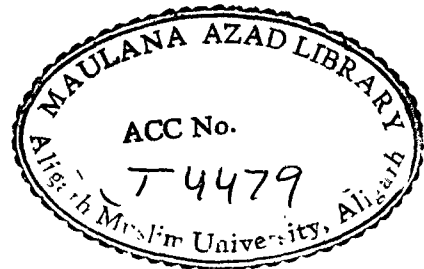




**THE USE OF MYTHOLOGY
IN
THE POETRY OF KEATS**

ABSTRACT



**THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE AWARD OF
THE DEGREE OF**

Doctor of Philosophy
IN
ENGLISH

BY
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**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
ALIGARH MUSLIM UNIVERSITY,
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1993**

A B S T R A C T

Over the years, John Keats's unique imagination has been profusely studied and analysed and critics have recognized mythology as one of the major influences on his thought and imagery. The present study attempts to elaborate this aspect further.

It consists of an assessment of his poems, both mythic and non-mythic, in the context of the poet's own mythic vision. It throws light on the sub-stratum of mythical themes that lend coherence and unity to the entire range of his poetry. It elaborates the conviction that mythologizing comes naturally and easily to Keats. Like a pagan from the mythical Golden Age, he freely re-enacts, weaves and at times even creates new myths and thus exploits fully the archetypal power inherent in his material.

Keats's use of mythology is personal and without any extra-literary design. Keats believed that the artist does not proceed to the root of all feeling and impulses by the simplest path. His artistic intuition leads him to the elemental forms of nature and human life incorporated in mythology. Keats's doctrine of Negative capability supplies the base for his mythic vision. Myths

record the primary unconscious process of shaping human responses to the varied conditions of life. Instinct serves as the chief generative agent in Keats's mythologizing processes.

Mythology provides him with substance not only for his poetry but also for his philosophy. It leads him to a deepened understanding of man and the universe. He is attracted to mythology and mythologizing as the very means of comprehending and communicating his artistic experience. The two systems of mythology that have influenced him in particular are the Greek and Roman systems. Traces of Biblical and Hindu mythology can also be found in his poetry. However, he does not rigidly follow any given system of mythology. He retells myths as though they are his own creations. This gives him the license to freely mingle the different systems, to add or delete events and incidents wherever it suits him. At times, he even breaks the barriers of time and for the purpose of expressing an idea clearly, he brings together different mythological stages and presents them as co-existent. He frequently interknits smaller myths into the framework of the major one.

It is possible that Keats was not always conscious

of the full potential and relevance of every mythic image, allusion, and archetype that he used in his poetry. However, as mythic images and archetypes have their own unconscious organisations and design, they were easily and effectively absorbed into his poetry.

Keats's long poem Endymion highlights the profound sensitiveness of Keats to ancient mythology. The quest of Endymion can be defined as a venture of the poet's mind into its own hidden depths. It can also be treated as the quest of the poet for his medium as well as aesthetic goals. Keats's second epic Hyperion is a mythological elaboration of his own poetic desires. Keats's ballads and romances are a reworking of the tales of ritual origin. The dominant mythological motifs of his epics can be located in these poems also. The heroines of The Eve of St. Agnes and 'Isabella' are chaste and virtuous women and represent the beneficent aspect of the Great Goddess who is one of the mythological divinities whom Keats especially reveres. In a shift, she becomes the death-goddess. The heroines of Lamia and 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' represent this evil aspect of the Great Goddess. All female family associations can be traced to her. So deep was Keats's preoccupation with these

romantic archetypes that he transported them into his own situation. In the poems addressed to or inspired by his beloved Fanny Brawn, the same motivations are seen at work. Fanny is cast as a character in his larger mythical plot.

In the major odes, the Great Goddess appears variously. She symbolizes the generative spirit behind all creation. Keats instinctively perceives the communicative relevance of certain ancient divinities of his artistic purpose and through their fictionalized experiences he seeks deliverance from the oppressive forces that limit his own creative potential. Keats seems to adopt Apollo as a personal symbolic deity. Apollo occurs in his poetry as the embodiment of artistic integrity and the highest form of beauty. The father-figure too, has a specific status. In all situations, he extends support to the quest of the younger man.

The archetypal green bower has regenerative connotations. It is linked to the death and rebirth of vegetation. In Keats's mythic vision it comes to represent the constantly changing state of man. Trees, in his mythic vision, are the immortal historians with oracular properties. Water represents the life spirit. Air represents

the spiritual ascent that recharges the intuition. The four elements, earth, water, air and fire are used to connect the mortal and immortal worlds.

Poetry for Keats is not the mere literary rendering of ideas but a comprehensive cognitive crystallization of relationships of life itself to all its primary forms viz. the elements (earth, air, water, fire) to love, to death to all the agonies of the human heart. Mythology serves as the sensual and fertile metaphor for his poetic vision.



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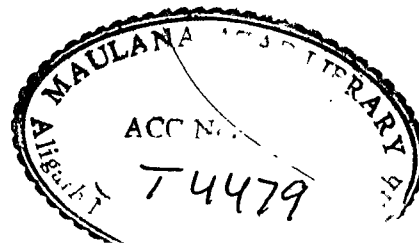
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Preface

Over the years, John Keats's unique imagination has been profusely studied and analysed and critics have recognized mythology as one of the major influences on his thought and imagery. Critical concepts have linked all mythological allusions to the verbal and visual sources available to the poet. The significance of the poet's mythological imagery has been generally analysed in the light of the classical texts available to him.

While acknowledging the value of such works, the present study attempts to elaborate this aspect further. It consists of an assessment of his poems, both mythic and non-mythic, in the context of the poet's own mythic vision. It throws light on the sub-stratum of mythical themes that lend coherence and unity to the entire range of his poetry. It elaborates the conviction that mythologizing comes naturally and easily to Keats. Like a pagan from the mythical Golden Age, he freely re-enacts, weaves and at times even creates new myths and thus exploits fully the archetypal power inherent in his material.

Mythologizing is an essential component of his

psychic and creative processes. As it is difficult to separate the psychological and biographical elements, there are junctures at which the poet and his hero merge into each other. The poet's own experiences are woven into the fabric of his larger mythical plot. Infact, the mythical mode serves as the deepest and most fertilizing source of poetic energy.

Keats's letters have been used as the testimonials to these observations. Relevant passages have frequently been cited. They highlight the fact that Keats's use of mythology does not suggest a deliberate contrivance for the sake of mere poetic effect but represents his artistic response to the world around him.

I have made use, where appropriate, of Sir James George Frazer's The Golden Bough, Robert Graves's The White Goddess and Joseph Campbell's The Hero With a Thousand Faces. A number of myths have been cited in this study. They are based on versions offered by Thomas Bulfinch's The Age of Fable, Charles Mills Gayley's The Classical Myths in Literature And in Art, Robert Graves's The Greek Myths, H.J. Rose's A Handbook of Literature, Sir Paul Harvey's The Oxford Companion to

Classical Literature and Donald Mackenzie's Indian Myth and Legend.

In the preparation of this study I have received help, cooperation and encouragement from many quarters. I owe a deep sense of gratitude to my teacher Professor Masoodul Hasan who with his keen insight and amazing perspicacity not only guided me throughout my research but also gave me immeasurable moral and intellectual support. In the same vein, I must acknowledge the contribution of Professor Azizuddin Tariq, Chairman, Department of English who helped and encouraged me at every stage of this thesis. I would like to thank the staff of the Seminar Library, Department of English, Aligarh Muslim University, and the staff of the Maulana Azad Library, Aligarh Muslim University for their generous assistance. I am extremely grateful to the British Council Library, New Delhi and the American Centre Library, New Delhi for promptly making books and reprints of articles available to me. I must also thank Mr. Shafaat Ali Khan, the typist for his prompt and efficient service.

Seemin Hasan

(SEEMIN HASAN)

A B B R E V I A T I O N S
- - - - -

<u>The Fall</u>	The Fall of Hyperion
<u>The Eve</u>	The Eve of St. Agnes

CHAPTER I

The Mythic Modes in Literature - A Brief Survey
(From the Renaissance to the Romantic Period)

I

Mythology is the legacy of the oral tradition of concepts and perceptions left behind by the ancient civilizations. In folk-transmission of the different myths through the different ages, complex psychological processes have instigated their --

Splitting, displacement, multiplication,
projection, rationalization, secondary elabo-
ration and interpretation -- 1

The result is that the term 'Mythology', as used in modern criticism, suggests a comprehensive system consisting of aspects of religion, folklore, anthropology, sociology, psycho-analysis, fine arts and literature. The basic myths have gathered about their core multidimensional meanings. They can be described as the embodiments of archetypal, physical and mystical human experiences, as well as the timeless and universal custodians of rituals and customs. For the artist they remain the continuous and evolving medium of both inspiration and expression as illustrated in the following definition --

What is music ? What is poetry ? What is
mythology ? All questions on which no opinion
is possible unless one already has a real
feeling for these things. 2

The 'real feeling' can be equated to aesthetic intensity. Mythology has its foundations not in history but in the realm of imagination. In a definition, Kerényi stresses the supernatural element --

... an immemorial and traditional body of material contained in tales about gods and godlike beings... tales already well-known but not unamenable to further reshaping. Mythology is the movement of this material, it is something solid yet mobile, substantial and yet not static, capable of transformation. 3

The Oxford Classical Dictionary emphasises the communal genesis of mythology --

Although etymologically the word means no more than the telling of tales, it is used in modern languages to signify a systematic examination of traditional narratives of any people, or all peoples with the object of understanding how they came to be told and to what extent they were or are to be believed, also of solving various other problems connected with them such as their connections with religion, their origin (popular or literary) their relations, if any, to similar stories told elsewhere and their chronology relative or absolute. 4

The definition offered by the Encyclopaedia Britannica relates mythology to religion --

... a sacred history, it relates an event that took place in primordial time,... it is always an account of a 'creation' it relates how something was produced, began to be... 5

A more metaphysical stand is taken by Bronislaw Malinowski in this definition --

... the assertion of an original, greater and more important reality through which the present life, fate and work of mankind are governed. 6

Wellek and Warren bring myth closer to literature by defining it as --

... narrative story, as against dialectical discourse, exposition; it is also the irrational or the intuitive as against the systematically philosophical. 7

Still another aspect is highlighted by Northrop Frye --

... a society's religious beliefs, historical traditions, cosmologic speculations, in short, the whole range of its verbal expressiveness. 8

Thus it is difficult to give a single comprehensive definition of mythology. Mythology contains in its depths the very childhood of human intelligence. We can trace this down to the rudiments of the human imagination which are universal. A study in comparative mythology reveals the tendency of the human mind at a given stage of development subject to similar circumstances to produce similar myths. Such themes as the origin of the world, the land

of the dead, fertility rites, virgin birth and the resurrected hero have a world-wide distribution. There is no human race in the records of which their archetypes cannot be located. Greek, Roman, Norse, Celtic, Hindu, Phrygian, Persian mythologies all contain these themes. The psychological force embodied in each of these themes may differ from one mythology to the other. Mythology, hence, becomes a vital component of modern civilization --

... an active force,... a pragmatic charter
of primitive faith and moral wisdom. 9

For the modern man, mythology is an indispensable asset. Though ethnologists protest that to consider these myths as embodiments of truth is a grave error, they all agree that they shed important light on the conditions and motives of the ancient man. Mythology may not explain the why and wherefore of things but it highlights the primary sources to which everything goes back. It proves the existence of imperishable realities in a mortal world. It provides us with the earliest records of the incipient history of the religious, social, aesthetic and spiritual resources of the pre-historic man. It helps us to follow the continuity of thought down the ages and to discern the systematic progress of mankind.

Philosophers suggest various theories for the beginnings of mythology. The two most convincing theories are the Theory of Deterioration and the Theory of Progress.¹⁰ The former assumes that man in the by-gone days had perfect knowledge of the universe, his place in it, his religious, moral, social and aesthetic conceptions. With the passage of time, his perfect conceptions degenerated and his reason and imagination became diseased, giving rise to unconvincing notions. The latter puts forward the view that man began with crude and bestial guesses at the truth and has with experience developed a superior intelligence that results in finer conceptions of his relationship to the world and his subsequent duties.

The mythological concepts and statements of the primeval man are characterized by an apparent lack of clarity and logic. In order to understand them and use them effectively, the modern man must glean out the method. Mythology is as old as language itself. It is not an external artifice or ornament tacked on to language but a living instrument of active speech. Language and mythology are inseparable aspects of the oral tradition.

Mythologists do not put forward any single theory for the interpretation of the origin and the meaning of myth.

There are, however, certain considerations that they say must be kept in mind while analysing a particular myth --

(1) Determining the geographical region from which the story originated : This means finding out whether the story is Roman, Greek or perhaps Celtic. K.O. Muller laid great emphasis on this aspect.

(2) Determining what class the story belongs to : This requires classifying the story as a true myth, fable or saga. Folklorists and investigators of legends of Medieval Europe and also of other non-classical legends can be given the credit for introducing this aspect. Important among them are Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm.

(3) Finally, there is the application of the comparative method. One should compare the legends of ancient savages and peasants, or of the primitive man with existing backward tribes like Bushmen and Red Indians. J.W.E. Mannhardt and Andrew Lang have done this job brilliantly. Another important aspect is the imagination of two similar peoples. Myth is not a product of reason but of the imagination. The Freud and Jung school of psychologists devotes considerable attention to this.¹¹

II

Like other literatures, English Literature, too, has not been an isolated phenomenon. It has been subject to various influences. Dominant among them is the influence of Greek and Roman Literatures. Profound systems of thought, highly philosophical interpretations of life, well-wrought works of art created by the masters have served as beacons of inspiration for English men of letters down the ages.

Themes connected with the Greek myths found literary expression in the works of classical authors between the eighth and first century B.C., Julia W. Loomis lists the more important ones, with their approximate dates, as follows¹² --

	<u>Authors</u>	<u>Work</u>	<u>Approximate Date</u>
1.	Homer	Iliad and Odyssey	8th Century B.C.
2.	(Unknown authorship)	Homeric Poems	8th to 6th Centuries B.C.
3.	Hesoid	Works and Days Theo- gony	7th Century B.C.
4.	Aeschylus	All Plays	5th Century B.C.
5.	Sophocles	All Plays	5th Century B.C.

6.	Euripides	All Plays	5th Century B.C.
7.	Callimachus	Hymns	3rd Century B.C.
8.	Apollodorus	Bibliotheca	2nd Century B.C.
9.	Virgil	Georgic Aeneid	1st Century B.C. (17 B.C.-19 A.D.)
10.	Ovid	Metamorphoses Heroids Amores	1st Century B.C. (43 B.C.-17 A.D.)
11.	Hyginus	Fabulae	2nd Century B.C.
12.	Pausanias	Description of Greece (the first Baedeker)	2nd Century B.C.

After the Dark Ages, Western Europe rediscovered the classical traditions. The reawakened and stimulated people assimilated the classical arts, ideals and philosophy into their literary, cultural, social, political and even legal systems.

According to Gilbert Highet classical influences pervaded western literature in three ways¹³ --

- (1) Translation
- (2) Imitation
- (3) Emulation

Translation of themes, ideals, styles and methods brought these exclusive works within the reach of all and

helped to lay the foundations of great works. Imitation extended the range and opened new avenues as men attempted to reproduce the rarefied standards of the Masters. Emulation resulted in master-pieces. Men produced works that combined the perfection of the Masters with modern ideals.

The Renaissance or 'revival of learning' set in during the early years of the fifteenth century in England. Classical themes were used by men of letters such as Chaucer, Gower and Malory. The doctrines of Hellenism, Platonism and Humanism found their way into English Literature. The age patronized translations. Among others were those by Philemon Holland, North's translations of Plutarch, and Chapman's translation of Homer. The English men of letters derived many themes and conventions from them. The sense of beauty prevailed. Literature, along with other forms of art, was created more for aesthetic pleasure than for moral guidance. Under these influences mythology acquired a respectable status.

In the comparatively relaxed scheme of things and because of the sanction of rhetoricians, it now became perfectly acceptable to blend the antique and the medieval, and also the Christian and pagan elements in literature.

The works of Sidney, Spenser, Lyly and others are eloquent examples of this synthesis. In The Shepherd's Calender Spenser associates Pan, the pagan god of shepherds, with Christ who in the Christian tradition is a good shepherd. The Faerie Queen abounds in the use of mythological images and symbols. Acrasio, the sensual mistress of the Bower of Bliss, can be equated with Circe. Spenser's treatment of mythology is elaborate yet subtle. He gives a religious dimension to the classical themes by allegorizing them.

Works of the Elizabethans were rich, sensuous and laden with personified abstractions and mythological allusions. The mythological apparatus, though used extensively was frigid. The mention of pagan gods and goddesses gave colour, glamour and decoration to the verse but it did not do much beyond that. The ancient legends were read widely and utilised in poetry in a direct fashion by poets like Francis Kynastin and Reynolds. But, their true potential lay hidden beneath their colourful exteriors, undiscovered and untouched. Of course, occasionally this shallow treatment of myth led religious fanatics to read immoral and lawless meanings into them, and then pagan mythology was strongly condemned. But the trend had obviously struck deep roots in English Literature and mythology continued to

be used enthusiastically. Traces of it can be discerned in Milton's poetry. In his attempt to glorify Christ and banish the pagan gods in 'On the Morning of Christ's Nativity', Milton rather ambivalently comments that the shepherds near Bethlehem had no idea 'That the mighty Pan/Was kindly come to live with them below;' In Lycidas he refers to the myth of Orpheus. In Paradise Lost the fallen angels become the heathen gods. Milton's mythologizing instincts surface in the form of veiled references.

Apollo, Daphne, Pan, Cupid, Ceres, Orpheus, Fauns, Nymphs, Satyrs etc. occur frequently in the poetry of the period. Among actual myths, the war of the Titans and Olympians and the Greek cycle of time viz. the primitive Golden Age giving way to progressively degenerating times, were adapted as garbled versions of Gospel truth to represent the revolt of Satan against God and the fall of Eden respectively. The Ovidian tale of the Great Flood was paralleled to the Biblical story of Noah.

The achievement of the age can be described as the identification of the familiar spirit of native folklore and the conscious and unconscious blending of the two. While preserving the superiority of the Christian tradition, pagan culture had found a permanent place in the scheme of

western literature.

The men of letters of the Augustan Age considered themselves to be an improvement on those of the seventeenth century in their treatment of the classics. However, they formed their opinions under certain limitations of which they were not aware. The age was marked by great advances in Science. The thinking of the people underwent radical changes. The baffling universe and its natural phenomena were explained, thus expelling the spirit of wonder from the human mind. Classics were greatly revered but were interpreted to suit the intellect rather than the heart and the imagination. In imitation of the Masters' lofty styles, superior standards of scholarship were maintained by the men of letters. Poetry was composed within prescribed forms and adhered to rules. Great emphasis was laid on correctness and proportion. Literature, by and large, became a specialized technique bound by rules and axioms. Mythology, with its depth of meaning, did not correspond to the new temper and not much attention was paid to it. The kind of genius that understands and appreciates the spirit of mythology did not exist during the Augustan Age.

Dryden and Pope translated Virgil and Homer

respectively. In both cases the narrative and objective passages have been dealt with ease. However, the spirit of the subjective passages, famous for their sensitive insight into archetypal human experiences, is lost in the attempt to reproduce the rational truth within a flawless format.

In poetry, too, the same limitations can be seen at work. The works of Prior, Pope, Dryden, Parnell, Gay and Swift present mythological figures like Daphne, Apollo, Orpheus, Adrienne, Dido, Leda, Venus etc. as though they were city bred eighteenth century characters. Their experiences are treated in a light-hearted and playful manner. Mention must be made of William Blake, the mystic liberator of the human spirit. He believed that he actually saw the angels and the strange figures that his pictures portray. As a poet, he tried to awaken the human mind to the most innocent vision of itself. However, he was limited by his arbitrary methods.

In the Augustan Age, symbolic mythology was not much in vogue. Traces of descriptive mythology can be found, the important contribution of which was to prevent mythology from lapsing into total extinction. Two prose works were Andrew Tooke's Pantheon (which later influenced Hunt and

Keats) and Spence's Polymetis. Though much criticized by contemporary critics as 'Undesirable food for the female mind'¹⁴ these works served to keep alive the genre in uncongenial times. The works of other prose writers like Johnson, Goldsmith and Fielding contain classical allusions but the symbolic spirit is beyond their reach.

III

The Romantic Revival can be defined as --

...a change from a mechanical conception of the world to an enthusiastic religion of nature... from realism to optimism... from traditional doctrines of literary imitation to conceptions of the naive and original... to dreams of the strange, the beautiful and the ideal... 15

This was a period of upheaval in social, political and philosophical thought in Europe. Rousseau preached the doctrine of nature, Voltaire publicised the significance of liberty, Herder presented the theory of life as an organic whole based on laws and Kant described the authority and the integrity of the individual mind. The Augustan ideals now appeared superficial to the poets and as they interpreted these ideas, a cult of Romanticism gradually evolved and came to the forefront of English Literature with

15

the publication of Lyrical Ballads by Wordsworth and Coleridge in 1798.

The new stream incorporated a reorientation of the English mind and a reinterpretation of the classics with special significance attached to mythology. The ideals and spirit of ancient Greece served as a renewed source of inspiration. The Greek philosophers had been aware of the unity of being, the ancient Athenian state had practised political freedom. Hellenic art represented beauty that did not adhere to rules, and mythology was a manifestation of the strength of the human imagination.

By its very nature and genesis the Romantic Movement was myth-oriented. It subsisted on the myth of a golden past and the noble savage. From myth to mythology is a natural corollary. Rational thinking gave way to individual response. Instinct, intuition, association were used for understanding the world and life. Wisdom and moral sense were no longer guided by the individual's response to the environment around him. Interest in ghost stories, legends, dreams and mythology was revived. The mythological imagination was reborn. Mythology gained in stature because it defined association of the golden past with the present. The universe, according to the Romantics, was alive and vital

and perpetually subject to change. The society before the poet was ugly and corrupt. The artist with his sharpened imaginative and creative faculties had to reform it. The days of the golden past and its noble savage could not be recaptured because man had progressed too far in the scale of evolution to go back to the state of perfect innocence. It was the job of the poet to bring about a union of the Apollonian and the Faustian creeds,¹⁶ and to create a faith that would be acceptable to all.

Thus, literature now became a philosophical and exploratory venture. The deepened layers of experience made the subject matter of the poet more complex and mythology served as a suitable vehicle of communication. The search for the noble savage (the ideal man of primitive society) and for the natural society from which the rational, modern, urban had expelled himself, led the poets to the very heart of mythology. In order to recreate the atmosphere of the Golden Age, which they felt would provide clues for reforming the corrupt modern world, they reinterpreted mythology, thus giving it a symbolic significance. Mythology, so far, had served only as an allegorical medium. Now, it acquired new dimensions and challenges. The concepts and the quest for sublimity rendered in the second half of the eighteenth

17

century also contributed to it. Translations of classical myths, fables, and legends had enhanced the people's awareness of pagan and non-Christian legacy and provide a framework for their reinterpretation. Biblical High Criticism promoted anagogic and symbolic interpretation of the supernatural and mystical concepts. Interpreted within this framework mythology revealed and defined subtle, complicated and tantalizing emotional situations. The abstractions served as the metaphor and the true meaning which lay beyond the apparent implication had weight and depth. A number of poets employed mythology in their works. However the results were widely disparate.

To use mythology in poetry during this period was also treated as a mark of progressive thinking or at least of detachment from the state religion. The Church reacted strongly to this rather pagan trend. Comprehensive works on each of the three mythological groups viz Greek Oriental and Celtic were produced by Clergymen in an attempt to prove that paganism was later than Judaism and a corruption of it. However, these works were condemned by the then powerful journal The Edinburgh Review. Mythology was treated as a subject of great controversy and satire. From the 1790s to 1812 the journal carried several articles on mythology.

The journal, obviously, exercised influence over the literary temper of the day and through its controversies served as the formal source of inspiration to many poets.

Among the first generation of Romantic poets, Coleridge did not use mythology proper in his poems. However, his views on the subject shed important light on the use of mythology by the later Romantics. He describes Greek mythology as --

...fundamentally allegorical and typical of the powers and functions of nature, but subsequently mixed up with with a deification of great men and hero worship. 17

Unlike the other Romantics, Coleridge was not instinctively 'Pagan'. The Greek religion according to him was in opposition to the basic Christian ideals. He was influenced by the exponents of German Romanticism and these views were common in it.

However, as a poet, Coleridge exhibited a deep understanding of sensuous and philosophic beauty. Even though he did not realize it, the fascinating and enigmatic images of Kubla Khan and the psychic rebirth of the mariner in The Ancient Mariner make him a forerunner of the later intensely mythopoeic poets. This is also suggested

in his translation of Schiller's Wollenstein when he enlarges the original with the following lines --

The intelligible forms of
 ancient poets,
 The fair humanities of old
 religion,
 The Power, the Beauty, and
 the Majesty,
 That had their haunts in dale,
 or piny mountain
 Or forest by slow stream, or
 pebbly spring,
 Or chasms and wat'ry depths;
 all these have vanished
 They live no longer in the
 faith of reason.
 But still the heart doth
 need a language, still
 Doth the old instinct bring
 back the old names.

(Act II, Scene IV)

William Wordsworth is a poet of nature and the natural man. The Prelude is his poetic autobiography. The poet portrays Nature as a moral and spiritual presence that guides and moulds his mind like a mysterious and profound teacher --

... underneath the
 pleasant brows
 Of cool Lucretilis, where
 the pipe was heard,
 Of Pan, Invisible God,

(Bk VIII, ll. 181-63)

His university education had made him familiar with Roman history and Roman philosophy. His knowledge of the Roman Stoics, particularly Seneca, served to strengthen his belief in the unity of God, man and the external world. The stoics believes that man is a part of the physical world which is a manifestation of God. The philosophy is reflected repeatedly in Wordsworth's poetry specifically in terms of the grandeur of nature --

And I have felt
 A presence that disturbs me
 with the joy
 Of elevated thoughts; a
 sense sublime
 Of something far more
 deeply interfused,
 Whose dwelling is the
 light of setting suns,
 And the round ocean and
 the living air,
 And the blue sky, and in
 the mind of man
 A motion and a spirit,
 that impels
 All thinking things, all
 objects of all thoughts.
 And rolls through all things.

(Lines composed A Few Miles above
 Tintern Abbey, ll. 93-102)

In the sonnet entitled 'The World is Too Much With Us', Wordsworth presents the 'Pagan' as a symbol of the ideal beauty and harmony of Hellenic life --

Great God ! I'd rather be
A Pagan suckled in a creed
 outworn;
So might I, standing on this
 pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make
 me less forlorn;
Have sight of Proteus rising
 from the sea;
Or hear old Triton blow his
 wreathed horn.

(ll. 9-14)

In The Excursion (Bk. IV) Wordsworth mentions the myths of Prometheus and Tantalus as fictions in form but as testimonies of eternal truths in substance. He defends mythology as the language of poetic idealism and imagination. The rustic Greek who was ignorant and superstitious lived close to the spirit of nature and received sustenance from his intimate communion with the divinities, of the sun, moon, wood and stream.

The passage on the 'unenlightened swains of pagan Greece' describes their myth-making faculty. According to the poet, they peopled the Heavens and the Earth with beautiful deities ranging from Apollo 'A beardless Youth, who touched a golden lute' and Diana 'a beaming Goddess with her Nymphs' to lesser divinities like Pan 'The simple Shepherd's awe-inspiring God !' This passage, naturally, appealed to Keats. He absorbed it fully and echoes of it

can be discerned in his own poetry, especially in Hyperion.

Another work by Wordsworth 'Laodamia' contains a beautiful picture of Elysium --

Of all that is most
 beauteous imaged there
 In happier beauty,
 more pellucid streams,
 An ample ether, a
 diviner air,
 And fields invested
 with purpleal gleams;

(ll. 103-106)

Wordsworth's use of classical allusions suggests that myths, for him, were testimonies of the invisible presence he believed in. It reiterates his faith in the imagination and in the natural religion. According to Douglas Bush, in Wordsworth's old age, his visionary gleam had fled, and he was 'a lost leader'.¹⁸ However, Wordsworth's major contribution was that he left behind for the younger generation, particularly for Keats, a rich, noble and poetic conception of pagan mythology.

Byron belongs to the second generation of the British Romantic poets. He is among those English men who actually participated in the stirrings of Greek national consciousness. The Greeks list him as a champion of

modern Greece. Many leading Greek poets like Dionysius Solomos, with his 'On the Death of Lord Byron' and Andreas Kalvos with his ode 'To the British Muse' have paid tribute to Byron in verse.

As a poet Byron could not help fusing together the antique Greek sentiments with modern Greek ambitions. The past glories of the nation meant that the modern Greeks should be capable of attaining freedom now --

Ancient of days ! august
 Athena ! where,
 Where are thy men of might ?
 Thy grand in soul ?
 Gone -- Glimmering through the
 dreams of things that were
 First in the race that led to
 Glory's goal,
 They won, and pass'd away : is
 this the whole ?
 A schoolboy's tale, the wonder
 of an hour !

(Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,
 Canto II, Stz. 11)

Though Byron went to Harrow and Cambridge, he made little use of the opportunities there to study the classical languages. However, with his remarkably retentive mind, he managed to imbibe much of the classics. He claimed that he was so fascinated by Prometheus Bound that it had influenced almost everything he had written.

Sir Walter Scott once commented on Byron --

'Lord Byron was also a traveller, a man whose ideas were fired by having seen in distant scenes of difficulty and danger, the places whose very names are recorded in our bosoms as the shrines of ancient poetry'. 19

Byron translated his experiences into vigorous poetry --

Fair Greece ! sad relic of
 departed worth !
 Immortal, though no more,
 though fallen great !
 Who now shall lead thy
 scattered children forth,
 And long accustom'd
 bondage uncreate ?

(Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,
 Canto II, Stz. XXXIII)

While Byron was in Greece, Lord Elgin removed some of the statuary from the crumbling Greek monuments and had them shipped to London. Byron denounced him violently --

Let Aberdeen and Elgin
 still pursue
 The shade of fame through
 regions of Virtue
 Waste useless thousands on
 their Phidian freaks,
 Misshapen monuments and
 maimed antiques;
 And make their grand Saloons
 a general mart
 For all the mutilated
 blocks of art.

