

IMAGES OF FIXITY AND PARADOX IN
THREE POEMS BY KEATS

"DYING INTO LIFE": IMAGES OF FIXITY
AND PARADOX IN THREE POEMS BY KEATS

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TITLE: "Dying into Life": Images of Fixity and
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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines fixed and paradoxical images in three of Keats's narrative poems: Hyperion, The Eve of St. Agnes, and Lamia. All three poems are concerned with the distinction Keats makes in his letters between the personality of the "man of power" and that of the "man of genius." My introduction explores this distinction by examining its genesis and growth in the letters.

The three chapters that follow seek to explain how Hyperion, The Eve of St. Agnes, and Lamia give dramatic rendering to Keats's debate over the value of each personality-type. In all three poems, Keats explores the sterility of that attitude toward experience adopted by the "man of power" by describing it through images of fixity, where the sense of closure evoked by the images suggests the circumscription of the attitude. The paradoxical images used to describe the approach to life taken by the "man of genius" attempt to evoke a contrasting sense of vigour, championing the speculative attitude by describing it in vital terms. The consistency of this representation makes it an important, though hitherto largely unnoticed, element of these narrative poems.

In my conclusion, I briefly suggest how this element informs other poems by Keats.

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INTRODUCTION

The distinction Keats makes in his letters between "men of power," persons who have strong, assertive personalities, and "men of genius," those with the capability of annulling this sense of identity, has always been of seminal importance to critics in their interpretation of Keats's work. As I shall attempt to demonstrate in some detail, the importance of the distinction lies in the fact that it acts as a kind of metacenter for Keats's rather diverse comments on the nature of poetic creativity. Keats's ambivalent reaction to the poetry of Wordsworth and other of his contemporaries, his dislike of formal religion, and his definition of negative capability, all find a point of contact within the terms of this distinction. But because it is so central to an understanding of Keats's attitude toward poetic creativity, critics have left us with very little to say about it. It has been explored comprehensively in almost every important study of Keats, from C.L. Finney's exhaustive work, The Evolution of Keats's Poetry (1936), to Stuart Sperry's recent, equally penetrating book, Keats the Poet (1973).¹

To my knowledge, however, it has not yet been noticed that Keats, in his poetry, uses a consistent pattern of imagery to represent these two kinds of personalities. The dominant personality is constantly depicted by fixed images--metaphors and similes that evoke a sense of inertia and circumscription. These images include architectural and natural objects which suggest fixity, and the depiction of inert natural states, such as human sleep or the chill of winter. In contrast, the non-assertive personality is pictured through paradoxical images--metaphors and similes which resist any sense of descriptive fixity or closure, thus remaining constantly dynamic. This study examines these fixed and paradoxical images in three of Keats's narrative poems--Hyperion, The Eve of St. Agnes, and Lamia--demonstrating how the images function to represent opposing personality-types. It also attempts to use the images as a means to a critical reading of these poems, in order to suggest their usefulness as a tool in understanding Keats's poetry.

Before I proceed to examine the narrative poems, however, it would be helpful to discuss briefly once again the letters in which Keats delineates the two kinds of personalities. His earliest reference to both occurs in a letter to Bailey, in which he distinguishes between "Men of Genius," who have no "individuality," no "determined character," yet "are great as certain ethereal Chemicals

operating on the Mass of neutral intellect," and "Men of Power," who are the "top and head of those who have a proper self."² The definition is nascent only. Keats retreats from it quickly with the disclaimer that "I am running my head into a Subject which I am certain I could not do justice to under five years study and 3 vols. octavo" (Letters 1:184). Even at this early stage in his development of the idea, Keats realizes that the subject is largely inclusive, capable of expanding into a whole poetics of creativity. However, the early distinction does at least hint at the direction Keats will take in later, expanded attempts at definition. It emphasizes the potential for creativity in the person who has no "determined character," and it defines this creativity as a social benefit. The selfless personality discovers its genius in its effect on other men and women. The distinction also serves to separate the "man of power" from other people who also have a sense of identity, but to a far lesser degree. The "man of power" is not powerful because he has a "determined character"; the majority of people in the world, as Keats later emphasizes in an important letter to his brother George and sister-in-law Georgiana, not only have a sense of identity, but indeed must have this sense in order to develop spiritually (Letters 2:102). Rather, it is because he is the "top and head" of all people with individuality,

because he takes his sense of self to an extreme, that he is unique.

Keats's disparaging remarks on Dilke's character help to clarify his distinction between the two types of personality. Writing to his brother George, he comes to the conclusion that "Dilke was a Man who cannot feel he has a personal identity unless he has made up his Mind about everything." He continues:

The only means of strengthening one's intellect is to make up one's mind about nothing--to let the mind be a thoroughfare for all thoughts. Not a select party. The genus is not scarce in population. All the stubborn arguers you meet with are of the same brood--They never begin upon a subject they have not prerresolved on. (Letters 2:213)

The unresolved intellect is the source of creative growth: the only way to form a mind is to remain constantly in doubt. Although he does not explicitly say as much, Keats implies that the mind which is always prerresolved is intrinsically sterile. Not to let the mind "be a thoroughfare for all thoughts" is to give up "the only means" toward intellectual growth.

For a person, like Keats, whose letters demonstrate such a constant concern with poetry and his own poetic creativity, it was inevitable that he extend his ideas on personality into the realm of art. Wordsworth becomes an example in Keats's letters of an artist whose potential is severely limited by his overwhelming need to assert the truth of his own beliefs. He is a type of the "man of power" whose mind is "prerresolved" on all subjects. His

sense of his own grandeur destroys the pleasure one takes in his poetry:

It may be said that we ought to read our Contemporaries. that Wordsworth & c should have their due from us. but for the sake of a few fine imaginative or domestic passages, are we to be bullied into a certain Philosophy engendered in the whims of an Egotist --Every man has his speculations, but every man does not brood and peacock over them till he makes a false coinage and deceives himself...We hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us--and if we do not agree, seems to put its hand in its breeches pocket. Poetry should be great & unobtrusive, a thing which enters into one's soul, and does not startle it or amaze it with itself but with its subject. [Letters 1:223-24]

Egotism--by which Keats means the extreme intrusion of the self into all affairs, poetic or otherwise--turns us away from the egotist's poetry. Instead of inviting our interaction with the verse, allowing it to "enter into" our "souls," the egotistical poet bullies us into holding his own beliefs. What should be a kind of gentle intercourse between poet and reader becomes the poet's rape of the reader's imagination, with the result that we come to hate the poet. Self-assertiveness in poetry has no generative effect on the reader's mind.

The "man of power," for all his rapacity in pursuing the truths he firmly believes in, renders his own work unhappily lifeless. The true achiever in the realm of art, in contrast, negates his own desire to believe firmly in anything. The "Man of Achievement... in literature" has "Negative Capability," the ability to

be "in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason" (Letters 1:193). Clearly this defines an approach to creativity far different from that of a Wordsworth (as Keats treats him). Stuart Sperry analyzes it in this way:

[negative capability] indicates a form of verification that proceeds not through the rules of logic but by means of that imaginative convergence--the intersecting or "dovetailing" of different insights--that by itself leads to no final conclusion but to a deeper awareness of the "Penetralium of mystery" in its perpetually fascinating complexity. (63)

The difference between the assertive poet and the negatively capable poet is that the latter refuses to use his work as a platform from which to champion a set of personal conclusions on life or art. The negatively capable poet abhors conclusiveness of any kind, remaining content with the mystery of life.

In many of his letters on the distinction between the assertive and the selfless personality, Keats is primarily concerned with the effect each kind of personality has on the creation of poetry. He is intent on indicating the artistic sterility of the self-assertive approach, while demonstrating the creativity of the negatively capable approach. At times, however, he increases the scope of the distinction to include a whole philosophy of living. In a letter to George and Georgiana Keats, he attempts to demonstrate that an openness to all experience,

a refusal to circumscribe one's manner of living through a preresolved philosophy of life, is the true means to spiritual fulfillment:

The point at which Man may arrive is as far as the parallel state in inanimate nature and no further--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 in spite, the world(ly) elements will prey upon his nature--The common cognomen of this world among the misguided and superstitious is a 'vale of tears' from which we are to be redeemed by a certain arbitrary interposition of God and taken to Heaven--What a little circumscribe(d) straightened notion-- Call the world if you Please "the vale of soul-making" Then you will find out the use of the world...I say 'Soul making' Soul as distinguished from an Intelligence--There may be intelligences or sparks of the divinity in millions--but they are not Souls (the) till they acquire identities, till each one is personally itself...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 diverse ways!...As various as the Lives of Men are--so various become their souls... This appears to me a faint sketch of a system of Salvation which does not affront our reason and humanity--I am convinced that many difficulties which christians labour under would vanish before it. [Letters 2:101-03]

Keats begins with the assumption that human beings, as part of the natural world, must share in the identity of that world in order to be happy. He then argues that this identity is formed from constant diversity. Beautiful mornings, cold winds, hot suns--a thousand diverse changes face human beings throughout life. The world is a place of extreme mutability and uncertainty; life

itself mirrors the principles of negative capability. The only means to "Salvation" is to accept this mutability in recognition that it is profoundly generative. Through this multiplicity of experience, human beings form their souls.

At first glance, there appears to be a contradiction in Keats's claim that individual identity is the result of an openness to circumstance. Keats, after all, associates this attitude elsewhere with the "man of genius," the person without individuality. What Keats is applauding in this personality-type, however, is more the capability of negating the self than the actual lack of self. Although in his earliest definitions of the "man of genius" Keats seems to suggest that he has, in fact, a very precarious sense of identity, Keats came to realize, as Aileen Ward argues, that "the ability to 'annul self' depended on a very firm sense of self" (161). It is, rather, the unwillingness to forget oneself--a stubborn sense of egotism--to which Keats objects. Northrop Frye has suggested that Keats uses the term "identity" in two ways: "identity-as," and "identity-with." Both kinds of identity "begin as consciousness or self-awareness, but one develops a hostile and the other a sympathetic relation to its surroundings" (English Romanticism 142). In Frye's terms, the "man of power" has identity as himself.

In contrast, the "man of genius" identifies with, finds himself in, his surroundings through a capability of forgetting about his identity as himself.

Earlier in the same letter, Keats suggests that this ability to negate one's sense of self is also the means to moral greatness. "Very few men," he writes, "have ever arrived at a complete disinterestedness of Mind: very few have been influenced by a pure desire of the benefit of others" (Letters 2:79). Only "Socrates and Jesus" come readily to Keats's mind as examples of people who "have had hearts completely disinterested" (Letters 2:80). Disinterestedness, he explains, can only be achieved through the realization that the pursuit of one's own purpose in life is finally an insignificant thing:

The greater part of Men make their way with the same instinctiveness, the same unwandering eye from their purposes, the same animal eagerness as the Hawk...I go among Fields and catch a glimpse of a stoat or a field-mouse peeping out at the withered grass--the creature hath a purpose and its eyes are bright with it--I go amongst the buildings of a city and I see a man hurrying along--to what? The Creature has a purpose and its eyes are bright with it. [Letters 2:80]

To realize the insignificance of self-involvement is to have a kind of moral negative capability. The transcendence of self-serving prepares the way for a life properly dedicated to serving others.

It is one thing, however, to champion the humanitarian value of the speculative personality in theory,

and another thing, as Keats realized, to demonstrate it in practice. Throughout the letters, there is an implicit fear that the human world is too harsh a place for someone as keenly sensible to suffering as the "man of genius." Keats was arguing from his own experience. He had often compared himself to this type of person, both in his own lack of identity, and in his desire to do some good in the world:

When I am in a room with People if I ever am free from speculating on creations of my own brain, then not myself goes home to myself: but the identity of every one in the room begins to press upon me that, I am in a very little time annihilated--not only among Men; it would be the same in a Nursery of children...I will speak of my views, and of the life I purpose to myself--I am ambitious of doing the world some good...(Letters 1:387)

But, for Keats, the knowledge gained from inhabiting other people's souls was often unpleasant. He writes to his sister-in-law:

The more I know of Men the more I know how to value entire liberality in any of them...The worst of Men are those whose self interests are their passion--the next whose passion are their self-interest. Upon the whole I dislike Mankind...(Letters 2:243)

Keats's knowledge of the world was increasingly an awareness of his own lack of empathy with it. Several months before he died, he wrote to Fanny Brawne:

I should like to die. I am sickened at the brute world you are smiling with. I hate men and women more...I wish you could infuse a little confidence in human nature into my heart. I cannot muster any--the world is too brutal for me...(Letters 2:312-13)

There is an implicit message in these complaints that the sensibility of the "man of genius" is too fragile for the "brute world," that his humanitarian impulse may be defeated by its harshness. Although Keats asserts that a speculative personality is the true means to human good, his own experience questioned this belief at a pragmatic level.

