

## **Keats's Relationship with the Orient: Early Ambivalence and Developing Control**

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**Abstract.** This paper has attempted to trace Keats's relationship with the Orient from his first entanglement with it up to his last. It finds that such a relationship responds to Keats's epistemology and its different changes. Under Keats's empirical epistemology, that depends for knowing the world on direct and sensory experience of its forms, the poet's relationship with the Orient suffers. The Orient's physical absence from the poet's sensory perceptive powers and its supernatural associations prevent the poet from experiencing it empirically. Consequently, Keats's dependence on the Orient during this early stage of his career is inhibited. It takes a radical change in Keats's epistemology to release the poet from his early inhibition. Such change occurs when Keats replaces his empirical epistemology with a transcendental one. The new direction depends for knowing the world on an imaginative creation of its forms and objects. Phenomenal presence and sensory experience become, under its rules, unnecessary. The poet succeeds, through this change, in envisioning and embracing the Orient. His literary dependence on it increases during the last stage of his career.

Keats's relationship with the Orient both as an external source of inspiration and as an internal literary component has hardly been an object of any major critical study. Nor have critics included it as a subordinate element in the multiplicity of their critical concerns with the poet or his works. For example, the critics' interest in the development of Keats's imagination disregards the extent of his imaginative dependence on the Orient.<sup>(1)</sup> For another example, the critics' numerous investigations of

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(1) Among the critics concerned with the development of Keats's imagination are Miriam Allott, "'Isabella,' 'The Eve of St. Agnes' and 'Lamia,'" in *John Keats: A Reassessment*, ed. Kenneth Muir (Liverpool: Liverpool Univ. Press, 1969); Stuart M. Sperry, *Keats: The Poet* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1973); Jack Stillinger, *The Hoodwinking of Madeline* (Chicago: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1971); and Earl Wasserman, *The Finer Tone: Keats's Major Poems* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1953).

the poet's religious doubts and conflicts neglect his conflict with the Orient and the resulting ambivalence and uncertainties.<sup>(2)</sup> Furthermore, the invaluable analytic studies of the development of Keats's artistic powers fail to trace any line of development in his contact with the Orient.<sup>(3)</sup> The best treatment that Keats's relationship with the Orient has had is some casually scattered remarks in the critical writings concerned with Keats. This paper, therefore, intends to explore in some detail Keats's literary and psychological relationship with the Orient from the beginning of his awareness of that world's presence up to his last entanglement with it.

Such relationship falls, in the course of Keats's poetic career, into two major phases. The first phase begins in 1816 and lasts into the year 1818. It is characterized by mixed feelings of attraction to the Oriental world, a willingness to indulge in its magic, beauty, romance and exoticism for the sense of freedom these elements impart, and a simultaneous reluctance to do. The second phase lasts till the end of his career. It finds the poet abandoning his earlier reluctance and allowing the Orient, instead, a relaxed presence in his writings.

These two phases in Keats's involvement with the Orient correspond in time sequence to two main epistemological directions in his career. The first direction is essentially empirical in nature for it depends, for knowing the world, on powerful responses to its external forms as they submit themselves to the poet's sensory perceptive powers. Finding the poet torn between his desire to identify with the Orient and his reluctance to give himself up to it, this empirical epistemology resolves the tension by inhibiting Keats's desire for identification; for it demands that the poet should know and experience the Orient empirically in order to be able to identify with it. The Orient's physical absence and its fantastic nature make the compliance with this empirical demand impossible. The desire for identification changes to a state of intellectual speculation on the Orient during this first phase of Keats's involvement with the Orient.

Significantly, this empirical direction in Keats's consciousness yields, towards the end of Keats's career, to an imaginative response that depends, for knowing the world, on the creation of objects and forms that do not expose themselves to the poet's immediate observation. This epistemological shift releases the poet's engagement with the Orient from earlier inhibitions. Identification, even with its fantastic and magical powers, ceases, under its influence, to be a problem.

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(2) For a biographically-oriented study of Keats's religious conflicts see Robert Rayan, *Keats: The Religious Sense* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1976).

(3) A good example of this kind of critical investigation is Judy Little, *Keats as a Narrative Poet: A Test of Invention* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1975).

Keats's earliest attraction to the Orient surfaces in a poem he addresses to his sister-in-law, Georgiana Augusta Wylie when he expresses deep admiration of Georgiana's dark beauty.<sup>(4)</sup> Describing her dark eyebrows he writes of how

In a dainty bend they lie,  
Like to streaks across the sky.  
Or the feathers from a crow,  
Fallen on a bed of snow.

(Lines 9–12)

The admiration also embraces her dark hair:

Of thy dark hair that extends  
Into many graceful bends:  
.....  
With a glossy waviness;  
Full, and round like globes that rise  
From the censer to the skies  
Through sunny air.