(English Bards and Scotch Reviewers,
 ll. 1027-32)

In The Siege of Corinth Byron gives a moving account of the influence of his surroundings on a modern Greek who is sensitive to the history of the nation and conscious of the spirits of the great warriors of the past who live on--

The very gale their names
 seemed sighing;
The waters murmured of
 their name;
The woods are peopled with
 their fame.

(Stz. XV, ll. 407-410)

Mythology, for Byron, was a tool for the expression of thoughts that were essentially his own, for he was rooted in reality, in the present. This makes him different from Keats who was aware of another permanence. While recreating the mythology of ancient Greece, Keats succeeded in establishing its relevance to any age. Infact Byron wrote about him --

(Keats) without Greek
Contrived to talk about the
 Gods of late,
Much as they might have been
 supposed to speak,

(Don Juan, Canto XI, Stz. LX)

Shelley has frequently been described as the solitary intellectual and aesthetic poet of grand cosmological

visions. A voracious scholar, he read and re-read the classics until they became indelibly imprinted on his mind. Phrases, ideas, images, characters, scenes etc. became part of his own thoughts. Homer, Aeschylus, Plato, Theocritus, Aristophanes and Lucan were much more than models to imitate. They were companions in nobility and depth of thought. In the preface to Hellas, the poet wrote --

We are all Greeks. Our laws, our literature, our religion, our arts have their roots in Greece. But for Greece -- Rome, the instructor, the conqueror, or the metropolis of our ancestors, would have spread no illumination with her arms, and we might still have been savages and idolaters. 20

Shelley was an atheist. In Queen Mab he denounced religion and commented thus on mythology --

'Though taintest all thou look'st
upon ! -- the stars,
Which on thy cradle beamed so
brightly sweet,
Were gods to the distempered
playfulness
Of thy untutored infancy; the
trees,
The grass, the clouds, the
mountains, and the sea,
All living things that walk,
swim, creep, or fly,
Were gods: the sun had homage,
and the moon
Her worshipper.

(Section VI, ll. 72-79)

Shelley's reinterpretation of mythology is much more subjective than that of the Renaissance poets. In Adonais, he uses the myth of Adonais and Venus to create a lament for the untimely death of Keats. His gift for picture making leads to a fresh, vital and decorative myth-making aptitude. Instead of describing Keats as an Arcadian shepherd, Shelley says --

...the quick Dreams....
Who were his flocks, whom near
 the living streams
Of his young spirit he fed.

(Stz. IX, ll. 73-76)

Shelley wrote a group of mythological lyrics in 1820 viz 'Arethusa', 'The Cloud', 'The Hymn to Apollo' and 'Hymn of Pan'. Shelley's hymn is different from Keats's rather mystical rendering of the same subject. Shelley's poem has a rather allegorical twist that may represent the disillusion of the idealist.

In The Witch of Atlas Shelley mythologizes rather purposefully. The ideal woman, the cave, the veil, the boat, the stream are given a metaphysical significance in relation to the many-faceted theme of beauty, love and imagination. The witch lives on Atlas' mountain. She is the daughter of the sun, the god of poetry. The cave is

the soul within which are visions of love, thought-stirring odours and life giving liquors. There are also some scrolls 'the works of some Saturnian Archimage' that guide men on how they may recreate the golden age of innocence.

Prometheus Unbound presents Prometheus as the ideal and imaginative man and Jupiter as the evil and tyrannical man. The Earth is the corrupt stage of superstition and suffering. The play concludes with the dethronement of Jupiter and victory of love in the soul of Prometheus and the energies of the world being directed to the good of man. Prometheus is set up as a Christ figure and can be sentimentalized.

Shelley, along with Keats, can be said to have established the mythological genre in the nineteenth century. Shelley's individual contribution, however, lies in the reinterpretation of the older mythic patterns into new iconoclastic and symbolic systems. Unlike Keats, Shelley does not believe in the exclusive power of mythologizing. His mythic patterns represent his search for the forms they can change into or pass beyond.

Lesser Romantic poets like Southey (The Luba the Destroyer, The Curse of Kehama) Hunt (The Nymphs, Hero

and Leander, The Story of Rimini) Peacock (Rhododaphne)
 Hartley Coleridge (The Vale of Tempe, Diana and Endymion)
 Mrs. Tighe (Psyche) and Lord Thurlow (Adriane Angelica)
 also employed mythology in their works.

Leigh Hunt belonged to Keats's circle of friends and shared with him his leanings towards sensuousness, romance and mythologizing. Hunt too, read Keats's boyhood favorites viz Lempriere's Classical Dictionary, Andrew Tooke's Pantheon and Spence's Polymetis.

In his preface to The Story of Rimini he wrote --

...the Grecian mythology... requires more than mere scholarship to understand -- as the elevation of the external world and of accomplished humanity to the highest pitch of the graceful, and as embodied essences of all the grand and lovely qualities of nature. 21

Even though Hunt had a clear perception of the aesthetic and spiritual significance of mythology he lacked the sensitive insight and psychological depth of Keats and Shelley and could never aspire to similar poetic pinnacles. His mythology contains no explicit symbolic pattern. His only poetic achievement is in terms of visual descriptions.

Thomas Love Peacock treats the philosophy and religion of remote pagan culture in his works. His chief

fascination lay in magic, mystery and beauty. In Rhოდodaphne he borrows from a number of myths and old fables such as the Apuleian version of the story of Psyche in which a god builds a supernatural palace in order to make love to a mortal. Other stories are present, too, and the link between them is their evocation of the natural cycle of the year, summer and winter, or of the daylight and the darkness. The two heroines of the poem represent the two faces of Proserpina who is both the daughter of Ceres and the wife of Pluto. The poem's hero is Orpheus who visits the underworld to rescue Eurydice and she is also his Muse. This configuration of myths is also present in the works of Byron and Keats. However, in spite of such similarities, Peacock is ranked as a lesser poet. His problem was that as a result of intellectual cross-pressures he could not fully reconcile myth with poetry. His use of mythology is muted and half-hearted.

The lesser poets fostered the growth of Romantic Hellenism. The mushroom growth of their mythopoeic works proved that the genre established by Shelley and Keats had struck deep roots in the British soil and the mythological impulse reasserted itself in a remarkably conspicuous and creative fashion.

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CHAPTER II

The Quest for the 'Known Unknown'
Endymion Bks. I & II

I

A thing of beauty is a joy
 for ever :
 Its loveliness increases;
 it will never
 Pass into nothingness;....1

(I, ll. 1-3)

Keats's long poem Endymion represents a quest. Endymion, the mythic hero, seeks the ultimate 'thing of beauty' symbolized in this context by the moon. Keats, the poet, seeks 'poetical fame'. In a letter to Bailey, dated 8 October 1817, he wrote --

As to what you say about my being a
 Poet, I can retu[r]n no answer but by
 saying that the high Idea I have of Poetical
 fame makes me think I see it towering to (sic)
 high above me. At any rate I have no (wi)
 right to talk until Endymion is finished --
 it will be a test, a trial of my Powers of
 Imagination and chiefly of my invention.... 2

Keats's initial conception of Endymion was as a test of his powers of invention. It was visualized as a complex and skill-oriented task that would ultimately prove his validity as a true poet. Keats selected the Greek myth of Endymion and Cynthia as a subject for this self-imposed challenge.

Keats did not have any knowledge of Greek. Works of Classical reference read in school had familiarized him with Greek mythology early in life. His constant favourites were Lempriere's Classical Dictionary, Andrew Tooke's Pantheon and Spence's Polymetis. Later, classical allusions encountered in his reading of Shakespeare, Spenser, Marlowe and Fletcher and other Elizabethans added to his knowledge. The public exhibition of the Elgin Marbles also contributed to his growing enthusiasm.

Endymion marks the beginning of the poet's quest for a place in the 'Temple of Fame'. In the Preface to the poem Keats wrote --

I hope I have not too late in the day touched
the beautiful mythology of Greece and dulled
its brightness : for I wish to try once more
before I bid it farewell. 3

The observation 'too late in the day' conveys the typically Romantic sense of loss at the decay of the ideal world. In a nostalgic vein, the poet desires a beginning which would not involve a break from the past but a return to it. He longs to restore the sanctity and the charm of the ancient fictions so that they can once again serve as the inexhaustible sources of the most refined pleasures. Endymion, thus, is a strategic move where the poet plans to

create '4000 lines' from 'one bare circumstance' and 'fill them with Poetry'.⁴ And poetry should come as 'naturally as the Leaves to a tree'.⁵ This axiom can be identified as the Romantic principle of natural inspiration and originality. There is also an awareness that the poet must fabricate a new mythology from the existing 'one bare circumstance'.

In a letter to his sister Fanny, Keats outlined this 'one bare circumstance' --

Many years ago there was a young handsome Shepherd who fed his flocks on a Mountain's side called Latmus -- he was a very contemplative sort of a Person and lived solitary (sic) among the trees and Plains little thinking -- that such a beautiful Creature as the Moon was growing mad in love with him -- However, so it was, and when he was asleep on the Grass, She used to come down from heaven and admire him excessively from (sic) a long time; and at last could not refrain from carrying (sic) him away in her arms to the top of that high Mountain Latmus while he was dreaming. 6

Keats's intention from the outset seems to have been to reshape and develop the myth to suit his own mythic vision. He outlines this intention in an earlier poem 'I Stood Tip-Toe' which is treated by some critics as a discarded fragment of Endymion. In this poem, Keats traces the origin of poetry and mythology --

For what has made the sage
 or poet write ?
 But the fair paradise of
 Nature's light.

(ll. 125-26)

The poet goes on to describe 'The fair paradise' as 'a forest wide' full of 'flowers wild and sweet' exposing visions of mythical lovers like Cupid and Psyche, Pan and Syrinx, Echo and Narcissus, and also Endymion and Cynthia. Keats appears to be theorizing that myths and legends originated in imaginative response of the 'savage and poet' to the beauties of nature. All these myths are basically love themes and they record the ordeals and sacrifices necessary for achieving fulfilment of true love.

The moon is hailed as the 'Maker of sweet poets' and 'Closer of lovely eyes to lovely dreams'. The moon, hence, becomes the metaphor for poetic inspiration, imagination, creativity and beauty. Her generative influence is communicated to Endymion who symbolizes the ideal poet--

He was a poet, sure a lover too,
 Who stood on Latmos' top, what
 time there blew
 Soft breezes from the myrtle
 vale below,
 And brought in faintness solemn,
 sweet and slow
 A hymn from Dian's temple, while
 upswelling,

The incense went to her own
 starry dwelling.
 But though her face was clear
 as infant's eyes,
 Though she stood smiling
 o'er the sacrifice,
 The poet wept at her so
 piteous fate,
 Wept that such beauty should
 be desolate.
 So in fine wrath some golden
 sounds he won,
 And gave meek Cynthia her
 Endymion.

(11. 193-204)

This passage, significantly contains the embryo of Endymion. It is suggestive of the layers of meaning the poet was going to invest in the myth and also of the substratum of the autobiographical element where the poet himself would merge with Endymion. Keats sees this union as an expression of happiness, health and love. He rated these blessings highly since his own life had denied them to him.

Cynthia, in Greek mythology, is identified with Artemis, Apollo's sister. Apollo is the god of the sun, poetry, eloquence and prophecy. Artemis has a triple role, that of the moon goddess, of a huntress equipped with the power of sending the plague to the mortals, and the benefactor who can provide the cure for the plague. Keats's Cynthia adopts her brother's attributes and appears as

the female benefactor of poets. Keats probably utilized this technique to keep alive the technique of his earlier poetry where Apollo was the inspiring deity. The shift is suitable because by now Keats had clearly begun to treat poetry as a woman and the poet as her lover.

The myth of Endymion and Cynthia, because of its associations with Apollo and its theme of eternal youth, beauty and love, held immense appeal for the young poet. Endymion's arduous journey and ultimate immortalization reflect Keats's deeper yearnings to be immortalized as a poet. Endymion, the seeker, is also the sought for. Cynthia, the female counterpart of Apollo, desires the union as desperately as Endymion himself. Infact, through mysterious and mystic means, she guides him all the way to their pre-destined wedding. This could be symbolic of Keats's desire to be guided by Apollo to the heights of poetical fame. This craving to be accepted as a true poet adds the element of Narcissism to the original myth.

In Endymion Keats wanted to give his readers

'...a little Region to wander in where they may pick and choose, and in which the images are so numerous that many are forgotten and found a new in a second Reading'. 6

All great poets, according to him, wrote long poems.

Spencer's long works had impressed Keats greatly. The poetic mazes of Epithalamion and The Fairy Queen offered him fresh insights in every subsequent reading and that is how he wanted to model his own poetry.

Keats dedicated the poem to the memory of Thomas Chatterton and in justification of it he stated --

Should anyone call my dedication to
Chatterton affected I answer as followeth:
Were I dead, Sir, I should like a book
dedicated to me -- 7

Keats's sharpened senses could preclude the shortened span of his life. The premonition of death is strong in these extracts and also in the empathy with Chatterton. This is, also, perhaps the reason for his 'feverish haste' to establish his reputation as a true poet.

Endymion was published in April 1818. Unfortunately, contemporary reaction was rather hostile as they failed to perceive the profound mythic insight of the young poet. Blackwood's Magazine and Quarterly Review, two of the leading periodicals of the day reviewed it adversely. Blackwood's criticism was painfully insulting --

It is a better and a wiser thing to be a
starved apothecary than a starved poet, so
back to the shop, Mr. John, back to the
"plasters, pills and ointment boxes". 8

'Quarterly Review dismissed Keats as 'a copyist of Mr. Hunt'.⁹ It seems that the hostile attitude of the critics did not make Keats lose his equanimity. This can be inferred from the following extract from one of his letters of the same period --

Praise or blame has but a momentary effect on the man whose love of beauty in the abstract makes him a severe critic of his own Works.... The Genius of Poetry must work out its own salvation in a man : It cannot be matured by law & precept, but by sensation & watchfulness in itself -- That which is creative must create itself-- 10

This passage also provides, in a nutshell, Keats's concept of a genuine artist.

In a letter to his publisher, John Taylor, Keats says --

The whole thing must I think have appeared to you, Who are a consequitive Man as a thing almost of mere words -- but I assure you that when I wrote it, it was a regular stepping of the Imagination towards a Truth. 11

The mazes and intricacies of the long poem have been condemned for having nothing tangible, in them. However, to the poet himself, it seems to symbolize, at a level, a mythic, upward ascent towards a 'truth'. It is an exploration of his profound sensitiveness to the Greek spirit as

opposed to rigid forms of antiquity. The importance of Endymion lies in the part it plays in the general development of the poet's mythic vision rather than in its intrinsic merits.

II

The opening lines of the poem describe a green bower characterized by vegetational abundance. In the ancient agricultural rituals which enact the myth of the dying and resurrected vegetation god, the bower symbolizes the seed-stage. This bower offers the poet sleep, dreams and health away from 'despondence' and 'gloomy days'. This ethereal and secure abode is also symbolic of the womb. Here, the poet will continue to sleep, until 'Some shape of beauty moves away the pall'.

This 'shape of beauty' is suggestive of a woman. Graves traces the foundations of Greek mythology to the many-titled Mother Goddess. Ancient Europe, according to him, had no gods. The concept of fatherhood did not exist in the ancient religious system until the coming of the Aryans. The Great Goddess was immortal, changeless and omnipotent and motherhood was her prime attribute. The hearth was her social symbol and the sun and the moon were

her celestial symbols. She was also linked to the seasons. In spring she was a maiden and gave birth to new buds and leaves, in summer she was a nymph and bore fruit and in the winter she was a crone who had ceased to bear.¹²

To make a beginning, the poet must return to the ritualistic state of vegetative innocence viz the seed-state and then after resurrection, he must follow the calendrical cycle of change viz. birth, ripening and death of vegetation in order to begin, develop and complete 'the story of Endymion' --

So I will begin....
 Now while the early budders
 are just new,
 ... and as the year
 Grows lush in juicy stalks,
 I'll smoothly steer
 My little boat....
 ... but let Autumn bold...
 Be all about me when I
 make an end.

(I. ll. 39-55)

The poem begins with a spring-rite for the nature-good Pan, then follows a pattern of productiveness expressed in Endymion's various encounters with Cynthia and in its conclusion contains an autumnal picture of Endymion's ritualistic death in a dying forest before launching a new

seasonal cycle initiated by the wedding of Endymion and Cynthia.

Keats draws a catalogue of natural bounties, trees, sheep, daffodils, rills, musk-rose etc. to maintain the atmosphere of fertility, creativity and inspiration generated by the green bower. He then proceeds to describe the 'sides of Latmos'. The sprawling forest full of lush foliage, fed by the 'moist earth' creates an image of plenitude. This is the home of Pan, the god of universal nature and erotic charms of the Arcadian fertility rites. He is the son of Hermes, the god of sleep and dreams, and is associated with woodland jollity, herds and flocks.

The dream-like description of the marble altar and procession create an image of incalculable age and the reader is skilfully transported into the timeless pagan world. This 'dream' or trance-like quality is characteristic of Keats's creative process, more significantly and consciously defined in his later poetry.

The poet recollects the 'Vales of Thessaly'. Apollo, at one stage, had incurred the wrath of Zeus and had been sentenced to one year's hard labour in the sheep folds of king Admetus. Now the poet compares the

procession to the shepherd bands who 'Sat listening round Apollo's pipe'. He recreates a vision of the primeval world where the first duty of the individual was simply to play his given role i.e. to be born, to work for his livelihood, and to die. Into this simple and unassuming society, the poet introduces his hero. From the 'multitude' the focus is now shifted to Endymion. 'The chieftain King' follows the throng. Lempriere claims --

Some suppose that there were two of that name, the son of the king of Elis and the Shepherd or astronomer of Caria. 13

Keats combines the two. The description of Endymion's chariot drawn by dapple-brown steeds is based on the description of the coming of Apollo to the Earth. Apollo is usually presented as driving the brilliant and blazing chariot of the sun. His arrival was heralded by the songs of the spring sung by the birds. Endymion's arrival is proclaimed by 'ditties' of the 'Multitude' that raised their voice to the clouds. In appearance, Endymion is like Ganymede, the son of King Tros who, being the most beautiful of the mortals, was selected by the gods to be Zeus's cup-bearer. Zeus fell in love with him, and disguising himself in eagle's feathers, raped him. Later on, in compensation, Ganymede was given the gift of immortality.

Ganymede's story offers an archetypal precedence to the experiences of Endymion. Endymion, too, was listed as one of the most beautiful mortals and was finally to achieve immortality.

Continuing the description the poet says that Endymion from a distance looked like 'One who dreamed/Of idleness in groves Elysian'. Elysium, being the place where those favoured by the gods enjoy a full and blessed life after death, represents total happiness. However, Endymion when seen at close quarters exhibits 'A lurking trouble in his nether lip'. His expression evokes depressing images 'Of yellow leaves, of owlet's cry,/of logs piled solemnly'. These are the emblems of winter and invoke an atmosphere of stagnation and decay. The 'logs piled solemnly' suggest the funeral rites of Oriental mythologies. The poet takes pains to communicate the significance of Endymion's recent experiences to the reader. Endymion has seen visions of perfect happiness and has suffered deeply with the realization that they were simply dreams.

In order to give the 'one bare circumstance' the status of a mythos or plot, Keats constantly weaves smaller myths into the fabric of the major one. Myths that are

archetypes of the quest of human desire and endeavour and the destinies of similar adventurers are used to inspire the hero in the course of his journey. This repetition of experiences and acts creates a talismanic energy that enhances the spirit of adventure and also helps to strengthen the resolution of the poet-hero to continue on his way.

The poet digresses for a while to describe the sacrifice to Pan. A venerable priest leads the procession to a marble altar. He, then, performs the rituals of pouring a libation on the Earth and making an offering of the first fruits. This is followed by the chanting of a hymn to Pan. The hymn evokes the charm and the mystery of the vegetational cycle --

O thou, whose mighty palace
 roof doth hang
 From jagged trunks, and
 over shadoweth
 Eternal whispers, glooms,
 the birth, life, death
 Of unseen flowers in heavy
 peacefulness;...

(I, ll. 232-35)

The congregation praises him for giving them a bountiful harvest --

...O thou, to whom
 Broad leaved fig trees even
 now foredom

Their ripened fruitage....
 ...Our village leas
 Their fairest blossomed beans
 and popped corn;...
 ...Yea, the fresh budding year
 All its completions --

(I, ll. 251-60)

Apart from being the benefactor, he is also the protector--

 ...breather round our farms
 To keep off mildews, and all
 weather harms;
 Strange ministrant of undescribed
 sounds
 That come a swooning over hollow
 grounds,...

(I. ll. 283-86)

His beneficence is counterpoised by a terrifying aspect.
 He is also the 'Dread opener of the mysterious doors/
 Leading to universal knowledge'. The frightened congrega-
 tion fervently prays to him to remain "unknown" --

A firmament reflected in a sea;
 An element filling the space
 between;
 An unknown -- but no more !

(I. ll. 300-302)

Endymion, the prince, the most beautiful and brave,
 has been receiving mysterious summons persuading him to
 cross the 'mysterious doors'. The image of the doors
 finds a parallel in a letter that Keats wrote to Reynolds

on May 3, 1818 --

This Chamber of Maiden Thought becomes
gradually darken'd and the same time on
all sides of it many doors are set open. 14

The hymn acquires autobiographical significance as the poet loses himself among the shepherds of Latmos. This extinction of the self, through the poet's merging with the Shepherds, is obviously of a mystical kind. Keats's mythopoeic attitudes find expression in these generative rites.

After the chanting of the chorus is over, the young Shepherds and maids dance to the music of the pipe. To the poet the whole scene appears as one from the mythic Golden Age 'High genitors, unconscious did they cull/Time's sweet first-fruits'. Keats's nostalgia for the simple generation, untainted ecstasy of the Eden of innocence results in this magical portrayal.

When tired of dancing, some of the shepherds sit down on the turf to listen to stories while others watch the 'quoit-pitchers' and thus evoke memories of long ago--

Of Hyacinthus, when the
 cruel breath
Of Zephyr slew him -
 Zephyr penitent,
Who now are, ere Phoebus
 mounts the firmament,

Fondles the flower amid
the sobbing rain.

(I. ll. 327-31)

Hyacinthus was accidentally killed while playing a game of quoits with Apollo. Lempriere described Zephyr as the killer. Zephyr's lament, however, is Keats's own contribution. The poet proceeds to talk about others who watched the archers, and thought of Niobe, the unhappy mother, and of the journey of the Argonauts in search of the Golden Fleece. Thus Keats depicts the mind of the ancient people filled with thoughts of love, sacrifice and bravery. Those who sat in the 'Sober ring' with Endymion and the venerable priest 'discussed upon the fragile bar/That keeps us from our homes ethereal'. The use of the pronouns 'us' and 'our' reinforces the poet's identification with the men of Latmos and also suggests that he shares with them their visions of the 'rule of Fate' and of Elysium and its 'anticipated bliss'. The intuitive wisdom of these shepherds to sift the illusory from reality and their acknowledgement of the undoubted powers of the creator, shed light on Keats's mystical inclinations.

As the discussion proceeds, Endymion, unable to overcome 'the cankering venom of his secret grief', swoons. In all the passages dealing with love-episodes, Endymion

either falls asleep, swoons or 'dies'. This is the typically Romantic concept of 'love-death'. It held a special appeal for Keats who was the most sensuous poet among the Romantics. The fierce passion of the hero's love paralyses him and he is conscious only of a luxurious sensuality that flows through his limbs. This 'death' is actually a living state where the fertile ground has been prepared for the creative process, either mental or physical.¹⁵ This experience finds very close correspondence in the myth of the dying god. Thus, it is only natural for Keats to use the vegetational cycle as the ground myth for the long poem.

When Endymion swoons, his sister Peona comes to his assistance. Keats probably derives her name from Peon, the name of the physician to the gods. Peona combines the soothing and comforting qualities of the mother-figure with the healing powers of the physician. She leads Endymion to another regenerative green recess and lays him down to sleep. The poet now invokes 'magic sleep' as the 'Great Key-/To golden palaces'.

When Endymion wakes, Peona persuades him to confide in her as she is afraid that he has 'Sinned in aught/offensive' to the heavenly powers. She recollects the occasion when Actaeon was turned into a stag and torn to piece by his

own hounds because he had accidentally seen Diana bathing. Diana represents the chaste aspect of the Moon-goddess. Intuitively, Peona senses Endymion's entanglement with the Moon.

The Moon is a very old and venerable goddess. At a stage, Great Goddess split into three -- the maiden, the nymph and the crone -- symbolizing the three aspects of moon, the new, the full and the waning. She represents 'the spirit of essential Beauty', the 'Oldest trees' are holy to her; she can make dead things live 'kissing dead things to life', she manipulates the tides of the Ocean, and the beasts and birds and the creatures of the sea are under her control. She is a goddess of many names such as Diana, Proserpine, Hecate, Isis, Cybele, Ceres, Rhea, Ops, and Cynthia.

In Keats's poem she appears in three forms viz. her celestial form (in which Endymion recognizes her) and as two maidens, one golden haired and the other black-haired in which he does not recognize her. The triple appearance causes the main complications of the plot. Endymion's progress in love can be paralleled to the essentially cyclic career of the fertility god who dies and is reborn over and over again. The Matriarch mates with her son-

consort and then disappears for a time to attend to the agricultural processes. The Matriarch and the Moon and Peona are the three aspects of the one Great Goddess. The ignorance of the mortal hero and the mortal reader lend mystery and irrationality to the atmosphere of the poem.

Endymion, soothed by the intoxicating music of Peona's lute, narrates his dream experiences to her. He starts with a description of his own feats of manliness such as his adventures with the lion and the vulture. After this, he refers to a beautiful 'nook, the very pride of June' where 'I have been used to pass my weary eves'. On one occasion, he has a rather unnerving experience. There is a sudden blossoming of 'a magic bed' full of ditamy and poppies under his feet. 'Ditamy' and 'poppies' are the sacred flowers of Diana. This is the first of a series of love experiences. Endymion falls asleep and dreams of 'The loveliest moon'. The moon is the provider of light and emotional and imaginative nourishment which is so excessive that it dazzles Endymion. The moon disappears behind a cloud and a ravishingly beautiful goddess takes its place. Bewildered, Endymion asks the deities --

Who from Olympus watch our
destinies !
Whence that completed form
of all completeness ?

Whence came that high perfection
of all sweetness ?

(I. 11. 605-7)

The description of Cynthia's golden hair, white neck and the paradise of her lips and eyes and hovering feet leads to a comparison with the 'sea-born Venus'.¹⁶ It is a rich example of Keats's imaginative creativity. Cynthia's incomparable beauty raised him to 'dizzy' heights of rapture 'madly did I kiss -- The wooing arms which held me'. The embracing bodies rested on a bed of flowers. No one disturbed them save a 'peeping Oread'. Oreads are mountain nymphs associated with Diana. Their embrace continued until Endymion's 'Sweet dream/Fell into nothing'.

This pattern of enchantment and awakening to disappointment is recurrent in Keats' poetry. To dwell on the contrast between dream and reality is a dominant Romantic trait. The pattern occurs again in 'Isabella', The Eye of St. Agnes, Lamia and also in the major odes.

Soon Endymion receives a second message from the other world. This time he sees a face in a well. It is 'The same bright face I tasted in my sleep'. The well is situated in a deep hollow near the 'matron temple'. He defines certain childhood associations with the well.

Latona was the mother of Cynthia and Apollo. The reference combines maternal and sisterly associations with erotic associations of the beloved. And finally there are also the Narcissistic associations of the face reflected in water. Endymion, the seeker, is also being sought.

Endymion receives a third communication from a grotto. While wandering around a hillside, Endymion arrives at a grotto which he believes to be the place from which Proserpine, the queen of the underworld, ascends and descends. The communication is as follows --

'Endymion ! The cave is
 secreter
 Than the isle of Delos.
 Echo hence shall stir.
 No sighs but sigh-warm
 kisses, or light noise
 Of thy combing hand, the
 while it travelling cloys
 And trembles through my
 labyrinthine hair.'

(I. 11: 965-69)

Endymion, by now, is completely and feverishly in love with this elusive maiden. He is filled with the energy of love and is ready to set out in quest of her.

Endymion's sister, Peona, being a mortal is unable to grasp the significance of his experience. To her it just

shows a 'poor weakness'. Endymion earnestly defends the experience and says there is 'nothing base' in it because of its intensity and 'higher hope'. Endymion's insistence on the reality of this vision is actually a re-presentation of Keats's well-known theory propounded in his letter to Bailey, written on Nov 22, 1817. There he vehemently asserts --

I am certain of nothing but the holiness
of the Heart's affections and the truth of
Imagination -- What the Imagination seizes
as Beauty must be truth -- whether it
existed before or not -- for I have the same
Idea of all our Passions of Love. They are
all in their sublime creative of essentially
Beauty -- 17

David Pollard discovers a Greek attitude in this passage--

This is a movement of the Passions as the
Greeks understood it. Pathos like its
Latin equivalent, Passio, implies an imposi-
tion from without which happens to a man
who remains passive. 18

Book I concludes in another rude awakening of the hero.

III

Endymion's quest begins in Bk. II. As hero of the mythical quest, he has to explore the Earth, the water, and

the air before he can attain unity with the sought. The descent into the bowels of the Earth represents an archetypal quest-image. The Earth, in the mythologies of agricultural societies, is necessarily envisaged as a woman, as she is the original producer of food. The seed must be buried in the Earth if it is to germinate. According to the myth of fertility, the consort of the Great Goddess couples with her, dies, and is born once again as her son. Instinctively sensitive to mythological relationships, Keats guides Endymion into the "Sparry hollow of the World", thus signifying the rooting process of the seed.

The narrative, in this section, begins with an apostrophe to love. Keats establishes love as a sovereign power which has everlasting value. He says that history is a 'gilded cheat' because it records just the events and ignores the greater dimension of human emotions viz love. Thus the story of the Trojan War is meaningless except for the love story of Troilus and Cressida --

Yet, in our very souls, we
 feel amain
 The close of Troilus and
 Cressid sweet.