I have briefly alluded to this problem because it is a growing concern in the three narrative poems I examine in this study. Throughout these poems, Keats's use of fixed and paradoxical images is increasingly affected by his preoccupation with the creative value of the "man of genius" in the human world. The study that follows seeks to explain how these images function to represent the assertive and speculative personalities, and how they illumine this central concern.

NOTES TO INTRODUCTION

¹Finney examines the distinction both on its own terms and in relation to eighteenth-century British philosophy (241-43). For a similar discussion, see W.J. Bate, John Keats 252-62. For a less philosophical, more psychological examination of the distinction, see Robert Gittings, John Keats 249-63, and Aileen Ward, John Keats: The Making of a Poet 159-64. Stuart Sperry's brilliant discussion of Keats's ideas on poetic creativity contains much of importance on this same distinction (57-71).

²John Keats, The Letters of John Keats, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1958) 1:184. All subsequent quotations are from this edition; volume and page numbers are noted in the text. Keats's spelling and punctuation are maintained throughout.

CHAPTER ONE

HYPERION

Hyperion is a convenient poem with which to begin an examination of Keats's use of fixed and paradoxical images. No other poem by Keats--perhaps no other poem in the English language--pursues the representation of stasis to a similar degree. And though it contains only one truly paradoxical image (the description of Apollo's metamorphosis in the third book), the predominance of fixed images which precede this single realization of paradox serves to set this moment in relief. Both image-types are remarkably apparent in the poem.

Few critics have failed to notice the prevalence of fixed images in Hyperion. As Ian Jack points out, Keats's claim that, after Endymion, this poem is written in "a more naked and grecian Manner" (Letters 1:207)--a remark many critics rightly adopt as a starting point for their readings--focuses our attention on "the verbal sculpture of Hyperion" (162). It is impossible to read the poem without recalling Greek sculpture, both in the symmetry of the verse and in the depictions of the statuesque Titans. It is equally impossible to miss the sense of fixity evoked by this sculptural emphasis.

Several critics have built their interpretation of the poem around this sense of inertia. Bernard Blackstone, for example, argues that Hyperion represents the ambivalent struggle of finished artistic form with the processes of nature which stand in antithesis to art (227-40). Keats's poetry, he contends, "presents a constant pattern: the urn, the artefact, standing in the midst of a floral context..." (xiii). Art or form represents "the eternal," while nature or growth represents "the temporal" (335). In Hyperion, the Titans become images of finished form, and their struggle with Apollo and the natural change he seems to embody is one between art/form and nature/growth. The Titans are thus depicted in fixed images to suggest the changelessness or timelessness of art. His reading is suggestive, but is not primarily concerned with imagery. Blackstone is more comfortable with themes.

Several more recent interpretations of Hyperion have also focused on the meaning behind its sculptural stasis. In Keats and Hellenism, Martin Aske argues that the poem's fixed imagery represents the spirit of the moribund epic form (73-100). He maintains that Keats's Titans represent epic fiction in all the deadly sterility of its pastness. Their stasis images a literary mode which is historically "fixed" in a time irretrievably lost to the belated Romantic poet.

In a similar reading, Nancy Goslee maintains that the statuesque Titans embody the spirit of ancient art as defined by Schlegel in his distinction between ancient and modern art. Goslee cites Hazlitt's review of Black's 1815 translation of Schlegel, suggesting that it may have informed Keats's use of imagery in Hyperion:

In the Heathen mythology, form is everywhere predominant; in the Christian, we find only unlimited, undefined power. The imagination alone "broods over the immense abyss, and makes it pregnant." ("Plastic to Picturesque" 129-30)

Goslee argues that Keats uses fixed imagery in his depiction of the Titans as an objective correlative for the spirit of an ancient art whose essence is defined by its conclusiveness. The Titans represent an art which shows static perfection, in contrast to Apollo, whose paradoxical description during his metamorphosis suggests, in Schlegel's terms, modern or picturesque art, an art capable of evolutionary development. Goslee's argument is important to my purposes because she emphasizes the significance of both fixed and paradoxical images in an interpretation of the poem, although her main concern is not with imagery, but with opposing conceptions of art in Keats's poetry.

Michael Ragussis has written the only interpretation of Hyperion to date which has delved deeply enough into the poem's fixed images adequately to suggest their importance. Ragussis attaches this exploration to a bold

and exciting view of literature and literary creation as the poet's struggle to invest chaos, "the archetypal space of blankness...the metaphysical void" (36), with language. At times, his Johannine reading comes precariously close to obscuring the poetry he examines in its mythic, almost religious, language. However, his interpretation of Hyperion, a poem itself fraught with such language, seems to gain therein a particular force. He argues that the poem's fixed images attempt to evoke mainly the stillness of silence, a huge quiet which "seems to resist...the poet's own activity of articulation" (44). The Titans represent a language "seen inevitably as a foreign idiom, a fragmentary sentence from a dead language, if not an impossible hieroglyphic" (65). Their stasis marks Keats's fear that the Word can never triumph over the void; that, in the end, all works of art become sterile in a fixed historicity which denies the growth essential to defeating chaos. Whether or not one finds this mythic tone suitable to an examination of literature, the careful imagistic analysis in which it is couched brilliantly emphasizes the importance of fixed images to an understanding of the poem.

Because Hyperion includes a strong sense of historical change in the struggle between an older group of gods and the young gods who take their place, and because Keats's statuesque depictions of the Titans recall

an identifiable historical period (the Hellenic age), Aske, Goslee, and Ragussis are able to give us historical interpretations of the poem which are justified by its very tenor. The contemporary critical awareness of the historicity of art further validates this approach. However, as these critics are aware (and, indeed, must be aware, since an historical understanding includes the recognition of one's place in the history of criticism), their readings marginalize certain elements of the poem which other critics have emphasized (at a similar cost). Tillotama Rajan, for example, looks at Hyperion as a revelation of the problems inherent to Romantic idealism, arguing that Apollo's link to a "previous divine hierarchy" which has revealed the instability of its own ideal existence discovers "the dark underside of," or the potential for similar instability in, the Apollonian ideal which attempts to take its place (158). Her argument is one of the most persuasive in a tradition of readings that explores Keats's poetry in terms of a constant struggle between the actual and the ideal.

Perhaps the most commonly held view of Hyperion, however, is that it is a dramatic rendering of Keats's debate between the self-assertive and the negatively capable personalities. This is the view of the poem Kenneth Muir articulates in "The Meaning of Hyperion."

Muir quotes many of the same letters I have cited in my introduction as evidence for his claim, and concludes:

In view of these quotations, it is noteworthy that Saturn and the other Gods of the old dispensation possess identities. Saturn speaks of his "strong identity," his "real self"; but Apollo has no identity. He possesses to a supreme degree the negative capability that Keats had laid down as the prime essential of a poet. In other words, the old gods are men of power, the new gods are men of achievement. The poem describes the victory of the men of achievement. That is its primary meaning; linked with it, and almost equally important, is the account of the price that must be paid for being a man of achievement. (108)

Muir's reading is useful because it examines the poem in the light of an issue which was, as we have seen, extremely important to Keats. To date, however, no critic has noted that Keats uses fixed and paradoxical images in Hyperion to represent the "man of power" and the "man of genius." Instead, those critics that have noticed the use of these image-types have attributed meanings to them which, however imaginative, are less firmly grounded in what I consider to be Keats's primary concerns. In the reading that follows, I attempt to demonstrate how fixed and paradoxical images are used in Hyperion to represent the opposition between the "man of power" and the "man of genius," and to suggest the critical fecundity of this imagistic exploration.

The Titans are depicted consistently in Hyperion by fixed images. A close examination of these images reveals that Keats uses them to evoke certain characteristics of the Titans' personalities which are consonant with the personality-traits of the "man of power." In my introduction, I defined the "man of power" as a person with a domineering personality who constantly asserts the validity of his own beliefs. He has a hard mental fixity which denies the creative potential of re-thinking and re-evaluating. The conclusiveness of his intellect is basically inhuman, because to be human, for Keats, is to be (like the natural world of which human beings are an intrinsic part) continually open to change. He is thus sterile in two ways: he lacks intellectual or imaginative creativity, and he lacks the means (metaphorically) to human intercourse. The sense of inertia evoked by the fixed images Keats uses to describe the Titans corresponds to the mental fixity of the "man of power." The Titans' stasis suggests their unwillingness, even their inability, to admit the necessity of change, both in thought and experience. The images also function to represent the Titans' extreme self-assertiveness, the characteristic egotism of the domineering personality. Furthermore, as the Titans' enervation hardens into entombment, the fixed images become representative of the deadly sterility endemic to this kind of personality.

In contrast, Apollo is depicted in a paradoxical image where the tension of the paradox's polar terms creates a sense of vivid dynamism. The image refuses descriptive fixity, its lack of closure suggesting the similarly inconclusive personality of the "man of genius." The vitality of this paradoxical description of the negatively capable personality points to the potential for creativity in the individual capable of negating his sense of self.

The kind of self-assertiveness Keats dislikes in Wordsworth is an inseparable part of the Titans' personality. They are all primarily self-concerned, the prominence of their egotism suggested by the long, self-absorbed speech with which Saturn, the representative of their former social unity and thus a metaphor for Titanic society, introduces himself into the narrative. Saturn's first questions concern only himself:

"...tell me if this feeble shape
Is Saturn's; tell me, if thou hear'st the voice
Of Saturn, tell me, if this wrinkling brow,
Naked and bare of its great diadem, ¹
Peers like the front of Saturn."

Similarly, Hyperion voices an almost childish egotism as he stamps his feet (1:222) and curses his usurper:

"Saturn is fallen, am I too to fall?
Am I to leave this haven of my rest,
This cradle of my glory, this soft clime,
This calm luxuriance of blissful light,
.....?
Fall! No, by Tellus and her briny robes!
Over the fiery frontier of my realms
I will advance a terrible right arm
Shall scare that infant thunderer Rebel Jove...."
(1:234-49)

The description of Saturn's inertia which opens the poem makes a connection between this egotism, or self-assertiveness, and the sterility to which it leads. Saturn's identity is so dominant that even in a sleep verging on death his form monopolizes the narrative canvas:

Deep in the shady sadness of a vale
 Far sunken from the healthy breath of morn,
 Far from the fiery noon, and eve's one star,
 Sat gray-hair'd Saturn, quiet as a stone,
 Still as the silence round about his lair;
 Forest on forest hung above 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 feather'd grass,
 But where the dead leaf fell, there did it rest.
 A stream went voiceless by, still deadened more
 By reason of his fallen divinity
 Spreading a shade: the Naiad mid her reeds
 Press'd her cold finger closer to her lips. (1:1-14)

The natural fixity here does not so much accompany Saturn's stillness as result from it. The multiple negations of sound, movement, and light correspond to the closed senses of the Titan king. The stream goes "voiceless by" because he himself has lost his voice, and the air is personified as lifeless again to evoke its immediate empathy with his fall. Rather than share in nature's stillness, Saturn imposes his own stasis on nature. The fixed imagery thus points to a connection between self-assertiveness and sterility; Saturn's imposition of himself on nature leads to its enervation. If, as Donald Goellnicht argues, Saturn's early depiction describes a diseased man--his symptoms range from listlessness (1:18)

to a "palsied tongue" (1:93) and a horrible shaking (1:94)-- this disease is partly the result of an egotism which is itself moribund (The Poet-Physician 212-222).

Similarly, Enceladus, the most egotistical of the Titans, a god who embodies "supreme contempt" (2:308), is imaged in terms of extreme ponderousness and constriction:

...the overwhelming voice
Of huge Enceladus swallowed it in wrath:
The ponderous syllables, like sullen waves
In the half-glutted hollows of reef-rocks,
Came booming thus, while still upon his arm
He lean'd; not rising, from supreme contempt.
(2:303-08)

Like night in Hopkins's famous sonnet "Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves," Enceladus attempts to overwhelm opposition by mere presence. He is precociously domineering, and like all people of this type, his mind is fixed unalterably on a "truth" he firmly believes in: revenge (2:324) must repay disgrace (2:344); any other advice is "overwise" or "over-foolish" (2:309-10). His voice--the tool for his egotism--is thus described in a simile which suggests fixity; his words are like waves trapped in the hollows of a reef. The circumscription of the image evokes his imaginative limitations, his inability to open his beliefs to re-evaluation.