(13–23)

Through its resemblance with incense in sunny atmosphere, the Oriental associations of Georgiana's dark beauty acquire sacred associations. This sacred beauty becomes more explicitly connected with the Orient when the poem moves on to speculate on the possibility of granting Georgiana Greek connections:

Couldst thou wish for lineage higher  
Than twin sister of Thalia  
At least for ever, evermore,  
Will I call the Graces four.

(37–40)

Georgiana's dark beauty qualifies her for high Oriental connections. These connections are highly placed as to become the best reward for such beauty. Keats reverently regards Oriental beauty and generously confers it on people in his world to whom he is deeply attached. He thus discloses that he has no reservations either in accepting this beauty, or in adopting it for literary purposes.

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(4) The title of the poem as provided by Keats is "To..." Editors have supplied the connection with Georgiana. The poem opens with the line: "HADST thou lived in days of old." See John Keats, *The Complete Works of John Keats*, ed. H. Buxton Forman (1900; rpt., 5 vols, New York: AMS, 1970). All references to Keats's poems, letters and notes depend on this book and will appear in the text.

This attitude of total acceptance of Oriental beauty for inspirational purposes is simultaneously coupled with the contrary state of rejecting it.<sup>(5)</sup> In a sonnet he addresses to his friend J.H. Reynolds, Keats opposes that friend's desire to introduce an Oriental source of inspiration into the familiar Occidental ones. Reynolds' wish surfaces when he writes:

Why should not tresses dusk, that are so fair  
On the live brow, have an eternal spell  
In poesy? – dark eyes are dearer far  
Than orbs that mock the hyacinthine bell.<sup>(6)</sup>

In his opposing sonnet to Reynolds, Keats subtly undermines his friend's Oriental fantasies by insinuating the viability of native beauty for literary and inspirational purposes. Blue color, as it differs from black, becomes his tool of subtle opposition. He begins by asserting its cosmic presence, for "Tis the life of heaven," and of waters as well (1,5). He also endows it with universal powers by claiming that ocean: "and all its vassal streams, pools numberless,/May rage, and foam, and fret, but never can/Subside, if not to dark blue nativeness" (6–8).

Because of its inherent presence in cosmic objects and its ability to exercise power and control over natural elements, the color blue cannot be denied significant function in more particularized forms of existence. Keats, therefore, moves to assert the value of the subtle shades that the color assumes in less cosmic natural objects. He professes that the color exists "as a mere shadow" with "strange powers" in many flowers such as the forget-me-nots, the bluebells and the violets (9–13). He also claims that it becomes most powerful when inhabiting human eyes, a native form of its cosmic presence: "But how great,/When in an eye thou art, alive with fate!" (13,14). In this native form of a predominant color, Keats expresses personal and emotional involvement; he seems to be in love with blue eyes that control his fate and inspire him. He thus rounds up his opposition to Reynold's quest of Oriental beauty by overvaluing native beauty, embodied in blue eyes, against Oriental charms.

Though subtly implied in the previous sonnet, Keats's rejection of Oriental beauty, and his embracing of native objects for literary inspiration, become more overt in the opening lines of Book IV of his "Endymion," when he writes:

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(5) The attitude of rejection is simultaneous with acceptance because Keats publishes the poem to Georgiana together with "Endymion," a poem in which his rejection of the Orient is very powerfully and explicitly stated.

(6) See the footnote to Keats's sonnet "To J.H. Reynolds" in Forman's edition, vol. 2, p. 198.



Muse of my native land! loftiest Muse!  
 O first-born on the mountains! by the hues  
 Of heaven on the spiritual air begot:  
 Long didst thou sit alone in northern grot,  
 While yet our England was a wolfish den;  
 Before our forests heard the talk of men;  
 .....  
 There came an eastern voice of solemn mood:  
 Yet wast thou patient. Then sang forth the Nine,  
 Apollo's garland: – yet didst thou divine  
 Such home-bred glory, that they cry'd in vain,  
 "Come hither, Sister of the Island!" Plain  
 Spake fair Ausonia. . .  
 still didst thou betake  
 Thee to thy native hopes.

(1–17)

Keats's attitude towards the Oriental source of literary inspiration is one of reluctance to listen to its summons. As in the opposing sonnet to Reynolds, the attitude seems motivated by a willingness to preserve native sources for inspirational purposes.

