

JOHN KEATS
THE POET AS MYTHMAKER
A STUDY IN THE THEORY AND COMPOSITION
OF MYTHOLOGICAL POETRY

by

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ABSTRACT

JOHN KEATS

THE POET AS MYTHMAKER

This thesis is a study in the theory and composition of mythological poetry in the work of John Keats. This subject is introduced in chapter I with an examination of the "Ode to Psyche." The argument of the Ode is important for its definition of the poet as a mythmaker and its equation of poetry and myth. Chapter II consists of definitions of mythological poetry and myth. Mythological poetry includes poems which merely allude or refer to myth, poems which reproduce received myth, poems which re-interpret and revitalize inert myth, and poems which are original creations of myth. Myth is defined as a verbal construction having special significance as a way of defining the relationship between man and his environment through the creation of the supernatural by projecting the human form upon the inhuman world; which has personal, social, and universal relevance, and may be the composition of an individual, in this case Keats; and in which, in accordance with their special significance, the narrative or theme, the characters, action, time, setting, and form are stylized or archetypal. In chapter III, I examine the intellectual context in which Keats formed his conceptions of poetry and myth and composed his mythological poetry. Influences on, and corres-

pendences to, Keats' theory and practice are identified in a historical survey of the theories and practices of his predecessors and contemporaries, and with some reference to Keats' biography. Chapter IV consists of an examination of Keats' theoretical approach to poetry and myth. Considering Keats' poems and letters as theoretical statements only, I illustrate the correspondences between his concept of poetry and the definition of myth which I made in chapter II. Keats writings also contain explicit identifications of poetry and myth and the poets that Keats most admired are composers of mythological poetry. Keats laments the passing of the golden age of poetry, but he offers his own poetry as a substitution for the works of the vanished golden age. He has declared that poetry is myth and that he, himself, will be a mythmaker. In chapter V, I conclude my thesis with a demonstration of Keats' development as a mythmaker through an examination of some of his mythological poetry. This development is an alteration from his early and derivative references to inert myth, through increasingly original reproductions and interpretations of received myth, to a final approach to the original creation of vital myth in the "Ode to Autumn."

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CHAPTER I

PSYCHE'S PRIEST: AN INTRODUCTION

The "Ode to Psyche"¹ is the first of the "great odes" which Keats composed in the spring of 1819. Keats copies it into a letter to George and Georgiana Keats on April 30, 1819, and he prefaces the poem with this confession:

The following poem--the last I have written is the first and only one with which I have taken even moderate pains--I have for the most part dash'd of my lines in a hurry--This I have done leisurely--I think it reads the more richly for it and will I hope encourage me to write other things in even a more peaceable and healthy spirit.²

Many of the "pains" which Keats has taken in this poem are doubtless technical. The composition follows the period of experimentation in the sonnet form which led to Keats' development in the ode of a longer and more flexible lyric form.³

It is unlikely, however, that Keats' concern for physical structure was such that, as Walter Evert suggests, "almost any topics would serve the purpose."⁴ Keats' account of the "pains" which he has taken with the "Ode to Psyche" is followed, not by a discussion of technique, but by an explanation of his subject:

You must recollect that Psyche was not embodied as a goddess before the time of Apulieus the Platonist who lived after the Augustan age, and consequently the Goddess was never worshipped or sacrificed to with any of the ancient fervour--and perhaps never thought of in the old religion--I am more orthodox that (sic) to let a hethen Goddess be so neglected--(II, 106).

Keats' tone is light, but this pertness does not deny the

earnestness of his subject. As a statement about the relationship between poetry and mythology, the "Ode to Psyche" expresses a concern which is significant throughout the canon of Keats' poetry and, as such, a consideration of this poem will serve as an introduction to my thesis, "John Keats, the Poet as Myth-maker," which is an investigation of Keats' concept of myth and of his own writing of mythological poetry.

The commentary on the Psyche of classical mythology which Keats includes in his letter is largely derived from Lempriere's Classical Dictionary.⁵ The other chief sources for Keats' conception of Psyche are William Aldington's Elizabethan translation of Apuleius' Golden Ass which he had been reading shortly before writing his Ode and Mrs. Tighe's poetic romance Psyche which Keats had read with great admiration in 1815 and 1816.⁶ Keats' poem, however, is not a narrative, but a reflective lyric and the "Ode to Psyche" has very little to do with the accepted myth of Cupid and Psyche. Cupid, "the winged boy," is seen in stanzas one and two couched at Psyche's side and he doubtless represents the "soft delight" which the poet in stanza five intends to create for Psyche, leaving:

A bright torch, and a casement ope at night,
To let the warm Love in!

Otherwise, Cupid is absent from Keats' poem. Psyche is noted by Keats for her legendary beauty and she has "lucent fans" appropriate to her traditional representation as a butterfly. Keats does not, however, develop the traditional interpretation

of the story of Psyche as an allegory of the relationship between Love and the Soul. There are some reminiscences of Apuleius' tale in Keats' poem, but these are only suggestions. The "bright torch" recalls the torches that are put out in Apuleius' tale as Psyche is abandoned by her parents and the "casement ope at night" may be connected, both with the window through which Cupid visited his new bride before the fatal burning, and also the window through which Cupid escapes in order to rescue Psyche at the conclusion of Apuleius' narrative. It is also likely that both the pastoral bower in which Keats discovers Cupid and Psyche in stanza one, and also the "rosy sanctuary" which he promises to make for Psyche in stanza five, owe something to Apuleius' description of the fair mansion to which Cupid takes his young bride. It is worth noting that Keats does not refer to the situation which precipitates the action in Apuleius' version. In Apuleius, the great beauty of the young princess has caused men and women to forsake the shrines of Venus and to worship the mortal Psyche in her stead. This impropriety incurs the wrath of Venus who sends her son Cupid to take revenge on Psyche. However, while Apuleius' Psyche is worshipped even as a mortal, Keats' Psyche has entirely missed the attentions appropriate to an immortal being. Keats' Psyche is seen with her lover Cupid and is described in terms of the convention of her great beauty in the opening stanzas of the Ode; and Keats' slight reference to Psyche's traditional association with the soul becomes appropriate in the development of Keats' last stanza; but Keats does not emphasize these classical

associations of the goddess Psyche. Keats' Psyche is primarily a mythological figure created in the imagination to be celebrated in poetry. Keats borrows the figure from classical mythology, but gives it an original significance in his poem.

The "Ode to Psyche" begins with an invocation to the "Goddess" Psyche which is followed in the first two stanzas by Keats' account of his vision of Psyche with her lover Cupid. This vision occurs "on a sudden," surprising Keats as he "wandered in a forest thoughtlessly." This sequence of the poet's enjoyment of natural beauty being followed by a mythological vision exemplifies the etiological interpretation of the origin of myth which occurs frequently in Keats' early poetry. Cupid and Psyche are discovered in an Edenic bower and Keats' description contains some lines of perfect sensuous beauty:

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

Keats returns to this pastoral imagery in the fifth and concluding stanza of the Ode where it serves to interpret the argument of Keats' poem. The first two stanzas of the Ode are largely introductory. Keats reveals that he has seen a vision of Psyche. At first he is surprised and doubtful:

Surely I dreamt to-day, or did I see
The winged Psyche with awaken'd eyes?

but the second stanza concludes with the surety of recognition:

But who wast thou, O happy, happy dove?
His Psyche true!

In the third and fourth stanzas Keats begins to develop his theme. Psyche is the "latest born" of a "faded hierarchy" and although she is "fairer" than both Phoebe and Vesper, her worship has been neglected. Psyche has missed the celebration of "temple," "altar," and "virgin-choir." She has enjoyed:

No voice, no lute, no pipe, no incense sweet
From chain-swung censer teeming;
No shrine, no grove, no oracle, no heat
Of pale-mouth'd prophet dreaming.

Keats' Psyche is:

. . . too late for antique vows,
Too, too late for the fond believing lyre,
When holy were the haunted forest boughs,
Holy the air, the water, and the fire;

The visionary world of the Olympian hierarchy has "faded" and become "faint;" the pagan gods are dead and their worship has vanished. Keats devotes several lines in stanza three to a description of the celebration which has passed, but his poem does not stop with a lamentation. For "even in these days so retir'd, / From happy pieties," Keats, the poet, retains the power of vision and he returns to the situation presented in the opening stanzas of the Ode:

I see, and sing, by mine own eyes inspir'd.

Keats himself will supply the worship which Psyche has missed:

. . . let me be thy choir, and make a moan
 Upon the midnight hours;
 Thy voice, thy lute, thy pipe, thy incense sweet
 From swung censer teeming;
 Thy shrine, thy grove, thy oracle, thy heat
 Of pale-mouth'd prophet dreaming.

In the last and finest stanza of the Ode, Keats explains the nature of his worship. He declares that he will be Psyche's "priest" and that he will "build a fane / In some untrodden region of [his] mind." This temple will be shaded, not by pines murmuring in the wind, but by "branched thoughts, new grown with pleasant pain." "Far, far around shall those dark-cluster'd trees / Fledge the wild-ridged mountains steep by steep" Keats' worship will be a growth of consciousness and knowledge of reality which will involve the experience of "pleasant pain." The oxymoron recalls the "vale of Soul-making" passage in the same letter to the George Keatses into which he first copied the "Ode to Psyche." Writing on April 21, 1819, Keats asks: "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!"⁷ The connection which Keats here makes between the "soul" and the "heart" may perhaps have directed his choice of the story of Psyche and Cupid as the reference for the subject of this Ode. In any case, the hopefulness and optimism with which Keats advances his claims for the visionary imagination do not seem to be based on an escape into fantasy as David Perkins suggests,⁸ for they are grounded firmly in the knowledge of reality, the passage through "a World of Pains

and troubles."

Keats' visionary landscape will contain creations of both nature and the imagination, both "zephyrs, streams, and birds, and bees," and also "moss-lain Dryads." The temple "in the midst of this wide quietness" will be "a rosy sanctuary" which Keats will ornament:

With the wreath'd trellis of a working brain,
 With buds, and bells, and stars without a name,
 With all the gardener Fancy e'er could feign,
 Who breeding flowers, will never breed the same. . . .

The experience of reality will combine with the forces of the "working brain" and the imagination, "the gardener Fancy," in an endless act of creation. Keats assures Psyche confidently:

And there will be for thee all soft delight
 That shadowy thought can win,
 A bright torch, and a casement ope at night,
 To let the warm Love in!

We find at last that this is another of Keats' poems about poetry. Keats' task as Psyche's priest, his restoration of the antique world of pagan myth, is one of imaginative creation. The act of worship which Keats will dedicate to Psyche is the recreation of the visionary world in his own mind and through the medium of poetry.

The role of the poet as a mythmaker, as it is exemplified in the "Ode to Psyche," is a subject which is significant throughout the canon of Keats' poetry. Much of Keats' poetry is mythological poetry and many of Keats' poems contain statements which attempt to define the relationship between poetry

and myth. In the course of Keats' poetic career there is no great change in his interpretation of the relationship between poetry and myth; myth is identified with or used as an image or symbol of poetry. On the other hand, there is an important development in the quality of Keats' mythological poetry itself; his early and derivative references to received myth are replaced by an approach to original and creative mythmaking. The theoretical identification of poetry and myth is realized in the composition of his last poems.

CHAPTER II

MYTH AND MYTHOLOGICAL POETRY: DEFINITIONS

We have reached a point where, before I can proceed to explore the implications of my findings in the "Ode to Psyche" as they are developed in the remainder of Keats' poetry, I must make some basic definitions. In discussing Keats' mythological poetry I mean to include more than that variety which is accepted by Douglas Bush in his Mythology and the Romantic Tradition in English Poetry. Mythological poetry in my study includes those poems which make derivative allusions or references to received myth, poems which reproduce themes, ideas, figures, or other elements from received myth, and poems which provide original interpretations of any of the above elements of received or inert myth. These varieties of mythological poetry may refer to the classical mythology of Greece and Italy, as do those poems which Bush considers mythological and as do the majority of Keats' mythological poems including the "Ode to Psyche," but they may also refer to other mythologies created by both primitive and modern man. This study will also consider as mythological poetry those poems which are original creations of myth. Thus Keats' "Ode to Autumn," which Bush admires but reluctantly finds "outside [his] range, though the delicate personifications of the second stanza exhibit Keats's myth-making instinct at its ripest and surest,"¹ is in my thesis considered an important specimen of mythological poetry.

This last variety of mythological poetry is often con-

sidered to be more vital than that poetry which derives from and reinforces existing myth. In his essay "The Possible Nature of a 'Mythology' to Come," Henry Murray contrasts the composition of "myths in mythic diction for mythic functions" with:

. . . the craftsman's use of one or more inert myths of antiquity as scaffolding for image sequences, or in order to supply the learned with opportunities to identify recondite allusions, or to imbue his work with some flavor of profundity--to do this, tongue in cheek, without conviction or commitment.

No plenitude of mythic images, references, symbols, names, or parallels can constitute a living myth, and, if used in this sense, however sanctimoniously, "myth" will deteriorate into a five-cent term and a counterfeit at that.²

Murray's stricture, deleting the accusation of insincerity, might be applied to some of Keats' early mythological poetry, but the important consideration is that Keats moved from poetry of this sort to the composition of vital myth. It might also be noted that any one poem can contain elements from several of these varieties of mythological poetry. Although there is a general development in Keats' poetry from the first variety to the last, most of his poems are mythological mixtures.

The fact that Keats did turn to writing mythological poetry is in part a characteristic of his age and I will refer to this again in chapter III of my thesis. The nature of mythological poetry itself is another possible reason for Keats' interest. Considering the relationship between myth and poetry, Northrop Frye in "Myth, Fiction, and Displacement," makes some comments which are relevant here: "Again, it is as true of poetry as it is of myth that its main conceptual elements are analogy

and identity, which reappear in the two commonest figures of speech, the simile and the metaphor. . . . Hence we often find poets, especially young poets, turning to myth because of the scope it affords them for uninhibited poetic imagery.³ Thus we find that the use of old mythologies may constitute a profitable crutch to the apprentice poet which Keats was for the largest part of his short poetic career. These references which at their worst are incongruous ornaments may be made vital through skillful adaptation and reinterpretation. And so the young W.B. Yeats writes poetry which he later condemns as "a coat / Covered with embroideries / Out of old mythologies . . . ;" yet he continues to use the old mythologies and his later adaptation of the Helen of Troy theme in "The Tower" is masterful. This progress of poetry which is widely recognized in the mythological poetry of Yeats may also be discovered in the work of Keats. Considering the development of Keats' poetry we find that his final attempts at original mythmaking are preceded by an increasing facility in his use of received mythology.

Having made my definition of mythological poetry in terms of the possible relationships between poetry and myth, I must come to grips with a definition of myth itself. My definition is derived from the theories, various and conflicting, of professional and amateur mythographers. My choice of theoretical allegiance is based on a process of consultation, comparison, consideration, and intuition; and so, gathering ideas and using opinions where they suit my purpose, I propose the following definition.⁵

I have taken some suggestions from the etymology of the word "myth." As a derivative of the Greek "mythos," "myth" may be defined by its original meaning as a pattern of narrative⁶ or plot.⁷ This definition is the basis of Richard Chase's statement: "A myth is a story, myth is narrative or poetic literature."⁸ These etymological definitions eliminate mythological representations in music and the plastic arts from the company of those things which are included in my definition, and the reference of "myth" in my thesis is limited to verbal constructions. We may also notice on the basis of etymology, that a myth is a verbal construction having a special significance, for the term "mythos" was commonly glossed by ancient writers as vera narratio.⁹ This explication serves to dispense with "invention, exaggeration, and falsification," associations which were later and spuriously attributed to the term "myth."

The particular character of myth may be defined through an attempt to determine its origin. Assuming a process of cultural evolution, many scholars attribute the composition of myth to a primitive mythopoeic age. There are three main theories explaining the origin of myth which are based on this premise. The first is that myths are etiological allegories through which primitive man sought to explain natural phenomena in the world around him, and it is this theory which is reflected by Keats in the "Ode to Psyche." The second is that myths originate in stories about historical persons and events; the historical basis is forgotten and the history becomes myth. The

third theory is that myth originates as an attempt to explain or illustrate a ritual. This theory, which originated with Jane Harrison and the Cambridge movement in the early twentieth century, has enjoyed great popularity. It must be noted, however, that although it has been proved that some myths are derived from rituals, there are also rituals, those of the Christian Church, for example, which are derived from myth. We might also question, as Stith Thompson does in "Myths and Folktales," ". . . how the ritual itself evolved and how the inventive process which moved from ritual into a story about the gods and heroes is any easier than any other form of invention."¹⁰ Therefore it is quite likely that a poet like Keats, could compose myth from pure invention and without the inspiration of rituals and religious celebration such as Psyche never received.

One interesting development of the ritual theory is Northrop Frye's explanation of the four typical plot forms in which literature is written; Frye begins his explanation in "New Directions from Old," with a definition of myth or "mythos" as "the verbal imitation of ritual."¹¹ The resemblance between the repeated pattern of actions and the repeated pattern of words, though it does not demonstrate that one is derived from the other, does suggest that there is something common in their origin or their function. As explanations of the primitive origin of myth these theories are ultimately unsatisfactory, because they must remain theoretical; it is impossible to determine the nature of the "unknown person in the unknown place and the unknown time and the unknown culture who first contrived

the story."¹² The chief value in these theories of origin lies in the similarity of their explanations of the function of myth. According to each theory, myth is an attempt to humanize or to explain to man the nature of the external world. Thus, according to the etiological theories, myth explains how or why things are as they are; while according to the historical or euhemeristic theories, myth is a way of preserving traditions about cultural origins and forms. In the ritual theory, myth is linked with religion and philosophy as an attempt to understand or to make contact with natural phenomena. In terms of Northrop Frye's particular development of the ritual theory, he characterizes ritual and myth as " . . . something of a voluntary effort . . . to recapture a lost rapport with the natural cycle."¹³

The function of myth in primitive cultures is summarized by the anthropologist B. Malinowski:

Myth fulfills in primitive culture an indispensable function: it expresses, enhances, and codifies belief; it safeguards and enforces morality; it vouches for the efficiency of ritual and contains practical rules for the guidance of man. Myth is thus a vital ingredient of human civilization; it is not an idle tale, but a hard-worked active force; it is not an intellectual explanation or an artistic imagery, but a pragmatic charter of primitive faith and moral wisdom. . . . These stories . . . are to the natives a statement of a primeval, greater, and more relevant reality, by which the present life, fates and activities of mankind are determined, the knowledge of which supplies man with the motive for ritual and moral actions, as well as with indications as to how to perform them.¹⁴

Malinowski emphasizes the social or cultural role of myth, but this function has larger implications. Mircea Eliade's discussion of the function of myth has applications which are at

once more universal and more personal:

Its function is to reveal models and, in so doing, to give a meaning to the World and to human life. This is why its role in the constitution of man is immense. It is through myth . . . that the ideas of reality, value, transcendence, slowly dawn. Through myth, the World can be apprehended as a perfectly articulated, intelligible, and significant Cosmos. In telling how things were made, myth reveals by whom and why they were made and under what circumstances. All these "revelations" involve man more or less directly, for they make up a Sacred History.¹⁵

Eliade's discussion reminds us of the sacred quality usually associated with myth and of the special status of myth as vera narratio. This association is reflected appropriately in Keats' description of himself as a priest in the "Ode to Psyche."

As an attempt to humanize or explain the external World, the function of myth is not peculiar to the primitive, but may be equally appropriate to the modern world. Thus this function

is also characteristic of myths which have been and may be composed by modern writers. And so, John Vickery comments:

". . . the creating of myths, the mythopoeic faculty, is inherent in the thinking process and answers a basic need."¹⁶

In admitting this continuity of function and of composition, I am expanding the category of myth to include more than the classical and the primitive myths. The composition of myth is not restricted to a mythopoeic age of the past, but is a present possibility and is a fact accomplished by several recent writers including Keats.