(II. 11. 12-13)

The only path worthy of the 'muse' is that of 'love and

poesy'. The poet turns to mythology as the perfect vehicle for the articulation of his philosophy. He set about --

In chafing restlessness...
 ... to uprear
 Love's standards on the
 battlement of song.

(II. 11. 39-41)

The 'Brain-sick shepherd prince' is found 'wandering in uncertain ways' until he is attracted by a bud on a 'wild rose-tree'. He plucks the rose, dips it in the water of a shady spring, the bud magically flowers and releases a golden butterfly with strange characters painted on its wings. The butterfly guides him into a glen, to a splashing fountain near the mouth of a cave. Midst music that flows in from a distant 'holy bark' carrying pilgrims to Delphi, the butterfly is metamorphosed into a nymph who delivers a message of hope --

 ... thou must wander far
 In other regions, past the
 scanty bar
 To mortal steps, before thou
 cans't be ta'en
 From every wasting sigh,
 from every pain,
 Into the gentle bosom of
 thy love.

(II. 11. 123-27)

The butterfly in Greek is called 'psyche' which is also the Greek name of the soul. The rose, traditionally, is the symbol of love. The face in the well and the nymph in the fountain suggest a female or generative aspect of the water-spirit. The complication, obviously, is that Endymion's quest-descent into the underworld is not the traditional descent into the land of the dead, but as part of the regenerative rites of the fertility myth which is being sustained as the ground myth by the poet.

The sudden disappearance of the nymph causes some despair to Endymion. However the regenerative energy of his love helps him to recover. He swears by 'the Orphean lute' that he will not give up but continue steadfastly to search for his 'thrice-seen love'. The reference to the 'Orphean lute' is significant. In Greek mythology, Orpheus was the most famous poet and musician who ever lived. Infact he is treated as the founder of the mystic cult known as Orphism. Apollo gifted Orpheus with a lyre and the muses taught him how to use it. He enchanted the wild beasts and made the rocks move to the sound of his music. When his wife Eurydice died of a snake-bite, he boldly crossed into Tartarus with the intention of bringing her back. With his beautiful music he charmed the ferryman and the Judges

and also suspended the tortures of the damned souls. Persephone allowed him to take Eurydice on the condition that he should not look back. He broke his promise and thus lost her forever. Later, the Maenads tore him to pieces and his head floated down the river still singing. Ultimately it came to rest in a cave where it prophesied day and night until Apollo bade it be silent. The lyre was then taken up to heaven to become one of the constellations.

Orpheus, thus, becomes the metaphor for love, poetry and myth. The Orphic voice is the prophecy of the poet and the Orpheus myth, in its narrative, exposes a method of bridging the worlds of the mortals and the immortals. His journey to Hades brings in the spirit of inquiry and adventure. So far, the myth offers a parallel to the story of Endymion. However, Orpheus lost all as the result of an extremely mortal weakness. Endymion, if he is not to suffer the same fate must transcend mortality. So, he prays to Cynthia (still not aware of her real identity) for help. Almost immediately he feels that 'The bars/That kept my spirit in are burst'.

The experience is so 'dizzy' and 'dazzling' that he once again calls to the goddess for help. His 'maddened stare' 'lifted hands' 'trembling lips' and finally being

'frozen to senseless stone' imply that the process of immortalization or deification has begun. This stationing or freezing as a statue is the base of Keats's imagery of the deification of his heroes. The image of 'marble-men' occurs in the sonnet on the Elgin Marbles, in Hyperion and also in the Ode on a Grecian Urn. The sculptured figures have achieved a kind of immortality through being frozen into stone. To treat statues as 'breathing stones' was a common aesthetic response of the Romantics.

This experience of Endymion finds an archetypal precedence in the story of Niobe. Niobe was so proud of her seven sons and seven daughters that she taunted Leto for having only two children. Leto, in anger, killed all of Niobe's fourteen children leaving her alone to bewail her loss. On the tenth day, Zeus turned her into stone. The torment of being separated from those she loved, resulted in Niobe being frozen into stone. Endymion, too, has experienced the torment of being separated from the one he loved. Using this myth as the image-base, Keats suggests that Endymion, too, was 'frozen to senseless stone'.

To enhance the poignancy of Endymion's feelings, the poet refers to Deucalion and Orion. Deucalion's flood was the result of Zeus's anger. Zeus intended to wipe off the

entire human race. Deucalion and his wife survived in an ark and thus the human species was preserved. For nine days, however, they prayed to Zeus to withdraw the waters. Orion was a giant who was loved by Eos, the dawn. Artemis, out of jealousy, took away his eyesight and blind Orion remained 'hungry for the morn'.

Endymion is told by a voice from the cavern to
'Descend' --

A little lower than the
 chilly sheen
Of icy pinnacles, and
 dipp' dst thine arms
Into the deadening ether
 that still charms
Their marble being; --
 now as deep profound
As those are high, descend !
 He ne'er is crowned
With immortality, who
 fears to follow
Where airy voices lead;
 so through the hollow,
The silent mysteries
 of earth, descend !

(II. ll. 207-214)

The 'airy voice' advises Endymion to treat this descent as an 'ascent' of a pinnacle. Images of ascent and descent are interchangeable in the ancient Greek concept of time which is represented by the an ever-revolving wheel. Endymion's descent is not an escape but a rather

mystical aerial ascent, the journey of achievement, of a newly liberated human spirit, suggested in the earlier line 'the bars/ That kept my spirit in are burst'.

The labyrinth that Endymion enters is hard, gleaming and metallic with fearful, vast caverns and pits. It is symbolic of the human sub-conscious. He meanders through fantastic passageways lighted by sparkling gems. He is so absorbed in their beauties that he fails to notice the 'fiercer wonders' which can only be comprehended by 'The mighty ones who have made eternal day/For Greece and England'. 'Mighty ones' refers to the major poets who are envisioned as living in Elysium and continuing the task of writing imperishable poetry. A note-worthy implication of these lines is that immortalization of Endymion will also be the immortalization of Keats the poet.

Endymion now comes across a temple of Diana. The wonders and beauties of the fascinating subterranean journey had diverted him temporarily from his sorrow. Now, however, the 'habitual self' returns. He remembers his unhappiness and his quest. He addresses a prayer to Diana --

Young goddess, let me see
 my native bowers !
 Deliver me from this
 rapacious deep !
 (II. ll. 331-32)

In answer to his prayers, music guides him to a secret underground bower, luxuriant in vegetation. This is the bower of Adonis. A green bower within the bowels of the Earth is a Keatsian invention. Greenery in all forms, is traditionally the cover for the exterior of the earth. However to sustain the presence of the regenerative Mother throughout the narrative, the poet creates the green bower.

He is admitted by a 'Serene cupid'. In Roman mythology, Cupid is the boy-god of love, son of Venus. But here, Keats's reference is not to the boy-god but an attendant of Venus. The 'feathered lyricist' whispers --

Though from upper day
 Thou art a wanderer, and thy
 presence here
 Might seem unholy, be of
 happy cheer !
 For 'tis the nicest touch
 of human honour
 When some ethereal and
 high-favouring donor
 Present immortal bowers
 to mortal sense --
 And now 'tis done to thee,
 Endymion

(II. ll. 433-39)

The 'ethereal donor' is obviously his dream-love. By following the dictates of the 'airy voice', Endymion has

proved his fidelity in love. Acknowledging this, the goddess rewards him with a prophetic glimpse into actual mythology. This is also the moment of initiation where he will receive a new and positive orientation that will prepare him for the life of a deity.

Adonis is asleep on a silken couch. He, 'Safe in the privacy of this still region' is completing his winter sleep. The path to the bower had led through cold stone caverns. Thus Adonis, too, is 'frozen to senseless stone' and like the dreamy Endymion he, too, is a sleeper.

According to the myth, Venus arose from the foam of the sea, near the coast of the island of Cynthera. She was wafted by the Zephyrs and received on the sea-shore by the seasons, who were daughters of Jupiter and Themis. She was extremely proud of her beauty. But the wife of King Cinyras boasted that her daughter Smyrna was more beautiful than Venus. The goddess avenged this insult by causing Smyrna to fall in love with her own father. Smyrna used to satisfy her desires by using the darkness of the nights as a cover until one day Cinyras discovered her guilty secret. Wild with wrath he chased her with a sword. Smyrna was changed into a myrrh tree. Out of this tree was born Adonis. Venus now fell in love with him and when he was

killed by a boar while hunting, she caused the rose to spring from his blood. Both Venus and Proserpine now claimed him. Jupiter decreed that Adonis should spend part of the year with each. The myth of the sharing of Adonis by Venus and Proserpine indicates the archaic analogy of the two goddesses. This analogy is actually identity, in one ambivalent goddess figure. It is also prophetic of the next series of Endymion's adventures when he is to be shared by two maidens.

Cupid offers a feast to Endymion. The food is delicate and exquisite and evocative of rich mythological associations. The wine evokes memories of Bacchus's associations with Adriane; the cream is 'sweeter than that nurse Amalthea skimmed' for Jupiter, and the pears have been sent by Vertumnus, the Roman god of Spring. The underworld that Endymion visits has constant interaction with the regenerative forces of nature. The luxuriant vegetational abundance indicates the presence of the life-spirit in the underworld. The feast that Endymion is offered is 'ready to melt between an infant's gums'. In the ritual of initiation, in the primeval religions the fertility god received exotic food before copulating with the Great Goddess. This food and love sequence occurs again and

again in Keats's poetry. Food serves as sacrament or 'communion' in the ritual magic that makes the earth provident. Though Adonis is the fertility god, the exotic food is offered to Endymion. The food etherealizes Endymion's senses, and he begins to 'feel immortal'. Now, Venus descends into the bower and Endymion is witness to the 'rebirth' and her union with the 'new-born' lover that is the generative principle of life. With a view to encouraging Endymion, Venus says --

Endymion, one day thou wilt
 be blest.
 So still obey the guiding
 hand that fends
 Thee safely through these
 sweet ends.

(II. ll. 573-75)

Feeling 'assured of happy times' he moves ahead. He discovers that the diamond path ends 'abrupt in middle air'. He prays to Jupiter for help. An eagle appears and carries him to 'A jasmine bower'. The bower is very erotic --

It was a jasmine bower, all
 bestrown with golden mass.
 His every sense had grown
 Ethereal for pleasure :

(II. ll. 670-72)

Following the ritualistic mode of the food and love sequence, this bower is the place where he is destined to encounter his dream-goddess --

Stretching his indolent arms,
 he took - O bliss ! -
 A naked waist : 'Fair Cupid,
 whence is this ?'
 A well-known voice sighed
 'Sweetest, here am I !'
 At which soft ravishment,
 with doting cry
 They trembled to each other.

(II. ll. 712-16)

Their love-making is an extension of the food-image of the bower of Adonis. Endymion 'dreams 'deliciously', tastes her, and 'sips' her 'essence'. Endymion's concern now is to retain these moments of happiness forever --

'O known Unknown from whom
 my being sips
 Such darling essence, wherefore
 may I not
 Be ever in these arms ?

(II. ll. 739-41)

Cynthia tells him that there is an obstacle in the course of their love. She is the goddess of chastity and hence cannot commit adultery. The poet thus makes a rather Christian concession. Consummation of love requires sanctification. A marriage must take place and then they will

have 'an immortality of passion' --

...we will shade
 Ourselves whole summers by
 a river glade,
 And I will tell thee
 stories of the sky,
 And breathe thee whispers
 of its minstrelsy...
 Lispings empyrean will I
 sometimes teach
 Thine honeyed tongue --
 lute breathings, which I gasp
 To have thee understand...

(II. 11. 810-813, 819-21)

The implication is that through his marriage, Endymion will not only be immortalized but will also become an immortal poet. She will be his divine Muse. The reward of fertility will extend to immortal poetry. The golden-haired maiden in this myth of Endymion and Cynthia represents the maiden form of the Great Goddess responsible for the breeding functions. This is a result of Keats's school-boy fixation with 'a fair woman as a pure goddess' that appears in a rather confessional letter of July 1818 --

I am certain I have not a right feeling towards Women.... Is it because they fall so far beneath my Boyish imagination? When I was a Schoolboy I thought a fair Woman a pure Goddess, my mind was a soft nest in which some one of them slept, though she knew it not -- 19

Most of his heroines (Cynthia, Madeline, Isabella) appear as pure and chaste maidens. This is Keats's concept of the perfect woman. Love-making, following the tradition of the fertility rites is a mystery and the initiation should be ceremonial and should take place in the hidden depths of either mythological underworld as in Endymion or in the depth of the dream world as in The Eve of St. Agnes and Lamia. The swoon of Endymion is a mystic death which can be paralleled to the temporary death of Adonis and this is a necessary step for the achievement of an 'immortality of passion'.

After the departure of the goddess, Endymion now 'began to ponder on all his life' and found that 'Essences-once spiritual are like muddy lees' in comparison to the 'magic' of 'excessive love'. Love has helped him to evolve, and to liberate himself from the barriers of mortality.

At this stage, the poet interrupts his narrative to comment on the importance of traditions and on the genesis of mythology. This 'ditty' --

Long ago 'twas told
By a cavern wind unto a
 forest old
And then the forest told
 in it a dream

To a sleeping lake, whose
 cool and level gleam
 A poet caught...
 He sang the story up into
 the air
 Giving it universal freedom.

(II. ll. 830-834, 838-39)

The poet is suggesting that myths embody elemental truths. They bring realization and enlightenment. He defines mythology as 'the tradition of the gusty deep' and finds within it potential for change and deliverance.

This diversion gives Endymion the time to recover from his swoon and to continue on his way once again. Now he enters 'A vaulted dome' that was 'huge and strange'. Midst fog and dusk appears Cybele 'the shadowy queen' seated in a lion drawn chariot. She silently, 'faints away/Into another gloomy arch'. Cybele is the sinister aspect of the Great Goddess. She is the death-in-life goddess. She destroys her consort as the queen-bee destroys the drone. One of her sancturies is a subterranean chamber. This is the malignant version of love-bower. That Cybele passes him by without any communication suggests that he has imbibed the wisdom that archetypal quest heroes imbibe in their underworld descents.

Endymion now encounters Alpheus, a river god and

Notes and References

1. The Poems of John Keats, ed. M. Allot (London, 1970) p. 120. All subsequent citations from Keats's poems are from this edition.
2. The Letters of John Keats (1914-21) Vol. I, ed. Hyder E. Rollins (London, 1958), p. 169.
3. Allot, op.cit., p. 119.
4. Rollins, op.cit., Vol. I, p. 170.
5. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 238.
6. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 154.
7. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 170.
8. Cited by M. Allot, op.cit., p. 756.
9. Cited by Aileen Ward, John Keats, The Making of A Poet (London, 1963), p. 212.
10. Ibid., p. 223.
11. Rollins, op.cit., Vol. I, pp. 373-74.
12. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 218.
13. Robert Graves, The Greek Myths, Vol. I (Edinburgh, 1957), pp. 11-12.
14. Cited by M. Allot, op.cit., p. 127.
15. Rollins, op.cit., Vol. I, p. 281.
16. This idea has been elaborated in Sleep and Poetry.
17. Ian Jack, Keats and the Mirror of Art (Oxford, 1967) p. 154. Ian Jack feels this description is reminiscent of Botticelli's 'Birth of Venus'. However the painting was not known in England during Keats's time. But the similarity in artistic response is noteworthy.

18. Rollins, op.cit., Vol.I, p. 184.
19. David Pollard, The Poetry of Keats - Language & Experience (Sussex, 1984), p. 26.
20. Rollins, op.cit., Vol.I, p. 341.

CHAPTER III

The Cosmic Marriage

Endymion Bks. III & IV

Book III opens with a condemnation of false gods. The poet comments on the small stature of these self-appointed deities who have not 'one tinge of sanctury splendour'. Their 'baaing venities' 'self-applause' and the 'intoxicating tones' of their worshippers force him to ask 'Are than regalities all gilded masks?' The answer follows --

No, there are throned seats
 unscalable
 But by a patient wing, a
 constant spell,
 Or by ethereal things
 that, unconfined,
 Can make a ladder of the
 eternal wind,
 And poise about in cloudy
 thunder-tents
 To watch the abysm-birth
 of elements.
 Aye, 'bove the withering
 of old-lipped Fate
 A thousand Powers keep
 religious state,
 In water, fiery realm,
 and airy bourne,
 And, silent as a consecrated
 urn,
 Hold sphery sessions for
 a seasion due.

(III. 11. 23-33)

The 'throned seats' belong to the true deities. The sanctity of their offices is strictly maintained. Their procedures are as 'silent as a consecrated urn' in

contrast to the 'shouting and belaboured drums' of the false gods. Superior assets like patience and sincerity 'can make a ladder' for the mystical, aerial ascent to the heavenly region above the primal divisions of the cosmos viz. earth, water, air and fire. Endymion's quest through the same primal realms is also a test of his patience and sincerity. In Bk.II Keats had traced the origin of mythology to the elements. Now he, reiterates his faith in the superiority of the mythic vision. The consecrated urn' concretizes, for the poet, the spirit of his mythic vision. The urn is a recurrent image as the relevance of mythology to poetry is a recurrent question. For Keats, mythology embodies the rudiments of poetic magic. It contains in its depths the secret principles of poetic decorum which only the true poet with his instinctive reverence can identify. And when the 'high Poet' comes in contact with the gods --

...benevolence
Shakes hands with our own
 Ceres, every sense
Filling with spiritual
 sweets to plenitude,
As bees gorge full their cells. 1

(III. 11. 37-40)

The consistent presence of the great mother is emphasized. Once again she spreads her generative benevolence of the poet's imagination filling it with 'spiritual sweets'.

opposite shore of Hellespont. He used to swim across to Hero, who directed his course by holding up a lighted torch. While on his wonted amorous sally, on a stormy night, Leander was drowned. Orpheus's journey to the underworld to bring back Eurydice ended in disaster because of his failure to exercise the promised restraint. Pluto, the ruler of the underworld carried away Proserpine, the daughter of Ceres, to be his queen. But Jupiter yielding to her mother's lamentations ordained that she should spend six months of the year on the Earth and the other six months in the underworld. She ultimately became linked with fertility rites.

Now, the moon-goddess, whom the poet refers to as Cynthia --

...hast sent
A moonbeam to the deep,
 deep water-world,
To find Endymion.

(III. ll. 100-103)

Endymion is found on the golden sand of the sea-bed. He 'felt the charm to breathlessness' and experienced a sudden warmth 'of his heart's blood' Sensing Cynthia's presence, he lays his head on a pillow of sea-weed to 'taste' it.

In a letter to Reynolds, Keats describes a similar mystical sensation and associates it with immortality --

This morning Poetry had conquered....
There is an awful warmth about my heart
like a load of immortality. 2

Endymion goes past heaps of oceanic deposits, decayed carcasses, and debris of buried civilizations. He sees a --

...gold vase embossed
With long forgotten story...
... of Saturn's vintage,
 mouldering scrolls
Writ in the tongue of heaven,
 by those souls
Who first were on the earth;
 and sculptures rude
In ponderous stone, developing
 the mood
Of ancient Nox,

(III. 11. 126-33)

Saturn, the leader of the Titans, along with Nox, the goddess of the Night is among the most ancient deities. These two represent the wisdom of age. The gold vase is the recurrent urn and represents the true poet's mythic spirit. Keats, in the above quoted lines, follows the typically Romantic anthropological theory that the early inscriptions, sculptures and monuments were forms of primal history 'writ in the tongue of heaven'. The debris on the sea-floor that Endymion is exploring is symbolic of

the secret essence of ancient wisdom which is one of objectives of his quest. The major objective is the Moon to whom he now apostrophizes.

The passage defines a host of mystic associations with the lunar goddess that prove that the quest is a result of predetermined destiny. Endymion says that she has been a 'presence' in his life ever since he can remember. When a child, he treated her like a sister. In his boyhood, she was his teacher explaining the changes of the calender to him --

In sowing time, ne'er would
 I dibble take,
 Or drop a seed, till thou
 wast wide awake,

(III. ll. 153-54)

The agricultural images are evocative of the fertility rites. This is further enhanced in the next few lines where he describes the Moon as the maiden who, in his youth, enlightened him about art and love. She was 'the sage's pen' 'the poet's harp' and finally 'the charm of women'. By playing the role of both his sister (who in Keats's poetry is interchangeable with the mother) and his beloved, the moon-goddess once again takes on the role of the Great Goddess and Endymion of the fertility god.

Endymion cannot, as yet, recognize the true identity of the golden-haired maiden and feels guilty about betraying his original love. He is now plunged into emotional confusion where he discovers that he loves two maidens. The moon never entirely faded from his heart 'no thy starry sway has been an under passion to this hour'. He desparately prays to the unknown goddess to forgive him for thinking of anyone but her. And immediately overpowered by fresh guilt asks the Moon to pardon him for his unfaithfulness. This state of high confusion and the inability of Endymion to decide where his true allegiance lies is the chief complication of the plot. This complication is furthered in Bk. IV with the appearance of the Indian Maid.

Endymion's meditations are interrupted by an encounter with an old man --

Upon a wedded rock this
 old man sat,
 And his white hair was
 awful, and a mat
 Of weeds were cold beneath
 his cold thin feet,
 And, ample as the largest
 winding-sheet
 And cloak of blue wrapped
 up his aged bones.

(III. 11. 193-97)

This old man is Glaucus. Glaucus and Endymion are 'twin

brothers in this destiny'. Glaucus's appearance at the moment of Endymion's high confusion suggests that he will offer a solution. Glaucus gives Endymion a book and a wand which he had received, in his youth from 'an old man's hand' that came out of the sea. This is an archetypal motif defining a law of succession where the old and hoary yield to the new and beautiful. Keats was to exploit this theme more fully in Hyperion.

The 'old man' has a specific status in Keats's mythological poems. In Lamia the old man appears as the philosopher who forces his way into the palace of sin and exposes the deception of the snake-woman. In The Eve he appears as the pious beadsman who dies when the lovers consummate their love, thus atoning for their sins. In The Fall, he as Saturn, surrenders to Apollo, the immortal poet.

According to the original myth, Glaucus scorned the power of Aphrodite and to insult her, he refused to let his mares breed. Aphrodite complained to Zeus who permitted her to take whatever action she pleased against Glaucus. She led the mares out one night to drink from a well sacred to herself. At the games, the mares bolted, overthrew the chariot and ate Glaucus alive. This myth has

relevance to an aspect of the fertility myth which involved the sacrifice of a royal prince. Once a year, the king pretended to die at sunset. The royal prince was invested with his titles, married to the queen and killed twenty-four hours later by women disguised as horses. This ritual supposedly gave long life to the King and preserved good weather and a bountiful harvest. The Keatsian Glaucus is used as a foil to preserve the more important Endymion.

Like the myth of Alpheus and Arethusa the myth of Glaucus is used by the poet to give humanitarian significance to the quest. It also represents one of the trials that the poetic self must pass through before becoming immortal. Keats expounded the same idea in the following passage in a letter to George --

Do you not see how necessary a World of
Pains and troubles is to school an intelligence
and make it a soul? A place where the heart
must feel and suffer in a thousand different
ways. 3

Glaucus had achieved a form of semi-divinity. Circe, the malignant enchantress, turned him into an old man and cursed him with death at the end of a thousand years. Glaucus informs Endymion that --

...Though thou know 'st
 it not,
 Thou art commissioned to
 this fated spot
 For great enfranchisement.

(III. ll. 297-99)

Endymion has come as the benefactor and deliverer not only of Glaucus but of the drowned lovers of a thousand year span.

Glaucus at one time had, like Endymion, led a simple and peaceful life on the seashore. But led by 'distempered longings' he plunged into the sea like Endymion had plunged into the underworld. Glaucus fell in love with the water-nymph Scylla who teased and worried him --

She fled me swift as sea-bird
 on the wing,
 Round every isle, and point,
 and promontory,
 From where large Hercules
 wound up his story
 Far as the Egyptian Nile.

(III. ll. 404-7)

Hercules was the son of Jupiter and Alcmene, a mortal woman. He was famous for his strength, courage, endurance and the ability to restore happiness to the miserable. Like Endymion and Glaucus, Hercules also belongs to the archetype of mortal heroes who have struggled

against immortal powers. The Keatsian Endymion imbibes some Herculean traits viz. endurance, fortitude and provision of happiness to the miserable.

The poet refers to the end of Hercules's story. On one occasion, Hercules and his wife had to cross a river. Hercules asked a centaur to carry his wife across. The centaur tried to run away with her. Hercules shot an arrow into his heart. As he was dying, the centaur asked Dejanira, Hercules's wife, to keep a portion of his blood and to use it as a charm to preserve the love of her husband. Dejanira soaked her husband's robe in the blood. As soon as the garment became warm on the body of Hercules, a poison penetrated his body. He tried to wrench off the garment but it stuck to his flesh and tore away whole pieces of his body. Hercules built a funeral pyre and burnt himself. Jupiter, however, ensured that only his mother's part perished. The immortal element was sent to heaven where he was admitted as a deity. Thus, in his transformation from a mortal to a deity, the story of Hercules offers a parallel to the story of Endymion.

Returning to the narrative, we find that Glaucus has been teased by Scylla into a state of 'fierce agony'. In desperation he seeks the help of the witch-goddess Circe.

Circe is also an enchantress and a magician. She has a death island, a willow grove and a cemetery. When Glaucus goes in search of her, he finds that 'Aeaea's isle was wondering at the moon.' There is an age old connection between witchcraft and the moon. The magical efficacy of charms is said to increase on moonlit nights. A spell of enchantment puts Glaucus in a swoon. When he awakes, he finds that he is in a 'twilight bower'. Here, Circe, disguised as a highly sensual maiden ensnares him in a web of sexual ecstasy. This bower is a variation of Adonis's bower of love. It represents another landmark in the poet's comparison of truth and falsehood. As there are true gods and false gods, there is also true and false love. Whereas Adonis's bower represents the very nucleus of fertility, Circe's bower represents the nucleus of decay. Circe represents the lesser mysteries of the Great Goddess. She, like the old man, is another archetypal figure in Keats's poetry. She ensnares, captivates and enthralls. The pale Kings and princes in the ballad 'La belle dame sans Merci,' had been held in 'thrall'. In Lamia the snake-woman had held Lycius in 'thrall'. Thus the young witch is the idiom for lust and sin. In Endymion's story the displacement of Circe provides a psychological exorcism and he escapes the enchantment of this lustful love. However,

in Lamia and 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' the heroes cannot escape, they succumb to the evil power of the witch.

One day, led by rumbling thunder and 'poisonous groanings' Glaucus reaches a spot where a gaunt, blue flame bewitches him. Circe is performing her sadistic rites --

...my arbour queen,
 Seated upon an uptorn
 forest root,
 And all around her shapes,
 wizard and brute
 Laughing, and wailing,
 grovelling, serpentine
 Showing tooth, tusk and
 venom-bag and sting !
 Oh, such deformities !

(III. ll. 498-503)

She sits surrounded by a herd of animals that once had been men. The fodder she empties before them is a basketful of 'clusters of grapes'. In Keats's poetry the intoxication of the grape is of the worst kind. It can make men either into gods or beasts.

Circe proceeds to conduct a negative parallel of the erotic rites that had been conducted in Adonis's bower and in the jasmine bower. In the benign form, 'a dewy luxury' had been shaken over the eyes of the lover from a willow branch. In its malignant parallel Circe takes a mistletoe branch, smears it with poison from 'a black dull-gurgling

phial' and 'whisk'd against their eyes the sooty oil'. The entire congregation groans like 'one huge Python'. Circe discovers that Glaucus has witnessed all this. Her vengeance is horrible. She kills Scylla and converts Glaucus into a 'gaunt wither'd, sapless, feeble, cramp'd and lame' old man and sentences him to a sea-exile of a thousand years which he decides to devote to serving lovers who have been drowned in the sea. From one such lover, he receives a scroll that contains a prophecy --

A youth, by heavenly power
 loved and led,
 Shall stand before him,
 whom he shall direct
 How to consummate all.
 The youth elect
 Must do the thing, or
 both will be destroyed.

(III. 11. 707-11)

The 'youth elect' is Endymion. Led by Glaucus, he enters a cavern and beholds thousands lying 'in silent rows'. Death in this cavern is benign. It has served as an embalmer and they look 'All ruddy -- for here death no blossom nips'.

The scroll describes a complex ritual that Glaucus and Endymion now enact. Glaucus tears the scroll into tiny pieces. Then he covers Endymion with his cloak and

strikes his wand nine times. He then asks Endymion to undo a complicated knot. Endymion performs this easily --

What is it done so clean ?
 A power overshadows thee !
 Oh brave !

(III. ll. 758-59)

Endymion's power is his unswerving fidelity in love. Soon Glaucus regains his youth and the dead lovers are resurrected --

And, as he passed, each
 lifted up his head
 As doth a flower at
 Apollo's touch
 Death felt it to his
 inwards - 'twas too much
 Death fell a weeping in
 his charnel house

(III. ll. 785-88)

Death or Thanos is the brother of Sleep or Hypnos. They are the sons of Nox and have their abode in subterranean darkness. Now, death has been overpowered by true love. In this respect Newell Ford finds a parallel between Endymion and Christ --

As Christ brought salvation to men by atoning for their sins, so the faithful Endymion brings salvation to the lovers by atoning for Glaucus' sin. True he is not, like Christ, conscious of his mission, but his unwavering devotion to

Cynthia works the same miracle as Christ's
unswerving devotion to God. 4

We see once again how Keats's mythologizing method adapts and transforms the original myth. He uses the ancient format to incorporate and project this Biblical belief. His method, thus, is different from Shelley's who used mythology mostly as an anti-Christian instrument.