However, neither this attitude of powerful rejection of Oriental sources of inspiration nor the other one of total acceptance of Oriental elements is to be taken as final or absolute. Each remains part of one complex response to the Orient. The nature of this response is first discernible in Keats's repeated polarization of native objects (blue eyes, northern grotts, wolfish dens) against Oriental elements (black eyes, dark hair, mythical figures) which suggests an identity conflict in Keats's consciousness. The poet seems to conceive of the Orient as a different otherness that threatens self-preservation. Therefore, despite his attraction to it, and the implicit desire to identify with its elements, he seems quite reluctant to do so.

This ambivalent attitude becomes more forcefully evident in Keats's frequent attempts to domesticate the Orient by endowing it with Occidental qualities. Such attempts indicate that Keats wishes to remove the threatening differences in the Orient before identifying with its elements. Among these attempts comes Keats's domestication of an Oriental anecdote in a letter he sends to Jane and Mariane Reynolds concerning a person called "Tamer" who

sold a certain camel called Peter to the overseer of the Babel Sky works, he thus spake, adjusting his cravat round the tip of his chin – "My dear Ten-story-up-in-air! This here Beast, though I say it as shouldn't say't, not only has the power of subsisting 40 days and 40 nights without fire and candle but he can sing – Here

I have in my Pocket a Certificate from Signor Nicolini of the King's Theatre; a certificate to this effect. (5 Sept. 1817)

Though appearing in an Oriental setting and owned by an Arab called Tamer, the camel has an English name and is renowned for singing in British theatres. His owner, Tamer, also undergoes some domestication for he is dressed in a European outfit, adjusting a cravat around his neck. The domestication of both camel and owner allows Keats to indulge in charming Oriental anecdotes and simultaneously reassures him that the act will not severely negate his self-preserving instincts.

Nevertheless, Keats continues to respond ambivalently to the Orient. His ambivalence surfaces in the ironic tone that often accompanies the processes of domestication and discloses Keats's uncertainties about their effect. Such a tone, for instance, envelops Keats's handling of the camel episode; for he introduces it in what appears to be a light, humorous and self-ridiculing attitude, and soon after discloses serious, self-assertive purposes.

Prior to the introduction of the Oriental anecdote Keats, in humorous boastfulness, writes: "I will unbar the gates of my pride and let my condescension stalk forth like a Ghost at a circus." His humorously alleged condescension rests in playing the role of an instructor to the two Reynolds sisters who are presumably too unlearned to respond to his wealth of knowledge with proper understanding. Obviously, Keats means to be entertaining to the two girls when claiming superiority. He achieves his purpose by ridiculing himself and his knowledge of Oriental tales.

However, the humor has an ironic disclosure. The poet's modest self-denial has a great amount of self-assertion. It materializes when he clarifies his purpose for introducing the Oriental episode:

Now the long and short is this — that is by comparison — for a long day may be a short year... But let us refresh ourself from this depth of thinking, and turn to some innocent jocularly.

Despite the jocular tone of the episode, and the implicit self-denial, Keats admits that he is serious, for there is "depth of thinking" and the humor is far from innocent. While presumably using such humor for entertaining the two girls, he actually exploits it for self-assertiveness; by arguing for the relativity of facts, Keats figures as a clever instructor for the two sisters. Ironically, the Oriental anecdote becomes his tool of self-assertiveness though earlier claimed to be an occasion for self-ridicule. Keats's attempt to disguise his real feelings towards the Orient points out the ambivalence in his involvement with the Orient. He seems reluctant to admit the real value

of acquiring Oriental knowledge, though depending on such knowledge to assert his own importance. Significantly, his reluctance continues to press Keats even though he domesticates the Orient. The persistence discloses the intensity of his self-preserving feelings during his early confrontation with the Orient.

These feelings become more intense when the desire to identify with the Orient reminds the poet of the limitation of his imagination. Rather than reassuring the poet of the continuation of his existence, the failure to comply with the desire to identify with the Orient generates a feeling of helplessness that threatens self-preservation. Paradoxically, both the desire to identify with the Orient and the failure to do so become a threat to Keats's self-preservation.

Keats's failure to identify with the Orient becomes inevitable under the influence of his empirical epistemology that depends, for knowing the world, on direct and sensory experience of its forms and objects. Faced with the Orient's geographical remoteness and its fantastic nature, the poet's epistemology makes identification with the Orient impossible.

Keats's empirical epistemology has many manifestations in his letters. One is worth nothing because it reflects his constant need to identify with forms and objects outside the province of self. It occurs in a letter the poet sends to Benjamin Bailey:

nothing startles me beyond the moment. The setting Sun will always set me to rights, and if a sparrow come [sic] before my window, I take part in its existence and pick about the gravel. (22 Nov. 1817)

The poet emphatically asserts that his capacity to respond to external reality limits itself to objects that submit themselves to his sensory perceptive powers. Only such objects can induce him to an intense involvement in their presence and an imaginative participation in their activities.<sup>(7)</sup> Hence, it becomes obvious that all objects that do not fall under his immediate observation fail to inspire him into similar intensity. Their unperceived presence usually has very little effect on Keats's imagination.

