without a stir,  
 Save from one gradual solitary gust  
 Which comes upon the silence, and dies off,  
 As if the ebbing air had but one wave:

Concerning these lines, Mr. Sélincourt explains the beauty: "This exquisite interpretation of the trees, whose age suggests their connection with the mystery of the past, is essentially characteristic of the manner in which the influence of Nature and of romance was blended in the mind of Keats."<sup>21</sup> In these lines, we meet with the happiest use of words, which is to be wondered at. For instance, the words, "tranced" and "senators", are put to accurate use. In order to express the silence of summer-night, can we find any other suitable word? The summer-night must be "tranced." And the word, "senators," suggests the dignity of politicians who have no rest of mind save when they are asleep. Most of the senators must be old and the senators for trees impress us as mysterious. The famous epithet, "branch-charmed," is a coinage of Keats and inadmissible grammatically, but it is "peculiarly effective for all that, in its suggestion of the potency and the all-pervading influence of the charm which has been laid upon the dreaming oaks."<sup>22</sup> And the adjectives, "solitary" and "gradual," are very effective "in sound and sense."<sup>23</sup> Many other exquisite examples may be mentioned, but the spatial narrowness causes us not to go further than this. Effectiveness, recognized in the above instances, which are but two, could not be gained without the chief study of *Paradise Lost*. Furthermore, the romantic quality which the instances make us feel is, to my thinking, very Miltonic. At least, the tranced atmosphere is not that of *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*. And what is worth noting here is that the world of *Hyperion* is not that of *Paradise Lost*, though it is written under the influence of the great poem. The romantic quality which pervades *Hyperion* must be an echo of the Milton who was writing the most romantic stanza:

No mighty trance, or breathèd spell,  
 Inspires the pale-eyed priest from the  
 prophetic cell. (*Hymn on Christ's Nativity*, XIX)

<sup>21</sup> *Ed. Sélincourt, op. cit., p. 497.*

<sup>22, 23</sup> *Ib., p. 498.*

and who was dedicating the mighty Alexanderines to the lovely Elizabethan fancy of the "yellow skirted faves" who

Fly after the night-steeds, leaving their  
moon-loved maze. (*Ib.*, XXVI)<sup>24</sup>

The fact is worth noting that however hard Keats was trying to absorb the classical strength of Milton, what was reflected in his poem was the romantic tone. This apparently ironical result might be natural to him who had lived largely in his imagination. If we may be permitted to be personal, we cannot help thinking that Miltonic classicism must have been alien to Keats who was romantic to the core. But this question will be touched on later in this essay. To return to the main theme: about April in 1819, he left off writing *Hyperion*. Now, we must remind ourselves that the failure to complete the work is not the first experience. Much the same event had previously happened to him. Early in his poetic career, when he was writing *Calidore*, he left it unfinished. The poem of 162 lines is said to be an ambitious work on the scale of Hunt's *Rimini*, but after all, it ends in only an imitative poem. There seems to be no convincing reason why he discontinued, and we may find several causes at work, "but one explanation of his failure to carry it through is almost certainly that he grew tired of a long poem that had no impetus beyond imitation of an admired poet."<sup>25</sup> I have mentioned this episode, because I think that it will have some connection with the case of *Hyperion*. As also in the case of *Hyperion*, when he was fascinated by an admired poet, it seems that he could not help imitating him. This thorough imitation shows the outstanding features in the development of his technique. In *Calidore*, he seemed to try to acquire a Spenserian manner through the imitation of *Rimini*, and in *Hyperion*, he attempted a Miltonic quality. These experiments may remind us of the words of T. S. Eliot: "A good poet will usually borrow from authors remote in time, or alien in language, or diverse in interest," but these self-defensive words should be fairly modified in application to Keats. As the above-mentioned instances show, Keats did not try merely to borrow (so that, technically speaking, he has not such a work as *The Waste Land*), but he wished to have, so to speak, internal connection with an admired poet. In other words, we can say that admiration caused him to imitate. Therefore, imitation, in the case of Keats, means admiration and does not show his lack of poetic ability. All the work of Keats is constructed of the very various elements absorbed in a different way from Eliot's. Considering Keats' continuous efforts to absorb, his short poetic career, which far surpasses that of any other poet, can be said to be a continuation of laborious experiments. (In passing, it must be admitted that the experimental spirit is also a remarkable feature in his actual life.)

*Hyperion* has remained a poetic fragment. There lies before us the most

<sup>24</sup> J. Bailey, *Milton* (Oxford, (1915) 1947), pp. 101-2.