Endymion along with Glaucus now gains the stature of a 'new-born god'. He leads the congregation to a 'mighty consummation' in Neptune's palace. Neptune is the deity of the waters. Triton, the merman welcomes them by blowing his conch. Nereids, the fifty daughters of Nereus and Doris, dance and sing. The palace is open and airy -- 'a golden sphere'. In contrast with the subterranean vault of Cybele in Bk II. Cupid and Venus, welcome the lovers. Venus, once again, encourages Endymion. She assures him that 'Love will have his day/So wait while expectant'. The rejoicing lovers sing a hymn in thanksgiving. Hymns were an integral part of the Athenian religious ceremonies. People conducted these rites with garlands, incense-burning and libations accompanied by hymns and dances. Keats's mythic yearnings find fulfilment in such rituals. He treats the act of worship as a manifestation of sincere devotion.

Immortal bliss for me too
 thou hast won,
 Arise then ! For the hen-dove
 shall not hatch
 Her ready eggs, before I'll
 kissing snatch
 Thee into endless heaven.
 Awake ! Awake !

(III. ll. 1022-27)

This awakening, immediately after the grand fertility ritual, can be paralleled to the waking of Adonis. This is the climax of the poem. Endymion has been successful in his quest and now must return to point from which he started. Endymion awakes to find that he is back in the forest.

II

Endymion's return to the forest suggests that he is still bound to the fertility principle of the Great Goddess. He returns to the forest to Mount Latmos in autumn. The calendrical year has come to an end and the vegetation is dying. It is time for fertility god to die once again. The wheel of time must complete a full circle before the rebirth of the hero can take place. The final aerial ascent symbolizes the way out of the whirlpool of the time-cycle. The time-cycle will lose its significance

once the hero has established himself in Elysium. Life in Elysium is changeless and static. It is characterized by eternal spring and happiness.

Bk IV commences with an invocation to the English muse --

Muse of my native land !
 Loftiest Muse !
 Of first-born on the
 mountains, by the hues
 Of heaven on the spiritual
 air begot !

(IV. ll. 1-3)

The muses, nine in number, are the daughters of Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory. The muses, themselves are the goddesses of literature and the arts. Keats enlists the English muse as the 'loftiest' of all. Now, as his hero launches the mystical phase of his quest, his spiritual inspiration can only be provided by the English Muse. By combining Greek and English concepts, the poet acknowledges that there are no frontiers between great literatures. Poetic inspiration, says Keats, is the only light in 'our dull, uninspired, snail-paced lives'. Seeking the Muse's blessings like the 'poets' gone' he proceeds to 'move to the end'.

Endymion, back in the forest of Mount Latmos, offers

a 'hecatomb of vows' to heaven. The piteous, lamenting tones of the Indian Maid reach him 'through thorny-green entanglement/Of underwood'. The lunar goddess uses another disguise, this time associated with an Oriental pagan cult --

Ah, woe is me that I should
 fondly part
 From my dear native land !
 Ah foolish maid !
 Glad was the hour when, with
 thee, myriads bade
 A dieu to Ganges, and their
 pleasant fields !
 To one so friendless the
 clear freshet yields
 A bitter coolness, the
 ripe grape is sour
 Yet I would have, great
 gods, but one short hour
 Of native air -- let me
 but die at home.

(IV. 11. 30-37)

According to Vedic mythology; the Ganges or the Ganga, the most sacred of all Indian rivers, the cleanser of sins and the giver of immortality, was originally confined to the celestial regions where it flowed from a toe of Vishnu. Sagara, a King of Ayodhya had great desire for an offspring. He performed penance with the result that one wife became mother of a single son and the other of sixty thousand sons. He prepared to perform a horse sacrifice, but Indra stole

the animal. All the sons were consumed by a fire. Sagara was informed that his sons would come to life again and rise to heaven when the Ganges flowed down to the Earth. His grandsons went through rigid penances and at length Brahma consented to grant the prayer that the sacred river should descend from the Himalayas. Shiva broke the fall of the waters by allowing them to flow through his hair and they were divided into seven streams. When the water reached the ashes of the slain princes, their spirits rose to heaven and secured external bliss.

It seems that the myth of Ganga provides Keats with a method for connecting the human and celestial regions. The Indian Maid, who is Cynthia in disguise descends to the mortal realms like Ganga. She frees Endymion from mortality and he, like the sons of Sagara, attains eternal bliss in heaven.

This adaptation of the Hindu myth serves a three-fold purpose. At the level of the narrative, it provides a new angle that sustains the reader's interest. At the level of his mythic vision, it proves that Keats could instinctively recognize and adopt in his poetry familiar strains in any mythic mode. At a third level, it is a concession to the Indophile trends of his day. To use

mythological allusions from Oriental mythologies was considered to be a sign of secularism.

Endymion had emerged from his adventures under the sea tested in courage and humanity but lacking in true melancholy that Keats, in coming years was to identify with true love. In the letter to Bailey, quoted earlier, he wrote --

The simple imaginative mind may have its rewards in the repeti [ti] on his own silent working coming continually on the spirit with a fine suddenness -- to compare great things with small -- have you never by being surprised with an old melody -- in delicious voice fe^rl^t over again your speculations and surmises at the time it first operated on your soul -- do you not remember forming to yourself the singer's face more beautiful than it was possible and yet with the elevation of the Moment you did not think so -- even then you were mounted on the Wings of Imagination so high -- that the Prototype must be hereafter -- 5

The views expressed here find an illustration in a passage in Endymion where the Indian Maid appears as the prototype of Cynthia. Endymion responds to her through the 'repetition' of his 'simple imaginative mind's' silent working. But unable to consciously acknowledge this, he feels guilty and fears that --

I have a triple soul ! Oh
fond pretence --

For both, for both my love
 is so immense,
 I feel my heart is cut for
 them in twain.

(IV. ll. 95-97)

Endymion's love-life has a repetitiveness, -- a rather circular nature -- like the life of the fertility god. Endymion's subterranean and submarine journeys have resulted in his falling in love again and again. His sense of guilt makes him wish he were dead or at least 'whole in love' --

....What is this soul
 then? Whence
 Came it? It does not seem
 my own, and I
 Have no self-passion or
 identity
 Some fearful end must be.
 Where, where is it?
 By Nemesis, I see my
 sprit flit
 Alone about the dark.

(IV. ll. 475-80)

These lines reflect Keats's views on the evolution of the immortal poet. The idea is discussed at length in the following passage --

As to the poetical Character itself... it is not itself -- it has no self -- it is everything and nothing -- It has no character.... A Poet is the most unpoetical of

anything in existence; because he has no Identity -- he is continually in for -- and filling some other Body -- The Sun, the Moon, the Sea and Men and Women who are creatures of impulse are poetical and have about them an unchangeable attribute -- the poet has none; no identity.... 6

Endymion, in his mythical quest, has so far been, "in for and filling some other Body." He has been in the Earth and in the water. He will now go in the air. He has also discovered that he has no Identity. Depressed that the Indian Maid has terminated any chances that he had of achieving immortality, he says that she has stolen 'the wings wherewith I was to top the heavens'. She is his 'executioner' and he begs her for some 'music dying'.

Music, according to Keats, was a charm that dispelled all problems. This was stressed in another letter to Bailey where he had wished --

O that I had Orpheus lute -- and was able
to cha [r]m away all your Griefs and
Cares -- 7

The Indian Maid sings the Song of Sorrow. Her verses define the sorrows of lovers as the essential aesthetic ingredient for the natural world. Maidens die so that roses may bloom. She traces the pattern of death and rebirth in nature. The song concludes with a host of

confused familial associations. Sorrow, to whom the maiden's song is addressed is 'her mother/And her brother/ Her playmate, and her wooer in the shade'. The Great Goddess represents many relationships. She is Endymion's mother, nurse, sister, playmate and lover and Endymion is her baby, brother and "wooer in the shade".

The Indian Maid finishes her song and then relates her experiences with Bacchus. Of all the achievements of Bacchus, his expedition into the East is most celebrated. He travelled on a chariot drawn by a lion and a tiger and was accompanied by Pan, Silenus and all the Satyrs. His conquests were easy and without bloodshed. Attracted by the 'merry din' and 'mad dancing' the Indian Maid 'rushed into the folly'. She joined the rout that travelled through the East conquering the 'Sleek Arabians', the 'Osirian Egypt', the 'parched Abyssinia' until --

Great Brahma from his mystic
 heaven groans
 And all his priesthood moans,
 Before young Bacchus' eye
 wink turning pale

(IV. 11. 265-68)

Osiris was among the chief deities of the ancient Egyptian pantheon. Great Brahma is the supreme god of the post-Vedic Hindu mythology. Bacchus's triumph over Osiris and

Brahma anticipates the law of succession of Hyperion.

Endymion is touched by the maid's pathetic tale and promises to be her 'sad servant evermore'. This once again is an expression of the hero's humanitarianism. Endymion, once again, experiences the duality of his emotions and describes his own state as 'madness'. He hears a call echoing through the forest 'Woe !/Woe ! Woe to that Endymion ! Where is he ?' Mercury, the messenger of the gods, swoops down, touches the mountain side with his wand and is gone. Two jet-black steeds with large dark-blue wings spring out from the turf. Endymion and the Indian Maid mount the horses and set off on an aerial journey. As the horse soars, the poet and Endymion combine --

Muse of my native land,
 am I inspir'd ?
This is the giddy air,
 and I must spread
Wide pinions to keep here.

(IV. ll. 354-56)

The winged horse enters the magnetic field of Hypnos or sleep who is 'slow journeying' towards Heaven as it has been communicated in a dream that 'a young man' is going to win immortality and also to 'espouse Jove's daughter'. Affected by the magnetic field, Endymion, along with the

Where those eyes are the
 brightest for that keep
 Their lids shut longest
 in a dreamless sleep.

(IV. 11. 537-42)

The passage contains a rebirth ritual. It is said that whoever enters the Cave of Quietude first takes a cool draught from an 'urn'. The draught is richer than anything 'young Semele' drank in 'her maternal longings'. Semele was the mother of Dionysius. When she was seven months pregnant, Jupiter appeared in thunder and lightning before her. She had a miscarriage. Jupiter, the father-god, saved the baby by putting it into his own thigh till the end of the natural term of pregnancy. This is the Olympian patriarchal myth established to fit the new orthodoxy once the relevance of coition to child-bearing had been admitted and the physical superiority of the male had been recognized. The new myth was a rationalization of some of the mysteries associated with the Great Goddess. The strange double-birth of Dionysius offers an analogy for the spiritual birth of Endymion symbolized by his experiences in the cave. The 'spirit-home' of the cave is said to be 'pregnant' to 'save' Endymion. Endymion returns to a foetal state in its depths. This is the last sleep of the mythical sleeper. It is both a sleep of

healing and sleep of preparation where physical powers are gathered together for the transformation of the sleeper.

While the hero is sleeping, a host of preparations is going on for the wedding. The constellations Hesperus, Aquarius, Castor and Pollox, the lion, the Bear, the Centaur, Andromeda collect to celebrate 'Cynthia's wedding and festivity'. Zephyrs, the west wind and Flora, the goddess of flowers are asked to bring --

Cool parsley, basil sweet,
 and sunny thyme --
 Yes, every flower and leaf
 of every clime
 All gathered in the dewy morning.

(IV. 11. 577-79)

Aquarius, the water-bearer is asked to brighten 'the Star-Queen's crescent on her marriage night'.

Endymion, however, unaware of these preparations descends to the Earth on his winged steeds. 'His first touch of the earth went night to kill'. He encounters the Indian Maid on the mountain side and plans a tranquil future with her --

Let us ay love each other.
 Let us fare
 On forest-fruits, and never,
 never go

information --

They vanished far away !
 Peona went
 Home through the gloomy
 wood in wonderment.

(IV. 11. 1002-3)

Marriage is a traditional link in the fertility rituals. Before a new fertility cycle can be launched a marriage must take place. Keats however leaves it out of his narrative. He also does not describe how the newly metamorphosed god Endymion looks in his divine form. Keats's Great Goddess had appeared significantly as the 'veiled Cybele' in the subterranean abyss of Bk II. The hero, having returned unscarred from his mythical quest has discovered the sanctuary of the divine regions. Further unravelling of the mysteries of creation are only for his immortal ears. The mortal reader, along with Peona, is left in a state of 'wonderment'.

III

Endymion is written in the heroic couplet. The form may be defined as the episodic epic commonly used by Spenser. Keats's sensibilities, to a great extent, resemble

Spenser's. Spenser was an early and distinct influence. The pictorial richness, the soft, drowsy music, the themes of love, chivalry, romance and adventure are recognizably Spensarian. Keats's readings of Spenser stimulated and sustained his own poetic theory.

Endymion can be considered as a confessional poem, resulting from the inner conflicts of the poet himself. Shelley's Alastor had put forward certain questions regarding the human world and the state of the poet. Shelley's hero found no satisfaction in the troublesome human world and bitterly frustrated in his quest died in solitude. Endymion's quest led him to a deeper understanding of the actual world and the common experiences of mankind. Shelley's hero was a solitary visionary whereas Endymion shared and understood universal experiences. The parallels between the two poems may be the result of Keats's attempt to offer a rebuttal to Shelley's poem.

Keats also made some use of Drayton's The Man in the Moon. Drayton's Endymion and Phoebe was not easily accessible in the days of Keats. Finney describes both Drayton and Keats as poets of the cult of the moon.⁸ The basic inspiration for the feast of Pan, the description of Glaucus's cloak, the aerial flight of Endymion and the

disguises of the moon goddess is possibly drawn from Drayton's poems.

Lyly's Endymion, too, may have furnished Keats with some designs for his poem. The incident of Corsites and Tellus in Lyly's poem seems to have been in Keats's mind while he was writing the Glaucus-Circe episode.⁹ Similarly, Mrs. Tighe's Psyche had appealed immensely of Keats. A strange knight serves as Psyche's protector. In the end, in answer to Psyche's prayers he reveals himself as Cupid.¹⁰ This kind of identification of the divine and the human occurs in Keats's poem as well.

Shakespearean and Virgilian echoes can be traced throughout the poem. The erotic passages remind one of Venus and Adonis whereas the description of the wreck at the bottom of the sea is reminiscent of Virgil's Aeneid.

Following the tradition of Chaucer and Spenser, Keats prolongs his verse by knitting and interknitting smaller myths into the primary one. The myths of Glaucus and also of Arethusa serve Keats for highlighting his humanitarian symbolism. The incidental refererence are sometimes exotic and ornamental such as the description of the procession of Bacchus. At other times, they are used

to create emotional depth and to add warmth and human feeling to his verse as in "Dryope's lone lullings of her child" or "blind Orion hungry for the morn". It is possible that Keats was not always conscious of the full potential and relevance of every mythic image and illusion that he used, to his ground myth viz. the myth of the Great Goddess. However, as mythic images and archetypal situation have their own unconscious organization and design, they were easily and effectively absorbed in the major myth.

When Endymion was first published, it was received with a good amount of hostility by the critics of Keats's own period. Modern critics vary in their reactions. One group, which includes Mrs. Owen, Colvin, Finney and Murry feel that Endymion appears coherent only if read as an allegory. Their allegorical interpretations range from metaphysical and neoplatonic interpretations to an account of the psychic process involved in aesthetic creativity. Critics like Amy Lowell, Newell Ford and Pettet feel that the poem is more symbolic than allegorical. In defence of their view, Pettet has pointed out that Keats himself never claimed any allegorical pattern for his poem.

Since Keats's plot in Endymion takes the form of

a quest, it can be defined as a venture of the poet's mind into its own hidden depths. Keats had encountered the major images and schemes of his plot in his reading of the translations of classical works in medieval and Elizabethan poetry and most of all in his school-stage classical dictionaries. The ritual behaviour, the archetypal situations, the various gods and goddess had undergone much unconscious and conscious psychological processing before being crystallized in his mind. Whenever parts were missing, he took care to supply them.

The core of the action in Endymion is the fertility myth. According to traditional mythology the fertility god descends into a dark seed ground, is reborn as the son and consort of the Great Goddess. He mates with her, provides fertility to the animate world and then at the end of the seasonal cycle dies once again. The three critical junctures are birth, marriage and death. These processes supply the ground myth for Endymion. Endymion plays the role of the fertility god and Cynthia plays the role of the Great Goddess. The recurrent archetypal figures are the old man and the beautiful witch. The archetypal object is the urn and the archetypal location is the bower.

There is a distinct method in Keats's mythologizing.

Read within the mythic format Endymion ceased to be merely 'an amalgam of visual and other sense impressions'.¹¹ It becomes symbolic of deeper associations. It highlights the profound sensitiveness of Keats to ancient mythology. It also focusses on the high intensity of the need to achieve an imaginative return to the cool, chaste world of the past. The quest of Endymion is really the quest of young Keats for his medium. At the end of his quest this medium, is identified as mythology. Mythologizing furnishes him with the mode for voicing his inner impulses and cravings.

Notes and References

1. These lines anticipate 'Ode to Autumn' -
'For Summer has o'erbrimmed their clammy cells.
2. Rollins op.cit., Vol.I, p. 370.
3. Ibid., Vol.II, p. 102.
4. Newell Ford, The Prefigurative Imagination of John Keats (California, 1951), p. 67.
5. Rollins, op.cit., Vol.I, p. 185.
6. Ibid., Vol.I, pp. 386-87.
7. Ibid., Vol.I, p. 182.
8. Claude Lee Finney, The Evolution of Keats's Poetry, Vol.I, pp. 250-51.
9. Bush, op.cit., p. 100.
10. Bush, loc.cit.,
11. E.C. Pettet, On the Poetry of Keats (Cambridge, 1957), p. 123.

CHAPTER IV

The Course of Nature's Law

Hyperion

The Fall of Hyperion

I

Keats started working on Hyperion within a few months of completing Endymion. Endymion is a poetic romance set in the Golden Age. Hyperion is an epic of sorrow dealing with the end of the Golden Age. In a letter to Haydon, Keats commented on both the poems --

...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 (sic) 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 Apollo in Hyperion being a fore-seeing God Will shape his actions like one ! 1

Apollo Cynthia's lute-voiced brother is "once more the golden theme". Apollo, the sun-god, whose sway extends to the realms of music, poetry, prophecy and medicine had been the central figure in some of Keats's earlier poetry.² With this beautiful and enigmatic deity Keats felt a kind of empathy and to celebrate his triumph over the Titans had been his ambition for quite some time.³

Hyperion is an epic -- fragment in two versions. The second version, a re-cast of the first in the format of a dream, is called more specifically The Fall of Hyperion.

Keats's failure to complete the poem has been variously explained. An important reason is the general lack of spontaneity and vitality. Keats's sensuous and mythologizing imagination was curbed by the statuesque figures and sculptural backdrops of the poem. Another reason was that Keats had realized that 'there were too many Miltonic inversions in it'.⁴ By abandoning Hyperion, Keats was opting for the purity of spontaneous language. He had succeeded in 'convincing his nerves'⁵ that 'a fine writer is the most genuine being in the world.'⁶

Keats was familiar with the myth of Hyperion long before he selected it as the primary subject of the long poem. Lempriere's Classical Dictionary Edward Baldwin's The Pantheon, Hesoid's Theogony (Cooke's translation), Hyginus's 'Fabulae' printed in Auctores Mythographi Lahiri had familiarized him with the battle between Olympians and the Titans and the consequent defeat of the latter.

According to Hesoid's Theogony⁷ from which Keats derived the basis of the mythological matter of Hyperion, Chaos was the first to come into existence. Next came Earth, Erebus and Eros. Earth bore Heaven, Hills and Sea. And Heaven and Earth, mating together, produced Oceanus, Coeus, Creus, Hyperion, Japhet, Thea, Rhea, Themis, Mnemosyne,

Phoebe, Tethys and Saturn, the youngest and the most terrible. Then came the Brontes, Steropes and Arges, followed by Cottus, Gyges and Briareus. Heaven confined his third brood in a secret place within Earth. But the strain proving too much for her, Earth appealed to Saturn for help. Saturn castrated Heaven with a scythe given to him by Earth. The blood which dripped on to Earth produced the Giants and the Furies and the nymphs called Melial. The members, thrown into the sea produced Venus. According to Hesoid, Heaven named his first brood Titans.

Saturn, taking Rhea as wife, become the ruler of the universe. He was warned by his mother that he would be dethroned by one of his children. So, as soon as each child was born, he swallowed it. Rhea, unhappy as the loss of her children, gave him a stone wrapped in swaddling clothes to swallow when her sixth child was born. This child was Jupiter. When he grew to maturity, he tricked Saturn into vomitting his children. Led by Jupiter, the younger gods declared war against the Titans. They took their stand on Mount Olympus and thus came to be known as the Olympians. The war continuel for ten years. Jupiter now released Cottus, Gyges and Briareus who had been imprisoned inside Earth. They supplied him with thunder and

lightening in return for their freedom, Ultimately, the Titans fell before the thunderbolts and the Olympians came to rule over the universe.

This battle has various connotations. According to some mythologists it is a nature-myth, a kind of contest between the untamed and beneficent aspects of nature. Others feel that it represents the victory of the Olympian cult, brought to Greece by invaders, over the existing religion of the pre-Hellenic people.⁸ The myth contains the archetypal patriarchal cannibalism. Dorothy Van Ghent identifies 'an Oedipal quality' that she says, 'makes them [the cannibalistic scandals] particularly repugnant'⁹ Keats, however, offered a variation to the traditional myth. He gave the Titans a serenely beneficent character. He took pains to sift out the evil aspects supplied by traditional history and made the Titans majestically beautiful. To make the Olympians more beautiful, he invested them with an intellectual beauty, so that the 'first in beauty, should be first in might'. Traditionally the Titans were simply fertility daemons associated with the planets and the weather. The new breed of gods, the Olympians were a highly humanized race of gods. In Keats's version both are humanized. The Titans are physically stronger being giants,

whereas the Olympians are physically smaller but have a superior intellect.

Mythology, according to Keats, is not just a static storehouse of enchanting tales but a comprehensive system that comes to life under the mythic vision of the poet. Each time a myth is retold by a poet, it gains a new dimension. The mythical personalities occur again and again in different circumstances. The pattern of behaviour is reconstructed in every age and each time it provides a further revelation. Thus, mythology is a link between similar experiences down the ages.

Leigh Hunt once commented on Keats --

Talking the other day with a friend about Dante, he observed that whenever so great a poet told us anything in addition to or continuation of an ancient history, he had a right to be regarded as classical authority. For instance, said he, when he tells us of that characteristic death of Ulysses in one of the books of his Inferno, we ought to receive the information as authentic and be glad that we have more news of Ulysses than we looked for. 10

Keats makes full use of his principle in his treatment of the myth of Hyperion. He manipulates the myth to use it as a vehicle for defining a law of succession, and also to embody the archetypes of the cyclical rebirth

rituals. Apollo in Hyperion and the Dreamer in The Fall undergo the traditional rebirth of the King-succession rituals. Infact Hyperion stops abruptly at the rebirth of Apollo as the immortal poet.

Keats's Hyperion begins with the defeat of the Titans. The giants are presented writhing in pain and anger, immediately after the Olympians have usurped power. The battle is alluded to as an event of the past. This is in keeping with the poet's mythic vision. His symbolic conception of the myth was to use it as a vehicle for defining the law of succession. Thus, the description of the battle fell outside his range.

In one of his notes on Milton's Paradise Lost, Keats had stated --

There is a cool pleasure in the very sound
of a vale. The English word is of the
happiest chance.... It is a sort of Delphic
Abstraction -- a beautiful thing made more
beautiful by being reflected in a mist. 11

Delphi is a city with an oracular shrine and precinct of Apollo, situated in a deep rocky cleft on the south-west spur of Mount Parnassus. Keats describes the vale as a 'Delphic Abstraction', instinctively linking all beautiful things to Apollo.

The opening scene of Hyperion is set in a 'vale'.
There is a misty aura over the vale, suggesting events of
a far-off time --

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 grey-haired Saturn,
 quiet as a stone,

(Bk I. ll. 1-4)

These lines evoke a funereal environment. Everything is
unnaturally still and the general mood is one of tragic
grimness. 'Deep' 'sunken' 'Stone' suggest a grave.
This is the ritual burial at the end of a seasonal cycle.
The reign of the Titans has come to an end. There is no
air, no light, no sound, no movement. It is almost like
the paralysis of Chaos. According to Hesoid, Chaos was
a yawning abyss composed of Void, Mass and Darkness. Light
succeeded Chaos and all matter came to life. The myth has
now been inverted. Light and life have left the earth and
blank darkness is gradually taking over --

Forest on forest hung about
 his head
Like cloud on cloud. No stir
 of air was there,
Not so much life as on a
 summer's day

Robs not one light seed
 from the feathered grass
 But where the dead leaf
 fell, there did it rest.

(Bk I, ll. 6-10)

This is a claustrophobic image. There is no comfort,
 no solace, no hope, only desolation and despair. The
 layered forest represents a dark mass, a solid covering
 separating Earth from creativity and life. There is no
 movement save that of a dead leaf falling. That, too, is
 a downward moved --

A stream went voiceless
 by, still deadened more
 By reason of his fallen
 divinity
 Spreading a shade; the
 Naiad 'mid her reeds
 Pressed her cold finger
 closer to her lips.

(Bk I, ll. 11-14)

Naiads are stream nymphs. In her 'voiceless' state, this
 naiad is reminiscent of the tongueless Procne. Procne's
 tongue was cut off by her husband, King Tereus, when he
 wanted to marry again. She was confined to the slaves'
 quarters at the time of her husband's second marriage. Her
 troubled state can also be matched with Saturn's 'fallen
 divinity'. The adjectives 'deadened' and 'cold' empha-
 sise the sterility of the atmosphere.

Saturn, the fallen Titan, is stationed against this morbid backdrop. Saturn literally means 'The sower'. He is the god of agriculture and his age has been described as the age of gold. As Titan king, his 'god like exercise' had been --

Of influence benign on
 planets pale,
 Of admonitions to the
 winds and seas,
 Of peaceful sway above
 man's havesting,
 And all those acts which
 Deity supreme
 Doth ease its heart
 of love in.

(I. ll. 108-12)

His reign had been characterized by great cosmic serenity. Progress, evolution and dynamism were unknown in the Titan world. There was a mist of dreamy timelessness over the universe which was ripped apart by his overthrow. In this post-war scene, Saturn's divine powers are paralysed. His beneficence has expired and his right hand, the symbol of his power lies 'nerveless, listless, dead'. The fallen god faces a mental void and he is unable to comprehend his misfortunes. Like a lost and forlorn child he turns to his Ancient Mother, Gaia, for comfort and advice. The role of the archetypal mother figure in Keats's poetry is crucial.

Again and again the bruised hero turns to her for solace and comfort. She is omnipotent, beneficent and immortal and never completely away from his poetry.

Upon the scene now appears the Titaness Thea. Her physique has a massive sculptural quality. She is so tall that an Amazon appears like a pygmy before her. The Amazons were women warriors who lived in heroic times. Thea's strength is so great that she could have taken Achilles by the hair and bent his neck.

All the Titans are giant nature daemons. In Sleep and Poetry Keats describes the poet as a giant --

Then the events of this
 wide world I'd seize,
 Like a strong giant,
 and my spirit tease
 Till at its shoulders,
 it should proudly see
 Wings to find out an
 immortality.

(ll. 81-84)

The poet must understand all the secrets of nature i.e. the 'symbol-essences' of Earth, air, fire and water. So, it is only appropriate that the Titans are elemental spirits. Apollo, is a giant poet with the superior intellect who seeks immortalization.

Back in the poem, Thea too seems to have lost her
divine attributes and joined the ranks of the mortals --

One hand she pressed upon
 that aching spot
Where beats the human heart,
 as if just there,
Though an immortal, she
 felt cruel pain;

(Bk I. ll. 42-44)

Thea can only sympathize with Saturn. There is solemnity
in her but no intellect and foresight. Saturn's sovereign
relationships with the four elements have come to their
cyclic end. There is confusion all around. This confusion
must persist until a new system of relationships is estab-
lished. Saturn's tragedy lies in his inability to per-
ceive the necessity of such a change and accept it as the
inevitable movement of the cycle.

The night is 'tranced' or in the grip of an energy
that is not in the control of these fallen divinities --

Those green-robed senators
 of mighty woods,
Tall oaks, branch-charmed
 by the earnest stars,
Dream, and so dream all
 night without a stir,

(Bk I. ll. 73-75)

This is an intensely mythical picture. There is an

immense, changeless serenity about the oak-grove. The oak-grove, traditionally, is the scene of the nuptial union of the vegetation king and the Great Goddess. Also, by virtue of being a green recess, it is symbolic of the powers of regeneration. However, right now its potential has been curbed and like Adonis the "senators of the mighty woods" have fallen into a deep sleep.

When Saturn awakes, Thea asks him to come and comfort their fallen house --

He followed, and she turned
to lead the way
Through aged boughs, that
yielded like the mist
Which eagles cleave upmounting
from their nests.

(Bk I. ll. 155-57)

The eagle is the sacred bird of Jupiter. It carried Hercules's soul to Olympus through the mist created by the smouldering logs of his funeral pyre. Like the oaks, the eagle, too is linked with death and regeneration. Through these mythic motifs the poet is gradually establishing the regime of the Olympians. He is following the Greek concept of the time cycle where the seed of birth is present in death.

The scene now shifts to Hyperion's palace. Hyperion

Like a lithe serpent vast
 and muscular
 Making slow way, with head
 and neck convulsed
 From over-strained might.

(Bk. I. ll. 259-63)

This image of torture is rather Miltonic as it recollects the demonic serpent of Biblical mythology. It must be noted that, in his narrative, Keats does not prefer or adopt any single system of mythology. He draws freely on various systems and wherever it suits him, he smoothly brings about a fusion of different mythologies. This technique gives an additional dimension to his treatment of mythology.

As Hyperion waits at his palace door 'the Heaven with its stars/ Look'd down on him with pity' and he hears the voice of his ancient father Coelus. According to the myth, Coelus was on severely hostile terms with his children. Keats, however, invests him with paternal tenderness. Coelus speaks to him from 'the universal space' which is always the setting for Keats's mythical poems. He talks about 'joys and palpitations sweet' that had been experienced by the powers that met at his creation. The poet, here is referring back to Endymion where love and creativity had been the major theme. Coelus says --

I am but a voice;
 My life is but the life
 of winds and tides,
 No more than winds and
 tides can I await.
 But thou canst.