Keats's desire to identify with the Orient suffers from this empirical epistemology. The Orient's geographical remoteness removes it from the poet's sensory observation and, in consequence, from the sphere of his capacity for identification. This claim is supportable in the light of Keats's sonnet "To the Nile," in which the poet's

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(7) This opinion I share with Keats's critics. James L. Jones, *Adams Dream: Mythic Consciousness in Keats and Yeats* (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1975), p. 39, writes of how "Keats follows Shakespeare's method," and "'passes into all forms' through empathy and his Chamilion nature." My intention, however, is to indicate how this capacity in Keats affects his relationship with the Orient.

desire to identify with the Oriental region begins in speculation on its unperceived presence and ends in an inability to invoke that presence.

The sonnet opens by stating the poet's epistemological dilemma. The poet finds himself posed between two possible, seemingly contradictory, conceptions of the Oriental region. On the one hand, Keats assumes the land to be "fruitful" since it has been "Nurse of swart nations since the world began." On the other hand, he pre-conceives of the region as a desert and wishes to find an explanation for its two contradictory aspects: "Art thou so fruitful? or dost thou beguile/ Such men to honour thee" (6,7).

The epistemological dilemma posed by the Orient's physical absence seeks solution. James Jones claims that Keats finds reconciliation in imagining green rushes by the river's banks and small green isles, without denying its desert-like existence.<sup>(8)</sup> The point that the critic misses is the manner in which Keats's attempted reconciliation takes place and the denial it involves. Keats initiates the desired reconciliation by projecting his own native conceptions of river areas onto the Oriental region:

'Tis ignorance that makes a barren waste  
Of all beyond itself, thou dost bedew  
Green rushes like our rivers, and dost taste  
The pleasant sun-rise, green isles hast thou too,  
And to the sea as happily dost haste.

(10-14)

The scene virtually changes to an English one on a sunny day. The green rushes and islands are professedly English features and the eventual union with the sea is no less so. The reconciliation thus involves a denial of the region's native characteristics not an invocation of their presence.

Keats's failure to invoke the Oriental region ends in an inability to identify with its elements. The imposition of his native identity on the Orient is an experience that differs radically from the intense participation in the Sparrow's activity. While in the Sparrow's case Keats loses his identity, in the river's case he asserts it. The poet's powerful response to immediate objects of perception (his native river banks in this case) overshadows his ability to successfully conjure objects not directly exposed to his senses. Keats's empirical epistemology, confronted with the Orient's physical absence, makes the desired identification with the Orient very difficult to attain.

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(8) Jones, p. 176.



This failure to invoke the Orient and to identify with it is more likely to occur when the relationship with the Orient involves a fantastic aspect of that world, for Keats's empirical epistemology finds it even more difficult to envision untangible elements and experiences. This difficulty becomes once obvious in a letter Keats sends to Mrs. Wylie, George's mother-in-law, when he hears during his Scottish tour that she is concerned about his safety, having read in a newspaper about a man falling over a Scottish precipice and afraid it may have been Keats. Keats's assuring letter to Mrs. Wylie takes the following jocular, disbelieving turn:

If it was me, I did it in a dream, or in some magic interval between the first and second cup of tea; which is nothing extra-ordinary when we hear that Mahomet, in getting out of bed, upset a jug of water, and, whilst it was falling, took a fortnight's trip, as it seemed, to Heaven; yet was back in time to save one drop of water being spilt. (6 Aug. 1818)

The humor lies in Keats's decision to deny the deadly accident by speculating on the possibility of its occurrence to himself in a fantastic way. The Oriental element becomes Keats's tool of jocular denial. The comedy, indeed, becomes more evident when Keats carries the joke to its climatic limits humorously asserting that "No romance lady could resist me ... being tumbled over a precipice into the sea – oh! it would make my fortune." Keats links the fantastic element in human experience, and in the Orient, with the concept of romance and responds to them all in a jocular form of disbelief and distrust.

However, Keats's humor has an ironic implication. It lies in his simultaneous desire to experience the fantastic aspects of romance while jocularly denying its credibility. This desire materializes towards the end of the letter when Keats, in a moment of sincerity in which he puts aside disguise, admits:

Sometimes when I am rather tired I lean rather languishingly on a rock, and long for some famous beauty to get down from her Palfrey in passing, approach me, with – her saddle-bags, and give me – a dozen or two capital roast-beef sandwiches.