The prevalence of bower imagery in the poem furthers the depiction of the sterility endemic to the assertive personality. These images again share in the general stillness:

Just at the self-same beat of Time's wide wings
 Hyperion slid into the rustled air,
 And Saturn gain'd with Thea that sad place
 Where Cybele and the bruised Titans mourn'd.
 It was a den where no insulting light
 Could glimmer on their tears; where their own groans
 They felt, but heard not, for the solid roar
 Of thunderous waterfalls and torrents hoarse,
 Pouring a constant bulk, uncertain where.
 Crag jutting forth to crag, and rocks that seem'd
 Ever as if just rising from a sleep,
 Forehead to forehead held their monstrous horns;
 And thus in a thousand hugest phantasies
 Made a fit roofing to this nest of woe. (2:1-14)

The bower here is an extension of the Titans' forms. Its hugeness mirrors their size; its stillness reproduces their stasis. It is essentially ego-affirming, literally their place of origin, their mother's womb (turned tomb), a cradle which reflects their fallen glory (so Saturn listens to the earth, his "ancient mother, for some comfort yet" (1:21)). In contrast to the bowers of Keats's early poems, "Sleep and Poetry" and "I Stood Tiptoe," where transcendent vision results from the poet's "delicious ramble" through the private woods, the Titans' bower focuses the mind inwards, multiplying identity in a wilderness of mirrors. In the same way, Hyperion's palace of light--a place he refers to as "this cradle of my glory" (1:236)--amplifies his own brilliance.

The Titans seek refuge in this bower in order to escape the changes forced on them by their demise. Ironically, their answer to change is to find a location which itself buttresses the sense of identity that has

been so severely challenged by their fall. Like the "man of power," they need this strong sense of identity to survive. However, their retreat into the self-affirming comfort of the bower is also a descent into a tomb-like den, a place where the vital "beat of Time's wide wings" (2:1) is absent. Its inertia is indeed "monstrous" (2:12). The sterility of the bower represents the deadliness endemic in the egocentric personality, a mindset which in asserting itself precludes the variety of experiences necessary for spiritual growth.

Keats's letter on the "vale of soul-making" (Letters 2:101-03), as I demonstrated in my introduction, includes his reaction to what he calls "little circumscribed straightened notions." Christianity is Keats's prime example of this kind of thinking. Those who believe "we are to be redeemed by a certain arbitrary interposition of God and taken to heaven" are surely "misguided," because they attempt to escape that plethora of experiences which are necessary to form a soul.

It is hardly surprising, then, that two of the most powerful fixed images in Hyperion associate the Titans with religion and superstition. The first is the narrator's description of the silent communion of grief shared by Thea and Saturn in their sunken vale:

And still these two were postured motionless,
 Like natural sculpture in cathedral cavern,
 The frozen God still couchant on the earth,
 And the sad Goddess weeping at his feet.

(1:85-88)

The pun on "still," the implied artificiality of "postured," and the heraldic portraiture of "couchant" combine to amplify the stasis of the frozen gods, while the primary simile ("Like natural sculpture in cathedral cavern") associates their stillness with an image of the deathly circumscription--the cold, sculptured bodies in the church crypt--which is (literally enough here) at the bottom of all religion.

The second image again utilizes the idea of religious architecture, the aberrancy of the structure suggesting the faultiness of the Titans' mindset:

But for the main, here found they covert drear.
 Scarce images of life, one here, one there,
 Lay vast and edgeways; like a dismal cirque
 Of Druid stones, upon a forlorn moor,
 When the chill rain begins at shut of eve,
 In dull November, and their chancel vault,
 The heaven itself, is blinded throughout night.

(2:33-38)

The closed vault corresponds to the Titans' closed minds, the image suggesting the deathly stasis of this closure. "Forlorn" lacks the narrative power it will have in the Nightingale ode, but its thematic use is similar: it signals the unreality of the image, its geographical skew from the mutable human world. The Titans share in the rigidity of mind so prevalent in religion, a mental fixity which denies speculation and thus leads to an ultimate form of sterility.

The correlation between static images and the personality-type they represent is underpinned by Keats's use of a spatial-temporal opposition in the poem.² The Titans are all primarily sight-oriented gods. Saturn asks Thea to search for his lost identity with her eyes (1: 116-125), Hyperion is attacked mostly through his visual sense (1: 227-45), and it is the sight of the sun-god which restores momentary vigour to the fallen Titans (2: 345-91). They are visually oriented because they exist primarily in space; as Saturn suggests, if their identity is to be found, it will be found there:

--I am gone
 Away from my own bosom: I have left
 My strong identity, my real self,
 Somewhere between the throne, and where I sit
 Here on this spot of earth. Search, Thea, search!
 Open thine eyes eterne, and sphere them round
 Upon all space: space starr'd, and lorn of light;
 Space regioned with life-air; and barren void;
 Spaces of fire, and all the yawn of hell.
 (1: 112-20)

What is not spatial is threateningly foreign to the Titans. The new-comer Time is their dread foe. Their retreat into bowers of stone is an attempt to escape time, and it is the "meek ethereal Hours" (1:214) which threaten, however insidiously, to destroy Hyperion.

Apollo, in contrast, is first introduced to us through Clymene as a god whose essence is both spatial and temporal. Describing Apollo's music she says:

A living death was in each gush of sounds,
 Each family of rapturous hurried notes,
 That fell, one after one, yet all at once,
 Like pearl beads dropping sudden from their string.
 (2:281-84)

The image is both spatial and temporal, static and sequential. Clymene's use of paradox in the description is important in prefiguring Apollo's later paradoxical description. Yet it also suggests the incomprehensibility of this type of music to Clymene's imagination. The Titans, lacking an understanding of time, are limited to spatial knowledge, a limitation which excludes the mutability necessary to negative capability.

Keats's attention to time and space in art was not, of course, a novel concern in his day. Lessing's Laokoon, written a half-century earlier than Hyperion, grapples with the same ideas, although Lessing is unable to envision, like Keats, a kind of art which is entirely temporal, yet wholly spatial. Instead, he concludes that poetry can only represent spatial objects "indicatively, by means of actions" (91). What is striking, however, about Keats's description of an ideal art comprehending simultaneously both time and space is the way in which it prefigures the attitudes of several twentieth-century literary critics, and more broadly, the understanding of the modern world. Einstein's relativity theory has re-oriented

the modern consciousness toward an awareness of the interdependence of time and space, so that we now look at time as the fourth dimension of space. Some contemporary literary critics have expanded the implications of Einstein's theory to the study of language and literature. Roman Jakobson, for example, has argued that literature--and language itself--enjoys an extreme simultaneity of "coexistence and succession" (11-24). And in a passage which bears a striking resemblance to Keats's concerns in Hyperion, Mikhail Bakhtin censures epic art for disallowing the same simultaneity:

The epic world is an utterly finished thing, not only as an authentic event of the distant past but also on its own terms and by its own standards; it is impossible to change, to re-think, to re-evaluate anything in it. It is completed, conclusive and immutable, as a fact, an idea and a value. This defines absolute epic distance. One can only accept the epic world with reverence; it is impossible to really touch it, for it is beyond the realm of human activity, the realm in which everything humans touch is altered and re-thought. (17)

The failure of epic, to Bakhtin, is its divorce from time and change. The epic writer creates from memory, from the events of a frozen chronotope, producing a work of art which is basically inhuman, "beyond the realm of human activity." Indeed, Bakhtin's observation that "in ancient literature, it is memory, and not knowledge, that serves as the source of creative impulse" (15) recalls Keats's identical distinction between the two terms. "Memory," Keats writes, "should not be called

knowledge--Many have original Minds who do not think it--they are led away by Custom..." (Letters 1:231). Memory, to Keats, is an understanding based on convention, on the fixity of what has been. Both Bakhtin and Keats censure a reliance on memory, because, to both writers, the fixed intellect is the enemy of the people: the stasis of the fixed mind robs it of its potential for involvement in the human world, the world Bakhtin calls "the developing, incomplete and therefore re-thinking and re-evaluating present" (17).

Bakhtin's distinction between "monological" and "dialogical" linguistic methods can also be applied usefully to Keats's concerns in Hyperion. Bakhtin distinguishes between "monologic utterance" or "unitary language" (269), and what he calls "dialogism" (277). Monological language "constitutes the theoretical expression of the historical processes of linguistic unification and centralization, an expression of the centripetal forces of language" (27). This mode of expression can be destructive, because it excludes the variety inherent in communication:

The victory of one reigning language (dialect) over the others, the supplanting of languages, their enslavement...--all this determined the content and power of "unitary language"....(271)

In contrast, dialogism is a mode of linguistic relativity: it is a recognition of the multiplicity of linguistic and

social contexts which inform utterance. And it is essentially creative: "the dialogic orientation of a word among other words (of all kinds and degrees of otherness) creates new and significant artistic potential in discourse... " (275). Dialogism, like dialogue, is the production of meaning and understanding from the give and take between qualifying participants in a linguistic context. Bakhtin's distinction between the monological and the dialogical is, in Keats's terms, one between a "preresolved" approach to language which "fixes" what may and may not be called "true" language, and a "negatively capable" approach, which allows the mutability of contextualization to create a more vital mode of expression.

In Hyperion, the failure of communication between the Titans may be seen to result from a mode of speech which is, in Bakhtin's terms, rigidly monological, completely sterile in its fixity. Like most epics, Hyperion contains many speeches, most of them monologues. Saturn and Hyperion have extended speeches where the absence of an interlocuter is emphasized by the silence which follows their abundant questions. The lack of meaningful dialogue in the poem suggests the impotence of Titanic communication, and several of the poem's fixed images underline this sense of sterile speech. Thea's (unanswered) speech, for example--the first in the poem--is pictured in images of inertia:

As when, upon a tranced summer-night,
 Those green-rob'd senators of mighty woods,
 Tall oaks, branch-charmed by the earnest stars,
 Dream, and so dream all night without a stir,
 Save from one gradual solitary gust
 Which comes upon the silence, and dies off,
 As if the ebbing air had but one wave;
 So came these words and went....(1:72-79)

The image associates the impotence of Thea's words with the power intrinsic to her nature. They are like the faint rustle of wind in the leaves of huge oaks. The trees are described as senators in order to evoke the rule, state, and majesty of the Titan goddess, while the phrase "mighty woods" suggests order and force. Thea's words have a huge grandeur, but they lack vitality.

In its sterility, the image is an important parody of the air-in-motion image so common in Romantic poetry.³ Examples of this symbol in Romantic writing are too numerous to cite here, but one is especially appropriate. In "To Matilda Betham" Coleridge writes:

Poetic feelings, like the stretching boughs
 Of mighty oaks, pay homage to the gales,
 Toss in the strong winds, drive before the gust,
 Themselves one giddy storm of fluttering leaves;
 Yet, all the while self-limited, remain
 Equally near the fixed and solid trunk
 Of Truth and Nature in the howling storm,
 As in the calm that stills the aspen grove. (34-41)

The wind here is typically Romantic; as M.H. Abrams says, wild and free (Correspondent Breeze 42). The poet stands as the fixed branch of the sturdy oak, terribly moved by the creative wind, but firmly "self-limited," staunchly self-conscious. The paradox is that of Romantic irony,

and while Coleridge's knowledge of Schlegel perhaps obtrudes rather sharply into the image, it is nevertheless of paradigmatic significance for Romantic aesthetics in its assertion of the creative value of energetic inspiration.

Keats's description of Thea's voice substitutes stasis for freedom, order for wildness, and silence for inspiration. The wind--Thea's voice--is ineffectual: "So came these words and went," Where Coleridge's mighty oaks respond fervently to the storm of inspiration, Keats's woods refuse to stir. The parody emphasizes the sterility of Thea's words, an impotence stressed by her inability to awaken Saturn by means of this speech (1:52-71).

If the Titanic personality jeopardizes its own ability to communicate, it also threatens its capacity for understanding. The Titans' self-assertiveness obstructs their awareness. Only Oceanus among the Titans has achieved the self-negation necessary to see beyond himself into the heart of truth. His reply to Saturn's puzzled lament at his own blindness is a lesson in proper Keatsian psychology.

In his letter of 19 February 1818 to John Hamilton Reynolds, Keats describes one of the main methods whereby people may increase their knowledge and understanding:

I have an idea that a Man might pass a very pleasant life in this manner--let him on any certain day read a certain Page of full Poesy or distilled Prose and let him wander with it, and muse upon it, and dream upon it--untill it becomes stale--but when will it do

so? Never--When Man has arrived at a certain ripeness in intellect any one grand and spiritual passage serves him as a starting post towards all "the two-and thirty Pallaces" How happy is such a "voyage of conception;" what delicious diligent Indolence!...--Now it appears to me that almost any Man may like the Spider spin from his own inwards his own airy Citadel --the points of leaves and twigs on which the Spider begins her work are few and she fills the Air with a beautiful circuiting: man should be content with as few points to tip with the fine Webb of his Soul and weave a tapestry empyrean--full of Symbols for his spiritual eye, of softness for his spiritual touch, of space for his wandering...--Man should not dispute or assert but whisper results to his neighbour, and thus...Humanity instead of being a wide heath of Furse and Briars with here and there a remote Oak or Pine, would become a grand democracy of Forest Trees.