(Bk.I. ll. 340-43)

Coelus accepts that his own life had been governed by the natural order but he cannot understand the grief of the Titans as the next necessity in the evolutionary cycle. He admonishes Hyperion and orders him to strive. At his bidding, Hyperion descends to the Earth.

In the reconstruction of ritual circumstances to fit a new analogy, once the role of the father had been recognized, the archetypal father-son combat had also been recognized. Keats, however, alters the archetype to present it as the cyclical rebirth ritual. There is no real combat. The father-figure, like Glaucus in Enlymion, gives ethical support to his bewildered son.

Bk. II opens with the depiction of the misery of the fallen Titans. Keats's rendering of the scene owes a part to the infernos of both Milton and Dante. The Titans are stationed in a den that is immense, mysterious and dark. Like the original Tartarus, it is characterized by huge, subterranean caverns and stony pits. Primeval cataracts

plunge into bottomless depths 'pouring a constant bulk, uncertain where'. Nightmarish animal-shaped crags grapple with locked 'monstrous horn'. The dungeons are like the 'veins of metal' symbolic of anxiety, fear, frustration and impotence.

Among the rigid sculptured forms, their ancient mother Cybele can be identified. She sits in this infertile, barren, stone vault unable to revive her fallen children. Cybele, traditionally, is an Asiatic goddess associated with the powers of nature. She is one aspect of the Great Goddess. In Endymion she appeared in her negative aspect. In Hyperion, however, she represents the sorrowful mother whose generative powers have been suspended.

Among the other Titans Coeus, Gyges and Briareus, Typhon, Dolon and Porphyryon 'were pent in regions of laborious breath'. According to traditional mythology, Coeus, Gyges and Briareus were the hundred-handed giants who had been imprisoned by Cronus in a secret place within the Earth. Saturn continued to keep them in imprisonment. They were released by Jupiter when they agreed to help him in the battle against the Titans. Keats alters the myth. He represents them as fighting on the side of Saturn

instead of Jupiter. Another variation that he makes is to present Typhon as a Titan. Traditionally Typhon was born after Jupiter had overthrown Saturn. He had a hundreded serpent-heads, fiery eyes and a tremendous voice. Keats's law of succession depended greatly on the law of beauty -- 'the first in beauty should be the first in might'. Thus, all ugly, monstrous daemonic figures are listed as Titans.

The other Titans are free but 'scarce images of life'. Among these he mentions Mnemosyne, Phoebe, Creus, Iapetus, Cottus, Asia, Enceladus, Atlas, Phorcus, Clymene and Themis. Traditionally Asia and Clymene were the same persons. Keats differentiates between the two. Clymene, according to him, is the wife of Iapetus and Asia is the daughter of Caf. The name of Caf does not occur in classical mythology at all. He is probably the Arab mountain god Kaf, who can be equated with the Greek Atlas.¹¹ Over this morbid congregation hovers the shapeless form of Ops, the shrouded queen of death.

The tale of their mammoth downfall has been recorded by the elemental historians, the trees, to be narrated to posterity --

There is a roaring in the
bleak-grown pines

When winter lifts his voice;
 there is a noise
 Among immortals when a God
 gives sign,
 With hushing finger, how
 he means to load
 His tongue with the full
 weight of utterless thought,
 With thunder, and with music,
 and with pomp.
 Such noise is like the roar
 of bleak-grown pines
 Which, when it ceases in
 this mountained world,
 No other sound succeeds;

(Bk. II. ll. 116-124)

Keats's auditory imagination finds expression in this awe-inspiring picture. The mysterious, haunting tree-voices are treated as the primal metaphor for antiquity and immortality and are equated with the majestic utterances of the Titans. Trees, in Keats's mythic vision, are the immortal historians with oracular properties. In The Fall Moneta says --

Thou might'st better listen
 to the wind,
 Whose language is to thee a
 barren noise
 Though it blows legend-laden
 through the trees.

(Canto II. ll. 4-6)

With the arrival of Saturn to the den, begins the council of the Titans. The Titan "rebel crew" of Keats's

mythological poem are the pagan images of the "rebel crew" of Angels in Milton's magnificent Biblical poem. However, the psychological character of the entire situation is purely Keatsian. His inferno imagery is borrowed only at the visual level. The subterranean prison is not the usual place of punishment for the damned souls but a vision of the Earth itself as a place where universal human suffering is inevitable. The Titans are suffering not because they were evil and over-ambitions like Milton's fallen angels but because they have suddenly been reduced to mere mortals. Keats visualizes a pre-Biblical fall where the elements suffer the agonies of fear, impotence and death.

Saturn tells the other Titans that he has searched the entire realm of knowledge available to him in order to detect the cause of their downfall. Even after studying the 'old spirit-leaved books' viz. the sibylline prophetic books Saturn is unable to 'unriddle' the problems. The Cumaen Sibyl, a priestess of Apollo, sold these books to a Roman Emperor. However, in Keats's version, she is more ancient than the Titans. Saturn's tragedy lies in his lack of comprehension and in his inability to place these problems in their proper perspective. He turns to Oceanus, one of the oldest gods, for help. The ancient myths do not

identify Oceanus as the thoughtful one among the Titans but Keats bestows this role on him. Like the shepherds in Endymion, he is contemplative and his wisdom is the result of 'cogitation in his watery grove'. Oceanus recognizes the law of evolution 'We fall by course of Nature's law not force/ Of thunder, of Jove' Oceanus explains that evolution is necessary and ever-present and this is the eternal truth --

So on our heels a fresh
 perfection treads,
 A power more strong in
 beauty, born of us
 And fated to excel us,
 as we pass
 In glory that old darkness;

(Bk.II. ll. 212-15)

These lines contain the cardinal theme of the poem. In mythological terms, the poet guides the psyche from darkness to enlightenment. He defines growth of cyclic. Knowledge, in Biblical mythology, comes through suffering and defeat. Oceanus's words echo the same sentiment. The ideas also find parallels in one of Keats's letter of the same period --

...there is really a grand march of the intellect -- it proves that a mighty providence subdues the mightiest mind of the service of the time being. 12

The next speech is by Clymene, the daughter of Oceanus. Her speech can be described as the musical paean of Apollo. She narrates how she had found a shell and heard a 'golden melody' from it. She put her hands to her ears but --

A voice came sweeter, sweeter
 than all tune,
 And still it cried 'Apollo !
 Young Apollo !
 The morning-bright Apollo !
 Young Apollo !
 I fled, it followed me, and
 cried 'Apollo !'

(Bk. II. ll. 293-96)

According to the myth, Apollo's arrival on Earth was heralded by the sweet music of nightingales and swallows. He brought beneficence of spring and freedom from autumnal dangers and diseases. These sensuous implications are recollected by Clymene. She is young like Apollo but she is ignorant and hence incapable of facing the struggle of evolution.

Enceladus has been listed as the fiercest and wildest of the Titans. According to the original myth, Enceladus and Typhon were the same person. Keats distinguishes between the two. He represents Enceladus as 'tiger-passioned, lion-thoughted'. Enceladus reacts angrily and reminds the Titans of their humiliations. He dismisses Clymene's speech

as 'baby-words'. War with the Olympians must be continued until the Titans can --

....Singe away the swollen
 clouds of Jove
Stifling that puny essence
 in its tent.

(Bk.II. ll. 330-31)

It must be noted that the superior muscular strength of the Titans is being emphasized again and again. The Olympians, in comparison, are described as 'puny'. Enceladus's target is the victory of the 'winged things'. In mythology, the goddess of victory was always represented with wings.

Upon the scene now arrives Hyperion. The brilliance that he radiates is too full of heat to be generative. Hyperion stands silent, dejected and mournful. This sorrowful reunion sets the seal on the defeat of the Titans. Enceladus's anger that matches the heat of Hyperion's brilliance, can only be treated as blind obstinacy. Most important of all is the indication from 'the Mother of the Gods/ In whose face there was no joy'.

Bk. III opens with an invocation of the Muse to leave behind the agony and tension of the Titans and to

as with some warm kiss surprized'. The description contrasts sharply with the angry heat radiated earlier by Hyperion. There is warmth, creativity, beauty and sensuousness in Apollo's radiance. Infact, it would not be wrong to say that we are now back in the familiar world of nature, myth and song, so expressive of Keats's poetic vision. The island of Delos with its 'olive green'... 'lawn shading palms', and singing zephyrs remind us of the 'sides of Latmos'. The epic format is already beginning to lapse into the lyric mode.

Like Endymion, Hyperion too has moved through universal space. From the green oak grove the scene shifted to Hyperion's airy world of 'bowers of fragrant and enwreathed light' and from there to the subterranean stone vault of Bk.II, to return finally to the green isle of Delos.

Delos is a small island in the midst of the Cyclades. It is the birth place of Artemis and Apollo. Leto, their mother, was loved by Zeus. Hera learnt of their union and was immensely jealous. Due to her anger, no land was willing to receive Leto. When the time of birth drew near, she came to Delos which was a floating island and hence not in the power of Hera. Later, Delos became an important

centre for the worship of Apollo.

The new hero is not an epic hero. He is, like Keats, the sentimental and youthful poet. He is torn apart by opposing emotions. He is waiting 'in fearless yet in aching ignorance', in blind darkness where 'painful vile oblivion seals my eyes' for the godhood that he intuitively knows he must obtain. He does not, as yet, know how to use the powers he finds burgeoning within him.

Keats's mythic vision treats the correctness of divine functions as the quintessence of godhead. If these duties are imperfectly rendered, the gods can degenerate into sub-divine beings. This is the lesson that Mnemosyne is to teach Apollo. He confesses that his ignorance makes him feel 'cursed and thwarted' and begs the knowledgeable goddess to 'Point me out the way'.

Mnemosyne is the goddess of memory, the mother of the Muses. She has a large stature and a solemn countenance and she is amply robed. Keats treats the process of rebirth at two levels -- the first psychological and the second physical.

The psychological transformation takes place when Apollo stands before her mute countenance --

format into the lyrical realms that Keats handled so well. Thus, Hyperion the epic could continue no further.

II

Two months after abandoning it, Keats recast the poem as a dream, calling it more specifically The Fall of Hyperion, A Dream. The dream framework has hypnotic associations that add mystery and enchantment to the original narrative. The narrative, in Hyperion, had seemed misty and distant. By entering the poem as the Dreamer, the poet establishes direct contact with the mysterious Matriarch who selects the candidates for rebirth. It is rather ironic that Keats himself was very near death when he wrote The Fall.

In the first few lines, the poet defines his poetic theory in mythic terms, spurred on by his myth-making instincts. Keats presents the structure of poetry as a temple guarded by a veiled goddess. The poet is the mortal intruder who, like Endymion, is subjected to various tests before he is permitted to enter the inner sanctum.

Dreams have a deep significance. The poet says 'Since every man whose soul is not a clod/ Hath visions and would

speak....' Dreams that feed the imagination are fertile and creative and related to true poetry. The man whose soul is a 'clod' is the false poet whose dreams are empty. Like Apollo, in the final book of the abandoned Hyperion, Keats too, feels oppressed with the ideas burgeoning within him. The themes of evolution and the sovereignty of beauty had become too important to be discarded and forgotten. The myth of Apollo's triumph had too much personal significance to be abandoned. So, Keats returned to the poem with a new approach. The Fall is a visualization of the recurrent Keatsian archetypal scenes and figures on a single canvas.

The 'dream' commences in the familiar archetypal green bower --

Methought I stood where trees
 of every clime,
 Palm, myrtle, oak and sycamore
 and beech,
 With plantain, and spice
 blossoms, made a screen;
 In neighbourhood of fountains,
 by the noise
 Soft-showering in my ears,
 and by the touch
 Of scent, not far from roses.

(I. ll. 19-24)

This bower is more magnificent and awesome than any other

Keatsian bower for it belongs to the most ancient of the gods. This cosmic forest is part of Eden where grow trees of 'every clime' nourished by fertilizing water. In this magical bower of the Golden Age, the poet experiences untroubled contentment. There is an 'arbour with a drooping roof/ Of trellis vines and bells'. It resembles the arbour in the Garden of Adonis and also the arbour in the 'Ode to Psyche'. This arbour is used by Angels and primeval goddesses possibly Mother Eve, for tasting the ritual offerings of special food in order to renew the fertilizing and generative properties of the Earth. The poet feasts 'deliciously' on the remnants and then drinks a 'full draught' from a 'fabled horn' that he identifies as the cornucopia of Ceres, the Mother of Proserpine.

Keats, here, is telescoping two variant rituals. The remnants of the divine feast were not to be traditionally shared by mortals. Mystic meals were shared by votaries in certain rituals related to Orphic cults. The Keatsian Dreamer from the strictly religious point of view performs a sac-religious act. However, as with myth, Keats freely combines rituals and archetypes, too. Traditionally, fasting was recommended in preparation for spiritual experiences. Keats inverts the custom by

offering a full magical feast to the Dreamer. By eating at the eternal natural source from which life is sustained and renewed, the Dreamer absorbs the divine grace of the Great Goddess and thus prepares himself for the spiritual experiences to come. Then he falls into a 'swoon'.

Keats presents Eve and Ceres on the same canvas. This telescoping adds a new dimension to the poet's already rich mythic vision. It also sheds valuable light on Keats's myth-making instincts. One discovers a series of screens or masks. In the mask of the dream vision the poet enters the myth. In the mask of the myth he presents his poetic theory and within the poetic theory is the seed of his mythologizing imagination.

When the Dreamer recovers from his swoon, he finds that he has been transported to a stone temple. This apparent awakening from a swoon symbolizes the movement from the subconscious to the unconscious resulting in a more profound involvement with the myth.

The stone temple is a primeval construction. It is the architecture of Nature herself, an 'eternal domed monument'. Its rows of columns extend both 'north and south' to end in a 'mist of nothing'. Eastward are the

black gates 'shut against the sunrise' and westward there is an image 'huge of feature as a cloud'. There is a staircase with a 'marble balustrade' leading up to the altar. To scale the 'innumerable degrees' of the staircase seems a 'prodigious toil' to the Dreamer.

In architectural terms, the temple is Grecian.

Potter in his Antiquities writes --

Almost all the temples were then so contrived, that the entrance and statues should look towards the east, and they who paid their devotion, towards the west. The place of the images was in the middle of the temple, where they stood on pedestals raised above the height of the altar. 13

At the symbolic level the 'eternal domed monument' with its 'strange vessels' and 'dyed asbestos' represents the structure of poetry. Joseph Campbell says that ancient temples 'still nurtured in mythology' are symbolic of 'the Inexhaustible Point'. The aim of the devotee who enters the sanctuary 'is to rehearse the universal pattern as a means of evoking within himself the recollection of the life-centering, life-renewing form'.¹⁴

The Keatsian Dreamer experiences the "life-centering, life-renewing" ritual. He is told by a veiled priestess that he is "dust and ashes" unless he can "mount up these

immortal steps". The veiled priestess is Moneta. In the earlier fragment, Moneta had appeared as Mnemosyne. Keats probably felt that Moneta was more appropriate to his new conception of the priestess's wisdom and prophetic power. Some classical authorities associate Moneta with Minerva, the Greek adaptation of the Egyptian Isis. Isis represents the productive forces of nature. She is also linked with universal knowledge and truth. Lempriere relates that inscriptions on the statues of the goddess were often in these words --

I am all that has been, that shall be, and
 none among the mortals has hitherto taken off
 my veil. 15

Keats seems to have created the same awe and mystery in his portrayal of Moneta. Moneta has a deathly pallor, and a tyrannous attitude. The confrontation of Moneta and the Dreamer is similar to the confrontation of the hero of the 'Ode on Melancholy' with 'Veil'd Melancholy in her sovran shrine'. In 'Ode on Melancholy', Keats said about the hero --

His soul shall taste the
 sadness of her might
 And be among her cloudy
 trophies hung.

(Stz. III. ll. 29-30)

The Dreamer's ordeal in veiled Moneta's temple is similar. The altar is 'horned' and there is a 'sacrificial fire' burning.

The Dreamer encounters a curtain of 'Maian incense'. Maia, in Greek mythology, is the daughter of Atlas and the mother of Hermes. In a rather Dantesque comparison Keats says --

...the small warm rain
 Melts out the frozen incense
 from all flowers,
 And fills the air with so
 much pleasant health
 That even the dying man
 forgets his shroud;

(Canto I. ll. 98-101)

The incense issuing from the sacrificial fire has regenerative potential. It revives a dying man so much that he 'forgets his shroud'. Dramatically energized, the Dreamer begins to ascend the steps. A 'stifling... suffocating... palsied chill' descends on him but after the first step has been taken --

... life seemed
 To pour in at the toes.
 I mounted up,
 As once fair Angles
 on a ladder flew
 From the green turf
 to Heaven.

(Canto I. ll. 133-36)

These lines are uttered in a Christian vein. Keats's mythic vision continues to draw from the Bible. M. Allott traces the source of these line to Genesis XXIII, 12 --

And Jacob ... dreamed, and behold the
angles of God ascending the descending on
it. 16

In this respect Keats differes from Shelley who used mythology mainly as an instrument for criticizing the Church. Keats's vision is not limited or restricted. He happily fuses pagan and Christian beliefs in a manner that is extremely fascinating.

While the Dreamer undergoes the nightmarish experience of the death-fantasy in order to fulfil the Medusa - rituals Moneta watches from above. Medusa is an ancient aspect of the Great Goddess. Her gaze could turn one to stone. The Dreamer ascends effortlessly. He has conquered profane death through a mystic rebirth involving a defiance of gravity.

On reaching the summit, he stands safe beneath the knees of the massive statue. He addresses the priestess--

"High Prophetess" said I
 "purge off,
Benign, if so it please
 thee, my mind's film."

(Canto I. 145-46)

Moneta continues to tend the sacrificial fire. She says that there are three classes of men. The first is the 'true poet' the second is the 'idle sleeper' and the third is philanthrop who 'come [s] not here'. She also informs him that this is the temple of Saturn. The Dreamer beholds --

...the snowy locks
Hung nobly, as upon the face
 of heaven
A midday fleece of clouds.

(Canto I. 452-54)

The ritualistic rebirth includes the presence of the father-god along with the mother figure unlike Hyperion where Mnemosyne had been alone. The Dreamer expresses his gratitude to Moneta for the favour she has done him by admitting him to the cosmic garden, saving him from death, and 'medicining' him --

That I am favoured for
 unworthiness,
By such propitious parley
 medicined
In sickness not ignoble,
 I rejoice, --
Aye, and could weep for
 love of such award

(Canto I. ll. 182-85)

Finally, she declares "the sacrifice is done" and

turning to the Dreamer bestows the supreme favour of letting him see into her brain. This a repetition of Apollo's divinization where he had looked into Mnemosyne's face. Moneta's brain has been visualized as the 'entails' of an earth-cavern that are 'rich with ore'. It can also be identified as the womb 'what things the hollow brain behind enwombed'. The description of 'the dark secret chambers of her skull' reconstruct a death's head. Keats once again identifies the grave with the womb. In this case, the regenerative archetype has been located inside the head of Moneta. Now, before the Dreamer's eyes, unrolls the history of creation, of the primeval gods and of the universe.

Moneta parts her veils and --

...then saw I a wan face,
 Not pined by human sorrows, but
 bright-blanch'd
 By an immortal sickness which
 kills not
 It works a constant change,
 which happy death
 Can put no end to;

(Canto I. ll. 256-60)

Thus divinized, the Dreamer, like Glaucus in Endymion can now have visions of the divine world. Before attempting to apostrophize Apollo, the poet had divinized himself. By

entering the myth, he is attempting to combine divine forms with human experiences and to present the vision in subjective terms. The revised method also did not work out. Basically, the content of the myth was too lofty and celestial to be defined in Keats's sensuous terms.

Moneta in The Fall takes on the garb of Keats's archetypal mother-figure. She dominates the poem like Cynthia dominated Endymion. Her deathly paleness, 'plenatary eyes', 'globed brain' and 'sphered words' are qualities that link her with Cynthia. Mnemosyne in Hyperion had been an Earth-goddess, maternal intuitive and awesome. Moneta is a more comprehensive mother-figure. She is fierce and tyrannical as well. Her death-essence, which she shares with Cynthia, suggests the erotic aspect. Thus, in shifting from Mnemosyne to Moneta, Keats shifted from an aspect of the Great Goddess to a comprehensive presentation of her varied attributes. She is now a symbol of poetic consciousness as well. She invests the Dreamer with primary knowledge of himself both as poet and as human being. Analysed in the context, the Dreamer's ascent symbolizes the poet's quest for immortal identity.

The first vision that the Dreamer has is a depiction of Saturn 'Degraded, cold, upon the sodden ground'. Thea,

no longer of superhuman size and strength, as she had been in Hyperion comes to comfort him. Thea has been humanized. There is an intense emotional quality in The Fall. Having seen the vision first-hand, the Dreamer defines 'the load of this eternal quietude' that grips the scene.

The verdant dreaming oak grove has been replaced by a forest where just 'a solitary gust' swells and dies. The total picture is dismal, bleak and unpromising. The promising of regeneration which had been identified in Hyperion is absent here. The tabular grief continues for almost an eternity --

For by my burning brain I
 measured sure
Her silver seasons shedded
 on the night,
An ever day by day methought
 I grew
More gaunt and ghostly.

(Canto I. ll. 393-96)

Universal nature had mourned the downfall of the Titans in Hyperion. The rich mist of grief that had been the backdrop for Hyperion has given way to an eerie and frightening atmosphere. The poet talks about 'mossy glooms', in 'time-eaten oaks' and 'foxes holes'. These are images of stagnation and decay.

Saturn, finally, addresses the solitary Pan. Pan had not figured in Hyperion. However, in his attempt to reclothe the myth in a subjective garb, the poet instinctively turns to the lonely god of universal nature. Pan was the only one of the Olympian deities who was not given a heavenly realm but confined to the earthly Arcadia. His was abandoned by his mother at birth and used by the gods as a source of entertainment. The poet, in this context, probably desires to highlight the loneliness and desolation of the fallen Titans.

Canto II opens with Moneta's warning that the events that she is describing to the poet have been humanized. Keats also re-emphasizes the change of approach--

Mortal, that though may'st
 understand aright,
 I humanize my sayings to
 thine ear,
 Making comparisons of
 earthly things;
 Or thou might'st better
 listen to the wind,
 Whose language is to thee
 a barren noise,
 Though it blows legend-laden
 through the trees.

(Canto II. ll. 1-6)

These lines are reminiscent of the theory of mythology that Keats had expounded in Endymion. The elemental origins of

the 'legends' and their retelling by the winds are referred to once again. The four elements viz. air, water, earth and fire are used to connect the mortal and immortal worlds. Myths, once again, are treated as authentic records of higher experiences.

Moneta now directs the poet's gaze to Hyperion's palace. The passage has been slightly altered from that of the first version. The modifications were made, mainly to avoid the Miltonic echoes. The portents of the eagle's wings and neighing steeds have been omitted, as has been the description of the opening palace door. The 'other realms' have been changed to 'melancholy realms' and the 'mammoth brood' is now described as an 'eagle brood'. The hopelessness of the Titans increases as they are described as listening not 'in sharp pain' but 'in their doom'. The 'omens drear' traced by the poet as a Miltonism, is changed to 'dire prodigies'. Hyperion, instead of coming 'slope upon' is 'sloping to'. However, before he can reach the 'great main Cupola', The Fall was finally abandoned.

III

Keats had intended to use the myth as a vehicle for

defining the law of progress. However, the archetypes of cyclical rebirth, the Great Goddess, the fertility hero, the green bower, and the old man imposed a circular structure on the poem. As definition of the law of progress the movement should have been in terms of an upward ascent.

Apollo's rebirth ritual involves the fertility myth. Apollo, himself, becomes the fertility god whose fertility functions are extended into the realms of poetry and aesthetics. He represents the generative spirit behind the entire universe, both physical and intellectual. In this role, he is permanently bound to the wheel of time which follows a circular pattern. Hyperion is a discussion of the mystical dimensions of the ritual whereas The Fall furnishes the psychological dimensions.

Poetry, for Keats, is not the mere literary rendering of ideas but a comprehensive cognitive crystallization of relationships of life itself to all its primary forms viz. to the elements -- earth, air, water, fire to the vegetation of the Earth, to love, to death, to all the agonies of the human heart. Mythology serves as the sensual and fertile metaphor for his poetic vision. In his treatment of the Hyperion myth, the poet is offering a mythical elaboration of his own poetic desires.

Keats explained his decision to abandon Hyperion to Reynolds in his letter dated 21st September --

There were too many Miltonic inversions in it -- Miltonic verse cannot 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 mark X to the false beauty proceeding from art, and one ||- to the true voice of feeling. 17

The immediate reason for stopping work on Hyperion was because Keats felt that 'life to him [Milton] would be death to me'. The lofty Miltonic idiom was dramatic, not narrative as Keats believed true poetry should be. Hyperion served as nourishment to Keats's critical potential. He learnt how to enlarge his poetic universe with a philosophical dimension, and also to change his rather indolent Spenserian verse with a new kind of force.

During the Romantic period, with the rejection of Augustanism, Milton came to stand for all that was lofty, epic and severe in the English poetic tradition. The second generation of the Romantics were deeply impressed by his heroic individuality, his serene assumption of the poet's public roles as moral teacher and spiritual healer and most of all by the supreme confidence with which he undertook his lofty theme.

The Romantic period was a period of revolt and Keats had the same lonely mission as the other great Romantics -- to proceed to the heart of humanity through poetry. Hyperion and The Fall are poems about the poet and poetry.

Apart from the Miltonisms, Keats's Hyperion also frequently echoes Shakespeare's King Lear, Spenser's Faerie Queen and Beckford's Vathek. The first twenty lines of The Fall echo Dante. The reconstruction of the poem as a vision may have been the influence of Coleridge's Allegoric Vision and Addison's Vision of Mirzah.

The first readers of Hyperion were impressed by its fragmentary form. Leigh Hunt described it as 'a fragment -- a gigantic one, like a ruin in the desert'.¹⁸ Byron felt that the 'fragment of Hyperion seems actually inspired by the Titans, and is as sublime as Aeschylus.'¹⁹

Modern critics like W.J. Bate, Gittings and Bush have praised it for its fine opening and the sustaining of poetical qualities throughout the three books. The Fall has been described by Bridges, as Keats's "most mature attempt... to express his own convictions concerning human life."²⁰ Critics like Colvin and Murry have generally

recognized the strengthened promise of poetic maturity both in the new material and in the adaptation of passages from the earlier version.

Keats's retelling of the myth of Hyperion, its adaptation, expansion and treatment are essentially individual. Loaded with symbolic significance and used as a mode for defining not only his poetic theory but also his mythic vision and ultimately the attempt to use it as a vehicle for defining the law of evolution are Keats's own contributions.

It is clear, therefore, that Keats was no blind imitator but a brilliant and talented artist hampered by inexperience and ill health. There is, in spite of Keats's own dissatisfaction with it, strengthened promise of poetic maturity in the two fragments.

Notes and References

1. Rollins, op.cit., Vol.I, p. 207.
2. Apollo is the central figure in 'Ode to Apollo', 'Epistle to George Felton Mathew' 'Hymn to Apollo' and 'Apollo to the Graces'.
3. Indications to this effect were made in the Preface to Endymion.
4. Rollins, op.cit., Vol.II, p. 353.
5. Ibid., Vol.I, pp. 115-6.
6. Ibid., Vol.II, pp. 297-8.
7. Cited by Finney, op.cit., Vol.II, pp. 495-7.
8. Rose, op.cit., p. 44.
9. Dorothy Van Ghent, Keats : The Myth of the Hero (New Jersey, 1983), p. 184.
10. Cited by Douglas Bush, John Keats (London, 1966), p. 118.
11. Finney, op.cit., Vol.II, p. 503.
12. Rollins, op.cit., Vol.II, p. 282.
13. Cited by M. Allott, op.cit., pp. 662-63.
14. Joseph Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces (New York, 1956), p. 43.
15. Cited by M. Allott, op.cit., p. 666.
16. Ibid., p. 665.
17. Rollins, op.cit., Vol.II, p. 167.
18. Cited by Aske, op.cit., p. 86.

19. Aske, loc.cit.
20. Cited by M. Allott, op.cit., p. 657.

CHAPTER V

The Goddess of Many Aspects

The Eve of St. Agnes
Isabella
Lamia
La Belle Dame Sans Merci
To Fanny
Ode to Fanny
I Cry Your Merci, Pity, Love
This Living Hand. .

I

The dominant motifs of Keats's epics can be located in his other poems also. Mythic images are incorporated spontaneously into his poetry. That he can modulate them to suit subtle as well as dynamic contexts shows the range of his mythic sensibility.

Keats's ballads and medieval romances are a reworking of the tales of ritual origins. Other poems especially, the ones addressed to or inspired by Fanny Brawne, his beloved, present an interlocking of personal psychological impulses with mythical images, structures and archetypes.

In this chapter we shall consider eight representative poems.

The Eve of St Agnes is a medieval romance. Finney describes it as --

a spontaneous expression of genius springing
like Pallas Athena full grown from the fore-
head of the poet. 1

The romantic treatment of erotic fantasy is considered to be a result of his association with Fanny Brawn.² Right from the beginning Keats had been fascinated by love-

themes. However, this was the first poem that was inspired by his own love affair.

St. Agnes' Feast is celebrated annually on January 21. Keats derived the information, probably, from John Brand's Popular Antiquities (1813 edn.) --

A Roman virgin and martyr, who suffered in the tenth persecution under the Emperor Dioclesian A.D. 306. She was condemned to be debauched in the common stews before her execution, but her virginity was miraculously preserved by lightning and thunder from Heaven. 3

According to tradition, virgins who followed certain rites on St. Agnes' eve, would see in a dream their future husbands on the same night.

Keats's rendering of the romance is in the Gothic mode. The chief effects are atmospheric, created out of associative magical, mythical and supernatural imagery.

Porphyro loves Madeline with whose clan, his own has bitter differences. On the enchanted St. Agnes' Eve, he undertakes a dangerous quest. He secretly enters her ancestral castle, follows her old faithful nurse Angela through mazes of cold, tortuous passages to her chamber. The lovers consummate their union and then disappear, like

Endymion and Cynthia, into the stormy night.