The "Beauty" that Keats longs to encounter exists in romances and fairy tales with their no-less-fantastic settings than the one in which the prophet's transcendence has taken place. The jocular disbelief in the fantastic aspect of the Oriental episode turns out to be a disguise. The poet longs to identify with the prophet's transcendence as much as he yearns to experience the sudden and unjustifiable appearance of the "Beauty" of fairy tales. The disguise discloses some tension in relation to his desire.

The tension is occasioned by the poet's empirical epistemology that makes the desired identification impossible to attain. Such a limitation surfaces in Keats's



attempt to domesticate the "Beauty" of fairy tales. He dreams of receiving nourishment from her hand and of satisfying ordinary and sensuous needs of daily life. The poet's imagination, under pressures from his empirical epistemology, fails to prolong its identification with fantastic objects and experiences. The prophet's superhuman trip to heaven falls into Keats's category of the fantastic. The poet cannot identify with it even though he longs to. His jocular distrusts in the possibility of its occurrence turns out to be a means of resisting its unattainable charms. Keats's self-preserving instincts, his apprehension at disclosing his own limitation, are alarmed at a possible failure of imagination and disguise themselves in the garb of jocular denial.

This guarded attitude from fantastic elements and experiences has its parallel in Keats's epistemological statements. Speculating on the function of what he calls the "simple" and the "complex" mind, Keats shows a suspicion of the kind of activity that the first involves and an inclination to indulge in the workings of the second. Calling the "simple" mind "imaginative," Keats rhetorically questions his friend Benjamin Bailey, in a letter, about its function: "do you remember," when placed under its influence, "forming to yourself the singer's face-more beautiful than it was" (22 Nov. 1817). Keats obviously means to imply that the "simple" mind is highly imaginative and, hence, deceptive. Furthermore, he also enforces that it is endlessly subjective for it finds "its rewards in the repetition of its own silent working coming continually on the Spirit with a fine suddenness."

Finding such purely imaginative activity incompatible with his concern for ordinary life experience, Keats advocates the role of the "complex" mind, defining it in the same letter to Bailey as

One that is imaginative, and at the same time careful of the fruits, – who would exist partly on Sensation, partly on thought . . . therefore it is necessary to your eternal happiness that you not only drink this old Wine of Heaven . . . but also increase in knowledge, and know all things.

Imaginative responses and creations uncontrolled by reflective processes can become misleading. The deceptive activity of the "simple" mind, therefore, depends on the more objective attitude of the "complex" one. The latter establishes connections between imagination and tangible reality. The ultimate result is a growth in knowledge, a perception of external objects in their objective and informative context, replacing simple imaginative soarings.

Keats's suspicion of the delusions that reside in the intuitive and unreflective responses of the imagination to the world intensifies his earlier reluctance to identify with the Orient. The fantastic aspects of that world and its geographical remoteness,

apart from the threat of imaginative failure that they carry, also present a large temptation to indulge in the "imaginative" responses of the "simple" mind at the expense of mature mental reflection on the real nature of the Orient. This temptation alerts the "complex" mind in Keats and induces him to approach the Orient as an object of knowledge, never to indulge it through primitive sensation and always to subjugate its different manifestations to his mental faculties, and intellectualizing processes.

Keats's new attitude begins to take effect in his poem "Modern Love" where he manages to disregard his intuitive attraction to the Orient completely and to subjugate the feeling to a rationalizing attitude whereby he can evaluate the Orient and study the role it plays in his world and the effect it leaves on his cultural setting. In this poem, Keats opposes sentimental indulgence of Oriental tales of love in his society and the resultant tendency of young people to idealize, and blindly imitate, the materialistic and emotional extravagances of these tales. He begins by ridiculing the phenomenon:

That silly youth doth think to make itself  
Divine by loving, and goes on  
Yawning and doting a whole summer long,  
Till Miss's comb is made a pearl tiara,  
.....  
Then Cleopatra lives at number seven,  
And Antony resides in Brunswick Square.

(4-11)

The ridicule soon becomes an overt disapproval of such blind practices especially because they are becoming too common in his own society:

Fools! if some passions high have warm'd the world  
It is no reason why such agonies  
Should be more common than the growth of weeds.  
Fools! make me whole again that weighty pearl  
The Queen of Egypt melted, and I'll say  
That ye may love in spite of beaver hats.

(11-16)

Keats conceives of Cleopatra's exaggerated passion for Antony as destructive. He also condemns her luxurious life because it has facilitated the destructive workings of her passion (she can hide the poison in her jewel and release it at will). Young people, therefore, should avoid indiscreet imitation of similar love relationships. Their emotional involvements, Keats recommends, should maintain ordinary native hues.