This widening of the category of myth to include post-primitive compositions is made by several mid-twentieth century myth critics and is usually accompanied by the maintenance of

the special quality or function of myth. In Mark Schorer's definition, myth ". . . gives philosophical meaning to the facts of ordinary life; that is [it] has organizing value for experience."¹⁷ In his "Notes on the Study of Myth," Richard Chase criticizes Schorer's definition, but his own explanation of the function of myth is similar to Schorer's: "Literature becomes mythical by suffusing the natural with preternatural force toward certain ends, by capturing the impersonal forces of the world and directing them toward the fulfilment of certain emotional needs."¹⁸ The mythic function of mediation between man and his environment has three fields of operation: the personal, the social, and the universal. Frequently critics confine their interest to only one of these areas and therefore they define myth as either the compositions of creative individuals, or of particular cultures, or of a universal "race-mind." However, a myth is usually operating at once in each of these areas.

Mythological compositions, particularly modern or post-primitive mythological compositions, are usually made by individuals although their reference is always more than personal. Much of the vividness and the articulateness of the composition may be derived from the composer's personal involvement in the mythic theme or idea which he is representing. This might be exemplified by Keats' personal interest in the myth of Cupid and Psyche which was seen in his discussion of the relationship between the heart and the soul in his vale of Soul-making letter. Myth critics with psychoanalytic orientations have

made many valuable contributions to the understanding of the personal function of myth. In his essay "Myth and Identity," Jerome Bruner suggests the personal origin of myth: ". . . the externalization of inner impulse in the form of myth provides the basis for a sharing of inner experience and makes possible the work of art that has as its objective to contain and cleanse the terror from impulse."¹⁹ Here the mythological composition is a means of relating the individual to his social environment. In this way, Keats uses a myth in the "Ode to Psyche" to express a personal idea in poetic and public form. This concept is also explored by Joseph Campbell in "Bios and Mythos: Prolegomena to a Science of Mythology." Campbell defines myth as a "biologically necessary spiritual organ," a "womb" which "leads the libido into ego-syntonic channels. . . ." for the adaptation of the individual to his cultural environment.²⁰ Although maintaining that myths are composed by cultures and not by individuals and that the main function of myth is social, the anthropologist Clyde Kluckhohn also acknowledges the function of myth on the personal level:

. . . it is equally important that myths and rituals, though surviving as functioning aspects of a coherent culture only so long as they meet the "needs" of a number of concrete individuals, are, in one sense, "supra-individual." They are usually composite creations; they normally embody the accretions of many generations, the modifications (through borrowing from other cultures or by intra-cultural changes) which the varying needs of the group have imposed. In short, both myths and rituals are cultural products, part of the social heredity of a society.²¹

Myth depends on its personal as well as its social relevance,

since in order to survive myth must ". . . meet the 'needs' of a number of concrete individuals. . . ."

While he does not define myth as a "composite creation," as Kluckhorn does, Joseph Campbell also points to what Kluckhorn calls the "supra-individual" quality of myth. Discussing Blake, Goethe, and Emerson as exemplary mythmakers, Campbell claims that their ". . . effort was to restore the poet to his traditional function of seer and mystagogue of the regenerative vision."²² The individual mythmaker, to be successful, must preserve his connection with a social and universal reference, and failure to preserve this connection may result in esoteric or private mythmaking. This accusation is often made against such poet mythmakers as William Blake and W.B. Yeats. And so Blake is dismissed by Douglas Bush in Mythology and the Romantic Tradition: "Devotees of Blake worship him as he is, but others may wish that he had not felt obliged to invent a private mythology."²³ While Harry Levin wonders: ". . . whether any single person--even so intense a poet as William Blake--can fabricate his own mythology? Must not a private myth, rather, be labelled a pseudomyth?"²⁴ I am not intending to make a defense of the mythological poetry of William Blake, but we can remember this accusation of obscurity as we consider the mythological poetry of John Keats. These criticisms are also valuable as indications of the need for myth to function on more than the personal level. Usually the poet mythmaker is personally involved in a problem which is also universal. Henry Murray suggests that:

. . . the creative imaginations which participate in the formation of a vital myth must be those of people--often alienated and withdrawn people--who have experienced, in their "depths" and on their own pulses, one or more of the unsolved critical situations with which humanity at large or members of their own society are confronted.²⁵

Here we might remember the "pleasant pain" which is the basis of Keats' vision in the "Ode to Psyche." The intensity of the life experience recorded in Keats' Letters also substantiates his preparation as a creator of "vital myth."

The way in which universal activities or problems are expressed in particular myths is determined by the culture in which the myth is written, since the culture provides the material for the composition of the myth. We will see in my next chapter how Keats was influenced by the researches of contemporary mythographers and the practice of contemporary poets. As a product of particular societies or cultures, myth, whether it is a composite or an individual creation, tends to embody what might be called "collective fantasies." Harry Levin suggests that it is in this way that "the most powerful writers gain much of their power by being myth-makers, gifted --although they sometimes do not know it--at crystallizing popular fantasies."²⁶ As an example of such mythmaking, Levin refers to the novels of Charles Dickens. Here, I must emphasize that it is the embodiment of a popular idea and not the "popularity" of the mythic representation, though this usually follows, which constitutes the essential quality of myth.²⁷ On the social level then, as the embodiment of "collective fantasies," myth tends to provide a formalized statement of a

society's ultimate value-attitudes which protects cultural continuity and stabilizes the society. Something of this may be seen in the reference to popular romantic nostalgia which is made by Keats in his presentation of the faded Greek religion in the "Ode to Psyche." However, while particular myths have functions which pertain to particular cultures just as they pertain to particular individuals, the appeal of true myth comprehends more than just particular individuals or particular cultures. In this way romantic nostalgia is a representation of the universal theme of loss, the ubi sunt formula. The basic characteristic of myth is its universality.

The function of myth as an attempt to humanize or explain the external World has a universal appeal and myth usually refers to this problem in terms of universal human activities. Therefore, there is often a close resemblance between individual myths or mythic representations. Anthropological research reveals ". . . that a number of myths--constituents of the mythologies of different societies--have had, from a very ancient origin, a temporal span (duration down the ages) and a spacial scope (distribution over the globe) of such great extent that they may be regarded as virtually universal, or "archetypal."²⁸ Because of their common function and their subsequently similar forms, mythological representations tend to follow an abstract story pattern. This does not occur in the "Ode to Psyche" because Keats is not presenting myth in this poem, but discussing the nature of poetry and myth. Henry Murray defines the mythological theme as an ". . .

abstract (a virtual universal), in the sense that it is a composite or generalization of countless human experiences or imaginations divorced of all particulars."²⁹ The consequence of this generalization and abstraction is the simplicity, the intensity and concentrated focus, which is characteristic of mythological narrative. This characteristic of myth can be seen most vividly through comparison with the digressive narrative of medieval romance.

The external World which myth seeks to interpret or transform is a source of typical structures usually analogous to such basic patterns as those of morning, noon, evening, and night; spring, summer, autumn, and winter; and birth, maturity, decay and death. From these patterns Northrop Frye has hypothesized the form of the central or Ur-myth of which all myths are representative. This theory forms the basis of his essay "Archetypal Criticism: Theory of Myths," in the Anatomy of Criticism.³⁰ In his essay "The Archetypes of Literature," he introduces a summary of this theory in the following words: "In the solar cycle of human life, there is a single pattern of significance, out of which myth constructs a central narrative around a figure who is partly the sun, partly vegetative fertility."³¹

The figure who dominates Frye's "central narrative" is the supernatural character who is present in all myths. However, in the "Ode to Psyche" this mythological character is not developed and might be considered absent, like the mythological plot and

for the same reason. The supernatural character in myth is created in the attempt to humanize the external world through the presentation of humans endowed with the power to control the natural process. Recalling the etiologial and the euheristic theories of the origin of myth, Henry Murray suggests ways in which man creates the mythological supernatural:

. . . it seems that a god can be created either by projecting a psyche, or personality, into an object or process that is already endowed with everlasting supernatural powers (e.g. earth, sun, volcano, lightning), or by raising for all time the extraordinary awesome powers of some departed mortal to a super-human level. The two processes could combine to produce myths of divine beings (or of souls) who have descended from sky to earth and/or ascended from earth to sky.³²

The mythic impulse to humanize the external World is also explained by the philosopher Ernst Topitsch in the basic premise of his essay "World Interpretation and Self Interpretation: Some Basic Patterns:" "Man for the most part conceives of what is remote, unknown, or difficult to understand in terms of what is near, well known, and self-evident."³³ It is this mode of conception which lies behind the transformation of reality which takes place in myth.

Through this transformation of reality myth is free to ignore the stricter demands of realism. Therefore there is no need for common logic or plausibility and this makes possible the stylization of character and action which is characteristic of myth. The transformation of reality also affects the mythological concept of Time. Myth takes place in a time which is usually undefined and always free from the restrictions of artificial or chronological time. Thus Keats' Psyche can be worshiped now although she has missed celebration in the pagan

world. The mythological concept of Time is not a denial of Time, but an affirmation of a cyclical perspective which exhibits "vitally periodic, as opposed to mechanically regulated, becoming."³⁴ Nor is the denial of conventional logic in myth really nonsensical. In "The Structural Study of Myth," Claude Lévi-Strauss explains that ". . . the kind of logic which is used by mythical thought is as rigorous as that of modern science, and that the difference lies not in the quality of the intellectual process, but in the nature of the things to which it is applied."³⁵ Finally, it is important to realize that the transformation of reality in myth is not considered to be illusory. A myth which is vital is always believed. In the words of Mircea Eliade, "The myth is regarded as a sacred story, and hence a 'true history,' because it always deals with realities."³⁶ With this affirmation we are returned to the ancient description of myth as vera narratio and Keats' description of himself as Psyche's priest and her "pale-mouth'd prophet dreaming."

To conclude my discussion of myth I may summarize my argument. In my consideration of John Keats as a mythmaker or mythological poet, I am defining myth as a verbal construction having special significance as a way of defining the relationship between man and his environment through the creation of the supernatural by projecting the human form upon the in-human world; which has personal, social, and universal relevance, and may be the composition of an individual, in this case Keats; and in which, in accordance with their special significance,

the narrative or theme, the characters, action, time, setting, and form are stylized or archetypal. I will consider as mythological, poetry which refers to or embodies both received and original myth.

CHAPTER III

MYTH THEORY AND MYTHOLOGICAL POETRY THE MYTHOLOGICAL TRADITION AND OTHER INFLUENCES ON KEATS

Keats' conception of myth and his composition of mythological poetry were influenced by the theories and practices of his contemporaries and their predecessors. In this chapter I intend, through a historical survey and with some reference to Keats' life, to examine the context in which Keats developed his theory and composed his poetry. The definition of myth, which I have given in chapter II as a basis for an examination of Keats' mythological poetry, incorporates developments in the social sciences and critical theory which were not available to the mythological poets and theorists who might have influenced Keats.¹ The study of myth, however, is an ancient study. Although the explanation of the origin of myth in ritual belongs to the end of the nineteenth century, the etiological and the euhemeristic explanations were well established in classical Greece where the study of myth began as an attempt to explain the relation of rational, philosophic truth to traditional, religious beliefs. Two principal theories were developed. The euhemeristic theory explained the gods as deified men and myths as disguised or forgotten history. The etiological theory interpreted the traditional myths as allegories revealing naturalistic and moral truths; myths were explanations of, or inspired by, natural phenomena. Although there is no sign of euhemerism, there are reflections of the

etiological theory in Keats' poetry. In the "Ode to Psyche," Keats' vision of Cupid and Psyche as he "wander'd in a forest thoughtlessly," may be given an etiological explanation as I suggested in chapter I. This transformation from nature to myth is evident also in Keats' earlier poetry, particularly "I Stood Tip-toe . . .," and I will expand my discussion of this aspect of Keats' theory in my next chapter.

In Hellenistic Greece the Neo-Platonic and Stoic philosophers used the interpretation of myth as etiological allegory in order to preserve the authority of tradition and the religious prerogatives of the state. In their sense, myth remained truth, or reality, as it was later for Keats. The Epicurean philosophers, however, used the etiological and the euhemeristic theories to deprive myths of their authority and to denounce them as fabrications. This attitude was adopted towards classical myth by the early Christians and the Christian myth was distinguished by discrediting the pagan myths and describing them as incredible narratives.

Yet the medieval Church tolerated the existence of myths to the extent that they were interpreted as purely poetic or artistic representations of human emotions and aspirations or as moral allegories. The interpretation of myth by allegorical and symbolic means made it possible very early in the Middle Ages for men to perceive wisdom disguised as fable and to see the fundamental relationship between the wisdom of pagan myth and that of the Bible. While the pagan myths, in their literal sense, were dismissed as fictions; as symbolic representations

or allegories they shared with Christian myth the prestige of being revelations of Truth. The classical myths were reinterpreted by Christian philosophers and rewritten by Christian poets as allegorical representations of Christian doctrine. In this way Virgil's fourth Eclogue was accepted as an annunciation of the birth of Christ.

The popularity of Greek and Roman myth increased with the revival of classical learning in the Renaissance. In England the etiological explanation of the origin of myth was revived by Francis Bacon in The Wisdom of the Ancients. Bacon interpreted classical myths allegorically as original repositories of esoteric wisdom. However, this philosophical revival was not as important as the increased employment of classical myth in English Renaissance Literature. The Elizabethan poets freely mixed classical myth with medieval accretions and elements borrowed from Renaissance Italy.² This heterogeneity is exemplified by Spenser's Faerie Queene which mixes classical myth with medieval romance and the Italianate epic. Myth was used abundantly by Renaissance poets both as incidental reference and ornament and as models for thematic and formal composition. This Renaissance literature was later admired by Keats as the product of a golden age in English Literature. Keats' knowledge of myth was largely determined by his reading and admiration of Spenser's Faerie Queene; Shakespeare's Venus and Adonis; Drayton's Endimion and Phoebe and The Man in the Moone; Sandy's translation of Ovid's Metamorphosis; Aldington's translation

of Apuleius' Golden Ass; Chapman's translations of the Iliad and the Odyssey, and the Homeric Hymns; and Milton's Comus and the Paradise Lost.³

With the passing of the Renaissance, the vogue for mythological poetry and the quality of mythological poetry written, declined. The fresh and inventive handling of myth in the Renaissance was replaced in the Augustan age by a narrower and moribund observance of tradition. The Augustan attitude to mythological poetry is exemplified in this observation of Dr. Johnson:

We have been too early acquainted with the poetical heroes to expect any pleasure from their revival: to shew them as they have already been shewn is to disgust by repetition; to give them new qualities or new adventures is to offend by violating received notions.⁴

Johnson condemns as indecorous the willingness to combine the use of myth with originality which characterized the successful mythological poetry of the Renaissance and later of the Romantic period, including the mythological poetry of Keats. The change from Elizabethan to Augustan attitudes and practice is chronicled by Keats himself in "Sleep and Poetry" which I will discuss in my next chapter. Douglas Bush summarizes the alteration in taste in the conclusion of his Mythology and the Renaissance Tradition:

. . . the allegorical tradition had been pretty well dissolved by skeptical rationalism; the intensities of Reformation religion were subsiding into cool Anglicanism and cooler Deism; and the newly established aim of poetry was the realistic and satirical

depiction of men and manners, in substance and style, freed from all that was visionary, mythic, and irrational.⁵

The disuse of allegory robbed myth of its truth and therefore of its real significance. For the Augustan poet:

. . . the prevailing notion of truth was too much limited to the immediate and actual, and the universal and typical were often confused with the obvious. The rationalism which could be so sane and civilized, and which illuminated so clearly the well-oiled machine of the universe, left few dark corners for the spirit of wonder and mystery, for the mythologizing of the forces of nature and the ideals of man.⁶

It is, of course, this "spirit of wonder and mystery" which Keats and the other Romantic poets found lacking in Augustan poetry and which led to the Romantic rediscover of the truth of myth and to the re-mythologizing "of the forces of nature and the ideals of man."

The traditional myths survived in Augustan poetry as a kind of poetic rhetoric useful as compositional devices for ornamentation, to provide decorative, but often trivial, tropes, allusions, and personifications. Occasionally myth might be used to supply the framework of love songs and jeux d'esprit or to provide the materials for burlesque and satire. In these forms the Augustan poets could not produce major mythological poetry, but the production of minor mythological verse continued and this poetry was to have a detectable influence on the mythological poetry of Keats. This influence is particularly evident in Keats' earlier poetry, but Joseph Texte, in his essay "Keats et le Néo-Hellénisme," notices that it is

also present in the opening of Endymion:

Il y a beaucoup de fraîcheur et de charme dans ce début: il y a aussi, pour tout dire, un peu de mièvrerie: ces vierges pâlisent et tremblent trop aisément; ces bergers "bien vêtus" et portant "des flûtes à bout d'ébène" nous font songer à des bergers d'églogues, dans le goût du siècle précédent. Il me semble qu'on n'a pas assez noté les origines de la poésie de Keats: elle n'est pas si entièrement originale qu'on veut bien le dire.

While the quality of mythological poetry declined after the Renaissance, interest in the study of myth increased. The interpretation of pagan myths as degenerate plagiarisms from true religion which was introduced by the early Church Fathers, was revived by the Christian apologists in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Attempting to reinterpret and redefine the relationship between sacred and profane antiquity and to establish the integrity of Scriptural testimony, the apologists explained Heathen mythology as subtly disguised Scriptural fact. The agreement between Scripture and pagan myth which was discovered through this reinterpretation seemed for orthodox theologians to confirm the authority of Scriptural testimony and the truth of Christianity. Soon the system of comparative mythology developed by the Christian apologists was also adopted by the skeptics who they had sought to confound. From the possibility of syncretizing all myths, the skeptics deduced that Christian myths had no more authority than pagan myths. However, both the Christian and the skeptic syncretists agreed on the fundamental truth of myth and in this agreement they opposed the neoclassical critics who dismissed

mythology as idle or false fictions. Towards the end of the eighteenth century the number of mythographers and theories of mythology increased rapidly and they flourished vigorously from about 1775 to 1835.⁸ Given this chronology, it is hardly surprising that Keats also developed an interest in mythology. The majority of these late eighteenth century myth theorists were syncretists. Their explorations of comparative mythology broadened the concept of myth and encouraged Keats and the other Romantic poets to return to the free mixing and alteration of traditional myth which had been practiced in the Renaissance. The change in poetic practice and critical opinion may be emphasized by comparing the remarks of Dr. Johnson which I have quoted above (p.28), with Francis Jeffrey's review of Keats'

Endymion:

Keats' subject had the disadvantage of being mythological. . . . There is something very curious, too, we think, in the way in which Mr. Keats, and Mr. Barry Cornwall also, have dealt with the pagan mythology, of which they have made so much use in their poetry. Instead of presenting its imaginary persons under the trite and vulgar traits that belong to them in the ordinary systems, little more is borrowed from these than the general conception of their conditions and relations, and an original character and distinct individuality is bestowed upon them, which has all the merit of invention and all the grace and attraction of the fictions on which it is engrafted. . . . The author before us, however, and some of his contemporaries, have dealt differently with the subject, and sheltering the violence of the fiction under the ancient traditionary fable, have created and imagined an entire new set of characters, and brought closely and minutely before us the loves and sorrows, and perplexities of beings, with those names and supernatural attributes we had long been familiar, without any sense of feeling of their personal character.⁹

For Jeffrey, being mythological is still a fault in poetry, but he recognizes that in Keats' hands mythological poetry has

been divested of much of its superficiality and has been given a new reality. Jeffrey does not, as Johnson would, consider this originality an offense, but an advantage.