The three opening stanzas describe the penance of the old beadsman on the saint's night in the chapel of the castle. The portrayal of the old man is typically Christian whereas his role is a mythic archetype. He tells his rosary, says his prayers before the Virgin's picture --

... and soon among
 Rough ashes sat he for his
 soul's reprieve,
 And all night, kept awake, for
 sinners' sake to grieve.

(Stz. III. ll. 25-27)

The old beadsman, like Glaucus and Saturn, is the foil character. Through his lonely, ritualistic prayers he is casting out evil and thus extending ethical support to the quest of the younger man. In the context, provided by the myth of the seasonal cycle, his death on the same night is necessary in order to preserve the new cycle launched by the consummation of the union of Porphyro and Madeline. The inevitability of the beadsman's death is prophecied in the following lines --

But no already had his
 death bell rung,
 The joys of all his life
 were said and sung;

His was harsh penance on
St. Agnes' Eve.

(Stz. III. ll. 22-24)

The host of images of bitter cold, old age and implied death in these three stanzas suggest the cyclical conclusion of one calendrical year.

Like the seasons run their course replacing one another, the 'sculptur'd dead' of the chapel are subtly replaced by the 'carved angels, ever eager-eyed' of the dance hall. Madeline, the chaste and pure heroine, is among the gay dancers. She is engrossed in her plans for the rites she is to perform under 'wing'd St. Agnes's Saintly Care'. These rites have been described to her by 'old dames' --

They told her now, upon
St. Agnes' Eve,
Young virgins might have
visions of delight,
And soft adorings from
their loves receive
Upon the honeyed middle
of the night
If ceremonies due they
did aright;
As, supperless to bed
they must retire,
And couch supine their
beauties, lily white,
Nor look behind, nor
sideways, but require

Of Heaven with upward eyes
for all they desire.

(Stz. VI. ll. 46-54)

In the meantime, her lover, "Young Porphyro, with heart of fire", comes across the moors for a "sight of Madeline". Porphyro is a Greek name -- infact the only Greek name in the entire poem. Keats mentioned Porphyron in Hyperion. Porphyron was one of these Titans who was "the brawniest in assault". The poet is decidedly more sympathetic to Porphyro than he is to Porphyron for Porphyro is allowed to be successful in his quest.

Porphyro's quest is of a dangerous nature. His enemies are "more fang'd than wolves and bears" the poet's sympathies are with his hero, as is elaborated in the following lines --

He ventures in -- let no
 buzzed whisper tell,
All eyes be muffled, or
 a hundred swords
Will storm his heart,
 love's feverous citadel.

(Stz. X. ll. 82-84)

The only person who has 'any mercy' for him is 'one old beldame' called Angela. Angela, too, is destined to die on this eventful night. She is described as --

A poor, weak, palsy-stricken
 churchyard thing,
 Whose passing-bell may ere
 the midnight toll !

(Stz. XVIII. ll. 155-56)

Angela represents the archetypal nurse of the fertility mummings who brings up the child-substitute of the King. The nurse also initiates the substitute in the consummation rites that he has to perform with the Queen. Angela addresses Porphyro as 'my child' and he looks at her like an 'urchin'. She is invested with the knowledge of the occult and she advises him in the following words--

Thou must hold water in a
 witch's sieve,
 And be liege-lord of all
 the elves and fays
 To venture so;

(Stz. XIV. ll. 120-21)

Having thus educated him, she leads him through many dusky, mysterious galleries, reminiscent of Endymion's subterranean journey. Finally, she hides him in a closet from where he has a view of Madeline's bed-chamber.

Madeline's chamber is a variation of the regenerative green bower which is the usual Keatsian setting for the consummation of love --

All garlanded with carven
 imageries
 Of fruits, and flowers,
 and bunches of knot-grass,

(Stz. XXIV. ll. 209-10)

The chamber, in its architectural mode, is associated with the lush vegetation of Adonis's bower. The "splendid dyes" used on the "diamanded" panes are like "the tiger moth's deep damask'd wings" reminiscent of the hovering cupids of Adonis's bower in Endymion. Keats uses this novel device to blend the medieval and the mythic elements, adding yet another dimension to his mythic vision.

Madeline enters her chamber, holding a silver taper like "a missioned spirit". In her innocence and purity -- 'She seemed a splendid angel, newly dressed/ Save wings, for Heaven'. She says her prayers and then retires to bed. The poet compares her sleeping from a 'missal' in a pagan country. In Endymion the bride had been a real goddess but in The Eve the poet's use of exalted religious metaphors to praise her suggests that he visualizes her as one. It also suggests that like Endymion's love for Cynthia, her love for Porphyro is not base. It also implies that the act which is soon to be performed has sacred sanction. Madeline falls into a 'wakeful swoon'.

Her bed is described as 'a soft and chilly nest'. The seasonal myth has been reversed. Instead of the hero, the maiden has fallen asleep.

Porphyro now prepares the archetypal sacramental feast. Angela, his official tutor in the context of the myth, had stored food in the closet. Porphyro spreads a gorgeous banquet --

Of candied apple, quince,
and plum, and gourd
With jellies soother than
creamy curd,
And lucent syrups, tinct
with cinnamon;
Manna and dates,

(Stz. XXX, ll. 265-68)

Manna has distinct Biblical associations. Endymion had feasted on manna from Syrian trees. In 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' the knight was fed on 'manna-dew'. The Dreamer in The Fall 'ate deliciously' the remains of a divine meal. However, Porphyro's banquet is not eaten. By preparing the banquet, the hero fulfils the ritual requirement of appeasing the fertility powers and invoking their blessings at his union with Madeline.

The next ritual is the waking of the sleeper.

Porphyro rouses Madeline from her symbolic winter sleep 'And my love, my seraph fair awake'. Madeline who is 'asleep in lap of legends old' wakes. The union is consummated. Porphyro now begs her to accompany him over 'the southern moors'.

The lovers disappear into the stormy night. Porphyro, like Endymion, has passed the various tests and reached the end of his quest. On the same night the old beadsman and Angela die suggesting that one cycle of the ancient seasonal rituals has come to its calendrical end and has been supplanted by a new one symbolized by the union of Madeline and Porphyro.

Porphyro has been treated by generations of readers and critics as Keats's negative hero. One critic describes him as --

a young pagan ravisher with no regard for
the religious taboo he is breaking. 4

The mythic framework protects him from this condemnation. In this context he becomes the archetypal fertility god who redeems the Earth from its frozen winter sleep and provides it with vegetational abundance for another calendrical year.

The Eve is a blend of specifically Christian and pagan mythological elements. Keats discovers intense and beautiful parallels between Christian and pagan mythology.

In a letter to Fanny Brawn, dated October 1819, Keats described his own concept of religion --

I could be martyr'd for my Religion -- Love
is my religion -- I could die for that -- I
could die for you. My Creed is Love and you
are its only tenet -- You have ravish'd me
away by a Power I cannot resist.... 5

In love, Keats could experience the kind of human fulfillment that has conventionally been termed as religion. Mythology attracted him with its whole spectrum of beautiful and intense love experiences, and thus became, for him, a source of religious experiences. Keats's blending of mythical idiom with the Christian metaphors must not be dismissed as simply a passionate rhetorical flight because it represents the successful completion of the poet's own quest for meaning in religion.

Isabella, or The Pot of Basil is a romantic expansion of Boccaccio's narrative in Decameron. Keats derived the story from the fifth novel of the fourth day.

Isabella, the only daughter of a mercantile family,

has fallen in love with a poor employee called Lorenzo. Her two evil brothers wishing her to marry someone of wealth, trick Lorenzo into going on a journey with them, murder him and bury him secretly in a forest. Lorenzo comes to Isabella in a dream and describes the place where he is buried. Isabella brings home his head and buries it in a pot of basil. Her brothers steal the pot. As a result Isabella goes mad and her brothers have to flee into the desert.

Like Endymion, Isabella also follows the seasonal cycle. The love story commences in May --

A whole long month of May
 in this sad plight
 Made their cheeks paler
 by the break of June:

(Stz. IV. ll. 254-56)

The lovers' conversation also contains the substratum of the fertility myth --

Love, thou art leading me
 from wintry cold,
 Lady, thou leadest me to
 summer clime,
 And I must taste the
 blossoms that unfold
 In its ripe warmth this
 gracious morning time.
 So said, his erewhile
 timid lips grew bold,

And posied with hers in
 dewy rime.
 Great bliss was with them,
 and great happiness
 Grew like a lusty flower
 in June's caress.

(Stz. IX. ll. 65-72)

Their love, along with the seasonal heat, reaches its full flush in June. The romance concludes when Isabella discovers her lover's corpse "In the mid-days of autumn" and then brings the head home to bury it in a pot of basil.

That Lorenzo is to die is implicit in his utterances right from the beginning. He tells Isabella 'I cannot live/ Another night and not my passion shrive'. In christian terms 'Shriving' is the sacrament of confession and absolution. Isabella, like Madeline, is the pure and chaste woman. Lorenzo, like Porphyro, imagines her to be 'A seraph chosen from the bright abyss/ To be my spouse'.

Their love is consummated in the archetypal green bower --

All close they met before
 the dusk
 Had taken from the stars
 its pleasant veil,
 Close in a bower of hyacinth
 and musk
 Unknown of any, free from
 whispering tale.

(Stz. XI. ll. 83-86)

Concealed by a veil of dusk and performed by hyacinth and musk, the bower symbolizes the traditional seed-bed of nature. It is secret like Cynthia's jasmine-bower in Endymion. All of Keats's archetypal vegetational symbolism is associated with this bower.

Isabella, through her erotic associations with Lorenzo assumes some of the aspects of the Great Goddess. The Great Goddess is maternal as well as sensuous in her associations with the fertility god who is both her son and her lover. Isabella, too, has a double relationship with Lorenzo. When she first falls in love, the poet says her cheek --

Fell thin as a young mother's,
 who doth seek
 By every lull to cool her
 infant's pain.

(Stz. V. ll. 35-36)

Love inculcates in Lorenzo 'the meekness of a child'. When she learns that he is dead, she visits his grave to sing him 'one latest lullaby'. And later when she has planted his head in a pot of basil, she sits by it, 'patient as a hen-bird'. She leaves it only for an occasional visit to the chapel and hurries back 'as swift/ As bird on wing to breast its eggs again'.

The Lorenzo will die is a foregone conclusion in the structure of the poem also. Isabella's evil brothers perform the ritual killing easily --

So the two brothers and
 their murdered man
 Rode past fair Florence,
 to where Arno's stream
 Gurgles through straitened
 banks, and still doth fan
 Itself with dancing bulrush,
 and the bream
 Keeps head against the
 freshets, sick and wan
 The brother's face in the
 ford die seem,
 Lorenzo's flush with love .
 They passed the water
 Into a forest quiet for
 the slaughter.

(Stz. XXVII. ll. 209-16)

Lorenzo, being a mere mortal, cannot fight destiny. His murderers take him beyond the gurgling river into a silent forest. Water is symbolic of the life-principle in Keats's mythic vision and the green forest is symbolic of regeneration. The ill-fated man is the healthiest of the three who reach the selected spot. The use of 'slaughter' suggests the sacrificial ritual. In ancient tradition the purest and most beautiful of the herd was sacrificed for the appeasement of the deity.

The autumnal part of the year sets in. The

'breath of winter' kills all vegetation as it plays 'a roundelay of death'. Lorenzo returns to his 'widow' in a dream and describes his vegetational grave to her --

Saying moreover, Isabel my sweet !
 Red whortle-berries drop above
my head,
 And a large flint-stone weighs
upon my feet;
 Around me beeches and high
chestnuts shed
 Their leaves and prickly nuts;
a sheep-fold bleat
 Comes from beyond the river
to my bed :

(Stz. XXXVIII. ll. 297-302)

Lorenzo is killed in the summer. However he cannot return until the winter, when preparations for the launching of the new seasonal cycle are to be made. Also, Isabella, must pass the test of endurance, like Endymion and Porphyro, before she can wake her sleeping consort.

Escorted by "an aged nurse" who is symbolic of the old crone of the fertility mummings, she proceeds to the "lismal forest-hearse" when she reaches the grave, the vegetation-magic works on her and --

Upon the murderous spot she
seemed to grow,
 Like to a native lily of
the dell --

Then with her knife, all
 sudden, she began
 The dig more fervently
 then misers can.

(Stz. XLVI. ll. 365-68)

In the mythical context this is the exhumation of the fertility-daemon. Upon this ritual depends the rebirth of the vegetation. There is a host of maternal images in this section. Isabella and her nurse "labour" for three hours at "this travail sore". She finds Lorenzo's mouldy glove --

And put it in her bosom,
 where it dries
 And freezes utterly unto
 the bone
 Those dainties made to
 still and infant's cries.

(Stz. XLVII. ll. 372-74)

Then she cuts off the head, and --

In anxious secrecy they
 took it home,
 And then the prize was
 all for Isabel.
 She calmed its wild hair
 with a golden comb,
 And all around each eye's
 sculptural cell
 Pointed each fringed lash.

(Stz. LI. ll. 401-5)

This is the ritual resurrection of the manhood of the lover. The greatest service of Isis, the Egyptian moon-goddess, was to locate and tend to the castrated organ of Osiris.

Isabella buries the head in a garden pot of 'sweet basil, which her tears kept over wet'. Now at last the lovers are united and Lorenzo can 'drink her tears' as he had wanted to do at the beginning of the romance. The basil flourishes 'as by magic touch'. Isabella's brothers steal the pot and they recognize the face of Lorenzo --

And so left Florence in a
 moment's space,
 Never to turn again, Away
 they went,
 With blood upon their heads,
 to banishment.

(Stz. LX. ll. 478-80)

Isabella's brothers face the exorcism usually faced by infidels or worshippers of false gods. Like sinners repelled at the touch of a sacred thing, they flee away into the desert.

And so she pined, and so
 she died forlorn
 Imploring for her basil
 to the last.

(Stz. LXIII. ll. 497-98)

Both Madeline and Isabella are chaste and virtuous women. These pure, virginal attitudes represent but one aspect of the Great Goddess. In a sinister shift, the love goddess becomes the death goddess or the archetypal young witch of Keats's poetry. She is cruel and scheming, a harlot and a murderess. She leads the hero into a field of demonic forces where she ensnares him in a net of illusory love and this ultimately results in the destruction of the hero. Lamia and the Belle Dame, the heroines of the next two poems that we are going to discuss, represent this evil aspect of the goddess of many aspects.

II

Keats derived the story of Lamia from Robert Burton's The Anatomy of Melancholy (part 3, Sec. 2, Memb. 1st, sub. 1st). Burton relates how Lycius, a young philosophy student of Corinth, met a 'phantasm' in the guise of a beautiful, young woman and how --

The young man, a philosopher, otherwise staid and discreet, able to moderate his passions, though not this of love, tarried with her a while to his great content, and at last married her, to whose wedding amongst other guests came Apollonius, who by some probable conjectures, found her out to be a serpent, a lamia; and that all her furniture

was like Tantalus' gold, described by Homer,
 no substance but mere illusion. When she
 saw herself thus described, she wept, and
 desired Apollonius to be silent, but he would
 not be moved, and thereupon she plate, house
 and all that was in it vanished in an instant.⁶

The harsh criticism that Keats had received for his loose couplets in Endymion had made him seek the polished couplets of Dryden, recommended as a model by Hazlitt. He said --

I intend to use more finesse with the Public.
 It is possible to write fine things which
 cannot be laugh'd at in anyway. There is no
 objection of this kind to Lamia. 7

The poem begins with an introductory episode set in a forest on the island of Crete. The messenger-god, Hermes during his search for an elusive wood nymph is accosted by an unusual snake --

She was a gordian shape of
 dazzling hue,
 Vermilion-spotted, golden,
 green and blue;
 Striped like a zebra, freckled
 like a pard,
 Eyed like a peacock, and all
 crimson barred;...

(Bk. I. 11. 47-50)

She had a woman's mouth in her 'Circean head'. She claimed that she had made the nymph invisible and if Hermes

would change her into a woman's shape, by touching her with his caducean wand, she would once again make the nymph visible. The deal is transacted. Her transformation, rather Dantesque in its rendering, is a painful and hideous process --

Her mouth foamed, and the
 grass, therewith besprent,
 Withered at dew so sweet
 and virulent;
 Her eyes in torture fixed,
 and anguish drear,
 Hot, glazed, and wide, with
 lid-lashes all sear,
 Flashed phospher and sharp
 sparks,
 The colours all inflamed
 throughout her train,
 She writhed about, convulsed
 with scarlet pain.

(Bk. I. ll. 148-54)

Hermes, along with his nymph, disappears into the forest --

Into the green-recessed
 woods, they flew;
 Nor grew they pale, as
 mortal lovers do.

(Bk. I. ll. 144-45)

Hermes was famous for his amorous intrigues. Keats uses this episode, which does not occur in Burton's account, to suggest the purely amorous nature of Lycius's liason with Lamia.

Lamia, appears in a valley near Corinth. Now she is

a 'virgin purest lipp'd'. Before her metamorphosis, she had a Circean head and now she is to play a Circean role in the life of Lycius. Circe, in Endymion, had practised black magic and had changed her lovers into beasts. In Lamia, a Circean snake assume the form of a woman.

Lycius, is serene "like a young Jove". He has a rational purity about him --

His fantasy was lost, where
 reason fades,
In the calmed twilight of
 Platonic shades.

(Bk.I. ll. 235-36)

Lamia tells him that she fell in love with him on the night of "the Adonian feast" in the temple of Venus. Thus establishing a link with the fertility goddess, she proceeds to ensnare him in her dangerous trap. Lycius is enchanted and like Endymion, he swoons into a death-like trance of love. 'The Cruel Lady' --

Pur her new lips to his,
 and gave afresh
The life she had so tangled
 in her mesh;
And he from one trance was
 wakening
Into another...

(Bk.I. ll. 295-97)

She now leads him to her 'purple-lined palace of sweet sin' in Corinth. On the way, they pass Apollonius --

With curl'd gray beard, sharp
 eyes, smooth bald crown,
Slow stepp'd, and robed in
 philosophic gown :...

(Bk.I. ll. 364-65)

Lycius shrinks from him as 'tonight he seems/ The ghost of folly haunting my sweet dreams'.

Lamia confined Lycius in the palace. He is separated from 'all the congregated world'. His ambition is lost and his earlier rational purity is replaced by pleasures that are ruinous and perverse.

In Endymion the self-destroying effect of love had been idealized because he had loved the chaste and pure goddess who had furnished him with the energy to evolve into an immortal. In Lamia the same self-destroying effect becomes a threat to Lycius's intellect because his beloved is a monstrous, incubus snake. The snake, more than any other bestial form, embodies a threat to the consciousness because it comes from the underground.

Lycius desires a marriage with 'his paramour'. After much resistance, Lamia prepares for the nuptial feast. She

converts the banquet hall into a leafy glade. The spherical tables have legs like leopard's paws and the goblets are made of pure gold. The illusory nature of Lamia's love is reflected in this inversion of the fertility ritual. In this illusory green recess, life is going to be annihilated with philosophic truth.

Apollonius, Lycius's 'trusty guide and good instructor' comes uninvited to the feast. Apollonius is Lycius's spiritual father. Lempriere described Apollonius as --

a Pythagorean philosopher, well skilled in magic, and thoroughly acquainted with those arts which can captivate and astonish the vulgar... he aspired to the name of the reformer of mankind. 8

In Keats's poem, Apollonius is the patriarch of a rational and masculine orthodoxy.

The citizens of Corinth, who are the invited guests at the nuptial feast, are a 'gossip rout'. They arrive 'mazed curious and keen'. Lamia serves them wine so that --

When the wine has done its
 rosy deed.
And every soul from human
 trammels freed...

(Bk.II. ll. 209-10)

each guest will be too intoxicated to recognize the illusory nature of the feast. However, the magic of the wine does not work on the wise Apollonius and --

The bald-head philosopher
Had fixed his eye, without a
 twinkle or stir
Full on the alarm'd beauty
 of the bride.

(Bk.II. ll. 245-47)

Lamia wilts and withers, her own eyes recessing like a snake's. Lycius cries out in protest but Apollonius declares 'Shall I see the made a serpent's prey?' The 'Spear of his gaze' cuts through her 'keen, cruel per- ceant, stinging' and Lamia vanishes before the entire congregation --

And Lycius' arms were empty
 of delight,
As were his limbs of life,
 from that same night.
On the high couch he lay !--
 his friends came round --
Supported him -- no pulse,
 or breath they found,
And in his marriage robe,
 the heavy body wound.

(II. ll. 307-11)

The dramatic conclusion invests the scene with the solemn inevitability of a Greek tragedy.

According to Robert Graves the Lamiae of Greece were beautiful women who seduced and then sucked the blood of travellers. In Aristophanes' day, they were regarded as emissaries of the Triple Goddess Hecate. Hecate is associated with the lower world and the night. She is the queen of ghosts and magic and the protectress of enchanters and witches. Graves assumes that they 'had been the orgiastic priestesses of the Libyan Snake-goddess Lamia'.⁹ Keats's adaptation and elaboration of the myth is a re-enactment of the archetypal attraction and menace of archaic forces and of conscious resistance to them. In a variant treatment of the fertility theme, he describes the ominous outcome of such a liaison. By surrendering to charms of the snake-goddess, Lycius loses his life. Their union results in decay and degeneration --

The myrtle sickened in a
 thousand wreaths.
By faint degrees, voice,
 lute and pleasure ceased;
A deadly silence step by
 step increased,
Until it seemed a horrid
 presence there
And not a man but felt the
 terror in his hair.

(II. ll. 264-68)

Lycius's death at the end of the poem symbolizes

his release from the demonic clutches of evil. Apollonius 'the reformer of man kind' exposes the bestial, paralyzing lure of illusory love and allows his foster-son to escape into the precincts of death which represents the logical continuity of the natural order.

Critics have differed widely over the poem's meaning and value. Some find the symbolism autobiographical, others feel that it is an expression of Keats's preoccupation with the destructiveness of love, and of the contrast between the illusory and the actual. In its mythic format, the poem incorporates all these themes, when it offers a parodistic treatment of the recurrent fertility theme.

'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' by Keats and 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' by Coleridge are two of the most famous ballads of the Romantic period. The rediscovery of the traditional English and Scottish folk-ballad in the later half of the eighteenth century is considered to be an important landmark in the reaction against Augustanism which led eventually to the Romantic movement. The Romantic writers published collections of ballads and also wrote a number of new poems in the ballad form.¹⁰

The title used by Keats 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci'

may be roughly translated as 'The beautiful woman without mercy'. According to Leigh Hunt, Keats used the title of Alain Chartier's poem 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' (1424).¹¹ Keats probably knew the poem from the English translation included in the 1782 edn. of The Poetical Works of Geoffrey Chaucer. In The Eve he says of Porphyro that in order to wake Madeline --

He played an ancient ditty,
 long since mute,
In Provence called 'La Belle
 dame sans mercy...'

(Stz. 11. 291-2)

The poem has a circular form established by the echoing of Stz. 1 at the end of the poem. This poem also follows the seasonal cycle. The Knight meets the Circean maid in summer. He describes her as --

Full beautiful, a
 fairy's child
Her hair was long, her
 foot was light,
And her eyes were wild.

(Stz. IV. 11. 14-16)

The description of the love encounter is exquisitely romantic. The Knight-at-arms, who is the ideal figure of a man of action, weaves garlands and bracelets for the beautiful wild maid. She offers him the ritual feast --

She found me roots of
 relish sweet
 And honey wild and
 manna dew
 And sure in language
 strange she said,
 "I love thee true".

(Stz. VII. ll. 25-28)

Like Lamia, she ensnares the Knight in a web of sensual illusion. She leads him 'to her elfin grot' which is reminiscent of Lamia's 'purple lined palace of sin' and here she 'lulls' him into a deep sleep and thus makes him her 'thrall'. To the Knight it seems that only a day has passed, but it is autumn when he wakes "on the cold hillside". The season of the year is indicated through associative imagery --

The sedge has withered
 from the lake
 And no birds sing !...
 The squirrel's granary
 is full,
 And the harvest's done.

(Stz.I, ll. 3-4, Stz.II, ll. 7-8)

On that cold hillside, the Knight has a sinister dream. He dreams of pale Kings, princes and warriors who gape skeletally in the gloom and tell him that they too had been enchanted by the Belle Dame and then killed after the rapturous experience. This ghostly vision of the

charnel house leaves the Knight unnerved and impotent. The poet establishes an identity between the fall of the year and the physical decline of the Knight --

I see a lily on thy brow
 With anguish moist and
 fever dew
 And on thy cheek a
 fading rose
 Fast withereth too.

(Stz. III. ll. 9-12)

The will of the Knight has been broken with his brutal awakening and he cannot resume his old life.

In the portrayal of the Belle Dame Keats may have been influenced by Spenser's fatal enchantress Phaedria in Fairie Queen. Phaedria invited the Knight Cymochiles to her little boat, dressed herself in garlands, sang enchantingly to him and then put him to sleep with his head on her lap. Finally she marooned him on an island. Robert Graves identifies a parallel between Keats's poem and the folk ballad of 'Thomas the Rhymer'. Thomas was taken by the Queen of Elfland on her milk-white horse to a beautiful garden. She fed him on bread and wine and lulled him to sleep and gave him the gift of poetic insight. However, she warned him that he may be the victim of a Sabbatical sacrifice going to hell by the road

that 'lies out ovr yon frostly fell'. Graves identifies the 'frosty fell' with Keats's 'Cold hillside'. He further suggests that the Belle Dame is the hag Death, one of the triple forms of the 'White Goddess'. Keats's brother Tom had died of consumption few months earlier. Graves feels that the Belle Dame specifically represents the plague tuberculosis which leaves 'anguish moist and fever dew' on the brow of its victim.¹²

In terms of the mythic vision, 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' is simply another metaphor for the darker aspects of the Great Goddess. The exquisite rapture of ruinous sensual allurements is an articulation of the self-destructive psychological impulse ever present in the human mind. Birth, love and death represent the continuities of the natural order. However the concept of illusory love and the vision of death as complete annihilation suggests the presence of hurdles in the path of the ideal man. The mystery that shrouds the figure of the Belle Dame, suggests an obscurity of emotional attitude also identifiable in some of Keats's letters. In a letter to Bailey, he described this attitude as a 'gordian complication' --

I am certain I have not the right feeling
towards women... When among Men I have
no evil thoughts, no malice, no spleen...

When I am among Women I have evil thoughts, malice, spleen... You must be charitable and put all this perversity to my being disappointed since Boyhood -- Yet with such feelings I am happier alone among Crowds of men, by myself or with a friend or two.... I must absolutely get over this -- but how? The only way is to find the root of evil and so cure it "with backward mutters of dis-serving Power". That is a difficult thing; for an obstinate Prejudice can seldom be produced but from a gordian complication of feelings, which must take time to unravel and care to keep unravelled. 13

Keats's romances are the 'backward mutters of dis-serving power' on this gordian complication. His romantic heroines are the various projections of it. In the basic mythical plot they represent the many aspects of the mother figure whose maternal principle binds mankind to the ever-revolving wheel of time.

III

Keats's medieval romances represent the poet's nostalgia for the past. They are tales of lovers of long ago, set in the beautiful Renaissance Florence, in the ancient Corinth, in a feudal castle and in the enchanted fairy world of white studs and romantic knights where true lovers achieve an eternity of bliss and the false suffer alienation, impotence and even death. So deep was Keats's

preoccupation with these romantic archetypes that he transported them into his own situation. In the poems addressed to, or inspired by Fanny Brawn the same motivations are seen at work. Fanny is cast as a character in his larger mythical plot. She subtly blends with the Great Goddess and assumes at times her beneficent and at other times her chilling aspects. Keats becomes sometimes her votary and sometimes her 'thrall'.

Keats first met Fanny Brawn in September 1818. The Brawns had rented Charles Dilke's house. At a later stage, he told her "the very first week I knew you I wrote myself your vassal".

The sonnet 'As Hermes once took to his feathers light' describes a love dream associated with Fanny Brawn. Keats's draft appears in Inferno I of the copy of Cary's Dante which he presented to her. In the journal letter of 14 February- 3 May 1819 Keats described his actual dream --

The dream was one of the most delightful enjoyments I ever had in my life -- I floated about the whirling atmosphere as it is described with a beautiful figure to whose lips mine were joined as it seem'd for an age -- and in the midst of all this cold and darkness I was warm -- even flowery tree tops sprung up and we rested on them

Aye, an hour ago, my
 brilliant Queen !
 Touch has a memory.
 Oh, say, love, say,
 What can I do to kill
 it and be free
 In my old liberty ?

(ll. 1-6)

'liberty' represents his creative activity. In his earlier poetry, the heroine was identified with the Muse. In Endymion Cynthia was the empyreal Muse who promised to teach the hero the poetry of cosmic essence. In the romances, the Muse was replaced by the sensual witch who either killed him or left him impotent and purposeless in a barren land. Through his emotional association with Fanny, the problem appears in Keats's own life. Fanny now appears as the Circean enchantress of the poems wielding a cruel and dangerous power through her beauty. In a letter to her, Keats wrote --

Why may I not speak of your Beauty, since without that I could never have lov'd you -- I cannot conceive any beginning of such love as I have for you but Beauty. There may be a sort of love for which, without the least sneer at it, I have the highest respect and can admire it in others : but it has not the richness, the bloom, the full form, the enchantment of love after my own heart. So let me speak of your Beauty, though to my own endangering; if you could be so cruel to me as to try elsewhere its Power. 15

In 'Ode to Fanny' Keats uses the image of the ritual feast that he has used in his poems --

Let none profane my Holy
 See of love,
 Or with a rude hand break
 The sacramental cake;

(Stz.VII, ll. 51-53)

In the same poem he is a distraught and possessive lover --

Who now, with greedy looks,
 eats up my feast ?
 What stare outfaces now
 my silver moon ?
 Ah, keep that hand unravished
 at the least;
 Let, let, the amorous burn,
 But, prithee, do not turn
 The current of your heart
 from me soon.
 On, save, in charity,
 The quickest pulse for me !