This tendency to resist and to criticize Oriental anecdotes and their sentimental reception in his culture discloses not only Keats's ability to subjugate the Orient to his reflective faculties and rationalizing processes, but also a growing capacity to maintain an emotional distance from its elements. For the first time since his opposition to Reynolds, Keats finds a successful way to resist his own attraction to the Orient.

This newly developed capacity persists even when Keats admits, rather than denies, his attraction to the Orient. The attitude surfaces in his sonnet "To John Hamilton Reynolds" when Keats's desire to experience emotionally charged moments in life results in discovering the moments of arrival from the Orient as one of them: "O to arrive each Monday morn from Ind!/ To land each Tuesday from the rich Levant!/ In little time a host of joys to bind" (9-11).<sup>(9)</sup> However, rather than imagining after the beauty and luxury of the Orient, Keats turns to contemplate the moments of arrival from that world, their emotional intensity and the pleasure they afford. This ability to ignore Oriental charms for a scrutiny of their psychological and cultural effects emphasizes both the distance that Keats maintains from those charms, and his growing intellectual control over his Oriental responses.

Significantly, both intellectual control and emotional distance persist even in the presence of the fantastic aspects of the Orient. For example, his admiration of the romance element in the Oriental tales Keats subjugates to deeper admiration of Milton's genius:

We have read the *Arabian Nights* and hear there are thousands of those sort of Romances lost — we imagine after them — but not their realities if we had them nor our fancies in their strength can go further than . . .

Milton's fanciful lines in *Paradise Lost* (Notes on *PL*). His rationally analytic tone discloses Keats's ability to control his attraction to the fantastic in the Orient. Such tone differs from his jocular denial of the prophet's transcendence. The earlier tension disappears on this occasion.

The emotional distance that Keat wishes for and succeeds in maintaining between himself and the Orient and the rational manner in which he approaches that world define the role that the Oriental element plays in his writings during this first phase of his engagement with the Orient. While barring the possibility of powerful reliance of the poet's imagination on Oriental elements, the distance also prevents the Orient from becoming a major poetic theme with Keats, reducing its function in

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(9) The sonnet open with the lines: "O that a week could be an age, and we/Felt parting and warm meeting every week."

his writings to a metaphoric one. On the Orient as a metaphor the poet depends to enrich his meaning or enforce his argument without powerful emotional or imaginative indulgence.

This controlled and limited dependence on the Oriental element surfaces in the comparisons the poet draws and the affinities he discovers between objects in his world and others in the Orient. He speaks, for example, of how it is possible to "find out resemblances between waves and camels" (*To Jane and Mariane Reynolds*, 5 Sep. 1817). He also associates the lovers' sweet kisses in "Endymion" with "nectarous camel-draughts" (479; bk. 3). The heroes in some of his narrative poems resemble figures in Oriental tales. Endymion, for instance, fixed in a trance, seems to the poet "Aye, even as dead-still as a marble man,/Frozen in that old tale Arabian" (405,6; bk. 1). These, and other similar similes and metaphors remain simple, and undeveloped, a fact that points out the restraint of Keats's imagination when handling Oriental elements. The restraint is also emotional, for Keats attaches no personal feeling or individual expression to these similes and metaphors. They remain, during this first phase of his involvement with the Orient, superficial and conventional. Therefore, while reflecting Keats's decision to resolve his ambivalence towards the Orient in intellectual control, the poet's metaphoric manipulation of Oriental elements also discloses an inhibition in his imagination and feelings toward the Orient.

This inhibition is neither final nor absolute, for towards the end of the year 1818, Keats's epistemology begins to undergo some changes and, hence, to affect his relationship with the Orient.<sup>(10)</sup> The change relates to the activity of the imagination that Keats has previously conceived in terms of strong relish of concrete reality (evident in his identification with the sparrow). The powerful response to concrete and immediate objects of perception disappears and allows for a new principle to be introduced:

We with our bodily eyes see but the fashion and Manners of one country for one age — and then we die. Now to me manners and customs long since passed whether among the Babylonians or the Bactrians are as real, or even more real than those among which I now live. My thoughts have turned lately this way (*To George and Georgiana Keats* 1818-19).<sup>(11)</sup>

Keats begins to discern a limitation in his earlier epistemological direction. He suspects that his past powerful response to immediate objects of perception has de-

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(10) Critics have noticed Keats's change in attitude that began in 1818. See Robert Rayan for an example.

(11) The change in Keats's epistemology is far from sudden. For its gradual revelation see Keats's letter to Richard Woodhouse of 27 Oct. 1818.



prived him of the privilege of living — no matter how imaginatively so — other civilizations. Therefore, he decides to release his imagination from its old practices and to replace them with imaginative soarings over and creations of unperceived realms. Significantly, he connects the release of his powers of the imagination with the Orient; it is the manners and customs of the Babylonians that he chooses to exemplify when he speaks of these powers. The choice indicates the increasing imaginative dependence that he intends to place on Oriental sources of inspiration.