The syncretists sought to demonstrate the unity of all myths, to show that beneath the seemingly disparate and heterogeneous elements of ancient universal mythico-religious and historical traditions there lay a single harmonious tradition. From this "key to all mythologies" the syncretists expected to discover the secret knowledge of man and of the ages. We remember Mr. Casaubon in George Eliot's Middlemarch and are willing to forget most of the mythographers, the notes they compiled, and the volumes they published; however, their efforts had an important effect on Romantic poetry and the use of myth. The mythographers restored the element of truth to the concept of myth. The gods and fables, which in the mechanistic world-view brought about by the Cartesian and Newtonian philosophies had been deprived of their vitality as poetic media, were re-invigorated and given new meaning and new implications. Rediscovering in myth a universal truth for man and his world, the mythographers revitalized for poetry what was in the Augustan age considered frivolous and unworthy of the serious-minded poet. The common assumption of the mythographers that myths rested upon some natural fact and that myths were embodiments of natural phenomena led to a popularization of the etiological myth theory in the nineteenth century and this theory is adopted by Keats in many of his early comments on myth which I will

illustrate in chapter IV. The perception of myth as a symbolic form was accompanied by the vindication of allegorical poetry which lay behind the composition of serious mythological poetry such as Keats' Endymion. Myth, which was merely ornamental for the majority of Augustan poets, became meaningful for the Romantics.

The researches and speculations of the syncretic mythographers provided inspiration, material, character, and form for the Romantic revival of mythological poetry. In the years immediately preceding Keats' poetic activity a number of literary productions appeared with classical themes. These included Thomas Moore's Anacreon, 1788; Landor's Gebir, 1798, and Count Julian, 1811; W.R.Wright's Horae Ionicae, 1809; and Mary Tighe's Psyche, 1805. This last poem had some direct influence on Keats' poetry; there are some traces in the subject of Keats' "Ode to Psyche" and more in the diction of the earlier Endymion. Many of the Romantic mythological poets combined their enthusiasm for classical myth with an admiration for Elizabethan poetry; Keats shared this mixed allegiance with Mary Tighe, Barry Cornwall, Leigh Hunt, Thomas Love Peacock, and Thomas Hood, all of whom had some influence on Keats' poetry.¹⁰

A new interest developed in folklore, ballads, and primitive epics. This alteration in taste is reflected in a new appreciation of Milton, Shakespeare, and Homer, the chief of Keats' poetic heroes. Their irregularities, which had been liabilities for Augustan critics, became virtues for the

Romantics. In his Letters Concerning Mythology, Thomas Blackwell presented an apology for the Homeric gods which attempted to make them meaningful and therefore usable to contemporary poets. Blackwell characterized Homer as an extemporizing bard whose subjects were the powers of nature and human passions and who described their various effects using man and his actions as metaphors for natural phenomena. These descriptions became the "Allegorical Religion" of the Greeks which was universally believed. As these interpretations of Homer are developed by Blackwell in his Enquiry into the Life and Writings of Homer, they reflect the influence of the etiological theory accepted by contemporary mythographers.¹¹ This influence is also present in Keats' identification of nature and myth, while the influence of the studies in epic poetry may be discerned in Hyperion, Keats' own adventure in epic composition.

The profusion of mythographers also stimulated the publication of classical reference volumes in popular editions. Joseph Spence's Polymetis: or an Enquiry Concerning the Agreement Between the Works of the Roman Poets and the Remains of the Ancient Artists, which appeared in 1747, was, like Blackwell's Letters Concerning Mythology, an attempt to make it possible for modern writers of the epic to readapt the old machinery in accordance with the advances which had been made in religious and scientific ideas. Spence hoped to explain the poetic allegories of the pagans so that they could be combined with the doctrinal truths of Christianity and the discoveries of the Newtonian philosophy, and thus provide a machinery highly advantageous to the epic writers of the day. Andrew Tooke's

Pantheon, which first appeared in 1722, was reissued in 1803.

In his glosses Tooke also provided a Christian interpretation of the classical myths. In 1806 Lempriere's Classical Dictionary was published, newly edited and corrected in accordance with developments in contemporary mythography. William Godwin, under the name of Edward Baldwin, published his Pantheon, or Ancient History of the Gods of Greece and Rome in 1806.¹²

All of these reference volumes were in Keats' own library and we have the authority of his old friend and teacher Charles Cowden Clarke that Keats was familiar with their contents:

The books . . . that were his constantly recurrent sources of attraction were Tooke's Pantheon, Lempriere's Classical Dictionary, which he appeared to learn, and Spence's Polymetis. This was the store whence he acquired his intimacy with the Greek mythology; here was he "suckled in a creed outworn;" for his amount of classical attainment extended no further than the Aeneid, with which epic, indeed, he was so fascinated that before leaving school he had voluntarily translated in writing a considerable portion.¹³

These reference volumes were then, a major source of Keats' knowledge of mythology though he certainly learned as much about mythological poetry from his reading of Elizabethan poetry and translations of classical texts, and from his own contemporaries.

Yet another aspect of the new interest in mythology was the great advance in the study of every branch of classical and oriental archaeology and topography which commenced in the middle of the eighteenth century.¹⁴ These researches produced many books including John Potter's compendium of ancient manners and furniture the Archaeologia Graeca which appeared in a new edition in 1795. One copy of Potter became part of Keats'

library and seems to have provided "virtually all of the material background and customs" which Keats described in Lamia.¹⁵ The interest in classical archaeology culminated in Keats' lifetime with the celebrated discovery and acquisition of the Elgin Marbles, 1803-1816. Early in March of 1817 Keats was taken to see the Elgin Marbles by their defender and his friend, Benjamin Haydon.¹⁶ Keats wrote two sonnets "On Seeing the Elgin Marbles" and "To B.R. Haydon" commemorating the occasion. The impression which the mingling of "Grecian grandeur with the rude / Wasting of old Time" made on Keats can also be traced in much of his later poetry, particularly the representation of the Titans in Hyperion.

The English interest in classical archeology was accompanied by an increase in the numbers of English travellers to Italy, Greece, and the Orient, and in the poetic exploitation of thematic representations of scenes and monuments in these countries. These "Italian journeys" and commentaries began early in the Renaissance, but increased significantly in the eighteenth century and were epitomized in Byron's sensational Journey to Italy and Greece in 1809 and his subsequent publication of Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, 1812-1818. It was the Byron of Childe Harold that Keats celebrated in his sonnet "Byron! how sweetly sad thy melody!" Keats himself did not leave England for Italy until he was fatally ill. Keats was in no condition to write a poetic account of his travels and he had completed his last poem before he took part in this manifestation of Romantic Hellenism. Keats made his Italian

journey on his death bed, but the travels of his contemporaries were part of the renewed interest in classical antiquity and mythology which characterized the atmosphere in which he wrote his poetry.

Another aspect of Romantic Hellenism was the idealization of liberty and humanitarianism which became symbolized by the revolt of Greece against Turkey in 1821, the year of Keats' death in Rome; and by Byron's death in the company of the Greek rebels. Byron's humanitarianism provided the inspiration for one of his few serious uses of classical myth in his poem Prometheus (1816), and for his famous lamentation for the passing of Greek liberty "The Isles of Greece." Keats died too soon to attach the Greek war of Independence to his theme, but his own humanitarianism and social concern is expressed in his references to King Alfred and to the Polish patriot Kosciusko in both "Sleep and Poetry" and in the sonnet "To Kosciusko." These poems are expressions of a general concern with the relation of the artist to society and the problems involved in that which became all important in the era of the French and the Industrial revolutions.¹⁷ This problem is given particular expression by Keats in his Fall of Hyperion. The Goddess Moneta demands of the poet-narrator:

. . . 'Art thou not of the dreamer tribe?
'The poet and the dreamer are distinct,
'Diverse, sheer opposite, antipodes.
'The one pours out a balm upon the World,
'The other vexes it' (I, 198-202).

This social concern tended to isolate the poet from society.

Douglas Bush describes the plight of the Romantic poets in his introduction to Mythology and the Romantic Tradition in English Poetry:

In an indifferent or hostile world they were groping for private and personal revelations, for the effect of both the romantic and the industrial movements was to make the artist, if not an anti-social figure, at any rate an isolated one. And, because the world was not only indifferent or hostile to poetry but sick and troubled, the poets felt, some of them, an inner as well as an outer conflict. Who were they to be cultivating poesy in solitude when the sufferings of mankind demanded sympathy and action? Besides, if the artist had a social function to perform, could he, in the interest of his own art, afford to live himself, not sharing the common lot? Hence such various answers, to consider them only from one point of view, as The Prelude and The Excursion, Endymion and The Fall of Hyperion, Alastor, and The Triumph of Life, The Palace of Art and Sordello, The Scholar Gipsy and The Earthly Paradise--or, to sum up these and other problems under one comprehensive name, the second part of Faust.¹⁸

This description of the Romantic artist as an "isolated" figure recalls Henry Murray's definition of mythmakers as ". . . alienated and withdrawn people--who have experienced, in their "depths" and on their own pulses, one or more of the unsolved critical situations with which humanity at large or members of their own society are confronted."¹⁹ And so it is not surprising to find Keats' mythological poems Endymion and The Fall of Hyperion among those poems which Bush suggests were "answers" to the problems facing the Romantic poet.

Though Keats would certainly never qualify as a poète maudit, there are some arguments that can be made which suggest that he experienced a certain amount of alienation as well as a concern for his fellow man.²⁰ He lost his father when he was nine years old and six years later he was deeply affected

by the death of his mother. At the death of his grandmother Jennings, Keats became the ward of Richard Abbey. Abbey separated Keats and his brothers from their sister Fanny and kept them in almost perpetual financial distress. Keats' economic problems were accompanied by a certain amount of social insecurity. Although Keats had many friends he once wrote to his brother George that: ". . . I know not how it is, but I have never made any acquaintance of my own--nearly all through your medium my dear Brother. . . (14 October 1818; I, 392). The persons dearest to Keats were his brothers Tom and George and his sister-in-law Georgiana. He was separated from them by the emigration to America of George and Georgiana in the summer of 1818 and by the death of Tom after a prolonged illness on December 1, 1818. Keats was uneasy with women and in a letter to his friend Bailey he concludes a passage explaining this prejudice with the statement that he is ". . . content that I am wronging no one, for after all I do think better of Womankind than to suppose they care whether Mister John Keats five feet high likes them or not (22 July 1818; I, 342). In December of 1816 he expressed his repulsion for "church bells" and "sermons" in the sonnet "Written in Disgust of Vulgar Superstition."²¹ Writing from Scotland to his brother Tom on July 9, 1818, Keats pauses to condemn the "state of society" and the church:

I have not sufficient reasoning faculty to settle the doctrine of thrift--as it is consistent with the dignity of human Society--with the happiness of Cottagers--All I can do is by

plump contrasts--Were the fingers made to squeeze a guinea or a white hand? Were the Lips made to hold a pen or a kiss? And yet in Cities Man is shut out from his fellows if he is poor, the Cottager must be dirty and very wretched if she be not thrifty--The present state of society demands this and this convinces me that the world is very young and in a verry ignorant state--We live in a barbarous age. I would sooner be a wild deer than a Girl under the dominion of the kirk, and I would sooner be a wild hog than be the occasion of a Poor Creatures pennance before those execrable elders--. . . (I, 320).

These examples from Keats' life and opinions should demonstrate that he did experience the isolation which Murray attributes to the potential mythmaker. It is important to realize that in his confrontation of life Keats moved beyond despair. The life-experience rendered in the "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and the "Ode to a Nightingale" is familiar:

. . . [the] breathing human passion. . .
 That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd,
 A burning forehead, and a parching tongue.²²

and

The weariness, the fever, and the fret
 Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
 Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,
 Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;
 Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
 And leaden-eyed despairs,
 Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
 Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.²³

Less familiar, is the poem "Why did I laugh tonight?" which concludes:

Yet could I on this very midnight cease,
 And the world's gaudy ensigns see in shreds.
 Verse, fame and Beauty are intense indeed
 But Death intenser--Deaths is Life's high meed
 (Letters, II, 81).

The pessimism expressed in this poem is contradicted by the comments with which Keats prefaced the sonnet when he copied it into a letter to his brother George on March 19, 1819:

. . . I am ever affraid (sic) that your anxiety for me will lead you to fear for the violence of my temperament continually smothered down: for that reason I did not intend to have sent you the following sonnet--but look over the two last pages and ask yourselves whether I have not that in me which will well bear the buffets of the world. It will be the best comment on my sonnet; it will show you that it was written with no Agony but that of ignorance; with no thirst of any thing but knowledge when pushed to the point though the first steps to it were through my human passions--they went away, and I wrote with my Mind--and perhaps I must confess a little bit of my heart--. . . (II, 81).

These words contain truth as well as comfort. We remember the vale of Soul-making passage which I have mentioned in my introductory comments on the "Ode to Psyche." There Keats explains the beneficent effects of "a World of Pains and troubles," while in another letter (May 3, 1818), he states that "Sorrow is Wisdom" (I, 279). Keats sought an answer to "sorrow" and an inspiration for poetry in the acquisition of experience and knowledge. Keats did not intend to withdraw from this "World of Pains and troubles" and he did not turn to poetry as an escape. Although Shelley suggests in the elegy Adonais that it was the harsh reviews of Endymion which caused Keats to wither and die, Keats himself had seen the limitations of the poem and mentioned these in his preface. He considered Endymion a product of inexperience. Keats intended to write more poetry inspired by his new knowledge of the world. Writing to John Taylor on April 24, 1818, Keats tells him:

. . . --I know nothing I have read nothing and I mean to follow Solomon's directions of 'get Wisdom--get understanding' --I find cavalier days are gone by. I find that I can have no enjoyment in the World but continual drinking of Knowledge --I find there is no worthy pursuit but the idea of doing some good for the world--some do it with their society--some with their wit--some with their benevolence--some with a sort of power of conferring pleasure and good humour on all they meet and in a thousand ways all equally dutiful to the command of Great Nature--there is but one way for me--the road lies though (sic) application study and thought-- . . . (I, 271).

Again, this time writing to Benjamin Haydon on March 8, 1819, Keats announces: ". . . I have come to the resolution never to write for the sake of writing, or making a poem, but from running over with any little knowledge and experience which many years of reflection may perhaps give me--otherwise I will be dumb (II,43). That Keats felt that such poetry would be an "answer" to the world is suggested in the letter which he wrote to Richard Woodhouse on October 27, 1818, some time after the appearance of the "damaging" Endymion reviews:

. . . . I will speak of my views, and of the life I purpose to myself--I am ambitious of doing the world some good: if I should be spared that may be the work of maturer years--in the interval I will assay to reach to as high a summit in Poetry as the nerve bestowed upon me will suffer. The faint conceptions I have of Poems to come brings the blood frequently into my forehead--All I hope is that I may not lose all interest in human affairs--that the solitary indifference I feel for applause even from the finest Spirits, will not blunt any acuteness of vision I may have. I do not think it will--I feel assured I should write from the mere yearning and fondness I have for the Beautiful even if my night's labours should be burnt every morning and no eye ever shine upon them (I, 387-88).

The importance which Keats attaches to the writing of poetry is reminiscent of the special significance belonging to myth as vera narratio and of its special function as an interpre-

tation and a humanization of reality. Keats' idea of poetry is, like myth, based on the experience of reality; and both myth and poetry, as Keats conceives it, are attempts to "do the world some good." It is possible that this correspondence is another factor behind Keats' composition of mythological poetry. We are reminded, particularly, of Keats' description of himself as a poet-priest and prophet in the "Ode to Psyche."

The argument that Keats' life and opinions compelled him to use myth is presented by W.H. Evert in his monograph Aesthetic and Myth in the Poetry of Keats. Evert concludes a discussion of the mind of Keats with this question:

Here then was Keats's dilemma: Inclined toward speculative activity and a basically religious view of life, yet out of sympathy with the dominant metaphysical mode of organizing experience in that culture to which he must address his poetry, how was he to proceed?²⁴

Evert's answer is that:

Like others of his time, but none more conspicuously, Keats met it by turning to a cultural taproot which had been largely neglected in the poetry of the Neoclassic age, the mythology of classical antiquity. Here he found, in the very origins of Western cultural history, a ready-made vocabulary and symbolism of those natural forces and ideal concepts on the balance of which he believed the cultural health of the individual to depend, and which he thought to be artificially stifled by the prevailing Christian culture. Perhaps it is inaccurate to imply, with the word "found," that he suddenly discovered this mine of elemental poetic ore, for his fascination with myth antedated his poetic career. But at some point very early in his writing life, certainly before he had firmly settled upon poetry as a profession, he had discovered the utility of myth and had constructed a fairly elaborate aesthetic upon its foundation.²⁵

For a demonstration of Keats' "elaborate aesthetic," I refer

the reader to Evert, but I will, in my next chapter, present a discussion of what Keats said, in his poems and letters, about poetry and myth.

Before doing this, I will conclude my discussion of the influences on Keats' concepts of myth and poetry by mentioning one more of great importance, the influence of the critical opinion and example of Wordsworth, the major poet among Keats' contemporaries. Writing the "Preface" to the Lyrical Ballads in 1800, Wordsworth quotes a passage from Gray as an example for his discussion of the language of poetry. He dismisses as without "any value" the line: "And reddening Phoebus lifts his golden fire...."²⁶ In his discussion of Wordsworth's "Preface" in chapter XVIII of the Biographia Literaria, Coleridge selects this line for particular comment and introduces the subject of the use of myth in poetry.²⁷ But Wordsworth did not mention this subject in his "Preface" and his only comment on Gray's "Phoebus" was to exclude it from his discussion. However, the re-authentication and repopularization of myth by the researches of the syncretic mythographers produced a change in poetic taste and this alteration may be seen in the poetry of Wordsworth. In 1800, Wordsworth did not bother to mention Gray's "Phoebus," but in 1807 he published the sonnet "The world is too much with us . . .," containing the concluding lines which became one of the most famous statements of Romantic nostalgia:

. . . Great God! I'd rather be
 A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
 So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
 Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
 Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;²⁹
 Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn.

This sonnet was echoed many times in the nineteenth century and it is possible that one of these echoes is another "source" for Keats' resolution, in his "Ode to Psyche," to become the priest of a pagan goddess.