(Letters 1:231-32)

Increased knowledge, here, is the result, simply put, of reading. Donald Goellnicht, in a provocative article on Keats's concept of reading and its relationship to reader-response theory, summarizes Keats's approach to creative reading in this way:

In Keats's concept of reading as finally a free, associative process, the piece of literature acts as a stimulant, "a starting post" for the reader's own "voyage of conception," which is based on his or her own creative energies. In this state the rational part of the mind is subordinated to the imagination, which has free reign to roam into all realms of sensation and imaginative thought as it strives toward the infinite, the mysterious "two-and thirty Pallaces." The reader's mind is thus liberated into a "higher," less egotistically controlled activity. That Keats denominates this state "diligent Indolence" points up its paradoxical nature: far from being only passive and receptive (indolent), as Locke would have it, the reader's response is active and creative (diligent) in a way that makes it very similar to the writer's original creativity.

("Delicious Diligent Indolence"
7-8)

For my purposes, it is important to note that this "free, associative process" demands a special freedom of intellect in order to be creative. This freedom, given the language in which it is described, is closely akin to, if not identical with, Keats's conception of negative capability. As Goellnicht points out, the different verbs Keats uses to describe this process--wander, muse, reflect, bring home to, prophesy upon, dream upon--are metaphors for speculation (6-7). A person "should not dispute or assert but whisper results to his neighbour, and thus by every germ of Spirit sucking the Sap from mould ethereal every human might become great" (Letters 1:232). The letter distinguishes between an "assertive" approach to reading--the disputation of an "egotistically controlled activity"--which thwarts the attainment of human understanding, and an approach in which the reader's ability to remain speculative is rewarded by increased knowledge.

The letter is a helpful gloss on Saturn's great lament over his own ignorance. Saturn's limitation, his inability to discover the reason for the Titans' fall, is caused by his extreme self-assertiveness. He is unable to "read" nature correctly because he cannot escape himself:

"Not in my own sad breast,
 Which is its own great judge and searcher out,
 Can I find reason why ye should be thus:

 Not there, nor in sign, symbol or portent
 Of element, earth, water, air, and fire,--
 At war, at peace, or inter-quarreling
 One against one, or two, or three, or all
 Each several one against the other three,
 As fire with air loud warring when rain-floods
 Drown both, and press them against earth's face--
 Where, finding sulphur, a quadruple wrath
 Unhinges the poor world;--not in that strife,
 Wherefrom I take strange lore, and read it deep,
 Can I find reason why ye should be thus:
 No, no-where can unriddle, though I search,
 And pore on Nature's universal scroll
 Even to swooning, why ye, Divinities,
 The first-born of all shap'd and palpable Gods,
 Should cower beneath what, in comparison,
 Is untremendous might." (2:129-35)

Saturn is unable to understand "Nature's universal scroll" because he asserts the supreme value of his own personality. It is there he begins his search for knowledge and there he ends, his ignorance dictated by his solipsism. As Oceanus tells him, he is "blind from sheer supremacy"(2:185). And he pursues his goal in frenzied activity-- "even to swooning"--refusing to remain in the state of "diligent Indolence" Keats prescribes as necessary to a truly creative "reading."

Oceanus, in contrast, follows Keats's advice on reading--he has "Wandered to eternal truth" (2:187). The verb is a sign of the speculative approach necessary to any "voyage of conception." While Saturn travelled feverishly throughout the universe searching for understanding, Oceanus had been languishing "in his watery

shades" (2:169)--the image recalls Keats's state of "delicious diligent Indolence"--where the truth found him. Receptivity combines with desire to create knowledge. As Oceanus says, "Receive the truth, and let it be your balm" (2:243). Of course, to be receptive demands self-negation, for self-assertiveness is, as Saturn's frenetic egotism suggests, supremely active. Oceanus thus dissociates himself from the egotism of the other Titans, asserting that truth only speaks to the humble, to those "content to stoop":

"O Ye, whom wrath consumes! Who, passion-stung,
Writhe at defeat, and nurse your agonies!
Shut up your senses, stifle up your ears,
My voice is not a bellows unto ire.
Yet listen, ye who will, whilst I bring proof
How ye, perforce, must be content to stoop:
And in the proof much comfort will I give,
If ye will take that comfort in its truth."
(2:173-80)

Egotism, Oceanus suggests, circumscribes awareness, just as the Titans' pride shuts their minds to the voice of truth.

While the Titans represent the deathliness and agony which plague the assertive personality, Apollo represents the vital freedom of the negatively capable mind. Embowered on Delos, he empathically visits the universe, yearning to partake in the different essences he sees:

"What are the stars? There is the sun, the sun!
 And the most patient brilliance of the moon!
 And stars by thousands! Point me out the way
 To any one particular beauteous star,
 And I will flit into it with my lyre,
 And make its silvery splendour pant with bliss."
 (3:97-102)

This is the personality of Keats's camelion poet, whose self is defined by the beauties it experiences. And yet without the experience of the most beautiful--without the knowledge of human glory and pain--Apollo is as circumscribed in his awareness as the Titans:

For me, dark, dark,
 And painful vile oblivion seals my eyes:
 I strive to search wherefore I am so sad,
 Until a melancholy numbs my limbs;
 And then upon the grass I sit, and moan,
 Like one who once had wings. (3:86-91)

The images of inertia here--paralysis and winglessness--are intentionally chosen to recall the Titans' stasis. Without human experience, Apollo is as dead as the Titans: "painful vile oblivion" seals his eyes. Lack of human knowledge, even for the artist with the ideal creative personality, results in the stasis of death.

Apollo's meeting with Mnemosyne provides him with this knowledge. As Memory, the goddess is the embodiment of static experience, of events powerful only in their pastness. Apollo transfigures these static events into active experience, transcending memory for knowledge:

"Mute thou remainest--mute! yet I can read
 A wondrous lesson in thy silent face:
 Knowledge enormous makes a God of me.
 Names, deeds, gray legends, dire events, rebellions,
 Majesties, sovran voices, agonies,
 Creations and destroyings, all at once
 Pour into the wide hollows of my brain,
 And deify me, as if some blithe wine
 Or bright elixir peerless I had drunk,
 And so become immortal." (3:111-20)

Apollo's knowledge of human experience is gained through his ability to "read" Mnemosyne's face. He begets himself from the goddess in a paradigmatic act of Keatsian textual intercourse, in which Mnemosyne's record of human experience serves as the "grand and spiritual passage" which breeds a divine "voyage of conception" (Goellnicht 17-18). Apollo's ability to deify himself through textual intercourse dissociates him from Saturn, whose failure to "read" the universe creatively accompanies his loss of godhead and signals the sterility of his imagination.

Apollo's most marked separation from the Titans, however, is in the narrator's use of extended paradox in the description of this deification:

Soon wild commotions shook him, and made flush
 All the immortal fairness of his limbs;
 Most like the struggle at the gate of death;
 Or liker still to one who should take leave
 Of pale immortal death, and with a pang
 As hot as death's is chill, with fierce convulse
 Die into life... (3:129-30)

The paradoxes are established in human terms--birth and death, fever and chill--to suggest a deification which is also a humanization. The constant tension of the polar

terms resists closure, imaging the kind of negatively capable or freely speculative experience which is, to Keats, the basis of all true humanization. Even the narrator remains speculative, establishing an opening simile, then freely adjusting its scope in the opposite direction. Apollo's godhead is generated in irony; he is formed in formlessness. Indeed, he becomes nothing. His form is left unfinished by the poem's ending. The fragment of speech which shatters into silence refuses not only its own closure, but also any sense of finished product in Apollo's description. In contrast to the Titans, he is never delineated, only suggested. Thus the final paradoxical description of Apollo functions to depict the personality of the true "man of genius," the continually mutable, re-thinking, re-evaluating artist.

Keats's use of fixed and paradoxical images in Hyperion is remarkably confident. The range of metaphors he uses to represent the Titans' stasis demonstrates his own excitement in pursuing the relationship between personality-type and image. It has been argued that the final paradoxical image lacks artistic power; that Apollo's metamorphosis "is named rather than lived through in a passage which is considerably below Keats's usual standard," and that this artistic failure signals Keats's ambivalence toward Apollo and the concept of the protean mind (B. Rajan 227).

There may indeed be some truth to this suggestion-- we will find, in Lamia, that Keats's use of imagery is effected strongly by his doubts as to the generative value of this ideal personality. But in Hyperion, doubt is not yet central to the internal debate. For Keats, Hyperion is a rather naive poem. It relies on the overwhelming evidence presented against the Titanic personality to vitiate it in such a way that the Apollonian personality need not be "lived through" in the same way. In other words, Apollo is not shown to be superior because Keats believes the demonstration unnecessary; he is confident that the plethora of fixed images which precede the final moment of paradox is powerful enough to set the concluding image in vital relief.

NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

¹John Keats, Hyperion, Complete Poems, ed. Jack Stillinger (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1982) 250. All subsequent quotations are from this edition; book and line number are noted in the text.

²The opposition was first noted as thematically significant by Robert W. Stallman in "Keats the Apollonian" 143-56. Stallman argues that Keats's use of spatial description suggests his love of an ahistorical or time-transcendent art. Stallman, however, misses the fundamental ambivalence Keats feels for a spatiality divorced from time.

³For the most thorough discussion of the importance of this image to Romantic poetry see M.H. Abrams, The Correspondent Breeze.

CHAPTER TWO

THE EVE OF ST. AGNES

Critics commonly believe that Hyperion and The Eve of St. Agnes are worlds apart. Robert Gittings calls the later poem "a new shift of view" (405); Douglas Bush argues that it is "at the opposite pole from the grandeurs of Hyperion" (111); and W.J. Bate states that "The Eve of St. Agnes was in every way a relief from Hyperion" (438). To be sure, the poems are different in story and style. The Eve of St. Agnes tells a tale of human desire, and places it in the localized richness of a medieval castle on the moors. The eternity and breadth of myth are replaced by a narrative only a few centuries absent from Keats's own time, and a setting possibly adjacent to his own home. The richness of its Spenserian tone increases its distance from the Miltonic Hyperion. There is, however, an important consonance between the two poems, one which helps to close the gap between each fiction. Both poems are strongly informed by Keats's interest in the psychological distinction between individuals who invest all their faith in a single belief, and those who are able to remain entirely speculative about all things.

Religious language and religious postures predominate in The Eve of St. Agnes. All the main characters pray, some more fervently than others, at some time in the poem. Three of the characters' names--the beadsman, Madeline, and Angela--are nakedly religious. And there is a plethora of religious images throughout the poem. It is as if the titular saint has full power over the poem's circumstance.

I will turn in detail later on to this overwhelming religious atmosphere in the poem. At the moment I wish to demonstrate in more depth a point I touched on in my introduction, where I argued that religious faith represents to Keats a prime example of the kind of mindset which wrongly asserts the value of a single, prescribed method of experience. Attacking Christianity, Keats writes:

The common cognomen of this world among the misguided and superstitious is 'a vale of tears' from which we are to be redeemed by a certain arbitrary interposition of God and taken to Heaven--what a little circumscribe(d) straightened notion!

[Letters 2:101-02]

Keats objects to Christianity because it is "circumscribed"; in other words, it fixes the mind on a single belief, thus limiting the believer's range of thought and experience. He goes on, in the same letter, to emphasize that this rigidity of mind blinds men and women to the "world of circumstance," the only world in which they can form a soul:

The point at which Man may arrive is as far as the paralel state in inanimate nature and no further--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 can not escape it, it cannot destroy its annoyances--they are as native to the world as itself: no more can man be happy in spite, the world(1)y elements will prey upon his nature...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 diverse ways! Not merely is the Heart a Hornbook, It is the Minds Bible, it is the Minds experience, it is the teat from which the Mind or intelligence sucks its identity-- As various as the Lives of Men are--so various become their souls...This appears to me a faint sketch of a system of Salvation which does not affront our reason and humanity--I am convinced that many difficulties which christians labour under would vanish before it....

[Letters 2:102-03]

To Keats, the only means to forming a soul--the only path to spiritual fulfillment--is an acceptance of life's harsh mutability. One must school the mind to exist in this continual variety, rather than believe in a system of salvation which excludes it, because human nature, like the natural world, demands diversity.