<sup>25</sup> Pettet, *op cit.*, p. 10.

difficult and delicate question of why he failed to finish the poem. As to the reason why he left off, different conjectures may be possible, but we must try to get as near to the truth as possible. It is a curious fact that almost immediately after he wrote, "Shakespeare and the paradise (*sic*) Lost every day become greater wonders to me," he confessed, "The Paradise lost (*sic*) though so fine in itself is a corruption of our Language—it should be kept as it is unique—a curiosity—a beautiful and grand Curiosity. The most remarkable Production of the world. A northern dialect accommodating itself to greek (*sic*) and latin (*sic*) inversions and intonations. The purest english (*sic*) I think—or what ought to be the purest—is Chatterton's. The Language had existed long enough to be entirely uncorrupted of Chaucer's gallicisms, and still the old words are used. Chatterton's is entirely northern. I prefer the native music of it to Milton's cut by feet. I have but lately stood on my guard against Milton. Life to him would be death to me. Miltonic verse cannot be written but in the vein of art—I wish to devote myself to another sensation—"26 And on the same day he writes in the same strain, "I always somehow associate Chatterton with autumn. He is the purest writer in the English Language. He has no French idiom, or particles like Chaucer—'tis genuine English Idiom in English Words. I have given up *Hyperion*—there were too many Miltonic inversions in it—Miltonic verse can not be written but in an artful or rather artist's humour. I wish to give myself up to other sensations. English ought to be kept up. It may be interesting to you to pick out some lines from *Hyperion* and put a mark X to the false beauty proceeding from art, and one || to the true voice of feeling."27

This abrupt change of mind deserves particular notice. The reason why he gave up appears to be explained completely in the letters themselves, but we must step warily. Putting the letters aside for a while, it is necessary for us to inquire into what caused him to give up. According to the interpretation of Mr. Sélincourt, while he was writing *Hyperion*, he began to be aware that the imitation of Milton's style meant "the sacrifice of much that was essential to the expression of his own genius,"28 and "he could find no freedom in the restraint of a classical or even a Miltonic Epic."29 And we have another similar interpretation. Agreeing with Mr. Murry's opinion, Mr. Pettet writes: "...he (=Murry) is almost certainly right in his sustained contention that Milton and the composition of *Hyperion* deflected Keats's from the course of his own native genius."30 Three scholars of Keats almost fully agree that going on with *Hyperion* means a sort of sacrifice to him. It is on account of the disagreement of nature that, in spite of his hard efforts, he could not make *Hyperion* genuinely Miltonic. As I have suggested above, *Hyperion*, the product of hard efforts, could not be

<sup>26</sup> To George & Georgiana, Sept. 21, 1819.

<sup>27</sup> To J. H. Reynolds, Sept. 21, 1819.

<sup>28</sup> *Ed. Sélincourt, op. cit.*, p. 489.

<sup>29</sup> *Ib.*, p. lii.

<sup>30</sup> Pettet, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

anything but an imitation of the romantic Milton. Here we must remember Mr. Colvin's just remarks that "*Hyperion* is hardly Miltonic in the stricter sense."<sup>31</sup> Perhaps, the meaning of "hardly Miltonic" may be allowed to be taken as the imitation of the romantic Milton. On the one hand, Keats' escape from Miltonic bondage means uncertainty within himself, but on the other, does it not bespeak his victorious emergence—his struggle to find his own feet and to seek after the strength of will to rely on himself? And can we not say that he attempted a kind of rebirth into a new way of life? As in the case of *Calidore*, we can notice a youthful elasticity of the poet. And this keenly critical regard towards his own poetry was already realized in the shape of the poetic principle: "The Genius of Poetry must work out its own salvation in a man: It cannot be matured by law and precept, but by sensation and watchfulness in itself."<sup>32</sup> When we regard his apparent failure as a kind of rebirth, the Keats of *Hyperion* is growing into the greater poet.

Here we must return to the letters which we have laid aside. When Keats rejects *Paradise Lost* as "a corruption of our language" and acclaim Chatterton as "the purest writer in the English language," it sounds like a kind of excuse for the discontinuation, for, as a scholar points out somewhere, is Chatterton's language as entirely northern as he asserts? It seems somewhat doubtful whether he attached much importance to Chatterton, when he was writing the letters. At least, we cannot find enough evidence if he must mention Chatterton as an admired poet. (In connection with Milton, there emerges an important problem concerning the meaning of "art" or "an artful or rather artist's humour", but this is not a topic I wish to pursue here, so I leave it untouched with the hope of dealing with it at length some day.)

We must treat of the next subject—how much work was produced under the influence of Chatterton, the object of Keats' passionate admiration? *The Eve of St. Agnes*, "executed faultlessly in the spirit of the legend which inspired it"<sup>33</sup> and the companion fragment, *The Eve of St. Mark*, owe much to Chatterton for a subject in mediaeval legend and an atmosphere of mystery and enchantment. But in these two poems the influence of Chatterton seems not to be quite final. The legendary spirit and atmosphere which cover them are rather Spenserian. This fact also proves that the poet whom he prefers in the letters quoted above must not necessarily be Chatterton.<sup>34</sup> Giving critical explanation to the two poems, Mr. Sélincourt concludes that "if he (=Keats) owed something to Chatterton he owed still more to Spenser, and there are clear indications both in the wealth of imagery and vivid colouring of the diction and in the use of the metre, never before seriously attempted by him, that he was renewing the study of his earlier master."<sup>35</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Ed. Sélincourt, *op. cit.*, p. 489.