(Stz.III, ll. 17-24)

The same sentiment is expressed in another letter to her--

How have you pass'd this month ? Who have
 you smil'd with ? All this may seem savage
 in me. You do not feel as I do -- you do
 not know what it is to love.... Do not write
 to me if you have done anything this month
 which it would have pained me to have seen....
 I cannot live without you, and not only you
 but chaste you, virtuous you. 16

Keats made a valiant effort to distance himself from

Fanny. He wrote a 'flint-worded letter' to her from Winchester where he confessed that he could see her only 'chrough a mist' and that he was 'excessively unlover-like and ungallant' --

I cannot help it -- I am no officer in yawning quarters; no Parson-romeo... I can no more use soothing words to you than if I were at this moment engaged in a charge of Cavalry -- 17

However, he soon realized that his involvement was too intense and too overwhelming to be ignored. The sonnet 'I cry your Mercy, pity, love' expresses his complete surrender to love. His letter of 19th October 1819, written to Fanny, parallels the intensity of passion --

I sho [u] ld like to cast the die for love or death -- I have no Patience with anything else -- if you ever intend to be cruel to me as you say in jest now but perhaps may sometimes be in earnest be so now -- and I will -- my mind is in a tremble, I cannot tell What I am writing. 18

In the sonnet, the poet requires the 'whole' and 'all', down to the last 'atom's atom' of her body and soul. This is a frantic demand for a God-like monopoly over her. If she does not comply, he threatens to die --

Or living on perhaps, your
wretched thrall,

Forget, in the mist of
 idle misery,
 Life's purposes -- the
 palate of my mind
 Losing the gust, and
 my ambition blind !

(ll. 11-14)

The last lines restructure the archetypal image of the isolated, alienated and impotent thrall of the evil goddess who gives life only to give death.

Destiny intended no outcome for this romance except its termination through death. Strangely enough this is what Keats, too, unconsciously desired --

I have two luxuries to brood over in my walks, your Loveliness and the hour of my death, O that I could have possession of them both in the same minute. I hate the world; it batters too much the wings of my self-will, and would I could take a sweet poison from your lips to send me out of it.¹⁹

When he went to Italy he wrote to Brown 'If I had any chance of recovery, this passion would kill me'.

Keats's intensity of passion for Fanny seems to be an overwhelming unconscious obsession. The darker aspect of the Great Goddess seemed to extend to his own life as it drew to a close. His own love-affair too seemed to correspond with the mythic mode he used for his poetry.

From what is known of Fanny Brawn, she was a sheltered and well-bred girl and not promiscuous as Keats's letters project her to be.

The following fragment is treated by some critics as Keats's final address to Fanny Brawn. The beloved, in these lines is, directly accused of being her lover's murderer, --

This living hand, now
 warm and capable
 Of earnest grasping,
 would, if it were cold
 And in the icy silence
 of the tomb,
 So haunt thy days and
 chill thy dreaming nights
 That thou would wish
 thine own heart dry of blood
 So in my veins red life
 might stream again,
 And thou be conscience-
 calmed. See here it is --
 I hold it towards you.

It is interesting to note that Keats's mythic vision was so deeply ingrained in his psyche that it, at times, could influence even his personal life. He sought the Great Goddess in his beloved. Fanny, being a mere mortal, fell short of his requirements and thus caused much pain and heartache to him.

Notes and References

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2. Newell Ford, op.cit., p. 203.
3. Cited by M. Allott, op.cit., pp. 452-53.
4. Maria Gilbriath "The Etymology of Porphyro's Name in Keats's "Eve of St. Agnes" in Keats-Shelley Journal, Vol.XXXVII (1988), p. 25.
5. Rollins, op.cit., Vol.II, pp. 223-24.
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7. Rollins, op.cit., Vol.II, p. 174.
8. Cited by M. Allott, op.cit., pp. 632-33.
9. Robert Graves, The White Goddess (New York, 1959), p. 232.
10. Sir Walter Scott published a collection of ballads in 1802.
11. Leigh Hunt, Indicator (10 May, 1820).
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15. Ibid., Vol.II, p. 127.
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18. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 224.
19. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 133.

CHAPTER VI

'The Viewless Wings of Poesy'

Ode to Psyche
Ode to A Nightingale
Ode on A Grecian Urn
Ode on Melancholy
Ode on Indolence
Ode to Autumn.

I

In the landscape of his poetry, the odes of Keats mark the highest point. The poems are meditative, combining a variety of moods and also the Pindaric and Horatian elements.¹ They are not results of any concrete programme but are linked together by a certain philosophy that manifests itself in each of the odes. Quest for this philosophy leads the poet to mythology. Within it he discovers the highest manifestations of 'beauty' and ultimately of 'truth'.

In ancient times, the ode was a choral form, providing a dramatic musical setting for the ritual or heroic theatre. The divisions of the chorus answered each other in strophe, anti-strophe and epode as they provided a commentary to some action being carried out simultaneously at the altar or on the stage. We may observe that the ode incorporates the inherent cantatory character and magical intent of the primordial rituals and thus provides Keats with the perfect means of developing his mythic vision in poetry.

The poets of the Romantic Revival exhibited a firm belief in individuality, subjectivity and the ego. Contrary

to this prevailing mood, Keats possessed a universal vision. He rejected the myth of the god-like 'I' and the resulting self-assertive poetry. He put forward his doctrine of Negative Capability. Influenced in this capacity by Shakespeare, he claimed that the self and the prejudices of a poet should be annihilated and he should be capable of entering into and expressing the thoughts of other men and beings. Armed with this vision Keats could fully understand and appreciate the constant and continuous rhythms of human behaviour that are recorded in mythology. This understanding inspired a profound, sympathetic vision of Man and the Universe.

'Ode to Psyche' is the only one of the major odes that is based on a myth. Keats first encountered the myth in Mrs Tighe's allegoric romance Psyche. He also read William Adlington's translation of Apuleius's Golden Ass which contained the ancient form of the myth.²

Psyche greatly attracted Keats. She embodied beauty, struggle, suffering and also achievement. Referring to the ode, Keats wrote to George in the journal letter of 14th February - 3rd May 1819 --

You must recollect that Psyche was not embodied as a goddess before the time of Apuleius (sic) the Platonist who lived

after (sic) the Augustan (sic) age, and consequently the Goddess was never worshipped or sacrificed to with any of the ancient fervour -- and perhaps never thought of in the old religion -- I am more orthodox than (sic) to let a heathen (sic) Goddess be so neglected. 3

The story of Psyche was the perfect means of communication of his ideas. The suffering, and heroism of Psyche could meet the demands of his philosophy. So much so, that in order to show his appreciation, he decided to reward her. By now, he had realized that the evil in human nature was inherent and necessary and was the contribution of the egotistic instincts. The range of his Negative Capability had to be extended. Earlier he had opted for total disinterestedness as against the egotistic 'I'. Now, however, he realized that the instinct of man included both. And he could see beauty in all instinctive phenomena and impulses. He could bear the truths of life even when confronted by greatly painful experiences. Also he could locate beauty within them. By discovering a similar archetype of this philosophy in the myth of Cupid and Psyche he achieved a wholeness brought about by the fusion of the two domains -- the mythological and the intellectual.

The myth describes Psyche as the most beautiful of

the three daughters of a certain king. Venus, jealous of her, sent Cupid to punish her by causing her to fall in love with some ugly monster. However, she was so ravishingly beautiful that Cupid himself fell in love with her and with the help of Apollo and the West wind, he took her away to an enchanted palace where he visited her secretly and made her promise never to see his face. Psyche's wicked sisters came to visit her and persuaded her that her lover was a cannibal monster. Terrified Psyche broke her promise that night by lighting a lamp to see his face. A hot drop of oil fell on him and waking up, he left her in anger. Psyche, too, left home in search of him. Venus set her to many impossible tasks. She asked her, first of all, to sort out a large heap of various grains before nightfall. The ants took pity on her and completed the task for her. Another task was to fetch water from an inaccessible fountain. A friendly eagle completed this task for her. Finally, she had to go down to Hades to bring a casket of beauty from Persephone. She had almost completed this when curiosity got the better of her and she opened the casket. It did not contain beauty but a deadly sleep which overcame her. This is where Cupid found her. With the permission of Zeus, he revived her and married her.

Cupid represents the fusion of the good and the bad instincts. He carried off Psyche. Apollo's Delphic Oracle had advised Psyche's father to dress her as a bride and leave her on a lonely hill-top. The promise was marriage. However, Cupid did not formally marry her. Later on, he rescued her from the revengeful clutches of Venus and married her. Venus represents the egotist whose vision is limited by subjectivity. Finally, Psyche represents struggle, patience and the ability to confront greatly painful experiences. She also represents the evolution of the human soul. At this point, the poet enters the myth and through the agency of 'Ode to Psyche' strives to deify her and thus reward her.

Keats consulted Lempiere's Classical Dictionary where the meaning of Psyche is explained in the following words --

The word signifies 'the soul' and this personification of Psyche, first mentioned by Apulieus, is consequently posterior to the Augustan age, though it is connected with ancient mythology. 4

Keats, however, visualizes her as a beautiful love-goddess and wants to celebrate her union with the love-god Cupid.

A brooklet, scarce espied
 Mid hush'd, cool-rooted flowers,
 fragrant-eyed,
 Blue, silver white and budded
 Tyrian,
 They lay calm-breathing on the
 budded grass;

(ll. 10-15)

Nature, love, poetry and myth integrate to create a picture of freshness, beauty, ripeness and fertility. The green recess represents the archetypal seed-bed. Here Keats, as Psyche's poet-priest, will administer the fertility rituals. He takes on the heroic role with sincerity.

The vision of this true love proves to be a vision of truth itself for Keats. True love rated high with him--

I am certain of nothing but of the holiness
 of the heart's affections and the truth of
 the imagination - What the imagination
 seizes as Beauty must be truth - whether it
 existed before or not.... The imagination
 may be compared to Adam's dream - he awoke
 and found it truth. 5

Through this imaginative recreation of mythology, he discovers a vision of purity and truth.

The vision is analysed further when he recognizes 'the winged boy' as Cupid. He is now enraptured by the

beauty of Cupid's companion 'But who was thou, O happy, happy dove?' The dove is one of the birds beloved of Aphrodite. Psyche seems him to be the 'loveliest vision far/ Of all Olympus's hierarchy'. Like Apollo, the young god, defeated the older generation of gods with his matchless beauty, so Psyche leaves behind the beautiful Phoebe and Vesper with hers. Psyche's beauty is the coherent fusion of struggle, experience, wisdom and purity. The pain and trouble of life has given her a unique identity.

Now, Psyche has passed the test of the 'Vale of Soul Making', and has achieved a 'schooled' identity or in mythological terms the potential of divinities. She has led Keats onto expanded consciousness regarding human intellect. Thus mythology has created within Keats a kind of renaissance or a reawakening of consciousness about values that had with time faded and diminished. Not only does he experience this consciousness with her but he also tries to act in accordance with this experience. Armed with this illumination, he laments the fact that such an exceptional goddess is bereft of the worship and adoration of the pious men of ancient years --

...temple thou hast none,
No altar heaped with flowers;
Nor virgin-choir to make
delicious moan...

No shrine, no grove, no
 oracle, no heat
 Of pale-mouthed prophet
 dreaming.

(11. 28-35)

He once again yearns for the Golden Age when 'holy were
 the haunted forest boughs/ Holy the air, the water, the
 fire.'

It is too late now for those 'antique vows' but
 with his new, deepened understanding he is in a position
 to --

... see, and sing, by my
 own eyes inspired.
 So let me be thy choir
 and make a moan
 Upon the midnight hours --

(11. 45-45)

So intense and so sincere is his devotion to this pagan
 maid, that he is ready to be --

Thy voice, thy lute, thy
 pipe, thy incense sweet
 From swung censer teeming;
 Thy shrine, thy grove,
 thy oracle, thy heat
 Of pale-mouthed prophet
 dreaming.

(11. 46-49)

The process of deification has begun. He is determined that there shall be no lapses. The poet now behaves like an ancient bard freely exploiting the privilege of adding to mythology. Psyche is now placed in modern context. The poet realizes that the world is degenerate and corrupt. There is no holy and pious place on Earth at all. The early Greek religion laid great emphasis on sanctity and purity. Everything offered to a god was to be strictly clean and pure. Any suggestion of impurity was likely to rouse the wrath of the divinity and then he would bring terrible disasters upon those who were responsible. Extremely conscious of these factors, the poet decides that the only holy place, worthy of a goddess like Psyche is within his mind --

Yes, I will be thy priest,
 and build a fane,
 In some untrodlen region
 of my mind,...

(ll. 50-51)

To compensate for the ancient neglect, he strives to build this imaginary temple to felicitate the goddess. His thoughts are 'new grown with pleasant pain' of new understanding and they branch out around the temple. This new intensity of thought contrasts with the earlier 'thoughtless'

state. Along with Psyche, Keats, too, has evolved.

He visualizes a thicket of dark trees fringed by ranges of high mountains. The valley is filled with Zephyrs, birds and bees. The picture recollects the Golden Age with its realm of Flora and Pan. In the midst of this vegetative richness which gathers together the beneficence of Gaia and all her Earth-goddesses, he plans to build a temple for Psyche. The sanctuary will be 'rosy'. The rose is the flower of Aphrodite. The sanctuary will be decorated 'With the wreathed tellis of a working brain'. Her gardener will be 'Fancy' or the imagination which will breed flowers that will seem ever-new.

The sensuous natural setting of the first stanza now synchronizes with the mind and the imagination to produce a place of adoration and devotion for the goddess. It is a place where 'all the soft delight/ That shadowy thought can win' will be available. The thought must be shadowed by sensuous, physical appreciation to reach the ideal state. His actual gift to Psyche is 'warm love' accompanied by the sharpened faculties to appreciate it.

The 'bright torch' at the open window allows that all secrecy is over and now Cupid can be properly

welcomed. Keats's sensuous nature wishes to preserve, along with all her spiritual goodness, the sheer physical beauty of the goddess and offer her as a source of inspiration and as an example to all true lovers.

Another significance of the lighted window is that it serves as an emblem of hope. Like the song of the nightingale and the Grecian urn, this temple, too, is a permanent, refreshing ideal in a changing transient world. The whole world is dark and only the altar of Psyche is flooded with bright light. She is the only one who has, through perseverance and purity, passed the test of sanctity.

'Ode to a Nightingale' does not reinterpret or recreate any particular Greek myth. However, the spirit, atmosphere and values of the pagan world are richly invoked. Mythology, by now, had become so integral a part of the imaginative, creative and critical faculties of Keats that his poetry cannot be dissociated from it. This ode brings together the central problems that tormented him all his life. While discussing these problems, Keats is searching for release from the predominant misery of the human lot. The release, he feels, can come only through a vision of ideal beauty. This ideal, for him, is contained in the

very nucleus of mythology. With the limitations of reality weighing down upon him, the poet is not equipped to glimpse the golden, glorious world of the gods. He tries to accomplish this task by integrating with a being outside himself whose innocence and purity can break the barriers between the mortal and immortal worlds and transport him into realms of beauty -- the nightingale.

The nightingale is one of the birds whose singing heralded the arrival of Apollo. When Apollo came, he brought spring and freedom from autumnal dangers and diseases. Like the star in the east proclaimed the birth of Christ, so the song of the nightingale proclaimed the arrival of Apollo. Both them can be considered as emblems of hope. They bring to mankind the message that better days are about to come. Also, in Romantic poetry, birds are used as catalysts of spiritual change. In Coleridge's The Ancient Mariner a bird had been the precursor of the redemptive action.

When the poem opens, the charm of the nightingale's song has already begun to work on Keats. He is subjected to a kind of preternatural change. The voice of the nightingale enraptures him and he is irresistibly led forward. Like Hermes, the conductor of the souls of the

dead to the underworld, the song of the nightingale conducts the soul of the poet to new realms. The poet is not in control of himself. The magical notes, like the magnetic music of an enchantress, saturate him and carry him 'Lethe wards'. 'Lethe' in Greek mythology, is a river in Hades beyond the Elysian Fields where those souls about to be reborn, drink oblivion of former lives. The nightingale appears to be an agency merging with whom would provide him with relief. Gradually, the poet is drifting away from the state of conscious awareness towards one which is nonrational but creative. He can now glimpse the basic structure and the natural laws which have been preserved in mythology. With its exquisite song the bird appears to him like a 'light-winged' Dryad or a tree-nymph from Greek mythology. The completed picture places it in one of those green bowers that to Keats are reminiscent of the Golden Age. The whole plot appears 'melodious' -- it is invested with magical potentialities. Leaving behind the maimed and diseased world which is full of palsied old people and 'pale and spectre-thin' young people, the poet, like Endymion, ventures into a magic forest. The preternatural change effects the landscape as well. 'Summer' is the season of ripeness and fertility. The blossom and the fruitage is at its peak and the nightingale sings its

praise 'in full-throated ease'.

The poet now invokes that aid of old wine that 'hath been/ Cooled a long age in the deep-delv'd earth' and now combines all the elements of beauty, creativity, happiness, celebration, sensuousness, sweetness of Flora who is the goddess of blossoming plants, inspiration drawn from Hippocrene (the spring on Mount Helicon, sacred to the muse). These components can be compared to the ingredients of a druid's magic potion. With ages of closeness to Gaia or Mother Earth this wine has acquired limitless potentialities. Through being cooled for ages in the depths of Earth, it has imbibed the wisdom, strength and beneficence of Gaia. It also combines the dreams of the poet. It is one of the agencies that can remove him from a pain-filled world and transport him to the ideal world represented by the nightingale. The nightingale is above the ravages of time. It has never known 'The weariness, the fever, and the fret' of the mortal world. Thus, it can be equated with a divinity. It has transcended the limits of mortality. By leaving behind the world of pain and trouble, it has become immortal. These mythological potentialities of the nightingale represent a unity between man and his universe. The negation of all these problems

is the solution to man's fallen state, where 'The dull brain perplexes and retards'. So, the cup of wine which had appeared to be promising is simply an extension of Bacchus, the god of wine. He is sometimes identified with Dionysus who has both creative and destructive potentialities. He is a god of vegetation as well as wine. He is famous for his vengeance. Those who did not recognize his divinity were driven mad. The daughters of Proteus under his influence destroyed their own children. His influence, thus cannot guarantee a creative state of mind. The poet turns to the 'viewless wings of Poesy' to perform this task.

'Poesy' and 'Fancy' are two recurring words in the poetry of Keats. 'Poesy', it appears, is poetry laden with warmth, sensuousness and beauty. Infact, it is a very much glorified personification of poetry. The exclusive title brings to mind a beautiful enigmatic Greek goddess, radiant with love and beneficence. Its attributes includes the ability to preserve beauty, and also the ability to understand and sympathise with human nature. 'Fancy' is another name for the imagination. It is born through inherent creativity. It is responsible for feeding 'Poesy' with aspirations, dreams, longings and desires. Infact, it

represents the very parentage of 'Poesy'. A union of 'Fancy' with situations gives birth to 'Poesy'. Here, too, 'Fancy' and 'Poesy' come to his rescue. All at once, he beholds that 'haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne/ Clustered around by her starry fays'. The moon, a picture of loveliness, is presented in mythical terms. In the next line, its glorious majestic state is contrasted with the earthly state of man who is represented by the poet, sitting in total darkness. The only relief comes in the form of light which '...from the heavens is with the breezes blown'. He is immobile in a grave of vegetation which is the rich and ripe product of May. The picture recalls the image of Adonis buried deep under flowers and leaves in Endymion. Keats, the poet, experiences symbolic death. Thus, he compromises with mythology. The compromise is not inappropriate. Exhausted by trials of life, unable to evolve creatively, he returns to the 'seed' state which will refresh, refurnish and re-equip him for the trials of life. There is no contrariness, no confusion in this image but suspension of the sense and hope for re-enforcement with life and energy. The grave in Keats's mythic vision is equated with the womb to which the poet has returned. It symbolizes the beginning of a new kind of life. Within this archetypal frame-work the

suspended state appears to be the promise of deliverance. It is a compensation for an unsatisfying life, an ascent towards a healthier and fuller vision.

Death the demon also integrates with the Mother-figure. It does not symbolise the complete annihilation of the self of the poet but an extinction of earthly problems. In moments of intensity this is the death Keats always wished for. Just before he died he said to Severn --

I shall soon be laid in the quiet grave --
O ! I can feel the cold earth upon me -- The
daisies growing over me -- O, for this Quiet--
it will be my first. 6

Death, like any other thing of beauty, gives him intense pleasure.

The nightingale, in its role as a divinity combines the musical talent of Apollo, the happiness of Elysium, the fertility of Maia, the wisdom of Gaia and the beauty of Adonis. Conscious of its attributes and divine status the poet realizes he cannot integrate with it. The union of a mortal and immortal cannot be achieved. As its special attributes he recognises the ability to heal wounded souls.

The poet visualizes the beautiful notes wiping away the tears of the unhappy exile Ruth and always charming trouble away and creating a beautiful world for the 'emperor' as well as the 'clown'. Now, having completed its task of providing a few minutes of solace to the poet's wounded soul, the nightingale prepares to leave.

The 'magic casement' is the window between the two worlds of reality and ideal beauty. All at once Keats discovers that he is on the 'forlorn' side whereas the nightingale is disappearing on the other side. He is left along with the realizations that the 'actual' world of grief is inescapable. It has to co-exist with the ideal world. Man has come too far in the scale of evolution and now neither can be distilled from the other. The poet returns to his earlier stupor-like state --

Was it a vision, or a
 waking dream?
 Fled is that music...
 Do I wake of sleep?

(ll. 79-80)

This completes the circular nature of the poem. The circular pattern has associations with the time-cycle. The experience has exposed mythology before the poet as a channel for evolution. The tested, superior, classical

norms and values are suffused with soft, palpable human emotions and needs. This combination results in an unusual vision that gives his poems their special appeal.

II

'Ode on a Grecian Urn' continues the theme of 'Ode to a Nightingale'. In fact, it provides answers to some of the questions raised in the earlier ode. The object of inspiration, this time, is a marble urn with pictures of 'silvan' life engraved on it. Keats's fascination with Greek mythology was intense. Severn quotes Keats's comment '...the Greek spirit - the Religion of the beautiful; the Religion of Joy....'⁷ This 'spirit' has receded from the face of the Earth and can only be found in the midst of mythology. The Grecian urn, however, still crystallizes those days. The inscribed scenes kindle the imagination of Keats, and while recreating those ancient days he observes within them visions of beauty and universal experience of eternal endurance. Though such mythological thinking, he recreates the natural behaviour and responses of the uncomplicated early man and draws inspiration from him.

The urn, hence, is the point of focus or the

concrete centre. True to his sensuous nature, Keats uses a physical object to represent the permanence of the truths of life as deciphered by the mind and the heart. These abstracts ideas are physically manifested through these pictures.

The urn, of course, is purely imaginary -- a combination of Keats's recollection of the Sosibios vase, the Borghese vase, the Townley vase, the Portland vase, the Bacchic pictures of Poussin and the Elgin Marbles.⁸

According to Pettet, a passage from Collins's The Passion 'formed an embryo out of which a considerable part of his ode evolved'. He traces the use of 'Tempe' and 'the happy melodist, unwearied' to Collins's poem. Also, he points at the concluding three lines as particularly significant --

Revive the just Design of Greece,
Return in all thy simple state
Confirm the Tales her Sons relate !⁹

When seen against this background, the urn is symbolic of the basic principle that governs all forms of life. It depicts the beauty, purity and enchantment of the ancient Grecian life and serves as an all time guide to later generations. It is definitely more than an

inanimate piece of decoration. Its stature is that of a mythical divinity. The opening lines of the ode sound like the invocation of a deity --

Thou still unravished
 bride of quietness,
 Thou foster-child of
 silence and slow time,
 Silvan historian, who
 canst thus express
 A flowery tale more
 sweetly than our rhyme!

(ll. 1-4)

The urn, hence, is as beautiful, powerful, enigmatic and enchanting as any mythical goddess. It is a divinity, like Psyche, who has withstood the challenges and ravages of time and proved her purity and loyalty. It is a poet, like Apollo, who tells a 'leaf-fring'd legend'... 'more sweetly' than any mortal. It is also immortal and beneficent.

The poet goes on to furnish this newly-created goddess with a mythical history. The artist who created the urn is now dead and gone and the abstractions 'Silence and slow-time' are the divinity's foster-parents. Among its divine attributes are permanent youthfulness (as is implied by the use of 'child') and also wisdom (as is shown by the use of 'historian').

In its 'leaf-fring'd legend' the urn does not relate everyday experiences but tells of a 'mad pursuit', of a 'struggle to escape', of a 'wild ecstasy'.

To the poet it seems that the incident the legend elaborates took place in either Tempe or Arcadia. In classical antiquity, these two places were renowned for their natural beauty and the happiness of the people who lived there. Arcadia contains a temple of Apollo. Hermes (the god of luck, wealth, sleep, dreams, and fertility, patron of merchants and thieves) and Pan (the god of flocks and shepherds) were originally Arcadian gods. Thus, the new Keatsian goddess joins their ranks.

The next stanza finds the poet smoothly sailing away from the time-bound world into the timeless world. He now listens to the music, not with his 'sensual ear', but with his 'spirit'. The 'ditties' are 'unheard' yet 'endeared'. Like the music from the spheres, the unheard notes fully saturate his senses and he goes into a kind of a trance. He sees a 'Fair youth beneath the trees...' who is playing a pipe. The trees are leafy, green, thick and in full bloom. The picture recreates one of those fertile, green bowers that occur again and again in the poetry of Keats. The bower recollects unspoilt vegetation

and perfect physical beauty of the Golden Age, as the green recess of 'Ode to Psyche' had done. In this case the bower is frozen in marble. The trees will never be exposed to the ravages of autumn. Age will not creep over and destroy the boy. He will continue to sing forever and will always be beautiful. This picture may be considered as a projection of Keats's private Elysium -- eternal sensuous beauty that is above the ravages of time and the undying ability to create poetry 'for ever new'. It represents a dream-world above frightening and depressing reality.

The next picture shows a lover pursuing his beloved in an attempt to kiss her. As Keats integrated with the 'Fair youth' so he does with this lover. In spite of the proximity, the lover will not be able to kiss his beloved. The pair of lovers like Cupid and Psyche, and also like himself and Fanny, in spite of intense feeling for each other, are not able to attain fulfilment. Perhaps recollecting this myth, Keats tells the lover '-- yet do not grieve'. He indicates that there is always hope for relief. Just as the bower is rich and green and representing early spring and not the season of ripeness, the love, too, is young, fresh and still to ripen, 'still to

be enjoyed'. The entire scene, like the urn, depicts a state of being 'unravished'. Placed in proper mythological context, the urn represents the 'mythic consciousness' of Keats. Owen Barfield defines the term as 'a renewal of lost insights'.¹⁰ More important than increasing the sensuous beauty of these pictures, is the contribution that knowledge of these background myths makes towards their meaning. Through mythology, Keats reaches that sensitive, basic nerve of human experience that makes him familiar which its circular, recurrent nature. Thus, the common experiences of Cupid and Psyche, himself and Fanny, unite in the picture of the lover and his beloved --

Ah, happy, happy boughs,
 that cannot shed
 Your leaves, nor ever bid
 the spring adieu;

(ll. 21-22)

The boughs, here, are treated as separate entities capable of experiencing happiness. In the garden of the gods of Elysium, there is eternal spring and uninterrupted music. The 'happy melodist' reminds us of Orpheus. Orpheus played the lyre so well that his music had a spell-binding effect even on rocks and stones. The following

three lines are expressive of a similar state --

All breathing human passion
 far above,
 That leaves a heart high-
 sorrowful and cloyed
 A burning forehead, and a
 parching tongue.

(ll. 28-30)

The next picture transports him into the very heart of the old Greek religion. It depicts a gorgeous sacrificial procession led by a priest with a heifer. Perhaps the picture was motivated by a painting by Claude's 'Sacrifice to Apollo'. Ian Jack says 'The elegiac tone of Keats's lines is profoundly in sympathy with the serene nostalgia of Claude's religious processions'.¹¹

These marbles preserves the memory of beautiful days now lost. Among other things, they bring to us the pagan ritual of sacrifice. By surrendering to the deity the blood of a particular animal, or in stray cases even of a human being, the worshippers prayed for the community's happiness, or for averting evil, or for the expiation of some crime. Purity was one of the essential pre-requisites of sacrifice. Hence, on this 'pious morn' as the 'mysterious priest' leads the heifer to a 'green altar', we witness an ardent show of devotion. The reference to

'green altar' revives the concept of nature worship along with all its vitality and freshness. The unity and harmony of the community impresses him.

Carried forward by the thought process, he arrives at a '...little town by river or sea-shore' which is now 'emptied of this folk'. Since the congregation is immobile the town will always be empty, desolate and forlorn. He is removed from the happy scene and transported, as he was, in 'Ode to a Nightingale' to the grim actual world symbolised by the little town. Unlike the earlier ode, however, this ode does not conclude on this unhappy note. The wealth of experience and visions revealed to him by his newest divinity have led him to discover a certain philosophy that he defines in the final stanza.

The urn, the great mythological 'historian' has served as a lever to edge the poet's mental faculties into realms of greater understanding. Keats recognizes the 'silence' of the urn as its individual strength. This 'bride of quietness', this foster-child of 'silence and slow-time' with its unheard melodies may be compared to the Cave of Quietude (Endymion Book IV) where 'Silence dreariest/ Is most articulate'. This silence is healing and comforting -- a thing of serenity and solace. That

is why --

Thou, silent form, does
 tease us out of thought
 As doth Eternity. Cold pastoral !

(ll. 44-45)

The form projects eternal, timeless values that will never perish. It will always be 'a friend to man'. However, to the unschooled soul or the man without an identity it will seem a 'Cold Pastoral'.

Going back to Greek mythology, the urn may be compared to the Sibyl Erythraean. The Sibyls were prophetesses inspired by some deity, mostly by Apollo. Sibyl Erythraean made prophecies regarding the Trojan War. Apollo offered her a gift and she asked for a life of as many years as a fistful of grains of sand. However, she forgot to ask for prolonged youth. She became so old that she was hung up in an urn which later contained her ashes. In Roman mythology, the Sibyls are married to Dis (the male god of the underworld) yet they remain virgins.