Keats uses two metaphors in this letter to describe Christianity: he imagines it as a "little circumscribed straightened notion," and as a "difficulty" which Christians "labour under." Both metaphors evoke a sense of inertia, a stasis which Keats understands to be the result of intellectual circumscription. A similar image

is used in the sonnet "Written in Disgust of Vulgar Superstition," in which Keats describes the religious person "dying like an outburnt lamp" (11). The metaphors are important because they demonstrate that Keats consistently imagined religious belief in terms of stasis and inertia. Like the "man of power," the Christian never begins upon a subject he has not "preresolved on." The imagery Keats chooses to describe this mindset leaves no doubt as to its sterility, its ineffectiveness as a means to salvation.

Having used the term "salvation" as a signifier for an ultimate spiritual goal, however, I should introduce a caveat: Keats does not conceive of salvation as a transcendence of human life and suffering. As Ronald Sharp has convincingly demonstrated, "Keats believes that the human is the true sphere of spirituality... [He] rejects all theodicy in favour of a radical humanization, which considers dangerously deceptive any scheme that blinks--or even transcends--human suffering" (21). The "system of salvation" Keats proposes in place of religious schemes has its highest good in human intercourse. If everyone were to pursue their own diverse intellectual and spiritual goals, paradise could be attained; but Keats imagines this paradise as an earthly Eden of human relationships--humanity as a "grand democracy of Forest Trees" (Letters 1:232)--rather than an existence "redeemed by a

certain arbitrary interposition of God."

In The Eve of St. Agnes, Keats gives us a variety of characters who attempt to reach a spiritual goal through a religious approach to experience. The beadsman seeks fulfillment in Christianity, the first religion presented in the poem. Madeline and Porphyro adopt a different religion--that of romance--as a means to fulfillment; although Porphyro, as we shall see, partly resists the circumscribing spirit of this faith through the erotic energy which carries him toward his goal. And the revellers--those rather marginalized characters in the narrative--adopt a strictly sensual approach to experience, making of their revelry a pagan worship of appetite and desire. In each case, the search for fulfillment in religion results ironically in spiritual death.

The reading that follows is an attempt to explore the variety of religious approaches to fulfillment in the poem, and to demonstrate the ways in which Keats uses the fixed image as a metaphor for the spiritual constriction endemic to religion. The fixed image operates in The Eve of St. Agnes in much the same way as it did in Hyperion, to signal an attitude of mind which precludes the openness to experience which Keats sees as necessary to human fulfillment. The reading will also examine the paradoxical image which appears suddenly (as it did in Hyperion) at the poem's culminating moment, in order to demonstrate

how it functions to represent an ideal, vital experience in deliberate antithesis to the sterility of religion.

The Eve of St. Agnes begins, much like Hyperion, with an extended description of enervation:

St. Agnes' Eve--Ah, bitter chill it was!
 The owl, for all his feathers, was a-cold;
 The hare limp'd trembling through the frozen grass,
 And silent was the flock in woolly fold:
 Numb were the Beadsman's fingers, while he told
 His rosary, and while his frosted breath,
 Like pious incense from a censer old,
 Seem'd taking flight for heaven, without a death,
 Past the sweet Virgin's picture, while his prayer he saith.
 (1-9)

Ronald Sharp notes that the beadsman, in his inertia, is the symbolic vehicle for Christianity" (41). He is an example of a person who has rejected this world as a "vale of tears," one who looks forward to "a certain arbitrary interposition of God" whereby he can be "taken to Heaven." As Robert Kern points out, his escapism--his avoidance of human suffering--is "exemplified by [his] barren dream of reaching heaven 'without a death'" (183). He is described as a censer partly because the image evokes an appropriate sense of religious ritual, but also because it signals the beadsman's spiritual enervation. His breath, which is to his body as incense to a censer, represents his essential self. It is not merely his physical expiration, but also the embodiment of his spirit (thus it "Seem'd taking flight for heaven")and of his prayer. Yet it is "frosted breath."

The censer is not warm enough; the departing spirit is frozen the moment it leaves the beadsman's body. The image suggests that the act of ritualized prayer lacks energy. Religion results ironically in the death of the spirit.

The fixed image of the sculptured, praying dead in the following stanza underpins the effect of the former metaphor. Positioned on either side of the chapel aisle along which the beadsman must walk, these statues represent a formidable gauntlet of death through which the poor beadsman can move only "by slow degrees" (13):

The sculptur'd dead, on each side, seem to freeze,
Emprison'd in black, purgatorial rails:
Knights, ladies, praying in dumb orat'ries,
He passeth by; and his weak spirit fails
To think how they may ache in icy hoods and mails. (14-18)

The statues share with the beadsman the occupation of constant prayer. Like the self-reflecting forms in the Titans' bowers, they mirror and multiply his identity. They are an artistic embodiment of prayer and death, perfect symbols of the sterility lurking behind all religion, or what Stuart Sperry describes as "the harsh repression of human warmth and feeling" (206). Their entombment is multi-layered: not only are the men and women within the tombs confined by death, but the statues also, the frozen expressions of this confinement, are bound by "icy hoods and mails" and again by "black purgatorial

rails." This multi-layered imprisonment reminds us (indeed, it serves as well to remind the beadsman) of his confinement, that his is a frozen spirit trapped inside a stiffly religious exterior, entombed at this moment on either side by death itself.

Madeline suffers a similar spiritual confinement at the hands of the religion of romance which quickly usurps Christianity as the dominant circumscribed notion parodied by the poem. She is first introduced to us as the Lady of Romance, an alternative to the Christian Virgin who so dominated the beadsman's thought a few stanzas earlier:

These let us wish away,
 And turn, sole-thoughted, to one Lady there,
 Whose heart had brooded, all that wintry day,
 On love, and wing'd St. Agnes' saintly care,
 As she had heard old dames full many times declare.
 (41-45)

Keats is careful here to emphasize that Madeline's love is dependant on the romantic legend of St. Agnes's eve. She broods on the mystery of the legend like some mystic. Her passion is controlled, ordered, and directed by this old wives' tale. Indeed, her very presence in the narrative seems to demand a similarly narrow imaginative focus from the reader; the narrator asks the reader to become "sole-thoughted"--to set his thoughts entirely on Madeline--before she is introduced. Her heavy singleness of thought

acts like a magnet, drawing our own imaginations into the confines of the romantic legend.

The fault of the legend is that it turns romance into a ritual, sublimating passion into religious ceremony:

They told her how, upon St. Agnes' Eve,
 Young virgins might have visions of delight,
 And soft adorings from their loves receive
 Upon the honey'd 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 that they desire.
 (46-54)

In order to find passion, Madeline must become dispassionate; in order to discover love, she must abstain from human contact. (Keats may be poking fun at the Christian maxim that to gain one's life, one must first lose it, a notion he presents seriously in Hyperion where Apollo "dies into life.") In fact, the romantic ritual is remarkably similar to the beadsman's Christian ritual. The young virgins' fast reminds us of the beadsman's much larger physical abstinence, his penance done on rough ashes. Their eyes turned upward in prayer recall the similar direction of the beadsman's desire. Romance may supercede Christianity in the poem, but the ritualistic connection between the two religions remains obvious. They offer alternative means of passion: Christianity focuses on the fulfillment of the spirit, romance on fulfillment of the heart. Yet both are rigidly circumscribed methods

of experience which result in death. Christianity results in the beadsman's spiritual and literal death, while romance results in the metaphorical death of Madeline, "Hoodwink'd with faery fancy; all amort/Save to St. Agnes and her lambs unshorn,/And all the bliss to be before tomorrow morn" (70-72).

The part Porphyro plays in the poem is more ambiguous. Earl Wasserman and Leon Waldoff, among others, have argued that Porphyro is strictly a creative force, the embodiment of an energy which frees Madeline from the chains of the static legend.¹ But, as Jack Stillinger has pointed out, much of what he says and does may be interpreted as the shennanigans of a villainous seducer (67-93). He frightens Angela, peeps at the naked Madeline as she unwittingly disrobes in front of him, and uses all sorts of sweet tricks intended to enchant her to the point of defenselessness. As Angela notices, his intentions are so couched in deception that it is hard at times to fix his identity:

"A cruel man and impious thou art:
Sweet lady, let her pray, and sleep, and dream
Alone with her good angels, far apart
From wicked men like thee. Go, go!--I deem
Thou canst not surely be the same that thou didst seem."
(140-44)

As these various interpretations indicate, any attempt to view Porphyro narrowly disregards his essential ambiguity. When we first see him, for example, the images

used to depict his love both resist and succumb to the sense of religious fixity so pervasive in the poem:

Meantime, across the moors,
Had come young Porphyro, with heart on fire
For Madeline. Beside the portal doors,
Buttress'd from moonlight, stands he, and implores
All saints to give him sight of Madeline,
But for one moment in the tedious hours,
That he might gaze and worship all unseen;
Perchance speak, kneel, touch, kiss--in sooth such
things have been. (74-81)

The first image of heart's fire recalls the description of the beadsman as a censer. Both men are vessels in which their love burns as an offering. But the beadsman's love turns away from this world, the result of this denial of human experience being that his spirit, the flame of his censer, dies "like an outburnt lamp." Porphyro's love, in contrast, is directed toward human intercourse, and the heat of his burning heart signals the vitality of this desire. Immediately, however, Porphyro speaks, and the language he uses (the narrator tells us) is ritualistic. He wants to "gaze and worship all unseen." His desire for intercourse becomes sublimated into religious passion, channeled into a ritual which regulates or "fixes" the possible ways in which he might express this love: "Perchance speak, kneel, touch, kiss--in sooth such things have been." Indeed, it is precisely because "such things have been"--because of the conventionality of religious ritual--that religion circumscribes one's possibilities for new and diverse experiences.

As Robert Kern suggests, however, the fact that Porphyro "does take action in order to realize his goals" distinguishes him from among the poem's characters as the one least susceptible to the passivity of religious faith (185). In this sense, he is not only the internal hero of the romantic narrative, but also the champion of romance as a genre, because his actions attempt to revitalize a mode of expression which has become inert in the hands of Madeline and other such superstitious people. Mikhail Bakhtin has written of romance in a way which bears closely on this element of Porphyro's character. To Bakhtin, romance is an interplay between "becoming" and "stasis." The romantic hero "becomes" (forms an identity) in a world of "adventure time," "a time of exceptional and unusual events determined by chance" (116). "Becoming," then, happens during the experience of randomness (one thinks of Keats's "vale of soul-making," and the importance of change to forming an identity). In contrast, the everyday world in romance is "static"; it "has no becoming" (128). The triumph of the romantic hero is thus partly his dissociation from the chains of immutability. Porphyro's pursuit of love is a "becoming" in this sense; it is an attempt to break free from the chains of the static religious world in which he moves.

Nowhere is the stasis of this world more in evidence than in the description of the revel enjoyed by the baron's guests. At first glance, the revellers seem too vulgar to be religious. One critic sees them as "the blasphemers, the vulgar desecrators who have no alternative to traditional religion but the merest sensual indulgence" (Sharp 40-41). This view, however, depends on a conception of religion which forgets the inclusiveness of Keats's description of it as a "little circumscribed straightened notion." To Keats, religion is abhorrent because it limits human awareness. It includes formal religion and "superstition"--any manner of living that refuses to experience the "vale of soul-making." The revellers are thus religious in that they celebrate the sensual to the exclusion of all else, depending on "plume, tiara, and all rich array" (38), rather than on human suffering, to give meaning to their lives. In the presentation of the unhappy aftermath of their feast, the fixed image again suggests the circumscription of this approach; the "bloated wassaillers" (346) are "Drown'd all in Rhenish and the sleepy mead" (349). Excessive sensual pleasure is as deadly as excessive Christian abstinence.

The most noticeable use of fixed imagery in The Eve of St. Agnes occurs in the narration of the events which happen after the beadsman, Angela, and the revellers

have been "wished away" (41). This part of the story takes place entirely within Madeline's room, and the suddenly restricted narrative focus enhances the sense of closure evoked by the images. In fact, the room itself is tomb-like, creating a deadly frame for the action:

Out went the taper as she hurried in;
 Its little smoke, in pallid moonshine, died:
 She clos'd the door, she panted, all akin
 To spirits of the air, and visions wide....
 (199-202)

Madeline's room is a metaphor for her mind. Neither permits vitality to enter; both are invested with pallor. The room snuffs Madeline's candle-flame in much the same way as her religious approach to love stifles her passion:

But to her heart, her heart was voluble,
 Paining with eloquence her balmy side;
 As though a tongueless nightingale should swell
 Her throat in vain, and die, heart-stifled, in her dell.
 (204-07)

The image here is particularly appropriate since it is the religion of romance, the mandate of the legend, which literally takes away her tongue. If Madeline utters a single "syllable" (203), she will lose the vision of love she pursues. The Titans' silence in Hyperion was perhaps larger and more imposing, but it conveyed the same message-- the result of intellectual circumscription is a harsh, self-imposed fixity.