The manifestations of this new attitude materialize most forcefully in the writings of the year 1819, when Keats not only embraces the Orient without resistance, but also draws heavily on its fantastic aspects and magical powers, a side that he has been reluctant to take in. Writing to Fanny Brawne, the girl of his heart and dreams, in July of that year, Keats uses Oriental magic to express his deep suffering in Fanny's love. He tells Fanny an Oriental tale of a group of melancholy men who

Through a series of adventures each one of them by turns reach [sic] some gardens of paradise where they meet with a most enchanting Lady; and just as they are going to embrace her, she bids them shut their eyes — they shut them — and on opening their eyes again find themselves descending to the earth in a magic basket. The remembrance of this lady and their delights lost beyond all recovery render them melancholy ever after. How I applied this to you, my dear; how I palpitated at it; how the certainty that you were in the same world with myself, and though as beautiful, not so talismanic as that lady.  
(15 July 1819)

While refusing earlier to be inspired by Oriental beauty, Keats accepts it now for a source of inspiration. He goes in his acceptance so far as to identify the girl he loves with an Oriental seductress. Implicitly, he himself becomes identifiable with the disappointed Oriental men by experiencing equally tantalizing beauty and eventual deprivation. The identification in this case, unlike the earlier one with the prophet Mohammed, is serious in tone and free from tension and disguise. It also differs from the rational submerging of his attraction to the romance element in the *Arabian Nights* to his admiration of Milton's genius. His tone and attitude disclose that identification with the Orient has ceased to be a problem for Keats during this second phase of his engagement with the Orient.

This easeful but powerful form of reconciliation with the Orient has become possible under Keats's new epistemological changes. By releasing Keats from his adherence to immediate objects of perception, his new epistemology allows the poet's imagination free soarings over Oriental realms, including the magical and the fantastic ones. Such soarings actually release the poet from his earlier apprehensions at the limitation and the possible failure of his imagination. Identification with the



beauty and magical features of the Orient is no longer a threat to Keats's self-preserving instincts.

The release of Keats's power of the imagination from the sensory world is not the sole source of security in his undisturbed identification with the Orient. The poet's lately acquired rationalizing attitude toward the Orient, his developing intellectual control over his Oriental responses and the emotional distance he maintains between himself and the Orient all persist, despite the change in epistemology. Their persistence contributes to Keats's security in identification. His self-preserving fear of the "other" vanishes at their introduction to his consciousness.

This claim is supportable in the light of the restraint Keats places on Fanny's identification with the Oriental woman in the letter. In his extended Oriental metaphor the poet is careful not to identify Fanny with the "talismanic" side of the Oriental woman. They are identical only in as far as their striking beauty and tantalizing presence go. This restraint persists even though Keats adopts the magical framework of the Oriental tale and allows himself, metaphorically, to go up to heaven and to be driven back to earth in a magical basket. His restraint suggests an act of deliberation in the process of identifying with Oriental elements. This deliberation is also evident in Keats's identification with the Oriental men, for it remains metaphoric; his psychological state that alternates between pleasure and pain in Fanny's love resembles their heavenward and earthward movements. Therefore, despite their identification with Oriental figures, neither Keats nor Fanny lose their identities in the magical features of the Orient. Keats's identification with the Orient submits to his rationalizing attitude and intellectual control.

This controlled and rationalized identification with the Orient persists in Keats's late writings. It takes the form of powerful metaphoric and artistic reliance on the Oriental element without intense indulgence in its captivating presence. The magical powers of the Orient, for example, become intricately connected with the poet's major thematic concerns. His narrative poems, for another example, reach their climactic points through the interference of Oriental magic. His characters' emotional fulfillments take place in Oriental settings. This powerful form of metaphoric and artistic reliance, unprecedented as it is in Keats's writings, allows the poet to identify with the Orient without disturbing his self-preserving feelings. Two major poems of the year 1818, "The Eve of St. Agnes," and "Lamia" exemplify Keats's powerful, but controlled, identification with the Oriental element for a successful presentation of his main theme.

The theme of "The Eve of St. Agnes" revolves around the poet's desire to realize his visionary dreams of perfect love and union in the world of palpable reality. He discerns a possibility for this realization in Madeline's wish to catch a glimpse of her future husband in her dream, on St. Agnes eve. Keats grants her this wish, but also brings Porphyro into her chamber, thus giving the dream-image a physical counterpart. In the physical consummation that succeeds Porphyro's appearance in Madeline's chamber, Keats manages to bring the two worlds of visionary dreams and palpable reality together.