In 1814 Wordsworth published The Excursion in which he depicts the ancient mythological religions as testimonies of the presence of the Divine and of man's endeavor to apprehend this presence. He describes the creation of the myths of pagan Greece in accordance with the etiological theories of contemporary mythographers:

--In that fair clime, the lonely herdsman, stretched
 On the soft grass through half a summer's day,
 With music lulled his indolent repose:
 And, in some fit of weariness, if he,
 When his own breath was silent, chanced to hear
 A distant strain, far sweeter than the sounds
 Which his poor strain could make, his fancy fetched,
 Even from the blazing chariot of the sun,
 A beardless Youth, who touched a golden lute,
 And filled the illumined groves with ravishment.
 The nightly hunter, lifting a bright eye
 Up towards the crescent moon, with grateful heart
 Called on the lovely wanderer who bestowed
 That timely light, to share his joyous sport:
 And hence, a beaming Goddess with her Nymphs,
 Across the lawn and through the darksome grove,
 Not unaccompanied with tuneful notes
 By echo multiplied from rock or cave,
 Swept in the storm of chase; as moon and stars
 Glance rapidly along the clouded heaven,
 When winds are blowing strong. The traveller slaked
 His thirst from rill or gushing fount, and thanked

The Naiad. Sunbeams, upon distant hills
 Gliding apace, with shadows in their train,
 Might, with small help from fancy, be transformed
 Into fleet Oreads sporting visibly.
 The Zephyrs fanning, as they passed, their wings,
 Lacked not, for love, fair objects whom they wooed
 With gentle whisper. Withered boughs grotesque,
 Stripped of their leaves and twigs by hoary age,
 From depth of shaggy covert peeping forth
 In the low vale, or on steep mountain-side;
 And, sometimes, intermixed with stirring horns,
 Of the live deer, or goat's depending beard,--
 These were the lurking Satyrs, a wild brood
 Of gameson Deities; or Pan himself,
 The simple shepherd's awe-inspiring God! (Bk. IV, 851-887).³⁶

Wordsworth's identification of nature and myth is followed by many similar passages in Keats' poetry. The complete reversal of Wordsworth's attitude to myth may be seen in the note which he wrote in 1817 on his "Ode to Lycoris:"

. . . No doubt the hacknied and lifeless use into which mythology fell towards the close of the 17th century, and which continued through the eighteenth, disgusted the general reader with all illusion to it in modern verse; and though, in deference to this disgust, and also in a measure participating in it, I abstained in my earlier writings from all introduction of pagan fable, surely even in its humble form, it may ally itself with real sentiment, as I can truly affirm it did in the present case.³⁰

The immense significance which The Excursion had for Keats is specified by his description of the poem as one of the "three things to rejoice at in this Age" (Letters, I, 203). The passage from The Excursion which I have quoted and Keats' enthusiastic praise of the poem are sufficient to indicate the influence which Wordsworth had on Keats. The importance of this influence is suggested by Douglas Bush:

[Wordsworth] passed on to the younger generation, especially to Keats, its most influential representative, a noble and poetic conception of mythology as a treasury of symbols rich enough

to embody not only the finest sensuous experience but the highest aspirations of man. And it was Wordsworth who created a style, or rather styles, fit for the treatment of such subjects. Of course Keats and Shelley absorbed Shakespeare, Spenser, Milton, and others of the Renaissance tradition, but in the matter of mythology the earlier masters were not enough. After the eighteenth century the vitality of serious poetic myth needed to be demonstrated by a great poet who belonged to their own age, who wrote under similar conditions, and who wrestled with similar problems in philosophy and poetry.³¹

It can not be surprising that the result of all these influences working on Keats was the development of his interest in myth and his composition of mythological poetry. Some of the influences which I have examined in this chapter are personal and peculiar to Keats, but many of them are general and they influenced large numbers of his contemporaries. Keats' conception of myth and his mythological poetry were not unique, but derived from or shared with many of the Romantic poets; they are part of the Romantic revival in the mythological tradition.

CHAPTER IV

POETRY AND MYTH THEORETICAL STATEMENTS IN KEATS' POEMS AND LETTERS

This chapter is an examination of Keats' theoretical approach to poetry and myth and a demonstration of the correspondences between his concept of poetry and the definition of myth which I made in chapter II. I am considering Keats' poems and letters as theoretical statements only and will return to the poems in chapter V in which I will consider them as examples of mythological poetry. Keats' interest in myth was that of a poet, not a mythographer, and his writings do not include many theoretical statements about myth. However, his poems contain numerous references to myth in which he is defining myth or using myth to define poetry. The subject of large numbers of his poems, particularly the early ones, and of many of his letters is poetry, and much of what he has to say about poetry corresponds with the definition of myth given in chapter II of my thesis. This correspondence is of course appropriate, since many of his poems are based on mythological themes, and it is an important reason for Keats' success as a mythological poet. Keats' many identifications of myth as poetry are the basis of his statement in the "Ode to Psyche" that he will be Psyche's priest, for his act of worship will be the composition of poetry. However, poetry is a larger category than myth, not all poetry is myth, and it is the

correspondence between Keats' definition of poetry and the nature of myth which makes it possible for him to identify poetry and myth and for his mythological poems to become vital creations of myth and not merely poetry with inert mythological associations.

In my introductory discussion of Keats' "Ode to Psyche," I described the sequence made by the poet's enjoyment of natural beauty being followed by a mythological vision as a derivation from the etiologial theory of the origin of myth. I have referred to this correspondence again in my discussion of myth and mythography, and we have seen a more explicit example of the etiologial theory made into poetry in the lines which I have quoted from Wordsworth's Excursion. For Keats, the etiologial theory becomes an identification of nature, myth, and poetry which he expresses in many of his early poems. The earliest statement of this theme occurs in the "Ode to Apollo," "In thy western halls . . .," which Keats composed in February of 1815.¹ Here what was to become the usual order is reversed; Apollo, the mythological figure, is addressed first, and then his song is identified with the sounds of nature:

We listen here on earth:
The dying tones that fill the air,
And charm the ear of evening fair,
From thee, great God of Bards, receive their heavenly birth.

The close relationship between nature and myth reappears as one

of the themes in the Epistle "To George Felton Mathew" which Keats composed in November of 1815.² Unsure of his ability to compose poetry, Keats confesses to Mathew:

That I am oft in doubt whether at all
I shall again see Phoebus in the morning;
Or flush'd Aurora in the roseate dawning!
Or a white Naiad in a rippling stream;
Or a rapt seraph in a moonlight beam;
Or again witness what with thee I've seen,
The dew by fairy feet swept from the green,
After a night of some quaint jubilee
Which every elf and fay had come to see:
When bright processions took their airy march
Beneath the curved moon's triumphal arch (ll.20-30).

Here Keats is stating a wish to possess a mythmaking ability very similar to that of the "unenlightened swains of pagan Greece" in Wordsworth's Excursion. Keats explains the source of his lack of confidence as his obligation to live "in this dark city." He then goes on to describe the ideal setting for the composition of poetry, which he has identified above as myth in his references to "Phoebus," "Aurora," and the "white Naiad:"

Some flowery spot, sequester'd, wild, romantic,
That often must have seen a poet frantic;
Where oaks, that erst the Druid knew, are growing,
And flowers, the glory of one day, are blowing;
Where the dark-leav'd laburnum's drooping clusters
Reflect athwart the stream their yellow lustres,
And intertwined the cassia's arms unite,
With its own drooping buds, but very white.
Where on one side are covert branches hung,
'Mong which the nightingales have always sung
In leafy quiet: where to pry, aloof,
Atween the pillars of the sylvan roof,
Would be to find where violet beds were nestling,
And where the bee with cowslip bells was wrestling.
There must be too a ruin dark, and gloomy,
To say 'joy not too much in all that's bloomy' (ll.37-52).

Keats takes far too many lines and his descriptions are somewhat hackneyed, but his message is clear; the composition of myth is based on the contemplation of nature. The identification of poetry with nature is made again in the sonnet "How many bards. . . ," composed by Keats in March of 1816.³ In the octet Keats describes the pleasure that he takes in the memories of great poetry which come to him when he sits down to rhyme. In the sestet Keats states that he has the same response to the "number'd sounds that evening store. . . ." In this sonnet Keats does not mention myth, but the comparison made between poetry and nature is similar to that in the earlier "Ode to Apollo."

In August, 1816, Keats was living in Margate, placed in the poet's natural setting:

. . . pillow'd on a bed of flowers
That crowns a lofty clift, which proudly towers
Above the ocean-waves (ll.123-25).⁴

Yet he is dejected and in the opening lines of the poem containing these lines, the Epistle "To My Brother George," Keats recalls the:

. . . seasons when I've thought
No spherey strains by me could e'er be caught
From the blue dome, though I to dimness gaze
On the far depth, where sheeted lightning plays;
Or, on the wavy grass outstretch'd supinely,
Pry 'mong the stars, to strive to think divinely:
That I should never hear Apollo's song,
Though feathery clouds were floating all along
The purple west, and, two bright streaks between,
The golden lyre itself were dimly seen: . . . (ll.3-12).

Keats contrasts this experience of apprehension with the "wonders strange" seen by him "whose head is pregnant with poetic lore:"

A sudden glow comes on them, naught they see
 In water, earth, or air, but poesy.

 . . . when a Poet is in such a trance,
 In air he sees white coursers paw, and prance,
 Bestriden of gay knights, in gay apparel,
 Who at each other tilt in playful quarrel,
 And what we, ignorantly, sheet-lightning call,
 Is the swift opening of their wide portal,
 When the bright warder blows his trumpet clear,
 Whose tones reach naught on earth but Poet's ear.
 When these enchanted portals open wide,
 And through the light the horsemen swiftly glide,
 The Poet's eye can reach those golden halls,
 And view the glory of their festivals: . . .
 (ll. 21-22, 25-36).

The poet sees nature transformed into poetic images and this is the imaginary metamorphosis which creates myth. Keats hopes that he too will see more in nature than nature and he promises his brother:

And should I ever see them, I will tell you
 Such tales as needs must with amazement spell you
 (ll. 65-66).

In this poem we again have Keats' statement that the poet is inspired by nature and also his description of inspired poetry in mythological images.

In September of 1816, Keats writes another Epistle, this one "To Charles Cowden Clarke," in which he makes the same identification of nature, myth, and poetry.⁵ For some "weeks" he has been away from London and in the country he has enjoyed being able:

To see high, golden corn wave in the light
 When Cynthia smiles upon a summer's night,
 And peers among the cloudlets jet and white,
 As though she were reclining in a bed
 Of bean blossoms, in heaven freshly shed.
 No sooner had I stepp'd into these pleasures
 Than I began to think of rhymes and measures:
 The air that floated by me seem'd to say
 "Write! thou wilt never have a better day"(ll. 92-100).

Here we have one of Keats' many descriptions of the natural moon as the classical goddess. Keats' classical reference is not merely an allusion, but a genuine personification which might be read as a preparation for his more elaborate treatment of this figure in Endymion. In the Epistle, "To Charles Cowden Clarke," Keats claims that this natural phenomenon, which he has described as a mythological figure, has inspired him to write poetry. The poetry which he writes is not a photographic description of nature, but a mythological transformation.

Again, in "Sleep and Poetry," composed in November and December of 1816, Keats identifies nature as the inspirer of poetry.⁶ In an apostrophe to "Poesy" Keats asks:

... --Should I rather kneel
 Upon some mountain-top until I feel
 A glowing splendour round about me hung,
 And echo back the voice of thine own tongue? (ll. 49-52).

Still addressing "Poesy," Keats asks for "a bowery nook" which:

Will be elysium--an eternal book
 Whence I may copy many a lovely saying
 About the leaves, and flowers--about the playing
 Of nymphs in woods, and fountains; and the shade
 Keeping silence round a sleeping maid;
 And many a verse from so strange influence
 That we must ever wonder how, and whence
 It came (ll. 64-71).

~~that~~ Keats

It seems strange ~~should~~ make the observation which he does in the last two lines, for he has told us many times that poetic vision is inspired by nature and he tells us many times again. When he wishes to condemn the neo-classical poets of eighteenth century England, Keats calls them "dismal soul'd" and denounces their insensitivity to nature:

The winds of heaven blew, the ocean roll'd
Its gathering waves--ye felt it not. The blue
Bared its eternal bosom, and the dew
Of summer nights collected still to make
The morning precious: beauty was awake!
Why were ye not awake? But ye were dead....(ll.188-193).

Keats' descriptions of nature are much better written than the questions which he addresses to the "impious race" or "handicraftsmen" and it is not surprising to find that nature provides the inspiration of his poetry. He tells us that:

Things such as these are ever harbingers
To trains of peaceful images: the stirs
Of a swan's neck unseen among the rushes:
A linnet starting all about the bushes:
A butterfly, with golden wings broad parted,
(ll.339-343).

Keats returns to the "harbingers to trains of peaceful images" in "I Stood Tip-toe... ." which he composed in December of 1816.⁷ Here he describes the moon once more, calls it "O Maker of sweet poets," and asks: "For what has made the sage or poet write / But the fair paradise of Nature's light?" (ll.125-26). Keats describes the close connections between nature and poetry. I will give only one example of these: "In the calm grandeur of a sober line, / We see the waving of the

mountain pine" (ll.127-28). Keats continues, stating the connections between the experience of nature and mythmaking and he refers to figures from classical mythology: Psyche, Cupid, Jove, Fauns, Dryades, Syrinx, and Pan. In greater detail, he describes the creation of the myth of Narcissus and Echo:

What first inspired a bard of old to sing
 Narcissus pining o'er the untainted spring?
 In some delicious ramble, he had found
 A little space, with boughs all woven round;
 And in the midst of all, a clearer pool
 Than e'er reflected in its pleasant cool,
 The blue sky here, and there, serenely peeping
 Through tendril wreaths fantastically creeping.
 And on the bank a lonely flower, with naught of pride,
 Drooping its beauty o'er the watery clearness,
 To woo its own sad image into nearness:
 Deaf to light Zephyrus it would not move;
 But still would seem to droop, to pine, to love.
 So while the poet stood in this sweet spot,
 Some fainter gleamings o'er his fancy shot;
 Nor was he long ere he had told the tale
 Of young Narcissus, and sad Echo's bale (ll.163-180).

Then, Keats concludes the poem with a consideration of:

That sweetest of all songs, that ever new,
 That aye refreshing, pure deliciousness,
 Coming ever to bless
 The wanderer by moonlight? (ll.182-85).

This song was composed by a Poet and lover "who stood on Latmus' top" gazing at the moon:

The Poet wept at her so piteous fate,
 Wept that such beauty should be desolate:
 So in fine wrath some golden sounds he won,
 And gave meek Cynthia her Endymion (ll. 201-204).

Here we have one of Keats' most explicit statements of the

of the in-
 inspiration of the mythmaker by the beauty of nature. When Keats returns to the tale of Cynthia and her lover for the subject of his poetic romance Endymion, he retells the origin of the myth. The legend should be accepted as truth because it is a "titty:"

Not of these days, but long ago 'twas told
 By a cavern wind unto a forest old;
 And then the forest told it in a dream
 To a sleeping lake, whose cool and level gleam
 A Poet caught as he was journeying
 To Phoebus' shrine; and in it he did fling
 His weary limbs, bathing an hour's space,
 And after, straight in that inspired place
 He sang the story up into the air,
 Giving it universal freedom (Bk.II, 830-39).⁸

The explanation of the origin of the myth is different from that given in "I Stood Tip-toe. . . ," but the sequence of transference from nature, to poet, to myth, is identical. That this association of nature with poetry or myth is not merely a poetic convention for Keats, may be ascertained from the letter which Keats wrote to his brother Tom on June 27, 1818. Keats has been hiking through northern Britain and after describing his impressions of the scenery, he tells Tom:

The space, the magnitude of mountains and waterfalls are well imagined before one sees them; but this countenance or intellectual tone must surpass every imagination and defy any remembrance. I shall learn poetry here and shall henceforth write more than ever, for the abstract endeavor of being able to add a mite to that mass of beauty which is harvested from these grand materials, by the finest spirits, and put into ethereal existence for the relish of one's fellows. I cannot think with Hazlitt that these scenes make man appear little. I never forgot my stature so completely--I live in the eye; and my imagination, surpassed, is at rest--. . . (I, 301).

The fact that Keats did learn poetry there is often suggested by critics who refer to the resemblance of Keats' Titans in Hyperion to the craggy mountains of northern Scotland. Some elements of the etiological theory remained with Keats during the composition of his major poetry in 1819 and in the "Ode to a Nightingale," the poet's wish to fly on "the viewless wings of Poesy" is inspired by the music of nature, the song of the nightingale which:

In some melodious plot
Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,
Singest of summer in full-throated ease.

Keats had written of the inspiration which he might take from the song of the nightingale as early as the Epistle "To George Felton Mathew" in which the ideal setting for composing poetry is a place:

Where on one side are covert branches hung,
'Mong which the nightingales have always sung
In leafy quiet. . . (ll. 45-47).

Keats' view of poetry is much more complex in the "Ode to a Nightingale" than in the Epistle "To George Felton Mathew." I will again refer to Keats' view of poetry in the "Ode to a Nightingale" later in this chapter when I discuss the concept of Time in myth and in Keats' writing. At this point we may leave the poem after noticing that the belief in the inspiring power of nature remains in the "Ode to a Nightingale" and that this is an expression of the etiological theory which is an explanation of myth.

The close connection between myth and the external World or environment of man, which is demonstrated in the etiological theory of the origin of myth and followed by Keats in his descriptions of poetry, suggests another aspect of myth for which there is a corresponding element in Keats' conception of poetry. The function of myth, as I have described it in chapter III, is always to humanize or interpret and make acceptable as well as to explain the external world to man. This characteristic of myth is analogous to Keats' own interpretation of the significance or function of poetry. In "Sleep and Poetry," Keats declares that "the great end of poesy" is "that it should be a friend / To sooth the cares, and lift the thoughts of man" (ll.244-46). Several lines later he tells us that ". . . they shall be accounted poet kings / Who simply tell the most heart-easing things" (ll.267-68). These statements might well be interpreted as paraphrases of Joseph Campbell's description of myth as a libidinal "womb" ~~which~~ I have referred to in my definition of myth. In "I Stood Tip-toe. . ." Keats describes a bubbling brook which:

Charms us at once away from all our troubles:
So that we feel uplifted from the world,
Walking upon the white clouds wreath'd and curl'd
(ll. 138-140).

He tells us that this psychedelic high was the experience of the poet who composed the myth of Psyche, and presumably also of those who read it. Later in the same poem he tells us that

it is poetry which makes it possible to experience love without suffering physiological death:

Therefore ~~mid~~lover did of anguish die:
But the soft numbers, in that moment spoken,
Made silken ties, that never may be broken (ll.236-238).

Although such statements might make us skeptical of their validity, they do convey some idea of the potency which Keats attaches to poetry. Keats' most famous statement of this power of poetry is his description of "a thing of beauty" in the Induction to Endymion:

. . . [It] still will keep
A bower quiet for us, and a sleep
Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing.
Therefore, on every morrow, are we wreathing
A flowery band to bind us to the earth,
Spite of despondence, of the inhuman dearth
Of noble natures, of the gloomy days,
Of all the unhealthy and o'er-darkened ways
Made for our searching: yes, in spite of all,
Some shape of beauty moves away the pall
From our dark spirits. Such the sun, the moon,
Trees old, and young, sprouting a shady boon
For simple sheep; and such are daffodils
With the green world they live in; and clear rills
That for themselves a cooling covert make
'Gainst the hot season; the mid forest brake,
Rich with a sprinkling of fair musk-rose blooms:
And such too is the grandeur of the dooms
We have imagined for the mighty dead;
All lovely tales that we have heard or read:
An endless fountain of immortal drink,
Pouring unto us from the heaven's brink (I, 3-24).

Keats explains the function of poetry, the "thing of beauty,"
as a way of relating man to the earth and making it a pleasant
and uplifting habitation. This explanation might well be part
of a definition of myth and it is appropriate as the intro-

duction to Keats' first major mythological poem.

Keats restates this concept of the function of poetry in a letter to his brothers written on December 21, 1817, shortly after the completion of the first draft of Endymion. Keats tells them that he has been to see Benjamin West's "Death on the Pale Horse," and he explains that the picture fails because it lacks "intensity:"

. . . the excellence of every Art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate, from their being in close relationship with Beauty and Truth--Examine King Lear & you will find this exemplified throughout; but in this picture we have unpleasantness without any momentous depth of speculation excited, in which to bury its repulsiveness--
. . . (I, 192).

What Keats describes as "intensity" is essentially the mythic quality of interpreting the world, particularly those aspects which are disagreeable, and supplying a meaningful pattern, discovering "Beauty and Truth." The creation of meaningful patterns is also the subject of the letter to J.H. Reynolds written on February 9, 1818. Keats writes of "the Benefit done by great Works to the 'Spirit and pulse of good' by their mere passive existence." He then writes of, and compares the "Benefit done by great Works" with, the benefit which the individual can make for himself:

. . . 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 of distinctness for his luxury
 --But the Minds of Mortals are so different and bent on such
 diverse Journeys that it may at first appear impossible for
 any common taste and fellowship to exist between two or
 three under these suppositions--It is however quite the con-
 trary--Minds would leave each other in Numberless points,
 and all last greet each other at the Journeys end--. . .
 (I, 231-32).