It is in keeping with the general sense of stasis which pervades Madeline's room that she goes there in order to sleep. The legend promises that she will receive her "visions of delight" (49) only in her sleep. However, the imagery used to represent this sleep again indicates that Madeline's surrender to the romantic legend is self-restrictive:

...the popped warmth of sleep oppress'd
 Her soothed limbs, and soul fatigued away;
 Flown, like a thought, until the morrow day;
 Blissfully haven'd both from joy and pain;
 Clasp'd like a missal where swart Paynims pray;
 Blinded alike from sunshine and from rain,
 As though a rose should shut, and be a bud again.
 (237-43)

Earl Wasserman has argued that the rose image suggests "a self-contained and unexpended power with need of nothing beyond itself, an emblem of Becoming eternally captured, and therefore perfect and immutable" (243). It is more likely, however, that the rose is an emblem of regression eternally captured, an image of a growing sterility where perfection and immutability are the causative agents. Keats would not have associated escapism-- "Blinded alike from sunshine and from rain"--with perfection. Rather, the image depicts Madeline's ultimate rejection of the mutable world, that world so necessary to the formation of a soul, suggesting in its stasis the sterility of such an approach to experience.

The one element of Madeline's room that seems, at first glance, to resist the tomb-like atmosphere is its brilliant, stained-glass window:

A casement high and triple-arched there was,
 All garlanded with carven imageries
 Of fruits, and flowers, and bunches of knot' grass,
 And diamonded with panes of quaint device,
 Innumerable of stains and splendid dyes,
 As are the tiger-moth's deep-damask'd wings;
 And in the midst, 'mong thousand heraldries,
 And twilight saints, and dim emblazonings,
 A shielded scutcheon blush'd with blood of queens and kings.
 (208-16)

Ian Jack has argued that the window "symbolizes the sexual excitement of the lovers and contrasts brilliantly with the colourlessness and cold at the beginning of the poem"(195). However, while its colour may indeed evoke passion, it is nevertheless a passion overwhelmed by ornateness. The window symbolizes the lovers' sexual desire; but it also embodies the circumscription of this desire by the religion of romance. It represents the spirit of romance in all its ambivalence, capturing the vitality of romantic desire in "blush'd," yet pointing to the elaborate ritualism, the "thousand heraldries," which contain this passion. The reference to "twilight saints" also casts romance as religion, while the "shield-ed scutcheon" suggests the entrapment of custom or tradition. The window is thus the perfect decoration for Madeline's room. It entombs romantic desire in its own ornateness,

just as the romantic legend entombs and threatens to suffocate Madeline's passion.

It is not until Porphyro awakens Madeline from her sleep that the lovers begin to break the confining bonds of the religion of romance:

He play'd an ancient ditty, long since mute,
 In Provence call'd, "La belle dame sans mercy":
 Close to her ear touching the melody;--
 Wherewith disturb'd, she utter'd a soft moan:
 He ceased--she panted quick--and suddenly
 Her blue affrayed eyes wide open shone:
 Upon his knees he sank, pale as smooth-sculptured stone.
 (289-97)

Ironically, by awakening Madeline, Porphyro disrupts both lovers' intended plans: the sanctity necessary to Madeline's design is invaded, while Porphyro can no longer pretend to be the vision for which Madeline longs. Design is defeated by accident in a twist of plot which emphasizes the inevitability of random occurrence in life, and champions Keats's belief in the futility of the attempt to escape this kind of circumstance.

Awakened from the static chill of ritual into the world of chance, Madeline begins to suffer those pains necessary to human fulfillment, troubles Keats understands to be concomitant to soul-making: "Do you not see how necessary a World of Pains and troubles is to school an Intelligence and make it a soul?" (Letters 2:102). The "blisses of her dream" (301) undergo a "painful change" (300), and she complains to Porphyro of her "eternal woe" (314).

She has begun, in short, to experience growth pains, flung from the protective nest of the straightened notion into the human world of continual curves and angles. Humanization is inseparable from the experience of mutability. As Madeline grows, she voices suddenly and emphatically the need for real human love. Turning to Porphyro she exclaims: "For if thou diest, my love, I know not where to go" (315). This sudden emotional movement toward Porphyro is Madeline's first step toward warm human intercourse and away from the cold, imprisoning ritualism of the romantic legend. It is a movement forced by change, instigated by the experience of mutability.

The effect of this declaration of human need is epiphanic:

Beyond a mortal man impassion'd far
 At these voluptuous accents, he arose,
 Ethereal, flush'd, and like a throbbing star
 Seen mid the sapphire heaven's deep repose
 Into her dream he melted, as the rose
 Blendeth its odour with the violet,--
 Solution sweet. (316-22)

Porphyro and Madeline unite in an ecstatic change into paradoxical form. Provoked by a music itself paradoxical, at once sensual and clear ("voluptuous accents"), Porphyro becomes the embodiment of paradox, both "ethereal" or immaterial, and "flush'd" with very real human warmth. He is at once sexually active, "throbbing," and intensely restful, couched in a "deep repose." A living paradox,

he defies the delineation of static form and the kind of fixed intellect it images. He is the true achiever reaching his ultimate human fulfillment through and in complete mutability, a perfect image of the negatively capable experience. As the lovers blend together in their new-found formlessness as subtly as natural perfumes, they become a "solution sweet," a typically Keatsian chemical metaphor of perfect union which doubles as an alchemical metaphor of quintessence.² The physical solution is also a philosophical solution. The declaration of human need has indeed been the catalyst for a vital freedom.

This moment of formless freedom, however, is short-lived. The lovers' intercourse ends, and a dark, cold, malevolent storm reminds them of the possibility of cruelty and deception in love:

'Tis dark: quick pattereth the flaw-blown sleet:
 "This is no dream, my bride, my Madeline!"
 'Tis dark: the iced gusts still rave and beat:
 "No dream, alas! alas! and woe is mine!
 Porphyro will leave me here to fade and pine--
 Cruel! what traitor could thee hither bring?"
 (325-30)

Like the rose in Keats's "vale of soul-making" letter, the lovers are faced by the suffering native to the world. Their response is to revert to religious language, to escape this new pain in the emotional nest religion provides. Madeline again sees herself as a "dove forlorn and lost" (333), an image used earlier to suggest her

enslavement by the romantic legend, and Porphyro heaps image upon religious image in his attempt to console both Madeline and himself:

"My Madeline! sweet dreamer! lovely bride!
 Say, may I be for aye thy vassal blest?
 Thy beauty's shield, heart-shaped and vermeil dyed?
 Ah, silver shrine, here will I take my rest
 After so many hours of toil and quest,
 A famish'd pilgrim-saved by miracle.
 Though I have found, I will not rob thy nest
 Saving of thy sweet self; if thou think'st well
 To trust, fair Madeline, to no rude infidel. (334-42)

The lovers' return to religion raises doubts about the human ability to remain intellectually and emotionally free from "little circumscribed straightened notions" when faced with real suffering. Madeline and Porphyro do escape into the storm, a movement which suggests an acceptance of the challenge posed by suffering. But there is a vagueness about this movement which indicates that the narrator, at least, is uncertain whether the lovers' exit is a spiritual success. As soon as they decide to leave the castle, they begin to fade from the narrator's eyes, gliding "like phantoms" (361) through the final action, until at last the castle door opens and they are completely and irretrievably lost:

And they are gone: ay, ages long ago
 These lovers fled away into the storm. (370-71)

Our ignorance of Madeline's and Porphyro's history includes an uncertainty as to whether they are finally able to free themselves from the bonds of religion. We cannot be sure that their journey through the "vale of soul-making"

will not be halted by a desire to escape into dogmatic belief.

Thus The Eve of St. Agnes ends by questioning the ability of human beings to exist happily in a world of chance and circumstance without relying on a religious crutch. Keats claims that an immersion in mutability is the only true means to fulfillment. He argues that negative capability--the ability to live with uncertainties, mysteries, and doubts without a preconceived system of belief--is the only creative mindset. But in The Eve of St. Agnes, he is also concerned that this way of living may not be pragmatically possible.

The doubt signalled by the recurrence of fixed images in Madeline's and Porphyro's dialogue after their paradoxical love-making is unassuaged by the narrator's attempt to put this uncertainty behind him (literally) by relegating the lovers to an historical void, where the "ages" that stand between them and us obscure the problems raised by their predicament. The narrator's silence about their future too obviously begs the question of the efficacy of the negatively capable personality in the human world. Yet it is this silence with which we are left. The poem ends by voicing a skepticism which echoes in this void, its uncertain denouement qualifying the optimism of its earlier climax.

NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

¹Wasserman argues that Porphyro's desire allows him to lead both lovers "to an understanding of the mystery that permeates life" (119). Waldoff writes of Porphyro's "adaptation of romance to reality," suggesting that his desire allows the lovers to blend together the "ideal" and the "real" in their intercourse (62-81).

²On Keats's use of chemical metaphors see Stuart Sperry, Keats the Poet 36-54, and Donald Goellnicht, The Poet-Physician 48-83.

CHAPTER THREE

LAMIA

In Lamia, the speculative personality receives, for the first time in Keats's narrative poems, a thorough and extensive examination. The depth and the skepticism of this review stand in sharp contrast to Keats's earlier, more naive treatment of the attitude in Hyperion (and even in The Eve of St. Agnes, a poem which only hints at the doubt which permeates Lamia). Through the protean figure of the serpent-woman Lamia and the paradoxical images used to describe her, Keats explores the ability of the "man of genius" to exist creatively in two different worlds, the immortal and the mortal.

The paradoxical description of Lamia is the key to what she symbolizes. We have seen that Keats uses images of paradox in Hyperion and The Eve of St. Agnes to depict a mind free from the chains of dogmatic belief. Similarly, in Lamia, the serpent-woman's paradoxical nature embodies the mysteriously uncertain identity of the "man of genius." The overwhelming concentration throughout the poem on the ambivalence of her character, however, suggests Keats's dissatisfaction with a conception that was once a source of easy inspiration.

The first description of Lamia in her mythic environment is built from paradox, but without the ingenuousness that marked Keats's use of this trope in Hyperion and The Eve of St. Agnes. In place of its somewhat perfunctory representation in the earlier poems, Keats gives us here an extensive, almost exhaustive, image:

She was a gordian shape of dazzling hue,
 Vermilion-spotted, golden, green, and blue;
 Striped like a zebra, freckled like a pard,
 Eyed like a peacock, and all crimson barr'd;
 And full of silver moons, that, as she breathed,
 Dissolv'd, or brighter shone, or interwreathed
 Their lustres with the gloomier tapestries--
 So rainbow-sided, touch'd with miseries,
 She seem'd, at once, some penanced lady elf,
 Some demon's mistress, or the demon's self.
 Upon her crest she wore a wannish fire
 Sprinkled with stars, like Ariadne's tiar:
 Her head was serpent, but ah, bitter-sweet!
 She had a woman's mouth with all its pearls complete:
 And for her eyes: what could such eyes do there
 But weep, and weep, that they were born so fair?
 As Proserpine still weeps for her Sicilian air.
 (1:47-63)

In The Eve of St. Agnes, the contradictions embodied in Porphyro's and Madeline's paradoxical experience were aesthetically balanced: a star throbb'd against a dark, restful heaven; a rose blended its odour with a violet. Paradox, for the lovers, was a "solution sweet" (322). Similarly, in Hyperion, Apollo's paradoxical "dying into life" had at least an intended grandeur. There is little, however, that is either grand or aesthetically pleasing about Lamia. As W.J. Bate says, "the contradictions are so extreme as to be grotesque" (554). She is an unhappy panorama of spots, stripes, bars, and moons. The terms of

the image establish her as something of a circus animal (a zebra, leopard, or peacock), a side-event in a traveling show. Nevertheless, she has a human sense of longing; she weeps over the beauty of her eyes, which cannot help her in her quest for "love, and pleasure, and the ruddy strife/ Of hearts and lips" (1:40-41). The sense of the grotesque, combined with this evocation of melancholy, establishes a huge contrast between this paradoxical description and the earlier images. What was a pre-eminently naive and happy use of paradox becomes, in Lamia, an agonizing representation.

Lamia's discomfoting description is, in part, no more than the properly horrific element necessary to any tale about a monster. But Lamia is more than a monster. Her description can be seen as Keats's attempt to embody--to represent visually--his conception of the speculative personality. As we have seen, Keats defines this personality by its ability to resist identity, and by the panoramic quality of its morality:

...it is not itself--it has no self--it is everything and nothing--It has no character--it enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated--It has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen.... (Letters 1:387)

Lamia shares in the protean qualities of this frameless frame of mind. She has many identities--animal, astrological, occult, mythic, and human--and her morality is

similarly comprehensive. She may be an Iago: "some penanced lady elf, / Some demon's mistress, or the demon's self" (1:55-56). Or she may be an Imogen--Proserpine weeping "for her Sicilian air" (1:63), or the young innocent who blushes when Hermes asks her to name her wish (1:116). That Keats uses paradoxical imagery in Hyperion and The Eve of St. Agnes to depict the speculative personality further suggests Lamia's embodiment of this mindset.