<sup>32</sup> To J. A. Hessey, Oct. 9, 1818.

<sup>33</sup> Ed. Sélincourt, *op. cit.*, p. lv.

<sup>34</sup> See R. Gittings, *The Mask of Keats* (Heinemann, 1956), p. 88.

<sup>35</sup> Ed. Sélincourt, *op. cit.*, pp. lv-vi.

Though in this way the early fascination of Milton appears to have ceased to attract Keats' mind, the fact is that Milton continues to haunt him. About the persistent attraction, we cannot essay a satisfactory explanation. Should we seek it in the classical dignity of the Epic which defies apparent rejection? Apart from the attempt at a convincing explanation, we must turn our thoughts to the companion fragment, *The Fall of Hyperion*. Here is another failure to complete! Though the second *Hyperion* ended in another failure, it did not come to nothing with Keats. To him, it meant the ennoblement of the poetic status. Our concern here must be with the difference between the first and second *Hyperions*: how he attained to the height and whether the charm of Milton which had apparently lost effect was renewed in the later poem. The first *Hyperion*, the result of Keats' attempt to attain Miltonic splendour, turned Milton into "a Milton associated with Spenser."<sup>36</sup> The poem, though associated with Spenser, brought about another paradoxical result, that is to say, it became "impersonal in one of the wrong ways."<sup>37</sup> To put the matter in another way, in the poem, Keats lost "the vigour either of aestheticism or of the more serious interests, the maturer moral life, revealed to us in the Letters."<sup>38</sup> Despite of his great efforts, the poem did not spring from the finest qualities of his personality. A fine soul had disappeared. It follows that *Hyperion* offers an ironical way of losing personality. We have an equivocal work neither Miltonic nor Spenserian. But by the curious result we must not allow ourselves to be deluded into thinking that the poetic failure exemplifies his incompetence. As we have often observed, his tough, though sensitive, spirit and critical intelligence always reawaken and cause the poet to go on into a new area. Always we wonder at the quickness of the reawakening, backed up by a strong self-criticism. When he began to work on *The Fall of Hyperion*, it is highly probable that he was very conscious that in the former *Hyperion*, he could not reach the true depth and epic sublimity of Milton, and that at the same time he could not reach down to the depths of Spenserian emotion. Accordingly he was compelled to seek a new direction.

We have come to where we must consider the position of the second *Hyperion* in the geography of Keats' poetic career. About the meaning of the revision, Mr. F. R. Leavis explains that Keats' "main operation was an attempt to graft the poem (= *Hyperion*) on to his maturer personality."<sup>39</sup> As one of the examples; he cites the use of Moneta in the lines 243-8 of Canto I:

My power, which to me still a curse,  
Shall be to thee a wonder; for the scenes  
Still swooning vivid through my globed brain,  
With an electral changing misery,  
Thou shalt with these dull mortal eyes behold  
Free from all pain, if wonder pain thee not.

<sup>36</sup> F. R. Leavis, *Revaluation* (Chatto & Windus, (1936) 1956), p. 268.

<sup>37</sup>, <sup>38</sup>, <sup>39</sup> *Ib.*, p. 268.

To be sure, the Keats of the second *Hyperion* is deepening his comprehension of the human scene and takes us deep into the secret places of the human heart. This is an indication of his keeping very close to the concrete. Besides the passage quoted above, we can mention more examples showing Keats' spiritual suffering and sympathy with the misery of the human being, but it is not our present concern. Summing up the position of the poem in Mr. Leavis' words, "the poetry is concrete in its complexity and unmistakable in its effect. It is clearly the expression of a rare maturity; the attitude is the product of tragic experience, met by discipline, in a very uncommonly strong, sincere and sensitive spirit."<sup>40</sup> The second *Hyperion* may be an exemplary work in which Keats' "metaphysics" can be traced more in detail than in any other poem of his, but taken up strictly as a work of art, it cannot be said to be a perfect one, and it has its own blemishes. Giving due regard to human maturity, Mr. Leavis does not forget at all to point out the feeble impression: "To talk of 'new life' in this verse may perhaps seem paradoxical, for what strikes one at once about it, compared with the verse of the first *Hyperion*, is a kind of inertness: it lacks entirely the epic (if rather languid) buoyancy, the Miltonic wave-motion, the onward carrying rise and fall....; even when it most suggests the Keats of the Odes it is without poetical aura—unbe-glamoured and unintoxicated."<sup>41</sup> And he makes the following lines (I, 11. 47-51) exemplify the inert movement:

No Asian poppy nor elixir fine  
Of the soon-fading jealous Caliphat;  
No poison gender'd in close monkish cell  
To thin the scarlet conclave of old men,  
Could so have rapt unwilling life away.