This "Webb" that Keats describes; which is a pattern like the
 spider's web, which satisfies the "spiritual" needs of indivi-
 dual men, and yet is archetypal since all of the individual
 patterns are identical, greeting "each other at the Journeys
 end;" might be called a mythological web, since each of these
 qualities, the spiritual function and the stylized pattern or
 archetypal form, is a characteristic of myth. The web lacks
 only the form, the verbal medium, of the "great Works," which
 by implication share these mythological characteristics of
 Keats' "Webb," and which can more correctly be called mytho-
 logical. Although Keats does not refer explicitly to myth in
 this letter, it is significant that he is forming such con-
 ceptions while he is composing poetry on mythological themes.

Writing several days later, on February 27, 1818, this
 time to John Taylor, Keats explains what he calls "axioms" in
 poetry. The first of these: ". . . I think Poetry should
 surprise by a fine excess and not by Singularity--it should
 strike the Reader as a wording of his own highest thoughts and
 appear almost a Remembrance--. . ."(I, 238), attributes to
 poetry a quality which is similar to the archetypal nature of
 myth. Poetry should not strike its reader as strange or unusual,
 but it should seem familiar to his unconscious.

As I have shown in chapter II, the mythological archetype is usually conceived through analogy with natural cycles using typical structures or patterns drawn from the external World which myth seeks to interpret or transform. Although he is not describing plot patterns, Keats often suggests that poetry should resemble natural processes. The second and third of Keats' three axioms in poetry are essentially descriptions of "organic" verse:

. . . Its touches of Beauty should never be half way thereby making the reader breathless instead of content: the rise, the progress, the setting of imagery should like the Sun come natural natural too him--shine over him in the luxury of twilight--but it is easier to think what Poetry should be than to write it--and this leads me on to another axiom. That if Poetry comes not as naturally as the Leaves to a tree it had better not come at all (I, 238-39).

What Keats is demanding is naturalness in poetry, not the poetic imitation of nature; however, the correspondence between nature and poetry remains. In his sonnet "Spenser! a jealous honourer of thine," Keats uses an organic metaphor to describe the growth of a poet:

The flower must drink the nature of the soil
 Before it can put forth its blossoming:
 Be with me in the summer days and I
 Will for thine honour and his pleasure try.⁹

In the opening of Endymion Keats announces his prospectus for the composition of the poem. He is beginning in the spring and hopes to be half way by summer and to be finished by autumn:

Now while the early budders are just new,
 And run in mazes of the youngest hue
 About old forests; while the willow trails
 Its delicate amber; and the dairy pails

Bring home increase of milk. And, as the year
 Grows lush in juicy stalks, I'll smoothly steer
 My little boat, for many quiet hours,
 With streams that deepen freshly into bowers.
 Many and many a verse I hope to write,
 Before the daisies, vermeil rimm'd and white,
 Hide in deep herbage; and ere yet the bees
 Hum about globes of clover and sweet peas,
 I must be near the middle of my story.
 O may no wintry season, bare and hoary,
 See it half finish'd: but let Autumn bold,
 With universal tinge of sober gold,
 Be all about me when I make an end (ll. 41-57).

In these lines Keats is giving what he expects to be a realistic chronology for the composition of Endymion, but he is also creating a metaphor which describes the poem. The opening is the spring of the poem and its completion or fulfilment is the poem's autumn. Keats will be writing throughout the summer and the poem should be half-completed by mid-summer. The main body of the poem is described as its summer. These comparisons with natural process are about as near as Keats gets to a conception of poetry which, like myth, is stylized or patterned in accordance with the natural cycles. Yet, before I leave this subject, we might remember that Endymion is a "poetic romance;" that it will be written during the summer, though begun in the spring and not to be completed until the Fall; and that in Northrop Frye's Anatomy of Criticism it is the "Mythos of Summer" which he associates with the archetypal form of romance.

Keats' only specific theoretical reference to myth is part of the famous "vale of Soul-making" letter which he wrote to George and Georgiana Keats in April of 1819. In the intro-

duction to this passage of philosophy Keats defines the condition of man:

. . . Man is originally 'a poor forked creature' subject to the same mischances as the beasts of the forest, destined to hardships and disquietude of some kind or other. If he improves by degrees his bodily accommodations and comforts--at each stage, at each ascent there are waiting for him a fresh set of annoyances--he is mortal and there is still a heaven with its Stars above his head (II, 101).

Keats denies that this condition can be changed: ". . . the nature of the world will not admit of it--the inhabitants of the world will correspond to itself--. . ." (II, 101). Keats then proposes an explanation of, or an answer to, this condition; this is the theory of "Soul-making," to which I have already referred. Man's experience of the world is an education which fits him for immortality. Keats contrasts this system with the Christian one and then compares it with that of "the ancient persian and greek Philosophers" which has been made "more simple for common apprehension by introducing Mediators and Personages in the same manner as in the hethen mythology abstractions are personified. . . ." "Seriously," he adds:

. . . I think it probable that this System of Soul-making--may have been the Parent of all the more palpable and personal Schemes of Redemption, among the Zorastrians the Christians and the Hindoos. For as one part of th human species must have their carved Jupiter; so another part must have the palpable and named Mediator and saviour, their Christ their Oromanes and their Vishnu--. . . (II, 103).

Keats' description of mythological figures as mediators between man's mortal condition and his idea of immortality is a fundamental conception of myth. The fact that the mediators are

created to make the philosophy "more simple" accounts for their combination of the conditions of mortality and immortality. They have human forms, but they have superhuman control over the forces of nature. Here we might remember Ernst Topitsch's statement which I have quoted in chapter II or my thesis: "Man for the most part conceives of what is remote, unknown, or difficult to understand in terms of what is near, well known, and self-evident." This corresponds with Keats' own conception of immortality which he mentions in his letter to Benjamin Bailey on November 22, 1817: ". . . another favorite Speculation of mine, that we shall enjoy ourselves here after by having what we called happiness on Earth repeated in a finer tone and so repeated. . . (I, 185). Keats defines the supernatural as the natural transformed. His representation of the supernatural in his mythological poems reflects his understanding of the nature of myth and the function of mythological figures as interpreters or transformers of reality. The relationship of the supernatural, the natural, and the human is made explicit by Keats in the words which the goddess Moneta addresses to the poet-narrator in the opening of the Fall of Hyperion, Canto II:

'Mortal, that thou ma'st understand aright,
'I humanize my sayings to thine ear,
'Making comparisons of earthly things;
'Or thou might'st better listen to the wind,
'Whose language is to thee a barren noise,
'Though it blows legend-laden thro' the trees (ll. 1-6).

The words of the goddess, the supernatural, would be like the

language of the wind, barren and incomprehensible, except that they are humanized and made understandable through comparisons with familiar earthly things, the natural. Here we have Keats' definition of the supernatural element in myth and we might remember that he has told us several times that it is the poet who, like the mythmaker, is able to reveal the message of the wind which "blows legend-laden thro' the trees." Keats' conception of the supernatural as the creation of personifications which humanize reality, is essential to the composition of true myth. Although we can find elements of the theory earlier, Keats does not attain the complete realization of the theory in poetry until the composition of the "Ode to Autumn."

The mythological concept of time, which is part of my definition of myth in chapter II, is also represented in Keats' discussions of poetry. The nightingale or the nightingale's song which represents art or poetry in Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale," is not subject to the wastes of Time. In stanza seven, Keats describes this freedom of the nightingale and contrasts it with the human condition of those who hear its song:

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
 No hungry generations tread thee down;
 The voice I hear this passing night was heard
 In ancient days by emperor and clown:
 Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
 Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
 She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
 The same that oft-times hath
 Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
 Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

This immortality is shared by Keats' Grecian Urn. Like the nightingale, the figures which decorate the urn do not share the limitations of mortal humanity:

Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed
 Your leaves, nor ever bid the Spring adieu;
 And, happy melodist, unwearied,
 For ever piping songs for ever new;
 More happy love! more happy, happy love!
 For ever warm and still to be enjoy'd,
 For ever panting, and for ever young;
 All breathing human passion far above,
 That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd,
 A burning forehead, and a parching tongue.

As symbols of art, the nightingale and the urn share the freedom which is characteristic of myth; freedom from the restrictions of artificial or chronological time and from the limitations of the individual who dies and is not, like the natural processes, immortal. Keats' attitude to this transcendence of Time is not the same in the "Ode to a Nightingale" as it is in the "Ode on a Grecian Urn."

Although in the first stanza the Nightingale "Singest of summer in full-throated ease," by the conclusion of the poem the song has faded:

Past the near meadows, over the still stream
 Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep
 In the next valley-glades:
 Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
 Fled is that music:--Do I wake or sleep?

Keats is unable to answer his question. He was unable to stay with the nightingale for ". . . the fancy cannot cheat so well / As she is fam'd to do, deceiving elf." He is unable to believe

in the transformation of reality represented by the bird's song. This ambivalence in Keats' attitude to poetry is characteristic of several of the poems which he composed in the spring and summer of 1819. The inability to believe in poetry, to regard it as vera narratio, is a deviation from a concept of poetry which may be equated with the nature of myth. Keats' creation of romance rather than myth in Lamia, which I will discuss in chapter V, is undoubtedly connected with his uneasy attitude to the transforming power of poetry. However, Keats seems to return to a concept of poetry which is close to myth in the autumn of 1819. This return can be seen in The Fall of Hyperion and is given its finest expression in Keats' last poem the "Ode to Autumn."

Even in the spring of 1819 Keats' ambivalence about the power of art to transform reality is resolved in the "Ode on a Grecian Urn." In his opening apostrophe to the Urn:

Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,
 Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,
 Sylvan historian, who canst thus express
 A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme. . . .

Keats tells us that the urn is a "historian;" it tells a true story; and, although the urn is silent, it does communicate; it can "express / A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme. . . ." In the final stanza Keats expresses his conclusion to his contemplation of the beauty of the urn and its transcendence of the limitations of mortality:

O Attic shape! Fair attitude! with brede
 Of marble men and maidens overwrought,

With forest branches and the trodden weed;
 Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought
 As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral!
 When old age shall this generation waste,
 Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe
 Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st,
 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty,'--that is all
 Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

The Urn is Beauty, an "Attic shape" and a "Fair attitude;" and Keats compares it with "eternity." It is a "Cold Pastoral," because in its transformation of reality it does not partake of the life of mortality. But the Urn is "a friend to man," and its message, "Beauty is truth, truth beauty," can be believed. Although nothing else on earth is known, that is, and that is enough.

The "Ode on a Grecian Urn" is not Keats' only statement of the truth of beauty. Writing to Benjamin Bailey on November 22, 1817, Keats tells him:

I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of Imagination--What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth--whether it existed before or not--for I have the same Idea of all our Passions as of Love they are all in their sublime, creative of essential Beauty--In a Word, you may know my favorite Speculation by my first Book and the little song [O Sorrow] I sent in my last--which is a representation from the fancy of the probable mode of operating in these Matters--the Imagination may be compared to Adam's dream--he awoke and found it truth (I, 184-85).

Keats refers Bailey to Book I of Endymion in which he declares that: "A thing of Beauty is a joy for ever." I have already commented on the lines that follow this one and the similarity of Keats' description of the effect of poetry to the characteristic function of myth. In this letter, Keats emphasizes that the "joy forever" is not illusory, but truth. Keats refers to the

song "O Sorrow," and this is an example of the creation of "essential Beauty" through the transformation of human misery by the imagination. Here we might recall Keats' comments on West's "Death on the Pale Horse" in the "negative capability" letter, which I have already referred to, and which Keats wrote about one month after this one to Bailey. To use the language of the "negative capability" letter, the effect of the imagination in the song "O Sorrow" might be described as: the evaporation of all disagreeables "from their being in close relationship with Beauty and Truth." The most important characteristic of poetry, for Keats, is its beauty. He tells us, in the conclusion of the "negative capability" letter written on December 31, 1817: ". . . that with a great poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration" (I, 194). Keats believes that poetry, or the beauty of poetry, which is the creation of the transforming powers of the imagination, must be defined as truth. This belief in the truth of poetry may be compared with the definition of myth as vera narratio. Myth also is created by the transformation of reality and the transcendence of the limitations of the natural world; and myth is regarded, not as illusion, but as reality.

I have demonstrated several important resemblances between what Keats says about poetry in his poems and letters and what are the definitive characteristics of myth. I have also discussed the comments which Keats makes specifically about myth and shown their relevance to the theory of myth. Often Keats uses mythological materials as images for poetry

and we find that for Keats the terms "myth" and "poem" seem to be interchangeable. In the "Ode to Apollo," "In thy western halls. . . , " the mythmakers, Homer, Virgil, and Milton, are described as poets or "bards." In the Epistle "To George Felton Mathew," Keats confesses that he has doubted his ability to write poetry by telling Mathew that he has wondered whether he would ever see mythological figures in nature. In "I Stood Tip-toe. . ." Keats explains the composition of poetry by describing the origins of the myths of Greece and Rome. In the fragmentary "Ode to May," Keats describes the mythmakers of ancient Greece as ". . . bards who died content on pleasant sward, / Leaving great verse unto a little clan." There are many more examples of Keats' substitution of "myth" for "poetry" and "poetry" for "myth," particularly in the earlier poems, some of which I have mentioned in my discussion of Keats' conception of the inspiration of poetry. One of the most explicit equations which Keats makes between myth and poetry is that in the "Ode to Psyche," which I have discussed in my introduction, and in which Keats describes the composition of poetry as worship of the pagan goddess.

In the Induction to Canto I of The Fall of Hyperion Keats explains the relationship between dreams and poetry in statements which apply to myth as much as they do to poetry:

Fanatics have their dreams, wherewith they weave
 A paradise for a sect; the savage too
 From forth the loftiest fashion of his sleep
 Guesses at Heaven; pity these have not
 Trac'd upon vellum or wild Indian leaf
 The shadows of melodious utterance.

But bare of laurel they live, dream, and die;
 For Poesty alone can tell her dreams,
 With the fine spell of words alone can save
 Imagination from the sable charm
 And dumb enchantment. Who alive can say,
 'Thou art no Poet--may'st not tell thy dreams?'
 Since every man whose soul is not a clod
 Hath visions, and would speak, if he had loved,
 And been well nurtured in his mother tongue.
 Whether the dream now purposed to rehearse
 Be poet's or fanatic's will be known
 When this warm scribe my hand is in the grave (I, 1-18).

The transformation of reality into myth is analogous to the transcendence of mortality in these dreams, which "weave a paradise" or "guess at Heaven," which are dreams of immortality. The relationship between dream and myth is a common tenet of psychoanalytic mythographers; myths are shared dreams.¹⁰ The distinction that Keats makes between dreams and poetry is that poetry, like myth, is shared; poems are dreams which are written, "trac'd upon vellum or wild Indian leaf." Keats' distinction brings us back to my initial definition of myth as a "verbal construction." Here, we remember Richard Chase's statement: "A myth is a story, myth is narrative or poetic literature." For Keats, myth is poetry.

In his references to myth Keats often expresses the concept of a vanished golden age in which the composition of myth and poetry flourished. In the "Ode to Apollo," "In thy western halls. . . ," Keats compares the combination of the sounds of nature at evening, which is the song of Apollo, to the mixed voices of:

Bards that erst sublimely told
 Heroic deeds, and sang of fate,
 With fervour seize their adamant lyres,
 Whose chords are solid rays, and twinkle radiant fires.

These "bards that erst" are Homer, Virgil, Milton, Shakespeare, Spenser, and Tasso. They represent the poetry of classical Greece and Rome and the English Renaissance, which are for Keats the vanished golden ages of poetry. We have already seen that the most important source of Keats' knowledge of myth and mythological poetry was the poetry of Elizabethan England and the Renaissance translations of the classical poets, and Keats' own mythological poetry shared the heterogeneity or impurity which is characteristic of the Elizabethan mythological poets who he admired. In the "Specimen of an Induction to a Poem" Keats addresses himself to Spenser for inspiration, both because Spenser is the master of "tales of chivalry," but also because he is a representative of the Elizabethan golden age. In the famous sonnet "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer," Keats pays homage both to the literature of classical Greece represented by Homer and to that of Elizabethan England represented by Chapman's translation. Keats describes the flowering of Elizabethan poetry in "Sleep and Poetry:"

... Here her altar shone,
 E'en in this isle; and who could paragon
 The fervid choir that lifted up a noise
 Of harmony, to where it aye will poise
 Its mighty self of convuluted sound,
 Huge as a planet, and like that roll around,
 Eternally around a dizzy void?
 Ay, in those days the Muses were nigh cloy'd
 With honors; nor had any other care
 Than to sing out and sooth their wavy hair (ll.171-180).

This invocation of the Renaissance ideal is followed by Keats' denunciation of the poetry of eighteenth century England:

Could all this be forgotten? Yes, a schism
 Nurtured by foppery and barbarism,
 Made great Apollo blush for this his land.
 Men were thought wise who could not understand
 His glories: with a puling infant's force
 They sway'd about upon a rocking horse,
 And thought it Pegasus (ll. 181-87).

This regret for a vanished age of poetic greatness is also expressed by Keats in the Dedication to Poems published in 1817:

Glory and loveliness have pass'd away;
 For if we wander out in early morn,
 No wreathed incense do we see upborne
 Into the east, to meet the smiling day:
 No crowd of nymphs soft voic'd and young, and gay,
 In woven baskets bringing ears of corn,
 Roses, and pinks, and violets, to adorn
 The shrine of Flora in her early May.

Here the image of the golden age is the world of Greek myth. This image is reproduced in Keats' admiration for the "old vigour" of the Crecian bards in his "Ode to May."

These expressions of nostalgia are not terminal for Keats. He admires the mythology and the poetry of ancient Greece and Rome and of Elizabethan England, and he regrets the subsequent decline, but he does not accept the decline as a denial of the possibility of emulating the poets and myth-makers of the golden age. The homage which Keats pays to Spenser in the "Specimen of an Induction to a Poem" is paid as Keats himself is about to attempt to "revive the dying tone of minstrelsy." The denunciation of eighteenth century poetry in "Sleep and Poetry" is followed by an address to the spirits of the golden age:

Now 'tis a fairer season; ye have breathed
 Rich benedictions o'er us; ye have wreathed
 Fresh garlands: for sweet music has been heard
 In many places;. . . (ll.221-24).

Keats' admiration for his contemporaries is not unqualified,
 and he has some doubts about his own readiness to write poetry:

. . . yet there ever rolls
 A vast idea before me, and I glean
 Therefrom my liberty; thence too I've seen
 The end and aim of Poesy (ll.290-93).

The main statement of the poem is that Keats does intend to
 compose poetry and, by the conclusion of "Sleep and Poetry,"
 Keats has accomplished his purpose. He has completed "these
 lines; and howsoever they be done, / [He leaves] them as a
 father does his son" (ll.403-404). Although the first
 eight lines of the Dedication to Poems, 1817, are a lamentation
 for the passing of the world of Greek myth, the last six lines
 offer a resolution:

But there are left delights as high as these,
 And I shall ever bless my destiny,
 That in a time, when under pleasant trees
 Pan is no longer sought, I feel at free,
 A leafy luxury, seeing I could please
 With these poor offerings, a man like thee.

Keats' "poor offerings" are poems which he has written and
 which he considers a substitution for the works of the vanished
 golden age. This intention of emulating the bards of the
 golden age is also declared in the opening lines of the "Ode
 to May:"

Not that I am a bard, and still you shall
 May I sing to thee
 As thou wast hymned by the choirs of Greece

Mother of Hermes! and still youthful Maia!
 May I sing to thee
 As thou wast hymned on the shores of Baiæ?
 Or may I woo thee
 In earlier Sicilian? or thy smiles
 Seek as they once were sought, in Grecian isles. . . .

Perhaps the central statement of Keats' conception of myth and his reaction to the passing of the golden age, is the "Ode to Psyche. In my introduction I have already shown how Keats, in this poem, expresses his regret for the vanished days of "happy pieties," but declares that he the poet has the power to recreate the visionary world of myth in his own mind and through the medium of poetry. We can remember the difference between these mythographers who define myth as the creation of a primitive and vanished mythopoeic age, and those who believe that the composition of myth is always a possibility. Keats has declared that poetry is myth and that he, himself will be a mythmaker.