The ambivalence of Lamia's portrait thus constitutes, on one level, an artistic representation of the ambiguities of the protean personality. However, it also enacts what becomes increasingly throughout the poem Keats's dissatisfaction with this attitude. In other words, Lamia's disturbing portrait is an early revelation of an uncertainty on Keats's part that his ideal personality-type is actually ideal.

The dissatisfaction which finds voice in Keats's use of imagery is emphasized by Lamia's actions within the mythic world of Crete. Although she complains that she finds this immortal world, and her identity as a figure in it, supremely claustrophobic--

"When from this wreathed tomb shall I awake!
 When move in a sweet body fit for life,
 And love, and pleasure, and the ruddy strife
 Of hearts and lips! Ah, miserable me!"
 (1:38-41)

--she is nevertheless an integral part of its workings.
 It is her magical power which protects the wood-nymph from
 her suitors' machinations, and Hermes knows at a glance
 that Lamia is the figure to whom he must turn in order to
 have this nymph. The request he makes of Lamia is posed
 in such a way as to suggest no doubt on his part that
 Lamia can help him:

"Thou smooth-lipp'd serpent, surely high inspired!
 Thou beauteous wreath, with melancholy eyes,
 Possess whatever bliss thou canst devise,
 Telling me only where my nymph is fled,--
 Where she doth breathe!" (1:83-87)

Although she says she is unhappy in mythic Crete, she
 appears to be one of its most important inhabitants.

Crete, however, is a realm fraught with exactly
 the kind of religious attitudes Keats censured so roundly
 in The Eve of St. Agnes. The first description of the isle
 suggests the spiritual sterility that plagues its
 populace:

For somewhere in that sacred island dwelt
 A nymph, to whom all hoofed Satyrs knelt;
 At whose white feet the languid Tritons poured
 Pearls, while on land they wither'd and adored.
 Fast by the springs where she to bathe was wont,
 And in those meads where sometime she might haunt,
 Were strewn rich gifts, unknown to any Muse,
 Though Fancy's casket were unlock'd to choose.
 Ah, what a world of love was at her feet!
 So Hermes thought.... (1:13-22)

The situation of this "world of love" recalls the perverse circumstance of the lovers in the beginning of The Eve of St. Agnes. The nymph isolates herself coldly from her lovers in much the same way as Madeline isolated herself from all suitors on St. Agnes's eve. The tritons and satyrs express their love in a form of religious ritual that recalls Porphyro's adoration of Madeline: "Perchance speak, kneel, touch, kiss..." (81). And the result of this ritualization of passion, for Madeline, and Porphyro, and for the satyrs and tritons, is spiritual circumscription. The heart "withers" in the sterility of adoration. Even the narrator cannot resist a jibe at this approach to love, his final words--"So Hermes thought"--suggesting the comic subjectivity of Hermes's attitude.

That Lamia is an important figure in this perverse world indicates Keats's concern that she may share in its sterility; or, on a symbolic level, that the speculative personality may partake of the spiritual sterility Keats ascribes to the religious mind. One of the poem's main preoccupations is this problem of creativity. By exploring Lamia's ability to be creative--this includes her ability not only to work magic and to construct magical edifices, but also to be creative spiritually, to realize love--the poem examines the generative value of the speculative personality.

The Hermes episode, for example, is mainly concerned with Lamia's creative ability. Although she does not literally create the nymph for Hermes, it is her revelatory power which allows the god to locate his love-object and consummate his passion. Her actions thus constitute a figurative representation of creative ability.

The episode, however, is invested with an element of satire that distinguishes it from the paradigmatic models of creativity presented in the earlier narrative poems. In Hyperion, Apollo's divine self-creation is prepared for by his humanization. He transcends the bonds of his égo through a sudden awareness of human suffering. A similarly disinterested humanization (although on a smaller scale) prepares Madeline for intercourse with Porphyro. It is her declaration of human need--"For if thou diest, my love, I know not where to go" (315)--and her realization of human suffering, that allow her to find love. But in Lamia, both Hermes and Lamia hope to profit from the creative moment in which Lamia reveals the nymph to Hermes; they are no longer disinterested participants. As Bernard Blackstone puts it, when Hermes "meets the serpent Lamia, the two make a bargain. She will deliver the nymph up to him if he will give her human form. The morality is completely cynical" (300). Creativity has become a question of profit, fit for the market-place, in a severely skeptical rendering of the

Keatsian analogue of creation. Furthermore, although Lamia is effective in obtaining Hermes's end, the power of her accomplishment is undercut by the narrator's reminder that the act has taken place in a realm tangential to human experience: "Into the green-recessed woods they flew;/Nor grew they pale, as mortal lovers do" (1:144-45). Indeed, it may not have been accomplished at all. Hermes may have only dreamt that it was. But, for a god, the human distinction between dream and reality does not exist:

It was no dream; or say a dream it was,
Real are the dreams of Gods, and smoothly pass
Their pleasures in a long immortal dream.
(1:126-28)

Thus the Hermes episode demonstrates the creative potential of the speculative personality only to emphasize that this potential has been shown solely in a realm of action where potential is never pressed into reality.

As if in response to the skepticism of the Hermes episode, the poem attempts to relocate Lamia within the human world. In doing so, it picks up where The Eve of St. Agnes left off. The narrator of the earlier poem was unable to follow Madeline and Porphyro into the world of chance and circumstance. He was unwilling to explore the efficacy of love in a world of suffering; nor was he willing to face the central problem posed by the lovers' failure to remain in a state of mental freedom when challenged by this world--that is, whether the negatively capable mind can resist the human need for religious faith

when faced by the harshness of the mutable world. By exploring Lamia's ability, as a humanized creature endowed with the capabilities of the "man of genius," to love and to be creative in this world, Keats seeks to answer the questions he raised but avoided in The Eve of St. Agnes.

I have argued that Lamia's first paradoxical description is the key to an understanding of the ambivalence that surrounds her actions. In the same way, Lamia's metamorphosis from serpent-woman to human being is important to an understanding of the actions which occur in the human world. It is, in fact, not a true metamorphosis. A movement from paradox to paradox, Lamia's humanization does not change her symbolic nature, as she merely sheds one paradoxical skin for another, human one; that is to say, her reification does not change her symbolic value as an embodiment of the speculative mindset.

The grotesqueness that marked Lamia's first paradoxical description is again evident in her humanization:

Left to herself, the serpent now began
 To change; her elfin blood in madness ran,
 Her mouth foam'd, and the grass, therewith besprent,
 Wither'd at dew so sweet and virulent;
 Her eyes in torture fix'd, and anguish drear,
 Hot, glaz'd, and wide, with lid-lashes all sear,
 Flash'd phosphor and sharp sparks, without one cooling tear.
 The colours all inflam'd throughout her train,
 She writh'd about, convuls'd with scarlet pain:
 A deep volcanian yellow took the place
 Of all her milder-mooned body's grace;
 And, as the lava ravishes the mead,

Spoilt all her silver mail, and golden brede;
 Made gloom of all her frecklings, streaks and bars,
 Eclips'd her crescents, and lick'd up her stars:
 So that, in moments few, she was undrest
 Of all her sapphires, greens, and amethyst,
 And rubious-argent: of all these bereft,
 Nothing but pain and ugliness were left.
 (l:146-64)

It has, moreover, a similar thematic function. In both images, the sense of the grotesque signals Keats's disenchantment with a conception that, in former poems, he treats with a degree of naivety. Stuart Sperry has shown how Lamia's humanization draws on Keats's chemical analogy for creation:

Viewed in one way, the episode is a brilliantly comic if somewhat bitter parody of Keats's whole early sense of the nature of poetic creation. It unmistakably suggests his discovery of the ironic possibilities latent in those "compositions and decompositions which take place" before "that trembling delicate and snail-horn perception of Beauty" (l,265) and that intensity that makes "all disagreeables evaporate, from their being in close relationship with Beauty & Truth" (l,192). (303)

Keats, though, is not only satirizing his conception of the nature of poetic creation; he is also parodying those moments of humanization that he had presented in Hyperion and The Eve of St. Agnes as divine moments resulting from the possession of a negatively capable mind. In The Eve of St. Agnes, for example, the lovers' union, their essential humanization, is depicted by a chemical metaphor (they become a "solution sweet" (322)) which signals the creativity of minds suddenly freed from the circumscribing power of religious belief. Lamia's chemical transformation

is a parody of this image. The loss of beauty which accompanies it is a sign of the potential destructiveness of humanization, an early warning that the attempt to realize the potential of the speculative personality in the human world is perhaps self-destructive.

Although Lamia becomes a woman through this metamorphosis, she retains her paradoxical nature. Again, however, there is a disturbing quality to the description of her new identity:

...she was a maid
 More beautiful than ever twisted braid,
 Or sigh'd, or blush'd, or on spring-flowered lea
 Spread a green kirtle to the minstrelsy:
 A virgin purest lipp'd, yet in the lore
 Of love deep learned to the red heart's core:
 Not one hour old, yet of scintial brain
 To unperplex bliss from its neighbour pain;
 Define their pettish limits, and estrange
 Their points of contact, and swift counterchange;
 Intrigue with the specious chaos, and dispart
 Its most ambiguous atoms with sure art;
 As though in Cupid's college she had spent
 Sweet days a lovely graduate, still unshent,
 And kept his rosy terms in idle languishment.
 (1:185-99)

As Earl Wasserman says, Lamia is "beauty made palpable in such a fashion that it is freed of all the ugliness that attends such beauty in the physical world" (166-67). Wasserman, however, wrongly evaluates this beauty as advantageous to humanity: "for man the vision of perfect beauty must be extracted from all the ugliness that accompanies it in the world" (167). It is precisely this "ugliness," to Keats, which creates spiritual beauty. Only the

diversities of human suffering can help men and women form a soul. Because Lamia defies this inherent paradox of the human condition, she seems to embody an escapist philosophy, a mindset certainly at odds with the kind of negatively capable mind, the personality forged in human mutability, that, on one level, she represents. Jack Stillinger comments:

It is a nice trick to be both "A virgin purest lipp'd" and one "in the lore/Of love deep learned to the red heart's core;" or to be less than an hour old and "yet of scintial brain"; it is equally nice, and equally impossible for mortals, to separate "bliss from its neighbour pain" and, even while admitting their "contact, and swift counter-change," to hope to set limits between them. (55-56)

Lamia's human change promotes a tendency toward intellectual circumscription, the kind of rapacity of mind, the inability to allow the co-mingling of bliss and pain, that Keats had attacked in earlier poems by means of fixed images. That paradoxical imagery is used in Lamia to depict the same mindset indicates Keats's concern that the speculative personality, when faced by the human world, may revert to the dogmatism of the "man of power."

The first action Lamia takes in the mortal world of Corinth is to place herself in the path of the man she loves. Lycius, though, seems a dubious choice for a lover. He is a student of philosophy, and appears to have no conscious romantic desires as he devotes his life to study:

Over the solitary hills he fared,
 Thoughtless at first, but ere eve's star appeared
 His phantasy was lost, where reason fades,
 In the calm'd twilight of Platonic shades.
 Lamia beheld him coming, near, more near--
 Close to her passing, in indifference drear,
 His silent sandals swept the mossy green;
 So neighbour'd to him, and yet so unseen
 She stood: he pass'd, shut up in mysteries,
 His mind wrapp'd like his mantle....

(1:233-42)

Lycius's portrait reverberates with similarities to Keats's earlier depictions of men and women whose minds are "wrapped" in straightened notions. His physical silence recalls the silence that plagued both the Titans and Madeline. His ironic blindness to Lamia's presence reminds us of Saturn's failure to "see" his identity in the universe, and brings to mind the visual restrictions placed on Madeline by the romantic legend: "Nor look behind, nor sideways, but require/Of heaven with upward eyes for all that they desire" (53-54). The fixed images used to describe his mind--"shut up in mysteries," "wrapp'd like his mantle"--recall the plethora of static images which, in the earlier poems, indicated a similar spiritual inertia. Like Madeline, Lycius spurns the human realm "in indifference drear." His gray Platonism closes his senses (the situation recalls Oceanus's equation of this type of thinking with the stifling of the senses) to the world around him. He is an image of the "man of power," a person who asserts the value of a single philosophy of life.