Now, we have returned to our main theme. The words, "it lacks entirely the epic (if rather languid) buoyancy, the Miltonic wave-motion," begin to weigh with us. According to them, it follows that in the revising also, Keats' attempt to get the architectonic power of the Miltonic epic did not attain any success. But what we must stand on our guard against is that the repeated failure, if we are permitted to say so, does not mean the sheer disappearance of Miltonic influence. While the Miltonic power could not be obtained at last, the Miltonism, the hate of which caused Keats to give up *Hyperion*, "though less marked than in the first version, still persists in the revision."<sup>42</sup> As the enumeration of Miltonic echoes in the revision requires much space, I must abstain from adducing instances, but our attention must be called to the persistence. It must be admitted that till long after he abandoned the second *Hyperion*, the persistence continued to operate on both his work and spirit regardless of whether or not he was conscious

<sup>40</sup> *Ib.*, p. 272.

<sup>41</sup> *Ib.*, p. 269.

<sup>42</sup> *Ed.*, Sélincourt, *op. cit.*, p. 582.

of it.

As for the operation, the following distinct facts will suffice. When on board the ship for Italy, Keats "even contemplated the writing of a long poem on Milton's Sabrina, a project discussed with Severn on the journey out."<sup>43</sup> It will be hard not to admit that even till almost the time of his death, the charm of Milton continued to haunt Keats. The realization of the project would have had a considerable interest, and it is also an interesting fact to notice that at that time the object of his contemplation shifted from *Paradise Lost* to *Comus*. A conjecture must not be ventured now as to what drove him towards the shift, but the fact that preference was given to *Comus* over *Paradise Lost* seems to suggest something to us. However, we must not go further than this, for the suggestion will take us too far from the present subject. Suffice it to say that the charm of Miltonic quality never ceased to operate on Keats.

In the next place, the Miltonic influence over Keats' mind and spirit must be touched on briefly. Anyone who reads the letter to J. H. Reynolds (May 3, 1818) will not fail to notice that an outspoken criticism is hazarded of the comparison between Milton and Wordsworth. Also in this case, Keats' fine critical intelligence was working and his "admiration for these two poets was always crossed and complicated by the liveliest kind of doubt and questioning."<sup>44</sup> In this letter, Keats rejected Milton for Wordsworth: "I must think Wordsworth is deeper than Milton." The rejection which appears very decisive puzzles and misleads us. It seems to us that the rejection bears a curious resemblance to the abandonment of *Paradise Lost*: when Keats was writing *Hyperion*. Keats set to work composing the second *Hyperion* with renewed efforts as if he were fascinated again by Milton. Notwithstanding the fact that he was driven to the firm belief that Wordsworth is deeper than Milton, Milton continued to gain a subconscious influence over Keats' mind. We are faced with another ironical result. Mr. Murry gives an explanatory note to the meaning of the passages in the letter to Miss Jeffrey (May 31, 1819)—"To both Blake and Keats Milton's Satan and his creator were symbols and embodiment of energy; and when, in June 1819, Keats parted from Fanny Brawne to struggle with the world for a livelihood, Milton—instead of Shakespeare—became his Presider."<sup>45</sup> Undeniably, part of the passages sounds very Miltonic: "I must take my stand upon some vantage ground and begin to fight—I must choose between despair and Energy—I choose the latter." And at another critical moment, when "poetry becomes more and more a tense effort of the intellectual will, he invokes the example of Milton and makes a virtue of necessity."<sup>46</sup> He writes in the letter to J. Taylor (Aug. 23, 1819), "How a solitary life engenders pride and egotism! True—I know it does—but this pride and egotism will enable me to write finer things than any-

<sup>43</sup> D. Hewlett, *A Life of John Keats* (Hurst & Blackett), p. 363.

<sup>44</sup> Pettet, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

<sup>45</sup> M. Murry, *Keats* (Janathan Cape, 1955), p. 292.

<sup>46</sup> *Ib.*, p. 304.

thing else could." Thus, after this, again he discarded Milton, but it is Milton who often enabled Keats to tide over crises poetical and mental. This curious and paradoxical operation, though against his will, helped much to improve his poetic status. Only Miltonic pride could make his denial of reconciliation to lot conducive to the growth of mind. In the last place, some concluding remarks must be added to this essay. In spite of Keats' frequent rejections, Milton always maintained a tight hold over Keats and continued to be a living presence to him. After all, this fact also speaks to us of the significance of the real power and influence of genuine art.