CHAPTER V

MYTHOLOGICAL POETRY KEATS' APPROACH TO THE COMPOSITION OF ORIGINAL MYTH

It is not surprising that Keats, writing in the wake of a major revival of the mythological tradition and having a theoretical predisposition to identify poetry and myth, composed mythological poetry. It is significant that part of the revival of the mythological tradition took place in Keats' poetry. His early and derivative references to inert myth in the manner of the Augustan poets are gradually replaced by original reproductions and interpretations of received myth. This process of development is not continuous and several of Keats' finer poems, particularly the Odes and narrative poems written in the spring and summer of 1819, are non-mythological. This break in composition accompanies the ambivalence in Keats' attitude to poetry at the time, which I have mentioned in chapter IV. The departure from myth in theory and composition is exemplified in Keats' narrative romance Lamia. However, while Keats was completing Lamia, he returned to the composition of mythological poetry in The Fall of Hyperion and finally, in the "Ode to Autumn," Keats achieves the original composition of vital myth. In this chapter I will conclude my thesis by demonstrating this development of Keats as a mythmaker through an examination of some of his mythological poetry.

The earliest of Keats' surviving poems, the "Imitation

of Spenser," pays tribute to one of the more important models for Keats' mythological poetry.¹ Charles Brown describes the origin of the poem and the sudden development of Keats' poetic powers in the memoir of Keats which he sent to Lord Houghton:

It was the Faerie Queene that awakened his genius. In Spenser's fairy-land he was enchanted, breathed in a new world, and became another being; till enamoured of the stanza, he attempted to imitate it, and succeeded.²

The poem is an expression of Keats' impressions from a reading of Spenser's description of the Bower of Bliss. The "Imitation," particularly its poetic diction, also owes much to the eighteenth century imitators of Spenser and Milton.³ Keats' first specimen of mythological poetry is highly derivative and owes even more to the poorer poets among Keats' contemporaries and immediate predecessors than it does to the great Elizabethan who inspired the attempt. Keats was later to excel in his mythological personifications of nature, but the image of dawn in the first stanza of the "Imitation" is forced and artificial:

Now Morning from her orient chamber came,
And her first footsteps touch'd a verdant hill;
Crowning its lawny crest with amber flame,
Silv'ring the untainted gushes of its rill. . . (ll.1-4).

The image owes more to outworn poetic personifications of Morning than it does to any attempt to render vividly the reality of the dawn. As a consequence the "human" attributes given to "Morning" do not become creations of the supernatural through the projection of the human upon the inhuman world which is the essence of myth. In fact, although there are

several close approximations, Keats does not achieve this mythological transformation of reality until the "Ode to Autumn." Keats' recent translation of the Aeneid which he had begun in the Clarke School in Enfield and which he completed in Edmonton is reflected in his reference to Dido in the opening of the third stanza:⁴

Ah! could I tell the wonders of an isle
That in that fairest lake had placed been,
I could e'en Dido of her grief beguile;
Or rob from aged Lear his bitter teen:. . . (ll.19-22).

Keats' allusion to Dido works as a hyperbole, but has no further value as a descriptive reference. The "Imitation" is descriptive poem only; Keats does not attempt a mythological story or allegory in the manner of either his Elizabethan models or their eighteenth century imitators. As a mythological poem, this one is limited to references to old mythologies, references which fall far short of the facility which Keats later developed in the adaptation and creation of myth.

In February of 1815 Keats paid homage to the classical god of poetry in his "Ode to Apollo."⁵ This early poem is also written largely in imitation of eighteenth century models. Keats follows the tradition established by Dryden, Gray, and Collins; creating the Ode as "the sublime expression of passion by means of bold and resounding, but smooth diction." In particular, Keats seems to be following Vansittart's ode, "The Pleasure of Poetry," which supplied both his theme and his stanza form.⁶ In the manner of its models, Keats' "Ode to

Apollo" abounds in artificial and sonorous phrases such as these in the first stanza: "sublimely told," "heroic deeds," "adamantine lyres," and "radiant fires." Keats' treatment of his mythological subject the god Apollo is also limited, though Evert finds that the Ode makes a statement which is central to his thesis.⁷ In the last stanza:

But when Thou joinest with the Nine,
And all the powers of song combine,
We listen here on earth:
The dying tones that fill the air,
And charm the ear of evening fair,
From thee, great God of Bards, receive their heavenly birth.

Keats makes one of his least suggestive statements of the close relationship between nature and myth. We are told, but we are not shown, or made to believe, the relationship between "dying tones that fill the air, / And charm the ear of evening fair," the setting of the sun, and the music of the god Apollo. However, in the first two lines of stanza one: "In thy western halls of gold / When thou sittest in thy state," Keats does capture something of both the phenomenon of nature and also the personification of myth.

In the Epistle "To George Felton Mathew" Keats introduces allusions to classical mythology as symbols of poetry inspired by nature.⁸ Keats has been oppressed by the demands of his medical studies and he tells Mathew:

That I am oft in doubt wheter at all
I shall again see Phoebus in the morning:
Or flush'd Aurora in the roseate dawning!
Or a white Naiad in a rippling stream (ll.20-23).

These allusions are not merely descriptive, since they have a significant meaning for Keats, but Keats refers to these mythological figures only by name and he makes no original contributions to their identities. Keats concludes the Epistle, complimenting Mathew by attributing to him a series of metamorphoses:

For thou wast once a flowret blooming wild,
 Close to the source, bright, pure, and undefil'd,
 Whence gush the streams of song: in happy hour
 Came chaste Diana from her shady bower,
 Just as the sun was from the east uprising;
 And, as for him some gift she was devising,
 Beheld thee, pluck'd thee, cast thee in the stream
 To meet her glorious brother's greeting beam.
 I marvel much that thou hast never told
 How, from a flower, into a fish of gold
 Apollo chang'd thee; how thou next didst seem
 A black-eyed swan upon the widening stream;
 And when thou first didst in that mirror trace
 The placid features of a human face:
 That thou hast never told thy travels strange,
 And all the wonders of the mazy range
 O'er pebbly crystal, and o'er golden sands;
 Kissing thy daily food from Naiad's pearly hands (ll.76-93).

Although the sense of these lines does not amount to much more than that Mathew is a poet specially favoured, hardly a theme of mythological importance when applied to G.F. Mathew; it is significant that while Keats is using figures from classical mythology, he is not bound by his sources and he places the pagan deities in an original though trivial narrative.

In the Epistle "To My Brother George," which Keats wrote eight months later in August of 1816, Keats begins in a state of depression which has the same source and which he expresses in the same way as in lines 20-23 of the Epistle "To George Felton Mathew."⁹ Keats feels that he is unable to

compose poetry and he often thinks:

That I should never hear Apollo's song,
Though feathery clouds were floating all along
The purple west, and, two bright streaks between,
The golden lyre itself were dimly seen (11.8-12).

Keats feels that nature should provide the inspiration for poetry and he uses a reference to the classical deity Apollo to symbolize poetry. However, in his presentation of "Apollo's song," Keats goes beyond his earlier reference to "Phoebus in the morning" in the Epistle "To George Felton Mathew." Apollo is accompanied by his "golden lyre." This metaphorical description is "dimly seen;" but, though it is not vivid, it is an attempt to give the reference to classical myth a concrete presence. Later in the Epistle "To My Brother George," Keats describes the strange wonders seen by poets and among these is:

. . . the coy moon, when in the waviness
Of whitest clouds she does her beauty dress,
And staidly paces higher up, and higher,
Like a sweet nun in holy-day attire (11.59-60).

In this attempt at mythological personification, Keats does not use a classical reference, but his own description seems incongruous. The moon is "coy" and yet she is "a sweet nun;" she is occupied "dressing her beauty" and yet she is "staidly pacing." Keats is trying to produce an original personification, but he does not succeed in merging his parts and producing an identity, although the parts might remind us of the successful characterization of Chaucer's Prioress. Both the sun and the moon also appear in the sonnet "To My

Brother George," which Keats composed about the same time as the verse Epistle to George.¹⁰ Keats has seen many wonders. First, there was: "The sun, when first he kist away the tears / That fill'd the eyes of morn;. . . (ll.2-3). This image was a favorite for Keats. It is sentimental, but it does work as a description of a natural phenomenon. Keats' description of the second "wonder:" ". . . --the laurell'd peers / Who from the feathery gold of evening lean"(ll.3-4); is a dim way of describing the poets who dwell with Apollo in Elysium and accompany him in his diurnal progress across the sky and is even less definite as a description of the setting sun. In his description of the moon in this sonnet, Keats uses the name of the classical deity:

Cynthia is from her silken curtains peeping
So scantily, that it seems her bridal night,
And she her half-discover'd revels keeping (ll.10-12).

Keats has eliminated the confusion which mars his description of the moon in the Epistle to George and he produces an early version of Cynthia as she was to appear in "I Stood Tip-toe" and Endymion.

Keats completed "I Stood Tip-toe" in December of 1816.¹¹ The poem begins with a long and redundant catalogue of "luxuries." The images include many personifications including:

. . . sweet buds which with modest pride
Pull droopingly, in slanting curve aside,
Their scantily leav'd, and finely tapering stems
(ll.3-5),

"the early sobbing of the morn" (l.7), "the very sigh that
sifts the flowers" (l.10); and,

silence heaves" (1.12); and,

. . . a spring-head of clear waters
Babbling so wildly of its lovely daughters
The spreading blue-bells (11.41-43).

Though some are not, some of these images are fresh and vivid, but their appeal is to our senses only. Their significance is limited to themselves, and they do not, like mythological images, make any comment on the world of man and his activities. In the last half of the poem Keats refers specifically to classical mythology. Here he is defining the relationship between nature, poetry, and myth which I have discussed in chapter IV of my thesis. Keats comments on the myths of Psyche, Fauns, and Dryads, Pan and Syrinx, Narcissus, and Endymion. Here his descriptions are excellent, particularly his explication of the myth of Narcissus which I have quoted in chapter IV. However, Keats is not writing myth, but explaining the origin of myth, and "I Stood Tip-toe" is not a mythological poem, but a preparation for the composition of myth.

Keats began Endymion about April 19, 1817 and he completed his first major mythological poem on November 28, 1817.¹² Endymion is "a poetic romance," composed in the genre of the long romance of the Renaissance. This model is reflected in the heterogeneity of Endymion, the mixture of romance and myth which is characteristic of Elizabethan poetry. The length of the poem is explained by Keats:

. . . Do not the Lovers of Poetry like to have a little Region to wander in where they may pick and choose, and in which the images are so numerous that many are forgotten and found new in a second Reading: which may be food for a Week's stroll in the Summer? Do not they like this better than what they can read through before Mrs. Williams comes down stairs? a Morning work at most. Besides a long Poem is a test of Invention which I take to be the Polar Star of Poetry, as Fancy is the Sails, and Imagination the Rudder. Did our great Poets ever write short Pieces? I mean in the shape of Tales--This same invention seems indeed of late Years to have been forgotten as a Poetical excellence. But enough of this, I put on no Laurels till I shall have finished Endymion. . .

(Letters, 8 October 1817, I, 170).

Keats is attempting to emulate the Elizabethan poets of his golden age and Endymion is to be a test of his ability. In the same letter from which I have quoted above, Keats has said that Endymion:

. . . will be a test, a trial of my Powers of Imagination and chiefly of my invention which is a rare thing indeed--by which I must make 4000 Lines of one bare circumstance and fill them with Poetry. . . (I, 169-170).

Following his own observation of the natural beauty of the moon and developing from his personifications of the moon in his early poetry, Keats chose the classical myth of Endymion and Phoebe to provide the narrative outline for his romance. Keats is not, in Endymion, creating an original, but adapting and retelling a traditional myth. The myth of Endymion and Phoebe originated in the popular traditions of Elis in the Peloponnesus and of the Ionian cities in Caria and was the subject of a lost lyric by Sappho. Allusions to the myth are found in Theocritus, Apollonius Rhodius, Apollodorus, Pausanias, Lucian, Ovid, and Cicero. Allusions to the myth were made frequently in the literature of the Renaissance and Keats was

familiar with those in: Spenser's Epithalamion, Marlowe's Hero and Leander, Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice, Ben Jonson's Masque of Oberon, Marston's Insatiate Countess, Beaumont and Fletcher's Maid's Tragedy, Fletcher's Faithful Shepherdess, Drummond's sonnets, and Browne's Britannia's Pastorals. Keats was also familiar with the more extended treatments in John Lyly's Endimion and Michael Drayton's The Man in the Moone. It is possible that Keats had some contact with Drayton's earlier Endimion and Phoebe which might have provided Keats with the disguise motif in Book IV.¹³ It is also possible that the Indian maid was one of Keats' "inventions." Keats' "Invention" was given a hard test in Endymion, for in its original form the classical myth provided only "one bare circumstance," hardly sufficient material for 4000 lines of poetry. In order to produce the "long Poem" which he intended, Keats was forced to swell his romance with "numerous images" to supplement the inadequate dimensions of his narrative framework. Unfortunately the consequence of Keats' efforts was the over-luxuriance and digressiveness for which the poem is often condemned and more frequently forgotten.¹⁴ In his preface to Endymion, Keats himself described the poem as "a feverish attempt, rather than a deed accomplished."¹⁵ Although he began his narrative in a leisurely fashion, pausing for elaborate descriptive passages and fine lyrics, the shepherd's festival and the Hymn to Pan, by the end of Book I, Keats had said all that there was to say in the original myth. Endymion

was a shepherd prince on Mount Latmos who was loved by the moon goddess who visited him while he slept.

Forced to expand on the original story of Endymion and Phoebe, Keats introduced digressions in the plot which are appropriate to the romance genre, but which confuse the simplicity and the archetypal quality characteristic of mythological narrative. Three of these episodes are themselves based on classical myths, those of Venus and Adonis, Alpheus and Arethusa, and Glaucus and Scylla. Keats' main sources for these myths are also their Renaissance versions, perhaps with some guidance from his classical reference books. These digressions, although they are departures from Keats' central myth in Endymion, in themselves they exemplify Keats' reproduction and adaptation of received myth.

Keats' version of the myth of Venus and Adonis seems to be derived from the tenth book of Ovid's Metamorphosis, the third book of Spenser's Faerie Queene, and Shakespeare's Venus and Adonis.¹⁶ Endymion is welcomed by an attendant Cupid who tells the story of the love of Venus for the reluctant mortal Adonis, and of his death, and of her transformation of his death "to a lengthened drowsiness" from which he awakes each spring. At this moment Venus arrives to awaken Adonis to life and love. Venus pauses to tell Endymion that she has seen him pining, that she cannot tell which immortal loves him, but that, if he continues his quest, he will meet a happy ending. The sleep of Endymion is paralleled by that of Adonis in the digression and the

happy conclusion of the story of Venus and Adonis serves to foreshadow the union of the mortal Endymion with his immortal Phoebe while it provides Keats with two hundred lines of poetry.

Soon after, Endymion enjoys the embraces of his unknown goddess. This encounter is followed by Keats' introduction of the myth of Alpheus and Arethusa (II, 913-1017). Keats' prime source for this myth is in the fifth book of Ovid's Metamorphosis.¹⁷ Endymion is startled by the appearance of two streams, one pursuing the other. He hears them speak: Alpheus pleading with Arethusa and she wishing to grant his wish, but frightened of Diana. Endymion prays to the unknown goddess of his pilgrimage that she assuage "these lovers' pains; / And make them happy in some happy plains." This episode is perhaps a demonstration of Endymion's growing powers of sympathy; it does bring Keats past his quota of 1000 lines for book II.

Book III is dominated by the myth of Glaucus and Scylla. Keats made several alterations in his adaptation of this myth from books XIII and XIV of Ovid's Metamorphosis.¹⁸ Ovid's Glaucus was a fisherman who became a sea-god by eating a herb which had given life to the fishes which he had caught. He fell in love with the nymph Scylla and he sought the aid of the enchantress Circe to win Scylla's love. Circe offers her own love and when Glaucus refuses she transforms Scylla into a monster. Keats' Glaucus became a sea-god through his craving for a larger life. He falls in love with Scylla, but is captivated by the charms of Circe when he goes to her for

advice. When he discovers her true character Glaucus flees, but he is overtaken by Circe who kills Scylla and condemns Glaucus to a thousand years of old age to be followed by death. Following the advice of a magic book, Glaucus rescues and entombs the bodies of lovers drowned at sea. Endymion comes upon Glaucus on the floor of the ocean and the sorrow of the old man draws Endymion's sympathy. They discover that Endymion is a destined deliverer and he works some magic spells, restores youth to Glaucus and life to Scylla and all the drowned lovers. There is a celebration in the palace of Neptune where Endymion is once more promised success by Venus. Endymion swoons and is carried from the ocean floor to a green forest while he receives another message from his goddess. This digression, like the Alpheus and Arethusa episode, is a demonstration of the need for sympathy with human suffering before one can reach a "fellowship with essence." There is also a parallel between Glaucus' desertion of Scylla for a purely sensual love and Endymion's apparent disloyalty to his goddess in his love for the Indian maid.

The fourth book is composed of Endymion's vacillations between his goddess and the Indian maid who in the end is discovered to be the goddess. Keats' Indian Maid may owe something to the classical figure Ariadne¹⁹ or, as I have already suggested, she may be based on the disguised goddess in Drayton's Endimion and Phoebe. It is also true that such a figure is almost a necessity if Keats is going to use the

myth of Endymion and Phoebe as an allegorical demonstration of the ultimate identity of the real and the ideal.²⁰ There are many literary parallels for Keats' Indian maid, but it is possible that she is his own invention. Although Keats went to old mythologies for his main plot and for the secondary episodes which he needed to complete Endymion, the combinations and the connections which he made between these myths are his own. Although the completed poem might be dismissed as a "feverish attempt," it is an advance on his earlier use of myth which was only for allusion and image, while here he has attempted to compose mythological narrative.

The world of Endymion is that of pastoral and romance more than that of myth. There is a connection and a harmony made between man and his environment in the poem, but this is made through an idealization of reality. The idealization of reality in romance may be contrasted with the transformation of reality in myth. Myth preserves the identity of reality; but, though the World is not changed, it is made acceptable by being humanized. This interpretation of reality is the creation of the supernatural, an anthropomorphic force which seems to control the world of natural process without changing it. The setting of Endymion is the ideal green world on the slopes of Mount Latmos with wanderings through the earth, under the sea, and into the air. The poem takes place in an unchanging summer, not in the cyclical time of myth. Endymion has more of the magic of romance than the supernatural trans-

formation of reality which characterizes myth. The poem is dominated by the adventures of the mortal hero Endymion and supernatural figures are present almost only as accessories. Keats does not often succeed in making them real. The description of "Sleep slow journeying with head on pillow" (IV, 1.370), is an exception. We feel the presence of sleep in the lines:

For the first time, since he came nigh dead born
From the old womb of night, his cave forlorn
Had he left more forlorn; for the first time,
He felt aloof the day and morning's prime--(IV, 371-374).

The unseen form is captured in:

His litter of smooth semiluculent mist,
Diversely ting'd with rose and amethyst,
Puzzled those eyes that for the centre sought;
And scarcely for one moment could be caught
His sluggish form reposing motionless (IV, 385-89).

More often the supernatural characters in Endymion remain only borrowings from old mythologies. Keats comes very near to being trivial and ridiculous in his descriptions of some of the other guests at "Cynthia's wedding and festivity:"

. . . Hesperus: lo! upon his silver wings
He leans away for highest heaven and sings,
Snapping his lucid fingers merrily!--
Ah, Zephrus! art here, and Flora too!
Ye tender bibbers of the rain and dew, . . . (IV, 567-571).