There is, perhaps, a certain intended humour in the rapidity with which this Platonism evaporates when Lamia shows herself. But the images used to depict Lycius's reaction are disturbing:

...her eyes
 Follow'd his steps, and her neck regal white
 Turn'd--syllabbling thus, "Ah, Lycius bright,
 And will you leave me on the hills alone?
 Lycius, look back! and be some pity shown."
 He did; not with cold wonder fearingly,
 But Orpheus-like at an Eurydice;
 For so delicious were the words she sung,
 It seem'd he had lov'd them a whole summer long:
 And soon his eyes had drunk her beauty up,
 Leaving no drop in the bewildering cup,
 And still the cup was full,--while he, afraid
 Lest she should vanish ere his lip had paid
 Due adoration, thus began to adore;
 Her soft look growing coy, she saw his chain so sure.
 (1:242-56)

On the one hand, Lamia provides for Lycius the kind of vital paradoxical experience had by Apollo in Hyperion and the lovers in The Eve of St. Agnes. Lycius experiences her beauty in all the plenitude of its paradox; he drinks the cup of beauty which is continually full even when drained. Yet to drink from this cup, as in so many other fairy-tales (for example, the Circe episode in Endymion (3:418-614)), is to lose one's freedom: "she saw his chain so sure." In this way, Lycius is depicted as Orpheus looking back at Eurydice. The image recalls that poignant moment of myth when Orpheus, no longer able to contain his desire, disobeys Hades's order not to look at Eurydice until they have left the underworld and turns

backwards to gaze at her, losing his love at the moment of intended fulfillment. Orpheus's subsequent decline into poetic inertia and the final death which results from the destruction of his love reverberate in the allusive background, a mythic or archetypal warning that the love Lamia promises will result in the ultimate circumscription of death.

The images of fixity which are used to describe the progression of Lamia's and Lycius's love emphasize its deadly nature. Lycius is depicted as "tangled" in Lamia's "mesh" (1:295). He is "so in her comprized" that he seems "blinded" (1:347). And as he recovers from the first shock of meeting Lamia, he awakens "from death into amaze" (1:322), the pun skillfully indicating the mixture of delight and entrapment Lycius feels.

In Corinth, the two lovers create a religious kingdom of pleasure, a clichéd, conventional romantic experience which is as impotent and restrictive as the romantic ritualism that plagued Madeline and Porphyro. Lycius keeps a "tythe" (2:24) of love for Lamia, while she in turn creates for him an "empery/Of joys" (2:36-37), a "purple-lined palace of sweet sin" (2:31). As in The Eve of St. Agnes, the result of this ritualization of passion is spiritual circumscription. Lycius asks Lamia "How to entangle, trammel up and snare/Your soul in mine,

and labyrinth you there/Like the hid scent in an unbudded rose" (2:52-54), the image recalling the description of Madeline at the mercy of the legend of St. Agnes's eve:

Blissfully haven'd both from joy and pain;
Clasp'd like a missal where swart Paynims pray;
Blinded alike from sunshine and from rain,
As though a rose should shut and be a bud again.
(240-43)

For the lovers in both romances, love becomes an image of escapist regression when sublimated into religious worship.

Lamia's and Lycius's love, then, is regressively sterile because it blinks the human world. If Lamia only represented a kind of specious illusion--what Walter Evert has called Keats's "demonic view of the poetic imagination" (269)--the poem would be a simple allegory of Keats's belief in the importance of reality and the need to avoid illusions which obscure it. But Lamia also resembles, as we have seen, Keats's conception of the protean personality. There is a suggestion, in this conflation of escapism with the personality of the "man of genius," that Keats is skeptical about the creative value of this mindset. Keats had claimed that it was the source of speculations which, like a spider's web, expand from one point to another until they encompass whole areas of thought and experience, yet remain constantly ephemeral, ready to tear open in doubt, only to be rebuilt again. In Lamia, however, the speculative frame of

mind is unable to oppose the need for a firmer construct. Faced by the realities of the human world, Lamia creates, with Lycius's help, a religious edifice which attempts to resist change, chance, and circumstance.

Lamia's inability to exist in the human world in what Keats denominates as a creative manner is emphasized by the failure of her artistic creations. Like Apollo in Hyperion, Lamia is an artist able to incorporate both time and space into her art. Her creations image the kind of inclusive, paradoxical art Keats believes to be the product of the "man of genius." Her ability to travel effortlessly in her dreams to remote areas demonstrates her defiance of the limitations of space (in contrast with the earlier Titans, whose identities are locked forever in a timeless space), as does her capability of disinhabiting herself under her own volition, as when she fades from our eyes "at self-will" (2:142) after building her marriage-chamber. And the buildings she creates are constructed from a magical blend of temporal and spatial parts:

There was a noise of wings, till in short space
The glowing banquet-room shone with wide-arched grace.
A haunting music, sole perhaps and lone
Supportress of the faery roof, made moan
Throughout, as fearful the whole charm might fade.
(2:120-24)

Music--a temporal signifier--is the main buttress of the architecture, although the palace has a very real

spatiality in its "wide-arched grace." As an ideal artist, Lamia has the essential control of time and space necessary to oppose the production of static art, which Keats associates with the fixed intellect, as we saw in the religious artifacts of The Eve of St. Agnes--the censer, the sculptured dead, the stained-glass window--and in Hyperion's palace. She creates, instead, buildings which continually resist their own restrictive spatiality, magical constructs born from the paradoxical brain of the "man of genius."

Even these buildings, however, become invested with a religious feeling. The palace Lamia builds for Lycius, as we have seen, becomes an "empery/Of joys" (2:36-37), and the marriage-chamber "too fair, too divine" (2:212). The "wealthy lustre" (2:173) that pervades the room reveals "fifty wreaths of smoke/From fifty censers" (2:179-80). The loaded tables in the room remind us of the ritualistic love-feast Porphyro prepared for Madeline:

Twelve sphered tables, by silk seats insphered,
High as the level of a man's breast rear'd
On libbard's paws, upheld the heavy gold
Of cups and goblets, and the store thrice told
Of Ceres' horn.... (2:183-87)

The "gorgeous dyes,/The space, the splendour of the draperies,/The roof of awful richness" (2:205-07) recall the gorgeous stained splendour of the window in Madeline's room. Lamia's marriage-chamber becomes a religious construct, decorated with gods--"the tables stood,/"

Each shrining in the midst the image of a God" (2:189-90)-- and dedicated to a marriage intended to rob the soul of its freedom, the mind of any intercourse with the human world. And Lamia's art is as ineffective as it is immoral. It is built on illusion; at any moment "the whole charm might fade" (2:124). Indeed, its illusiveness is finally demonstrated by the keen-eyed Apollonius, whose steady gaze destroys the building "by faint degrees" (2:265). Lamia's failure as an artist insists on the sterility of her character in the human world. Through an examination of her failure, Keats voices a concern that the "man of genius" may be similarly ineffective as an artist in this world.

The only truly effective character in the poem is Apollonius, the "bald-head philosopher" (2:245). Something of a send-up of Keats's earlier treatment of the "man of power" in Hyperion, Apollonius is Saturn stripped of grace and nobility, with bull-headedness and self-importance substituted for the Titan king's grand solipsism. Nevertheless, he bears the marks of the "man of power." He dislikes uncertainty. When he enters Lamia's wedding-chamber, he laughs "As though some knotty problem, that had daft/His patient thought, had now begun to thaw,/And solve and melt:--'twas just as he foresaw" (2:160-p2). His joy, in other words, is prescience, the intellectual certainty of the "man of power." And like all such people, Apollonius preaches a philosophy that wrongly shelters the mind,

rather than opening it to all experiences. He says to Lycius: "'Fool! Fool!...from every ill/Of life have I preserv'd thee to this day,/And shall I see thee made a serpent's prey?'" (2:295-98).

But unlike Keats's earlier characters of this nature--the Titans, Madeline, and the beadsman--Apollonius has a very real power. He does not share in their paralysis. This power, of course, is destructive, rather than creative. At the wedding feast, Apollonius destroys Lamia "by rule and line" (2:235), as he applies the categorical mind of the "man of power" to Lamia's mystery, "straightening" her into a "little circumscribed notion." To Apollonius, Lamia is only a serpent, and his dogmatic insistence on this fact sways all other minds in the room, including Lycius's, to this opinion:

Then Lamia breath'd death breath; the sophist's eye,
Like a sharp spear, went through her utterly,
Keen, cruel, perçant, stinging: she, as well
As her weak hand could any meaning tell,
Motion'd (Lycius) to be silent; vainly so,
He look'd and look'd again a level--No!
"A Serpent!" echoed he; no sooner said,
Than with a frightful scream she vanished....

[2:299-306]

There is a textual suggestion in Apollonius's destruction of Lamia--the emphasis on sight as the sophist's weapon--that recalls Saturn's failure as a "reader" of the mysteries of the universe. Apollonius is a failed reader, because he treats his text (Lamia) without imagination. He comes to the text prepared with his own

conception of it. His "preresolved" mind does not allow room for textual intercourse; he does not allow Lamia to excite him into the realm of the spiritual "two-and thirty Pallaces." Instead, he rapes his text, taking pleasure in its destruction. And as the fixed image which ends the poem suggests, the wages of this kind of sin are death:

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 its marriage robe, the heavy body wound.
 (2:307-11)

Keats is still certain in Lamia that the domineering intellect leads only to sterility. The poem focuses less on the "man of power" than the earlier narratives, but when it does attend to him, the use of the fixed image again works to censure him roundly. What changes in Lamia is Keats's treatment of the "man of genius." The poem explores this personality-type with a depth and skepticism not afforded by the earlier poems. However, even though Keats reveals his own doubts, in Lamia's failure to exist happily and creatively in the human world, about the efficacy of the "man of genius" in a world of suffering, these doubts do not constitute a final, condemnatory judgement. Although Keats is not playing the satirist in Lamia (satire, as Northrop Frye has shown, demands a "militant attitude to experience" (Anatomy of Criticism 224) which is anathema to Keats),

there is a sense of the satirist's saving grace in the poem. Keats turns his beliefs upside-down--Lamia literally reverses the narrative movement of Hyperion, demonstrating the fall of the "man of genius" and the triumph of the "man of power"--only to demonstrate the grotesqueness of this position. Apollonius triumphs; but he wins only a Pyrric victory, its cost--Lycius's life--excessive to its gain.

CONCLUSION

In my examination of Keats's use of fixed and paradoxical images in Hyperion, The Eve of St. Agnes, and Lamia, I have suggested a process of linear development. In all three poems, the fixed image represents the circumscription endemic to the mindset of the "man of power," while the paradoxical image embodies the vitality of the "man of genius." What begins, however, in Hyperion as a conflict between personality-types won by the "man of genius," ends in Lamia with the triumph of the "man of power." Between these two antithetical conclusions stands The Eve of St. Agnes, a poem which looks backward to Hyperion in its ingenuous representation of the creativity of paradox and the speculative frame of mind, and forward to Lamia, in a nascent uncertainty about whether this attitude toward experience is viable in the human world.

Although I have examined these poems as something of a trilogy, my approach can be extended to at least one other of Keats's narratives. The Fall of Hyperion is a poem full of fixed images. The "eternal domed monument" (1:71) which dominates the first Canto is literally a museum of static forms. Inside, its apocalyptic curator,

Moneta, tends the desolation of a huge graveyard of frozen images. The Fall of Hyperion places the fixed image within a context which monumentalizes its form. My comments here, of course, are only notes toward a possible exegesis. What I seek to emphasize are the ramifications my imagistic approach may hold for a study of Keats's poetry as a whole.

In the Odes, for example, the fixed image is used to describe a variety of subtle distinctions in emotion. In the "Ode on Melancholy," the generative static emotion of melancholy is contrasted with the destructive inertia of Thanatos. Melancholy, the persona claims, is a feeling of inertia which can nevertheless be spiritually creative to those who can appreciate the way this emotional lacuna sets beauty and joy in vivid relief. Indolence is given to us in the "Ode on Indolence" as another variation in spiritual stasis. And in "To Autumn," the patient stillness of the season seems an apotheosis of the other moods, yet is invested with its own nuance. Paradox, too, has its place in the Odes; most notably in the "Ode on a Grecian Urn," where the paradox of the urn, its ability to speak to us through its silence, becomes the starting-point for an experience which brings the persona at least a momentary bliss, at most, a divine insight.

A study of fixed and paradoxical images in the whole of Keats's work would undoubtedly expand their

significance. What they signify in the Odes would be more or less than their symbolic value in the narrative poems. Indeed, for a poet like Keats, who believes in the creativity of change, a rigidly consistent symbology would be contradictive. Approached in a truly Keatsian manner, as symbols for our critical eye, as the "few points" to tip the "fine Webb" of our critical souls (Letters 1:232), these images may be the means to new insight into Keats's work.

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