Keats's Grecian urn has these sibylline qualities. The closing couplet of the ode may be regarded as its prophecy of message to mankind. The oracular properties of

the ancient sibyls find expression in this apparent paradox --

'Beauty is truth, truth
 beauty' -- that is all
 Ye know on earth, and
 all ye need to know.

(ll. 49-50)

'Beauty' now means the inextricably woven joy and grief within human experience. This was the 'truth' he had been attempting to discover and had been frightened by in 'Ode to a Nightingale'. 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' is a much more stable analysis of the same philosophy. Through the agency of the Grecian Urn, Keats comes to terms with this 'truth' and realises that this is the superior, permanent beauty that constitutes the basic law of life.

The next ode 'Ode on Melancholy' witnesses the deification of yet another deity created in the tradition of Apollo, Psyche, Maia and also the Grecian Urn.¹² The central idea of the poem is the contrast between false melancholy that causes stagnation of the senses, and true melancholy that is a necessary condition for the most intense experiences that lead one on to the goal of beauty and creativity. The kinship between intense sorrow and intense happiness is recognised as necessary and is brought

together in the benevolent form of melancholy, the goddess.

On at least two occasions, he exhibits this awareness in his letters. As early as March 1819, he wrote to George and Georgiana Keats --

Circumstances are like clouds continually gathering and bursting -- while we are laughing the seed of some trouble is put into (he) the wide arable land of events -- while we are laughing it sprouts is (sic) grows and suddenly bears a poison fruit which we must pluck -- 13

This is a very positive statement that shows that Keats had been preoccupied with this problem for quite some time and that ultimately only mythology could find a solution to it. That he is already thinking on these lines is obvious from another letter, again to the George Keatses. While defining the 'Vale of tears' he wrote --

-- For instance suppose a rose to have sensation, it blooms on a beautiful morning, it enjoys itself -- but there comes a cold wind, a hot sun -- it cannot escape it, it cannot destroy its annoyances -- they are as native to the world as itself : no more can man be happy inspite, that world (1) y elements will prey upon his nature. 14

Mythological motifs are an integral part of Keats's imagination. They enrich his expression and serve to unite the poet's instinct with his intellect and give him his

unique vision. To explain a philosophy, Keats naturally uses motifs as the rose, the sun and the wind.

The first lecture on the English poets delivered by Hazlitt guided the poet in the expression of his ideals. The topic was On Poetry in General (Jan 1818) and the following extract is especially significant --

The poetical impression of any subject is that uneasy, exquisite sense of beauty or power that... strives... to enshrine itself ... in the highest forms of fancy, had to relieve the aching sense of pleasure by expressing it in the boldest manner. 15

With the weight of this knowledge growing upon him, such a poem was inevitable. The trinity of a dramatic experience of beauty ('Ode to a Nightingale'), a thing of beauty ('Ode on Grecian Urn') and the spirit of beauty ('Ode on Melancholy') was a necessary milestone in the evolution of Keats the poet.

The first stanza is but one negative statement listing images, taken from mythology, of false melancholy. It is equated with oblivion, night, sleep and death through various classical references. The poet of the earlier odes has taken a significant step ahead in maturity, for those two poems had begun in an effort to leave behind the

world of pain and sorrow. Now, the poet is not only ready to accept melancholy but also ready to face its consequences. 'No, no, go not to Lethe...' begins the poet. Lethe, earlier referred to in 'Ode to a Nightingale' is the river in Hades. Water from it was drunk by souls about to be reborn, so that they forgot their previous lives. To the immature man who is extremely sorrowful, it offers oblivion as solace. Similarly, 'Wolf's bane' a herb with a poisonous juice, tempts him like 'wine'. 'Nightshade' is a tree that bears poisonous berries and is associated with Proserpine, the Queen of Hades. Here it is personified as a deadly, venomous spirit in the guise of a temptress that destroys these oppressive influences, the sorrowful victim makes a rosary of 'yew berries' and appears as evil and doomed as a priest of the occult. His very 'Psyche' or soul haunts him like a 'death-moth'. The total picture is chilling, infernal and rather ghostly. It projects a man with inverted inclinations. Through continuous association with Hades, the faculties of the melancholic man become vague and unsubstantial and 'drown the wakeful anguish of the soul'.

The destroying, defeating melancholy can totally incapacitate any man and keep him forever in 'Vale of

tears'. The poet condemns it and feels that it should be steadfastly avoided.

True melancholy is not a defeatist experience but a creative one -- a constructive gift of the 'Vale of Soul Making' -- a guide towards creative evolution of the energies. The second stanza is another single statement about the nature of true melancholy. Once again Keats draws his images from mythology. In contrast to the images of decay and stagnation of the first statement, this one is laden with images of fertility and purity. True melancholy is described as a 'fit' that 'fall' (s) from, 'heaven' in the form of a 'weeping cloud'. It comes as a gift from the gods and hence nourishes and revives. When Apollo descended to Earth, he brought the beneficence of spring as a gift for mankind. Keats seems to recollect the myth when he talks of the lifting of the 'April Shroud'. The green hill now becomes greener. Even before removal, the shroud is associated with whiteness and purity. April disintegrates as May the month of spring, commences. The first of May recalls and recreates the very seeds of fertility.

All these attributes gather together to create the profound figure of Melancholy. Growing with his philosophy

as the foundation, the abstract concept gains the stature of a palpable personality. Invested with his 'Fancy' the personality blooms into an enticing goddess. Melancholy does not feature in the Greek pantheon but Keats's treatment of her makes her story appear like an independent, established myth. Led by her, the poet becomes sensitive enough to drink in the poignant and enriching beauty of such things as a 'morning rose', the glittering, multi-coloured sand-dunes and a wealth of peonies. These images recollect the description of Cyprus, the island north-east of Mediterranean, where Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love, first landed. Aphrodite Urania was the goddess of high, pure love whereas in her other aspect as Aphrodite Pandemos, she is the goddess of sensual lust. The goddess Melancholy leads her devotees to Aphrodite Urania, as is obvious by the following lines --

Or if thy mistress some rich
 anger shows,
 Imprison her soft hand, and
 let her rave,
 And feed deep, deep upon her
 peerless eyes.

(ll. 18-20)

In the third and last stanza Keats actually comes face to face with his goddess. This confrontation represents a treaty of his conscious and sub-conscious thought-

processes. Through melancholy, he is able to reach this juncture. On the earlier occasions (e.g. when led by the beauty of the nightingale's song, and when led by the silvan pictures on the Grecian Urn) he had only reached what he describes as the 'temple of Delight'. This represents that cross-road in mental progress where there is no conflict, where the conscious thoughts and the subconscious thoughts do not destroy or suppress each other but healthily flourish side by side. In other words, it represents complete knowledge. Now, with the blessings of the divinity Melancholy to guide him, he can not only enter but also confront the 'veiled figure' in her 'soveran shrine'. The high pitch of his intensity does not break and he acknowledges the extent of her might. She elevates him as her oracle and he describes the test she takes of her devotees --

Though seen of none save him
 whose strenuous tongue
 Can burst Joy's grape against
 his palate fine;
 (ll. 27-28)

Now, he has passed this test and has become her devotee as he had earlier become of Apollo, Psyche, Maia and even the Grecian Urn. In keeping with the tradition of Greece and Rome where trophies of victory were hung up in temples, his

soul too is '...among her cloudy trophies hung.' The adjective 'cloudy' reminds us of the Heavenly palaces of the various gods, one of which is now occupied by Melancholy.

III

'Ode on Melancholy' was also written in May 1819.¹⁶ Unlike the other odes, however, it does not seem to analyse the living moment. The poet analyses his entire experience. His thought-process is projected in the form of a dream. The adoption of this technique links him with Hermes, who among other things is the god of dreams and sleep.

In a letter to the George Keatses the poet wrote --

This morning I am in a sort of a temper indolent and supremely careless : I long after a stanza or two of Thomson's Castle of Indolence. Neither Poetry, nor Ambition, nor Love have any alertness of countenance as they pass by me : they seem rather like three figures on a Greek Vase -- A Man and two Women.... This is the only happiness. 17

Now, once again these three figures confront him. Love, Ambition and Poetry -- these three abstractions single themselves out as the most important and dominating forces of his life. Together they form a kind of non-

Christian or pagan trinity.

The poet does not recognize them. He had been lost in 'nothingness' and they broke through the shield, quietly and secretly --

....Ripe was the drowsy hour;
 The blissful cloud of summer
 indolence
 Benumbed my eyes; my pulse
 grew less and less;
 Pain had no sting, and
 pleasure's wreath no flower:

(ll. 15-18)

The effect of indolence is like a trance or a dream. Indolence is now an agency of Hermes. These three figures move in a circle and the poet wishes they would 'melt' away and allow him to lose himself totally in the beneficence of Indolence. A new dimension is now added to this abstraction who is gradually shaping as a deity. Like the Grecian Urn and Melancholy, she too is a Mother-figure, a giver of comfort, security and peace. Keats's constant preoccupation with the Mother-figure proves that his thoughts-process is essentially mythological.

Indolence, too, can be linked to the Great Goddess whose benevolence attracts Keats. Now that she has taken him under her protection, he can look at Love, Ambition and

Poetry and analyse their role in framing his thought-process. In his reflections on life and in his philosophies they had always occupied the top strata. In fact, his entire career as an artist, demonstrates their closeness. These were the lively active energies that supported the essential identity of Keats. However, he was aware of his dependence on them and knew all the time that he had to evolve into an independent 'soul' and discard these supporting agents. This feeling is reflected in a letter to Reynolds --

....We hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us -- and if we do not agree, seems to put its hands in its breeches pocket. Poetry should be great and unobtrusive, a thing which enters into one's soul, and does not startle or amaze if with itself but with its subject -- 10

Like the three goddesses who appeared in triple-form to prove their divinity, these abstractions, too, form a trinity and conduct themselves in three-circles. Because they are not divine, they cannot accomplish this successfully. They appear like 'Ghosts' and their triple circle forces rather occult interpretations. They are as unhealthy and dismal as the inhabitants of Hades. The poet finally rejects them and they fade and he returns to Indolence.

Indolence, hence, signifies not lethargy but a fertile visionary state where truth is clearly visible. The senses of the poet are at rest, there is no 'fever'. Happiness is complete and a successful union of the Heart and Mind has been brought about in Universal Space. It is a fertile, creative state, as is provided by true Melancholy. There is drowsiness, dreaminess and contentment. In fact, it recreates the atmosphere of Elysium where the souls of those favoured by the gods find fulfilment. '...honed' implies a golden, lethargic and slow moving reverie. Among other things, the colour gold is associated with Apollo, the beneficent patron of poets. The golden mood, thus, gathers together the blessings of Apollo. The moment of discovery reveals to the poet that associations with Love, Ambition and Poetry do not bring joy but force realizations that banish the golden euphoria.

The poet compares his soul to a 'lawn'. This open expanse of rich, green grass, like every other open space in the poetry of Keats, is symbolic of freedom. This expanse, though sprinkled with flowers, was shadowed by the interplay of 'shades' and 'beams' that 'baffled' and 'stirred' him. This was caused by the intrigues of Love, Ambition and Poetry. Their desertion had come before

him like a 'cloudy morn'. But, before the tears could fall, realization came to him like 'an open casement' over which 'pressed a new-leaved vine'. The vine, symbolic of himself, is old but the leaves symbolic of his thoughts are new. The warmth and song enter his soul and when he bids farewell to the three, he says 'Upon your skirts had fallen no tears of mine'. The 'open casement' has occurred before in the other odes. In 'Ode to Psyche' it had opened from the temple within the brain and in 'Ode to a Nightingale' it had been a 'magic casement' connecting the real and the ideal world. On both occasions, the poet had been stranded on the other side, a mere observer of the happiness of those within. The time, however, levered by mythology, he is within. Present by his side is the newly created goddess Indolence. Bathed in her radiant halo, he is the recipient of complete happiness.

At peace with himself and the world, he imagines he is 'cool-bedded' in the 'flowery grass'. Keats's present stage signifies that he is undergoing a symbolic burial after which he will emerge resurrected as a creative poet, unhampered by any limitations.

'Ode to Autumn' was written in September 1819, nearly three months after the 'May' odes. It reflects the peace

of mind and mood of calm acceptance Keats had reached by now. There is no 'fever', no struggle, no quest, no analysis -- only tranquil meditation.

The poem is about 'Autumn' symbolically the period of destruction, death and decay. However, the poet with his new vision does not mourn but simply accepts it as the final cycle in the ritual of birth and death. Infact, it appears more poignant because it holds the promise of future fertility.

In a letter to Reynolds, written from Winchester in the same month, Keats commented on the weather and landscape --

How beautiful the season is now -- How fine
the air. A temperate sharpness about it.
Really without joking, chaste weather --
Dian skies -- I never liked stubble fields
so much as now -- Aye better than the chilly
green of spring. Somehow, a stubble plain
looks warm... this struck me so much in my
Sunday's walk that I composed upon it. 19

Keats associates autumn with 'Dian Skies'. Diana, in Roman Mythology is the deity connected with fertility. Ian Jack associates Keats's Autumn with Ceres, the Roman deity whose Grecian counterpart is Demeter.²⁰ Ceres stands for the generative power of nature whereas Demeter

was the goddess of corn and agriculture. The attributes of all these deities combine to create the benevolent deity 'Autumn'. Douglas Bush writes --

...the delicate personifications... exhibit Keats's myth-making instinct at its ripest and surest. 21

The Keatsian goddess is beautiful and radiant. Her radiance is laden with warmth and bursting ripeness. She represents the continual growth process. She links and relates the seasons to the sun and the Earth, and also brings together the three kingdoms -- vegetative, animal and human. She is all pervading as the spirit of beneficence and generosity and also as the guardian of fertility and fruition. Ultimately, like all other Keatsian goddesses, she is the magnificent Mother-figure -- patient, dignified, tender and laborious.

The first line of the ode is a direct invocation of the deity 'Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness'. She is in deep conspiracy with her 'close bosom friend' the maturing sun. The sun is associated with Apollo whose attributes include sunshine of spring and the blessings of harvest in summer and also warding off the dangers of autumn and winter. The two energies combine to produce a particularly productive season. The verse gathers together the

impressions of a misty, autumn morning. The poet begins from the home -- the resort of the Mother-figure. The vines around the thatch eaves are laden with fruits and flowers. The apple trees in the cottage yard are bent with the sheer weight of the fruit, which, in turn, is filled with 'ripeness to the core'. The gourds and the shells are swollen and plump. Flowers continuously bloom and the bees work on --

Until they think warm days
 will never cease,
 For summer has o'er-brimmed
 their clammy cells.

(ll. 10-11)

The images are mainly tactile and signify a depth of contented luxuriance and happiness springing from the fullness of life. The Keatsian goddess, though still invisible, is present amidst the extravagant fruitition and flowering like a throbbing pulse.

In the second stanza she descends into the scheme of things and is visible and the scene of action extends to the fields beyond the cottage yard. Like the multi-faced Earth-goddess Hecate, she is presented in a number of postures -- in the granary, relaxing in between bouts of threshing, in the field 'sound asleep' on a furrow,

balancing herself on a bridge across a brook while carrying loads of grain and finally by the cider-press, watching the '...last oozing hours by hours'.

The images are visual and represent a drowsy afternoon. Each of them is connected with a characteristic occupation of autumn. The total picture reads like a catalogue of seasonal rites. Each rite sheds light on some trait of the goddess. She labours in the granary, denoting hard-work, and perseverance. She tenderly 'Spare the next swath and all its twined flower'. Thus she proves herself to be the guardian spirit and protector of all the flowering and productive things. A gleaner is one who collects the grain left in the harvest fields by the workers. By collecting a heavy load, she exhibits qualities of strength, efficiency and thrift. The last picture where she sits by the cider-press shows patience and fortitude.

The last verse depicts an autumnal evening. From the familiar fields, we move on to the distant hills and skies. We are now faced with Autumn, the unhappy goddess preparing for her departure. Now, the poet becomes the consoler. He tells her 'Think not of them, thou hast thy music too'.

The 'barred clouds' reflect the sun that colours the fields with a 'rosy hue'. Thus Apollo, the sun-god, establishes an association with Autumn. The gnats, crickets, lambs, robins and swallows pay their tribute to her. Their music is --

Among the river swallows,
 born aloft
 Or sinking as the light
 with lives or dies;

(ll. 28-29)

The river weeds, swaying in the wind, carry this music all over the world. The picture re-collects the river weed of the King Midas myth. Apollo was challenged by Marsyas, a Satyr, to a music contest. The River-god Tmolus pronounced Apollo the winner. Midas protested and was punished with donkey's ears. He hid his deformity under a tall cap but it was discovered by his barber who found the effort, of keeping it a secret, unbearable. He dug a hole by the river and whispered the secret in there. From that same hole sprang a weed that repeated the secret everytime it was rustled by the winds.

The message relayed by the weeds is not sorrowful but one that informs the world that Autumn is not departing but taking part in the final ritual of seasonal death.

Like the 'gathering swallows' that have hopes of a warmer land, Autumn, too, is just launching on a new cycle of productivity.

Keats's use of mythology in the odes does not suggest a deliberate contrivance for the sake of poetic effect. On the other hand he recognizes and recreates mental principles which had been present in the mind of the early man and which have been unhistorically documented in mythology. Thus he instinctively perceives the communicative relevance of certain ancient divinities to his artistic purpose, and through their fictionalised experiences he seeks deliverance from the oppressive forces that limit his own creative potential. Mythology leads him on to awareness and self-discovery. It has become so integral a part of his critical and creative faculties that he cannot dissociate himself from it. Since man has come many stages away from the ancient innocence, the principles have to be reformed, recast and at times even added to. The poet successfully accomplishes it by adding to the existing mythology and even creating new myths.

Notes and References

1. Pindar, a Greek poet, established the form. Its salient features include elevated thought, bold metaphor and free use of mythology. Horace, a Latin poet, used Pindar as a model. However, his odes are more meditative and personal. Keats's odes are Horatian in form and feeling but contain some modified Pindaric elements.
2. Kenneth Allott, "The Ode to Psyche" John Keats: Odes (Suffolk, 1971) ed. G.S. Fraser, Casebook series, p. 206.
3. The Letters of John Keats (1814-21) Vol.II, ed. Hyder E. Rollins (London, 1958), p. 106.
4. K. Allott, op.cit., p. 208.
5. Rollins, op.cit., Vol.I, pp. 184-185.
6. Rollins, op.cit., Vol.II, p. 378.
7. Cited by Douglas Bush, John Keats (London, 1966), p. 139.
8. Ian Jack, op.cit., p. 218.
9. E.C. Pettet, On the Poetry of Keats (Cambridge, 1957), pp. 318-319.
10. Cited by Richard E. Hughes, The Lively Image: 4 Myths in Literature (U.S.A., 1975), p. 5.
11. Ian Jack, op.cit., p. 219.
12. Based on the chronological order followed by Miriam Allott, op.cit., p. 538.
13. Rollins, op.cit., Vol.II, p. 79.
14. Ibid., Vol.II, p. 101.

15. Cited by M. Allott, op.cit., p. 540.
16. M. Allott, op.cit., p. 541.
17. Rollins, op.cit., Vol.I, p. 78.
18. Rollins, op.cit., Vol.I, p. 224.
19. Rollins, op.cit., Vol.II, p. 167.
20. Jack, op.cit., p. 291.
21. Douglas Bush, op.cit., p. 105.

CHAPTER VII

C O N C L U S I O N

One of the major concerns of all the great Romantic poets was to identify the energies and impulses at the root of all feeling and conception and to bring them into conscious coherence with objective experience. Keats believed that the artist does not necessarily proceed to the root by the simplest path. His artistic intuition led him to the elemental forms of nature and human life incorporated in mythology.

Before the Romantic Revival, mythology had been used for decorative and allegorical purpose only. During the nineteenth century, the mythological imagination was reborn and mythology was remodelled with symbolic overtones. Keats's use of mythology is different from its use by some other second generation Romantic poets. Shelley and Peacock gave it the shape of an ideological cult serving their opposition to prevailing social and political trends.

Keats's use of mythology is much more personal and without any such extra-literary design. Apart from his boyhood favourites viz Andrew Tooke's Pantheon, Lempriere's Classical Dictionary and Spence's Polymetis, fragmentary allusions encountered in the works of Spenser, Chapman, Milton and Shakespeare, helped him to further his

knowledge of Classical Mythology.

Keats did not know Greek. In a letter to Reynolds dated 27 April 1818, he wrote --

I long to feast upon old Homer.... If you understood Greek and would read me passages now and then, explaining their meanings, 't would be, from its mistiness, perhaps a greater luxury than reading the thing oneself. 1

It was precisely this 'mistiness' which made mythology alluring as well as awe-inspiring to the poet. He did not need rigorous scholarship and deep meditation of classical texts to reach the natural temper and spirit of classical mythology. Keats was worried that he had touched mythology 'too late in the day'. However, by the end of his career he had achieved almost a consanguinity with it. The images, figures, rites, rituals, myths, legends, archetypes that Keats encountered in his early reading were absorbed into his mind and as he matured were processed and crystallized into a mythic vision. This mythic vision supplies the primary pattern for his mythic as well as non-mythic poetry.

In one of his letters, Keats described his doctrine of Negative Capability in the following words --

It struck me, what quality went to form a Man of Achievement especially in Literature and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously -- I mean Negative Capability, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason -- Coleridge, for instance, would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetratum of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half knowledge. 2

This doctrine supplies the base for his mythic vision. Myths record the primary unconscious process of shaping human responses to the varied conditions of life. In mythology there is no 'irritable reaching after fact and reason'. The 'fine isolated verisimilitude' may be equated to an archetype. The poet's mythologizing imagination allows him to remain 'content with half knowledge'. Instinct, it may be concluded, serves as the chief generative agent in Keats's poetry-making process.

Keats uses the term 'Poesy' to describe this process. During this experience, the poet falls into a trance or a dream and only instinct controls the operation of the creative forces. Instinct guides him to the most ancient source of inspiration viz. mythology. Mythology provides him with substance not only for his poetry but also for his philosophy. It helps him to conquer weakness of the mind and soul and thus strengthen his artistic aptitude. Mythology

leads him to a deepened understanding of man and the universe. Thus, emerges the conclusion that Keats is essentially a myth-maker. He is attracted primarily to mythology and mythologizing as the very means of comprehending and communicating his artistic experience.

The two systems of mythology that have influenced him in particular are the Greek and Roman systems. Traces of Biblical and Hindu mythology can also be found in his poetry. However, he does not rigidly follow any given system of mythology. He retells myths as though are his own creations. This gives him the license to freely mingle the different systems, to add or delete events and incidents wherever it suits him. At times, he even breaks the barriers of time and for the purpose of expressing an idea clearly, he brings together different mythological stages and presents them as co-existent. He frequently interknits smaller myths in the framework of the major one.

It is possible that Keats was not always conscious of the full potential and relevance of every mythic image, allusion and archetype that he used in his poetry. However, as mythic images, allusion and archetypes have their own unconscious organization and design, they were easily and effectively absorbed into his poetry.

Keats used his long poem Endymion as a test of his powers of invention. Endymion's quest can be defined as a venture of the poet's mind into its own hidden depths. It highlights the profound sensitiveness of Keats to ancient mythology. It also focuses on the high intensity of the poet's need to achieve an imaginative return to the cool, chaste, world of the past. The quest of Endymion is really the quest of Keats for his medium as well as aesthetic goals. At the end of his quest this medium is identified as mythology. Mythology furnishes him with the mode for voicing his inner impulses and cravings. Myths are treated as authentic records of higher experiences. The importance of Endymion, it may be observed, lies in the development of the poet's mythic vision.

Keats had intended to use the myth of Hyperion as a vehicle for defining the law of progress. However, the recurrence of the archetypes of cyclical rebirth, the Great Goddess, the fertility hero, the green bower, etc. imposed a circular structure on the poem. As definition of the law of progress, the movement should have been in terms of an upward ascent. Hyperion is a discussion of the mythical dimensions of the theme whereas The Fall furnishes its psychological dimensions.

Poetry for Keats is not the mere literary rendering of ideas but a comprehensive cognitive crystallization of relationships of life itself to all its primary forms viz. the elements i.e. earth, air, water, fire, to love, to death, to all the agonies of the human heart. Mythology serves as the sensual and fertile metaphor for his poetic vision. In his treatment of the myth of Hyperion the poet offers a mythological elaboration of his own poetic desires.

The dominant motifs of Keats's epics can be located in his other poems also. Mythic images are incorporated spontaneously in his poetry. That he can modulate them to suit subtle as well as dynamic contexts shows the range of his mythic sensibility. Keats's ballads and romances are a reworking of the tales of ritual origins. Other poems, especially the ones addressed to or inspired by Fanny Brawn, his beloved, present an interlocking of personal, psychological impulses with mythical images, structures and archetypes.

The heroines of 'The Eve' and 'Isabella' are chaste and virtuous women. These pure virginal attitudes represent but one aspect of the Great Goddess. In a shift, she becomes the death goddess. In the process of protective

self-delusion, she is ultimately responsible for the destruction of the hero. Lamia and the Belle Dame represent this evil aspect of the Great Goddess.

So deep was Keats's preoccupation with these romantic archetypes that he transported them into his own situation. In the poems addressed to, or inspired by Fanny Brawn the same motivations are seen at work. Fanny is cast as a character in his larger mythical plot. She subtly blends with the Great Goddess and assumes at times her beneficent and at times her chilling aspects. Keats becomes sometimes her votary and sometimes her 'thrall'.

In the major odes, Keats's use of mythology does not suggest a deliberate contrivance for the sake of mere poetic effect. On the other hand he recognizes and recreates mental principles which had been present in the mind of the early man. He, instinctively, perceives the communicative relevance of certain ancient divinities to his artistic purpose, and through their fictionalized experiences he seeks deliverance from the oppressive forces that limit his own creative potential.

Mythology leads him on to awareness and self-discovery. It has become so integral a part of his critical and creative faculties that he cannot dissociate himself

from it. Since man has come many stages away from the ancient innocence, the principles have to be reformed, recast and at times even added to. The poet successfully accomplishes this by adding to existing mythology and even creating new myths.

One particular Greek divinity appeals greatly to Keats -- Apollo. In this golden god, he discovers manifestations of ideal truth and beauty and finally adopts him as a personal symbolic deity. Perhaps a very personal affinity is at the root of it all, for Apollo is the god of medicine as well as poetry and Keats himself was an apothecary and a poet. In any case the incomparable beauty, high morality, the fresh, radiant attributes of the god capture the heart of the poet and make him a symbol of his highest values. Apollo occurs in his poetry as the embodiment of artistic integrity and the highest form of beauty.

One of the archetypal figures that Keats especially reveres is the Mother-figure. She occurs in every mythology of the world. Infact, the very foundations of Greek mythology have been traced to her.³ She is many-titled and until the coming of the Aryans, she reigned supre over the other deities. She is immortal, changeless and omnipotent

and motherhood is her prime attribute. She is also linked with the seasons. In spring, she is a maiden and gives birth to new buds and leaves, in summer she is a nymph and bears fruit and in the winter she is a crone who has ceased to bear. All female family associations can be traced to her. In Keats's poetry she occurs variously as Cynthia, Mnemosyne, Moneta, Cybele, Maia and Psyche. She is the archetypal giver of comfort and solace and the archetypal wise guide to whom the bruised and wounded hero turns again and again.

Sometimes she appears in her evil aspect. Then, she is the fatal enchantress, one who lures and destroys. All of Keats's women can be catalogued as representing one or the other of her aspects. Through complex inter-relationship they combine to evoke her magnanimous stature as the Goddess of Many Aspects.

The father-figure, too, has a specific status in Keats's mythological poems. He appears variously as Glaucus, Saturn, Apollonius and the old beadsman. In all the situations he extends ethical support to the younger man. In the reconstruction of the ritual circumstances to fit a new analogy, once the role of the father had been recognized, the archetypal father-son combat had also been

recognized. Keats, significantly altered the archetype by excluding the violence associated with the combat. Succession, in his poetry, is cyclical and generative. This alteration may be a result of Keats's consciousness of his own orphaned state and also of the intuitive preclusion that he was to die single and childless.

The archetypal green bower has regenerative connotations. Love is usually consummated in such bowers. The bower is linked to the death and rebirth of vegetation. In Keats's poetry, the myth comes to represent the constantly changing state of man. Sometimes man is creative, generative and constructive and at other times he is evil, degenerative and destructive. This complexity of human nature defies coherent interpretation and can best be presented as the ever-dying and ever-reviving god of vegetation.

Trees, in Keats's mythic vision are the immortal historians with oracular properties. Water represents the life spirit, is the symbol of creativity and also the medium of purification. All vegetation is nourished by water and man is reborn of water and the spirit. Air represents the aerial or spiritual ascent that recharges the intuition. The four elements, earth, water, air and

fire are used to connect the mortal and immortal worlds. The recurrent quest -- archetype represents the search of the poet for the lost insights of the modern man.

John Keats emerges as a great poet with depth, insight an intuitive and understanding of the world. He fully subscribes to the Romantic assertion that it is the job of the poet to reform the corrupt and degenerate modern world. This he strives to do through the instructive archetypes and symbols derives from mythology. Keats died at the age of twenty-six. Throughout his short career, his work as constantly developing and evolving. His artistic intuition not infrequently approximated a high maturity and also provided profound insights. So much so that, it influenced the poetry of W.B. Yeats, an Irish man who was born almost three-quarters of a century later.

In a commemorative poem, Yeats wrote about Keats --

His art is happy, but who
 knows his mind?
I see a school boy when
 I think of him
With face and nose pressed
 to a sweet-shop window,
For certainly he sank
 into his grave
His sense and his heart
 unsatisfied,

And made -- being poor,
ailing and ignorant
Shut out from all the
luxury of the world,
The coarse-bred son of
a livery-stable keeper --
Luxuriant song.⁴

Notes and References

1. Rollins, op.cit., Vol.I, p. 274.
2. Ibid., Vol.I, pp. 193-94.
3. Graves, op.cit., Vol.I, pp. 11-12.
4. Yeats, Ego Dominus Tuus.

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