Keats' presentation of his main mythological figure, the goddess of the moon, fluctuates between these two extremes. The invocation which Endymion addresses to the moon from the bottom

of the ocean in book III is vivid and imaginative:

'What is there in thee, Moon! that thou shouldst move
 My heart so potently? When yet a child
 I oft have dried my tears when thou hast smil'd.
 Thou seem'dst my sister: hand in hand we went
 From eve to morn across the firmament.
 No apples would I gather from the tree,
 Till thou hadst cool'd their cheeks deliciously:
 No tumbling water ever spake romance,
 But when my eyes with thine thereon could dance:
 No woods were green enough, no bower divine,
 Until thou liftedst up thine eyelids fine:
 In sowing time ne'er would I dibble take,
 Or drop a seed, till thou wast wide awake;
 And, in the summer tide of blossoming,
 No one but thee hath heard me blithely sing
 And mesh my dewy flowers all the night.
 No melody was like a passing spright
 If it went not to solemnize thy reign.
 Yes, in my boyhood, every joy and pain
 By thee were fashion'd to the self-same end;
 And as I grew in years, still didst thou blend
 With all my ardours: thou wast the deep glen;
 Thou wast the mountain-top--the sage's pen--
 The poet's harp--the voice of friends--the sun;
 Thou wast the river--thou wast glory won;
 Thou wast my clarion's blast--thou wast my steed--
 My goblet full of wine--my topmost deed:--
 Thou wast the charm of women, lovely Moon!
 O what a wild and harmonized tune
 My spirit struck from all the beautiful!
 On some bright essence could I lean, and lull
 Myself to immortality: I prest
 Nature's soft pillow in a wakeful rest(III, 142-174).

The moon becomes an image of the essence or beauty of all things. This image is appropriate both for the transforming power of moonlight which makes all things beautiful, and also dramatically, since it is the goddess of the moon who is the unknown goddess of Endymion's pilgrimage. In his descriptions of Phoebe as Endymion's lover Keats fails to preserve her identity as an ideal. He does sometimes effectively portray

her more than human beauty, as in this description:

. . . Ah! see her hovering feet,
 More bluely vein'd, more soft, more whitely sweet
 Than those of sea-born Venus, when she rose
 From out her cradle shell. The wind out-blows
 Her scarf into a fluttering pavillion:
 'Tis blue, and over-spangled with a million
 Of little eyes, as though thou wert to shed,
 Over the darkest, lushest blue-bell bed,
 Handfuls of daisies (I, 624-632).

Yet union with such a goddess is more like the enjoyment of
 an earthly ideal than intercourse with a heavenly essence.

Keats' descriptions of these unions are often embarrassing.

As Endymion wanders through the underworld in book II,

Stretching his indolent arms, he took, O bliss!
 A naked waist: "Fair Cupid, whence is this?"
 A well-known voice sigh'd, "Sweetest, here am I!"
 At which soft ravishment, with doting cry
 They trembled to each other.--Helicon!
 O fountain'd hill! Old Homer's Helicon!
 That thou wouldst spout a little streamlet o'er
 These sorry pages; then the verse would soar
 And sing above this gentle pair, like lark. . .
 (II, 712-720).

Unfortunately Helicon offers scarcely a dribble and Keats' verse hardly gets out of the underground. The ambiguity of Keats' portrayal of Phoebe is one of the most serious flaws in Endymion. Phoebe is so often a creature of the earth that we are pressed to explain the significance of the Indian maid in book IV. The relationship between the sensuous real and the ideal is more confused than it is explained.

We can discover a meaning in Endymion's adventures. His quest for the ideal, for "a fellowship with essence,"

is achieved through sympathy with the sufferings of the universe and union with the real. On this level there is some universal relevance in the theme of Endymion. More particularly, Endymion might be a statement about poetry, the relationship in poetry between experience and idea, the real and the ideal. Poetry has been the subject of much of Keats' earlier poetry and in "I Stood Tip-toe" he ends his poem and a description of the wedding of Cynthia and Endymion with the question:

Cynthia! I cannot tell the greater blisses,
That follow'd thine, and thy dear shepherd's kisses:
Was there a poet born?--but now no more,
My wand'ring spirit must no further soar (ll.239-242).

Perhaps in Endymion Keats is still not quite ready to soar and the insecurity of the poem is a result of, even more than it is an expression of, Keats' own ambivalence. Keats stays in the world of mythological romance and is unable to give us the certainty of true myth, the vera narratio.

Writing from Teignmouth on April 10, 1818, Keats concluded his preface to Endymion with this statement: "I hope I have not in too late a day touched the beautiful mythology of Greece, and dulled its brightness: for I wish to try once more, before I bid it farewell."²¹ Keats returned to the mythology of Greece in Hyperion, his second major mythological poem.²² Keats began to consider the fall of Hyperion as the subject for a poem as early as September 1817.²³ He composed the first two books of Hyperion in the two months between late

September of 1818 and the death of Tom Keats on December 1.²⁴ The death of his brother was followed by a lapse in composition; after several weeks Keats returned to the poem composing the third book, but by April 20, 1819, he had abandoned the poem.²⁵ As he was preparing to begin Hyperion, Keats felt that he was getting closer to the spirit of Greek myth and he contrasted this poem with the "many bits of the deep and sentimental cast" in Endymion, telling his friend Haydon that ". . . the nature of Hyperion will lead me to treat it in a more naked and grecian Manner. . ." (Letters, 23 January 1818, I, 207).

Once more Keats is basing his poem on a traditional myth. His knowledge of the original form of the myth comes through Elizabethan English translations of Greek and Roman poems and histories. He seems to be particularly indebted to Chapman's translations of Homer's Iliad, Odyssey, and Hymns, and Hesiod's Georgics; Cooke's translation of Hesiod's Works and Days and Theogony; Sandy's translation of Ovid's Metamorphosis; and Booth's translation of Diodorus Siculus' Historical Library. He also found allusions to the myth in Renaissance poetry, particularly in Ronsard's ode A Michel de l'Hospital, Spenser's Faerie Queene, Shakespeare's plays, and Milton's Paradise Lost. He also drew upon his classical reference books: Lempriere's Classical Dictionary, Spence's Polymetis, and Tooke's Pantheon.²⁶ With all these sources and influences, as well as others more contemporary, Keats' poem still does not read like a classical dictionary. The sources which might have influenced him are well assimilated and, while Keats

is attempting to emulate the composers of Greek myth, he is not merely imitating them or reproducing their poems. The shifting of Keats' prime poetic allegiance from Spenser to Milton is reflected in Hyperion. As Paradise Lost is a purer composition of myth than the Faerie Queene, so is Hyperion closer to true myth than Endymion.

Keats took the basis of his plot from the story of the genesis of the gods described in Hesiod's Theogony, which he read in Cooke's translation. But, as well as mixing his sources, he altered them freely. Keats has removed much of the crude and primitive violence that characterized Hesiod's story of the gods. In his speech to the other fallen Titans, Oceanus refers to the transference of power from "Chaos and blank Darkness," to "Heaven and Earth," and from them to the Titans who are excelled by the new Olympians (II, 173-243), but he does not refer to violent struggles between these generations. In his speech to the yet unfallen Titan Hyperion, Coelus, the Heaven, advises war on the Olympians; but he shows no hostility to his son Hyperion, only pity (I, 305-353). In Keats' poem the conflicts between the generations of the gods are reduced to that between the Titans and the Olympians only. This struggle is almost accomplished in the opening of the poem as we have it. Most of the Titans have already fallen and only the confrontation of Hyperion with Apollo remains.

Given the initial situation, the narrative in Hyperion is Keats' own invention as is his interpretation of the situation.

The unfinished condition of the poem and the subtitle, "A Fragment," has led to much speculation concerning the probable conclusion which Keats had intended for his poem. Richard Woodhouse suggested that according to the original plan the poem:

. . . would have treated the dethronement of Hyperion, the former god of the Sun, by Apollo--and incidentally of those of Oceanus by Neptune, of Saturn by Jupiter, etc., and of the war of the Giants for Saturn's re-establishment--with other events, of which we have but very dark hints in the mythological poets of Greece and Rome. In fact, the incidents would have been pure creation of the poet's brain.²⁷

Edward Hungerford suggests that the completed poem was to become a British epic with the action turning on the ultimate exile of Saturn and his fallen Titans to the British Isles.²⁸ On the other hand, Harold Bloom considers that the fragment is a complete poem ending with the final verse in the autograph manuscript: "Apollo shriek'd--and low he was the God!" although it was altered before the publication of the poem.²⁹ This argument turns upon the conception of Apollo as the protagonist of the poem, so that, once he has become a god, there was nothing more to say. But this ignores the first two books and the title of the poem which indicate that Hyperion is the protagonist and that the action must turn on the description of his fall. Still, it is unlikely that the action would be as extended as Woodhouse and Hungerford suggest. The Titans, except for Hyperion, have already fallen. The rebellion called for by Enceladus could only be a small one. It is likely that the poem would be concluded with the development of Hyperion

as a tragic figure, depicting his confrontation with Apollo and Hyperion's recognition of his loss of divinity, his fall. In any event it is unlikely that Keats felt compelled to expand his narrative with supplementary episodes as he did in Endymion. Taking the epic for his model rather than the loose and digressive romance, Keats keeps his narrative close to the simplicity, seriousness, and the significance which are characteristic of myth as I have defined mythological form and theme in chapter II.

The adventures of a mortal hero in contact with, and in quest of union with, the supernatural, in Endymion, are replaced by a conflict between supernatural figures in Hyperion. In his letter to Haydon Keats explained that the reason for the "more naked and grecian Manner" in Hyperion would be that:

. . . the march of passion and endeavour will be undeviating-- and one great contrast between them [Hyperion and Endymion], will be --that the Hero of the written tale being mortal is led on, like Buonaparte, by circumstance; whereas the Apollo in Hyperion being a fore-seeing God will shape his actions like one (23 January 1818, I, 207).

In the uncompleted poem we are not given much of "the march of passion and endeavour," but the narrative pattern of the poem does seem to digress less than that of Endymion; and, although we have no more than an introduction to Apollo, Keats portrays his immortals with much greater skill than he showed usually in Endymion. Keats' characterization of the supernatural was rarely successful in Endymion, but in Hyperion there are few failures and some of the portraits are very close to the

excellence which Keats achieved in the "Ode to Autumn." Keats took the names of his Titans from a variety of sources, but the characters which he gave them are his own invention. They become real mythological figures. Keats describes the unknown in terms of the known; he creates the supernatural by humanizing the inhuman forces of nature. We see this in each of the Titans and especially in Keats' fine portrayal of their father Coelus as he counsels Hyperion:

There as [Hyperion] lay, the Heaven with its stars
Look'd down on him with pity, and the voice
Of Coelus from the universal space,
Thus whisper'd low and solemn in his ear (I, 305-308).

In his address Coelus tells us that there is "sad feud" among the Titans and "rebellion / Of son against his sire." He has seen the fall of Saturn:

'I saw my first-born tumbled from his throne!
'To me his arms were spread, to me his voice
'Found way from forth the thunders round his head
'Pale wox I, and in vapours hid my face (I, 323-26).

Coelus asks Hyperion:

'Art thou, too, near such doom? vague fear there is:
'For I have seen my sons most unlike Gods.
'Divine ye were created, and divine
'In sad demeanour, solemn, undisturb'd,
'Unruffled, like high Gods, ye liv'd and ruled:
'Now I behold in you fear, hope, and wrath;
'Actions of rage and passion; even as
'I see them, on the mortal world beneath,
'In men who die.--This is the grief, O Son!
'Sad sign of ruin, sudden dismay, and fall! (I, 327-336).

He then advises Hyperion to resist this fall from immortality:

. . . --I am but a voice;
 'My life is but the life of winds and tides,
 'No more than winds and tides can I avail:--
 'But thou canst.--Be thou therefore in the van
 'Of circumstance; yea, seize the arrow's barb
 'Before the tense string murmur.--To the earth!
 'For there thou wilt find Saturn, and his woes.
 'Meantime I will keep watch on thy bright sun,
 'And of thy seasons be a careful nurse.'
 Ere half this region-whisper had come down,
 Hyperion arose, and on the stars
 Lifted his curved lids, and kept them wide
 Until it ceas'd; and still he kept them wide:
 And still they were the same bright, patient stars
 (I, 340-353).

Throughout this passage we are aware of the dual identity of Coelus; he is at once the eternal and inhuman sky, and the concerned father of the Titans.

Coelus draws our attention to the fact that the Titans have become more like mortals than they had been and that this humanization is the nature of their fall. Although the Titans are identified with nature, they are limited supernaturalists; they do not have the power to control natural processes. Hyperion attempts to raise the sun "and bid the day begin" six hours before the accustomed hour, but:

He might not:--No, though a primeval God:
 The sacred seasons might not be disturb'd.
 Therefore the operations of the dawn
 Stay'd in their birth, even as here 'tis told.
 Those silver wings expanded sisterly,
 Eager to sail their orb; the porches wide
 Open'd upon the dusk demesnes of night;
 And the bright Titan, phrenzied with new woes,
 Unus'd to bend, by hard compulsion bent
 His spirit to the sorrow of the time:
 And all along a dismal rack of clouds,
 Upon the boundaries of day and night,
 He stretch'd himself in grief and radiance faint
 (I, 292-304).

While the Titans are losing their divinity and acquiring the limitations of humanity, the Olympian Apollo moves through the sufferings of human existence to the acquisition of divinity.

When Keats turns to "the golden theme" in book III and shows us "the Father of all verse," his Apollo is much more like the mortal Endymion than like a God. But through the goddess of memory Mnemosyne, Apollo passes through the agonies and conflicts of human experience. He tells her:

'Mute thou remainest--mute! yet I can read
'A wondrous lesson in thy silent face:
'Knowledge enormous makes a God of me.
'Names, deeds, grey 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' (III, 111-120).

Apollo is transfigured:

Soon wild commotions shook him, and made flush
All 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: so young Apollo anguish'd:
His very hair, his golden tresses famed
Kept undulation round his eager neck.
During the pain Mnemosyne upheld
Her arms as one who prophesied.--At length
Apollo shriek'd;--and lo! from all his limbs
Celestial * * * * *
* * * * *
(III, 124-136).

We can assume that he becomes a god. Keats implies that Apollo has transcended the limitations of human existence,

the subjection to suffering and the forces of Time, the cycles of nature and of history. He transcends these by experiencing them. Thus, in Hyperion, Keats approaches these central problems of human existence which he avoided in the summer-world of Endymion. Keats rejects the premise of Hesiod's Theogony that the evolution of the gods is a process of decline from a golden age. For Keats, Apollo's experience and transcendence of human suffering makes him more beautiful. This is the basis of the Olympian beauty praised by Oceanus when he explains to the other fallen Titans that ". . . 'tis the eternal law / That first in beauty should be first in might. . . ." Once, more, as in Endymion and many of his earlier poems, Keats' theme is the growth of the poet and his Apollo is represented primarily as the god of poetry. However, in his groping with the problems of change and the suffering of human existence, Keats is exploring a more universal theme. With this theme he gives to Hyperion the significance of myth.

Hyperion marked the opening of the period in which Keats composed his greatest poetry. Among the Odes we remember the "Ode to Psyche" which I have used to introduce my thesis. However, the "Ode to Psyche" ~~is not a presentation of~~ ^{is not a} mythological narrative, but a definition of the nature of poetry and myth. Among the narrative poems we have Lamia, part one of which Keats composed in July of 1818 and part two in September.³⁰

Lamia is a long narrative poem based on the classical myth which was recorded in Part 3, Section 3, of Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy. This Renaissance version is derived from

the fourth book of Philostratus' de Vita Apollonii.³¹ Once more Keats is basing his theme on a classical myth as it was recorded by a Renaissance author. Keats recreated the furniture and manners of ancient Greece in Lamia from his copy of John Potter's Archaeologia Graeca.³² The imagery of the poem includes many allusions to Greek myth. Most of these allusions, those to Ariadne, Proserpine, the Muses, Apollo, Jove, Circe, Pyrrha, Ceres, Bacchus, the Naiades, Pleiades, Fauns, and Satyrs, remain mere allusions and are not developed by Keats within his narrative. The "ever-smitten Hermes" and his lovely wood-nymph are presented as characters, but they are not developed beyond the presentation of their relationship as a contrast to that between Lamia and Lycius. Hermes and the wood-nymph seem to be more like dreams than deities, although Keats tells us:

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 (I, 126-128).

These gods are mythological ornaments and not mythological representations of the supernatural. Keats claims in the opening lines of his poem that he is writing about the mythological world:

Upon a time, before the faery broods
Drove Nymph and Satyr from the prosperous woods,
Before king Oberon's bright diadem,
Sceptre, and mantle, clasp'd with dewy gem,
Frighted away the Dryads and the Fauns
From rushes green, and brakes, and cowslip'd lawns. . .
(I, 1-6).

However, despite Keats' contention, and the names of his characters,

is in the poem . . .

it is the post-mythological world of magic and romance which dominates Lamia. The protagonist is not an authentic mythological figure, but an enigmatic mixture of contrasts. In classical myth Lamia was "a sort of fiend who, in the form of a beautiful woman, enticed young men in order that she might devour them."³³ As Keats develops his version she is described first as a beautiful, many-colored serpent; she is "rainbow-sided" and "touch'd with miseries." She is associated with celestial, but transient light, on her sides she has "silver moons, that, as she breathed, / Dissolv'd, or brighter shone. . . ," and "Upon her crest she wore a wannish fire / Sprinkled with stars, like Ariadne's tire." "She seem'd, at once, some penanced lady elf, / Some demon's mistress, or the demon's self." She has, perhaps, the elfin quality of mischief or malice, but these derogatory connotations are restricted by their association with the adjective "penanced." Lamia is a "brilliance feminine;" she has a "woman's mouth" and fair weeping eyes, and her words come "as through bubbling honey, for Love's sake." Lamia has had compassion for the troubled wood-nymph making her invisible, and the sound of Lamia's own voice "in gentle heart, destroys / All pain but pity." Her head is "Circean;" this may refer at once to Lamia's transformation of the wood-nymph, and to the Circe-like destruction of men exercised by the Lamia of Philostratus. Keats' depiction of Lamia remains ambiguous throughout the poem. Lamia asks Hermes to give her back her woman's form

because she loves a youth of Corinth. When she is transformed Lamia possesses the fresh charm of an innocent ~~maid~~ combined with the captivating resources of an experienced woman. She is called a "cruel lady" for her coyness, her womanly wiles, and her words "entice" Lycius who is "entranced," "blinded," and "tangled in her mesh." Lamia submits to Lycius' desire to hold a public celebration of their union; she is reluctant, but "she lov'd the tyranny." Knowing that she is unable to alter Lycius' will, "she set herself, high-thoughted, how to dress / The misery in fit magnificence." At the banquet Lamia is given a garland of "willow and of adder's tongue," which "brow-beats" her "fair form" and "troubles her sweet pride." Lamia vanishes when Apollonius declares that she is a serpent, though Keats the narrator, has said some two hundred lines before: "Ha, the serpent! certes, she ~~was~~ none."

The poem may be interpreted as an attempt to define the nature of poetry and in this interpretation Lamia is a symbol of poetry. There is an immortality offered by art in Lamia's "purple-lined palace of sweet sin," but it is not the reality of myth and it vanishes when subjected to the piercing examination of philosophy which deals only in concepts derived from experience in the physical world. The poem contains many thematic contrasts: between poetry and philosophy, the immortal and the human, permanence and change, pleasure and pain, also between dream and reality, love and ambition, pursuit and satiety, passion and thought, and retreat from the world versus active participation. These contrasts remain ambiguous because

of the ambiguousness of the terms in which Keats presents them. This ambiguity ~~may~~ be contrasted with that in the characterization of Phoebe in Endymion, which is perhaps a technical failure. It is unlikely that the ambiguities in Lamia are due to a failure of Keats the artist in a poem which is itself technically proficient and which is written during the period in which Keats composed his most mature poetry. The ambiguity of the character Lamia and of the definition of reality in ~~this~~ poem is probably determined by an ambivalence which characterized Keats' own perception of reality at this time. Here we remember Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale," "La Belle Dame sans Merci," and "my demon Poesy" in the "Ode on Indolence." This lack of resolution places Lamia in the uncertain world of fantasy, and, because it lacks the confident description of reality which characterizes myth, the poem must be defined as romance.

While Keats was working on Lamia, he returned to the unfinished Hyperion in July of 1818.³⁴ Attempting to recast the poem as The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream, he wrote the new Induction which I have referred to in my discussion of Keats' conception of poetry and myth in chapter IV. Keats introduces a poet-narrator who defines the visionary nature of the poem, which is appropriate to a mythological narrative, and which reminds us of the "Ode to Psyche." The new poet-narrator seems to grow out of Keats' Apollo in book III of Hyperion and it seems likely that Keats intended to use the vision of the conflict between the Titans and the Olympians as an objec-

tification and generalization of the themes which he has introduced in his Induction. However, Keats found it difficult to adapt his old material to the new poem and he had not written much more than the introduction to The Fall of Hyperion when on September 21, 1819, in a letter to his friend Reynolds, he announced that he had given up the poem (II, 167).

While Keats worked on the revision of Hyperion and shortly before he abandoned this poem, he turned aside to compose the "Ode to Autumn" and in this poem Keats captured the essence of myth.³⁵ The Ode is announced in the same letter in which Keats told Reynolds that he would work no longer on the Fall of Hyperion. Writing from the old cathedral town of Winchester on September 21, 1819, Keats exclaims:

How beautiful the seas ~~is~~ now--How fine the air. A temperate sharpness about it. Really, without joking, chaste weather--Dian skies--I never lik'd stubble fields so much as now--Aye better than the chilly green of the spring. Somehow a stubble plain looks warm--this struck me so much in my Sunday's walk that I composed upon it (II, 167).

The Ode is a vivid and imaginative expression of this sensuous experience, but it is more than this; it is also an interpretation and a resolution of a problem of universal human experience. In this Ode Keats does not turn to the old mythologies for a subject to express his theme as he has in so many of his earlier poems. Although there might be some resemblance between Keats' personification of autumn and the classical goddess Ceres, this is a correspondence only, and the "Ode to Autumn" must be regarded as an original expression of vital myth.

The poem begins as an apostrophe:

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
 Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;
 Conspiring with him how to load and bless
 With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eaves run;
 To bend with apples the moss'd cottage-trees,
 And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;
 To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells
 With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,
 And still more, later flowers for the bees,
 Until they think warm days will never cease,
 For Summer has o'er-brimm'd their clammy cells.

Autumn is a season of change and consummation. It loads the vines with fruit and bends the trees with apples. All fruit is ripened, the gourds swollen, and the hazels plumped. In the warm days of autumn the flowers continue to bud and bloom. This is a season of "mellow fruitfulness," but in the fulfillment there is an implied completion and decline. We remember the synthesis of death imagery with the intense enjoyment of life in Keats "Ode to a Nightingale." There is a shadow in the mists which accompany the fruitfulness. The ripeness is obscured and darkened. Autumn is a friend of "the maturing sun" which brings, not only ripeness, but also briefer days, the approach of darkness, winter, and death. The cottage-trees are old; they are moss'd and bent. The fruits, the gourds, and the hazel nuts have reached such complete ripeness that they cannot become riper, they can only decline. The flowers of autumn are not new, but "later flowers.!" They have deceived the bees who "think warm days will never cease," but the warm days will cease, and soon. Summer has already 'b'er-brimm'd" the clammy cells of the bees. There is a suggestion of threat

in this bounty which exceeds capacity. The cells of the bees are "clammy;" while we have the sense that the hives are soft and sticky, we are also reminded of the dampness and the cold of winter. The noun "cell" itself has associations of smallness and deprivation.

In stanza two Keats exemplifies the benign indifference which characterizes Autumn's rule of change:

Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?
 Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find
 Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,
 Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;
 Or on a half-reap'd furrow sound asleep,
 Drows'd with the fume of poppies, while thy hook
 Spares the next swath and all its twined flowers:
 And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep
 Steady thy laden head across a brook;
 Or by a cyder-press, with patient look,
 Thou watchest the last oozings hours by hours.

Autumn is a master of the harvest often found close to his store. He is not avaricious and on the granary floor he sits careless. The season is both harvester and harvest; his hair is "soft-lifted by the winnowing wind." Autumn will leave a furrow half-reap'd to lie sound asleep "drows'd with the fume of poppies." While Autumn sleeps, he "spares the next swath and all its twined flowers;" his harvest is not hurried. Yet Autumn is still a harvester; as he crosses the brook, his head is laden with crops he has not spared. Although he sits patiently by the cyder-press, he has stayed to supervise the "last oozings." The emphasis on the process of ripening in stanza one is replaced, in stanza two, by a shift to the

activities of harvest. The approach of decay, darkness, winter, and death is not forgotten. Although the wind is soft, it is winnowing. The furrow is already half-reaped. the drowsy intoxicated sleep of Autumn is a premonition of death. Ultimately Autumn's "hook" will spare none of the swaths or the flowers. The concluding words of the stanza, "the last ooziings hours by hours," emphasize the approaching end and the passing of time. Yet the harvesting is no more urgent than the ripening; the consummation is accepted with calm resignation.

From the theme of dissolution, Keats reminds us of the cycle of continuation with his reference to "the songs of Spring" in the first verse of stanza three. This last stanza of the Ode is a representation of the harmonies of Autumn which is made in comparison with the music of Spring, the season of birth and renewal:

Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?
 Think not of them, thou hast thy music too,--
 While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day,
 And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue;
 Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn
 Among the river swallows, borne aloft
 Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;
 And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;
 Hedge-crickets sing; and now with treble soft
 The red-breast whistles from a garden-croft;
 And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.

After reminding us of the continuation of process, Keats tells us not to think of the "songs of Spring," but to listen for the music of Autumn. These harmonies blend life and death,

beauty and sorrow. The day, blooming with "barred clouds," is "soft-dying." The fields are touched "with rosy hue," but they are barren "stubble-plains." The small gnats sing, but they are a mourning, "wailful choir." The gliding river swallows are "borne aloft / Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies. . . ." The "full-grown lambs" are no longer lambs. They bleat loudly from the "hilly bourn." Here, the denotation of "bourn" is shadowed by its second meaning as a limit, a boundary, an ending. The Hedge-crickets sing and the red-breast whistles, but with the coming of winter, their songs will vanish. The swallows "twitter in the skies" and they are already "gathering," preparing for departure. We are reminded again of the "vale of Soul-making" letter and all of the other poems which reflect this theme. The "Ode to Autumn" contains "a World of Pains and troubles," but these are merged with beauty and contentment. The complete serenity which dominates the Ode might be interpreted as the product of successful Soul-making. The "Ode to Autumn" is one of Keats' last poems. It is written in the autumn of his young life. He was harrassed by many difficulties and his persistent sore throat was soon to be recognized as a sign of the fatal illness which would end his life. He had experienced and meditated on the "pains and troubles" which he discovered in the world, "a Place where the heart must feel and suffer in a thousand diverse ways!" (Letters, II, 102). Keats portrayed this world in the "Ode to Autumn." He drew his imagery from a particular setting in

the English countryside, but the images have more than a local representative value. The poem becomes archetypal in its presentation of the themes of consummation, decay, and death. The poem studies a problem of individual, social, and universal significance, and by offering a reconciliation, a resolution of this problem, the "Ode to Autumn" fulfils this function and assumes the significance of myth.

The Ode is a verbal construction, but it is not a story and it does not have a mythological narrative pattern. In this sense the Ode is a mythological fragment; but as a fragment the Ode reflects the age in which it ~~was~~ composed, an age which did not favour the writing and completion of long poems. Like many Romantic "fragments," the Ode is a complete poem and it captures the essence of myth. The role of the archetypal plot is filled partly by the poem's imagery which refers to the theme of the poem in terms of universally recognizable human activities. The mythological dimension is answered in the "Ode to Autumn" by the representation of the supernatural. Keats presents the world of change, consummation and decay, by personifying these natural phenomena without changing them. The world is humanized and this humanization makes the strange and uncontrollable seem familiar and desired. Keats revealed a facility for personifying nature very early in his poetry, but he did not, until the "Ode to Autumn," demonstrate mastery of the inhuman aspects of nature in his personifications. The difference may be felt vividly by comparing Keats' presentation

of Hyperion with his portrayal of Autumn. Through his personification of Autumn, Keats resolves the conflict between permanence and change. Change is not denied, but it is humanized. Time is presented in an affirmation of the vital cyclical perspective which characterizes myth. The Ode transforms reality by determining our attitude to reality. The poem does not present illusion, but truth, and the "Ode to Autumn" is, like all true myth, a vera narratio. It is not until this poem that Keats completely achieves the true composition of vital myth. Comparison of this poem with the early poetry of William Blake might suggest the possibility that, had Keats produced more poetry, his composition of myth might have been more comprehensive. This is a possibility which was denied by Keats' early death, but his achievement remains. The theoretical identification of poetry and myth which Keats made in the "Ode to Psyche" is realized in the composition of the "Ode to Autumn."

FOOT-NOTES

CHAPTER I

¹The Poetical Works of John Keats, ed. H.W.Garrod, 2nd ed., (Oxford, 1958), pp.262-64. This edition, which will hereafter be identified simply as Poetical Works, will be used for all subsequent references to Keats' poetry.

²The Letters of John Keats, 1814-1821, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins, II (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), 105-106. This edition, which will hereafter be identified simply as Letters, will be used for all subsequent references to Keats' letters. Individual letters will be identified by their volume and page in this edition.

³This period of technical experimentation is discussed in the following works:

H.W.Garrod, Keats (Oxford, 1939), pp.80-94;

M.R.Ridley, Keats' Craftsmanship: A Study in Poetic Development (Oxford, 1933), pp.195-207; and

W.J.Bate, The Stylistic Development of Keats (New York, 1945), pp.126-32.

⁴Aesthetic and Myth in the Poetry of John Keats (Princeton, 1965), p.309. Evert is particularly interested in the Apollo myth rather than myth qua myth and he uses this as the basis for some interesting interpretation of Keats' poetry.

⁵Letters, II, 106.

⁶Rollins, Letters, II, 106; and Douglas Bush, John Keats: His Life and Writings (New York, 1966), p.128.

⁷Letters, II, 102.

⁸The Quest for Permanence: The Symbolism of Wordsworth, Shelley, and Keats (Cambridge, Mass., 1959), pp.221-228.

CHAPTER II

¹Mythology and the Romantic Tradition in English Poetry (New York, 1963), p.105.

²Myth and Mythmaking, ed. Henry A. Murray (New York, 1960), p.347.

³Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology (New York, 1963), p.35.

⁴"A Coat," Selected Poetry, ed. A.Norman Jeffares (London, 1963), p.63.

⁵I am principally indebted to the following works for my knowledge of myth theory:

Richard Chase, Quest for Myth (Baton Rouge, 1949);

Mircea Eliade, Myth and Reality, trns. Willard R. Trask (New York, 1963);

Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (Princeton, 1957), and Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology (New York, 1963);

James E. Miller, ed., Myth and Method: Modern Theories of Fiction (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1960);

Henry Alexander Murray, ed., Myth and Mythmaking (New York, 1960);

Thomas A. Sebeok, ed., Myth: A Symposium (Philadelphia, 1955);

Bernice Slote, ed., Myth and Symbol: Critical Approaches and Applications by Northrop Frye, L.C.Knights and Others. A Selection of papers delivered at the joint meeting of the Mid-west Modern Language Association and the Central Renaissance Conference, 1962 (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1963);

E.M.W.Tillyard, Some Mythical Elements in English Literature: Being the Clark Lectures, 1959-60 (London, 1961);

John B. Vickery, ed., Myth and Literature: Contemporary Theory and Practice (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1966); and

Herbert Weisinger, The Agony and the Triumph: Papers on the Use and Abuse of Myth (Michigan, 1964).

⁶Frye, "Myth, Fiction and Displacement," Fables of Identity p.22.

⁷Harry Levin, "Some Meanings of Myth," in Myth and Mythmaking, ed. H.N.Murray, p.104.

⁸"Notes on the Study of Myth," in Myth and Literature, ed. H.N.Murray, p.104.

⁹H.Levin, "Some Meanings of Myth," p.104.

¹⁰In Myth: A Symposium, ed. T.A.Sebeok, p.105.

¹¹In Fables of Identity, p.53.

¹²Stith Thompson, "Myths and Folktales," in Myth: A Symposium, ed. T.A.Sebeok, p.105.

- 13 "Archetypes of Literature," Fables of Identity, p.15.
- 14 From Magic, Science, and Religion (New York, 1955), as quoted by Mircea Eliade in Myth and Reality, p.8.
- 15 Myth and Reality, p.145.
- 16 "Introduction," Myth and Literature, p.ix.
- 17 "The Necessity of Myth," in Myth and Mythmaking, p.135.
- 18 In Myth and Literature, pp.70-71.
- 19 In Myth and Mythmaking, p.286.
- 20 In Myth and Literature, p.22.
- 21 "Myths and Rituals: A General Theory," in Myth and Literature, p.22.
- 22 "Bios and Mythos," in Myth and Literature, p.22.
- 23 Page 40.
- 24 "Some Meanings of Myth," in Myth and Mythmaking, p.111.
- 25 "The Possibility of a 'Mythology' to Come," in Myth and Mythmaking, pp.344-45.
- 26 "Some Meanings of Myth," in Myth and Mythmaking, p.112.
- 27 I am arguing this in disagreement with E.M.W.Tillyard who decides that Dickens' Oliver Twist is more mythical than Blake's "Holy Thursday," because Dickens' novel was more popular (Some Mythical Elements in English Literature, p.15).
- 28 Murray, "The Possibility of a 'Mythology' to Come," Myth and Mythmaking, pp.310-311.
- 29 Ibid., p.330.
- 30 pp.131-242.
- 31 Fables of Identity, pp.15-16.
- 32 "The Possibility of a 'Mythology'. . . ," p.310.
- 33 In Myth and Mythmaking, p.157.
- 34 Philip Wheelwright, "Notes on Mythopoeia," Myth and Literature, p.64.
- 35 In Myth: A Symposium, p.66.

³⁶Myth and Reality, pp.5-6.

CHAPTER III

¹The principal sources of my information about the influences which contributed to the development of Keats' concept of myth and his composition of mythological poetry are:

Norman Arthur Anderson, Bard in Fealty: Keats' Use of Classical Mythology (Doctoral Dissertation, The University of Wisconsin, 1962. Anderson's interest in Keats' reference to classical myth leads him to construct a theoretical poet-making ritual and he interprets Keats' poems as representations of this ritual. Although Anderson's thesis is limited as interpretation, he has accumulated a large mass of factual information which I will occasionally resort to.);

David Bidney, "Myth, Symbolism, and Truth," in Myth: A Symposium, pp.1-14.

Douglas Bush, Mythology and the Romantic Tradition;

Richard Chase, Quest for Myth;

Edward B. Hungerford, Shores of Darkness (New York, 1940);

Albert J. Kuhn, "English Deism and the Development of Romantic Mythological Syncretism," PMLA, 71:2 (1956), 1094-1116;

Harry Levin, "Some Meanings of Myth," in Myth and Myth-making; and,

Henry A. Murray, "The Possibility of a 'Mythology' to Come," in Myth and Mythmaking.

²Bush, Mythology and the Romantic Tradition, p.xi.

³Anderson, Bard in Fealty, p.7.

⁴Hungerford, Shores of Darkness, p.7.

⁵Page 309.

⁶Bush, Mythology and the Romantic Tradition, p.22.

⁷Études de Littérature Européenne (Paris, 1898), p.113.

⁸Kuhn, "English Deism and the Development of Romantic Mythological Syncretism," PMLA, 71:2 (1956), 1096.

⁹Edinburgh Review, XXXIV (1820), 204; quoted by Anderson in Bard in Fealty, p.172.

¹⁰Anderson, Bard in Fealty, pp.6-18.

¹¹Bush, Mythology and the Romantic Tradition, pp.44-47.

- ¹²Anderson, pp.6-18.
- ¹³Quoted by Sidney Colvin, John Keats (London, 1917),
p.14.
- ¹⁴Bush, Mythology and the Romantic Tradition, p.xii.
- ¹⁵Bush, pp.113-114.
- ¹⁶Letters, I, 30.
- ¹⁷Bush, Mythology and the Romantic Tradition, p.xii.
- ¹⁸Page xiii.
- ¹⁹In Myth and Mythmaking, pp.344-45.
- ²⁰This biographical material is standard and may be found
in Walter Jackson Bate's critical biography John Keats (New
York, 1963), as well as in most other works dealing with Keats'
life.
- ²¹Poetical Works, p.532.
- ²²Ibid., p.261.
- ²³Ibid., p.258.
- ²⁴Page 13.
- ²⁵Page 14.
- ²⁶In English Romantic Poetry and Prose: Selected and
Edited with Essays and Notes by Russell Noyes (New York,
1956), p.360.
- ²⁷Biographia Literaria: or Biographical Sketches of My
Literary Life and Opinions, ed. George Watson (London, 1962),
Ch.xviii, p.213.
- ²⁸Page 213.
- ²⁹The Poetical Works of Wordsworth, ed. Thomas Hutchinson,
Revised by Ernest de Selincourt (London, 1956), p.206.
- ³⁰Poetical Works, pp.635-36.
- ³¹Mythology and the Romantic Tradition, p.70.

CHAPTER IV

- ¹Poetical Works, pp.429-430.
- ²Ibid., pp.28-30.
- ³Ibid., p.41.
- ⁴Epistle "To My Brother George," Poetical Works, pp.31-34.
- ⁵Poetical Works, pp.35-38.
- ⁶Ibid., pp.51-61.
- ⁷Ibid., pp.3-11.
- ⁸Ibid., p.122.
- ⁹Ibid., p.476.
- ¹⁰Ibid., p.521.
- ¹¹For example, see Joseph Campbell or Géza Róheim in Myth and Literature.

CHAPTER V

- ¹Poetical Works, p.25.
- ²Quoted by Sidney Colvin in John Keats, p.20.
- ³Claude Lee Finney, The Evolution of Keats's Poetry (New York, 1963), I, 33.
- ⁴Ibid.,
- ⁵Poetical Works, p.429.
- ⁶Finney, Keats's Poetry, I, 62-63.
- ⁷Aesthetic and Myth, pp.32-39.
- ⁸Poetical Works, pp.28-30.
- ⁹Ibid., pp.28-34.
- ¹⁰Ibid., p.39.

- 11 Poetical Works, pp.3-11.
- 12 Ibid., pp.64-188.
- 13 Finney, Keats's Poetry, I, 247.
- 14 Compare, W.J.Bate, John Keats, p.69.
- 15 Poetical Works, p.64.
- 16 Finney Keats's Poetry, I, 256.
- 17 Ibid., I, 257.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Edward Hungerford, Shores of Darkness, p.108ff.
- 20 Douglas Bush, Mythology and the Romantic Tradition, p.100.
- 21 Poetical Works, p.64.
- 22 Ibid., pp.276-305.
- 23 Finney, Keats's Poetry, II, 488.
- 24 W.J.Bate, John Keats, p.392.
- 25 Ibid., p.402.
- 26 Finney, Keats's Poetry, II, 494-510.
- 27 Quoted by W.J.Bate, John Keats, p.405.
- 28 Shores of Darkness, pp.135-162.
- 29 The Visionary Company, p.388.
- 30 Poetical Works, pp.191-214.
- 31 Finney, Keats's Poetry, II, 668.
- 32 Bush, Mythology and the Romantic Tradition, pp.113-114.
- 33 "Lamia," Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1959 ed. XIII, 628.
- 34 Bate, John Keats, p.585.
- 35 Poetical Works, p.273.

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