For this union Keats sets up an Oriental atmosphere. Prior to the moment of physical consummation Keats has Porphyro prepare an Oriental feast. Though surrounded by dangerous circumstances — for Porphyro has forced his entry into his enemy's castle when questing Madeline's love — Porphyro finds it necessary to have the feast ready before he wakes Madeline up to the reality of her dream:

And still she slept an azure-lidded sleep,  
In blanch'd linen, smooth and lavender'd  
While he from the closet brought a heap  
Of candied apple, quince, and plum, and gourd;  
With jellies soother than the creamy curd,  
And lucent syrups, tinct with cinnamon;  
Manna and dates, in argosy transferr'd  
From Fez; and spiced dainties, every one,  
From silken Samarcand, to cedar'd Lebanon.

(St. 30)

The lovers' physical fulfillment immediately follows the preparation of the Oriental meal which suggests that such fulfillment has become possible in an Oriental atmosphere. And since this act of fulfillment represents the climactic point in Keats's movement towards the realization of visionary dreams on palpably real grounds, its occurrence in an Oriental atmosphere discloses the poet's increasing imaginative and artistic reliance on the Oriental element.

This claim is supportable in the light of a similar emotional fulfillment in "Lamia" where Keats has the lovers realize their dream not only in an Oriental setting, but also in the midst of Oriental magic.<sup>(12)</sup> The dream of Lamia and Lycius begins at the suburbs of his city where they meet for the first time, at Lamia's conni-

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(12) Critics have frequently commented on Keats's reliance on the element of magic in his late poems. See Judy Little's discussion of "The Eve of St. Agnes" and "Lamia." Jack Stillinger's comment on Porphyro is also worth looking at.

vance and fall in love. On arriving in the city they find a magical Oriental palace waiting for their indulgence:

the ample span  
Of the wide doors disclos'd a place unknown  
Sometime to any, but those two alone,  
And a few Persian mutes, who that same year  
Were seen about the markets: none knew where  
They could inhabit, the most curious  
Were foil'd who watch'd to trace them to their house.

(387-93; pt. 2)

Through its association with mysterious Persian slaves Lamia's palace begins to acquire Oriental and magical connections. Such connections Keats enforces when he asserts that the palace has had no existence in the neighborhood prior to the lovers' arrival at its portal. The inhabitants of the city respond to its sudden appearance in wonder;

for they knew the street,  
Remember'd it from childhood all complete  
Without a gap, yet ne'er before had seen  
That royal porch, that high-built fair demesne.

(152-5; pt. 2)

In this palace that turns out to be of Lamia's own ordination their love reaches fulfillment, and Keats realizes his visionary dream of perfect love and union once again on Oriental grounds.

Nevertheless, the reliance on the Oriental element is more of a deliberate and an artistic process than of an intuitive and uncontrolled identification. As he drives the narrative to its climax, Keats intensifies the palace's magical and Oriental associations. This final phase in the tale is initiated by Lycius' decision to give his relationship with Lamia a socially acceptable form instead of mere pleasurable indulgences. With this purpose in mind, he leaves Lamia and goes out to invite his friends to their wedding. Left to her own sources, Lamia goes about setting up a pavilion and banquet hall for the wedding:

She did so, but 'tis doubtful how and whence  
Came, and who were here subtle servitors.  
About the halls, and to and from the doors,  
There was a noise of wings.

(117-9; pt. 2)

The result of this magical effort is an addition of an Oriental pavilion to Lamia's magical palace, for the Pavilion turns out to be of

Fresh carv'd cedar mimicking a glade  
Of palm and plantain, met from either side,  
.....  
Two palms and then two plantains, and soon,  
From either side their stems branch'd one to one.

(125-9; pt. 2)

Although the assorted Oriental plants, the palms and the plantains, do not actually appear in structuring the pavilion, for carved cedars merely create an illusion of their presence, the instrument of this illusion, the cedar trees, is no less Oriental, in Keats's consciousness, than the palms and the plantains are. Keats associates cedar trees in "The Eve of St. Agnes" with Lebanon. Lamia's response to Lycius' desire to announce their union is to add an Oriental pavilion to her magical palace.

Having "Mission'd her viewless servants" to do so, Lamia ordains exotic Oriental touches to the place. Among these additions occurs "A censer fed with myrrh and spiced wood," filling the air with splendor and sweet perfume reminiscent of Oriental atmospheres. Further exotic additions also occur when Lamia's slaves indulge the wedding guests in a typical Oriental luxury:

When in an antichamber every guest  
Had felt the cold full sponge to pleasure press'd  
By ministering slaves, upon his hand and feet,  
And fragrant oils with ceremony meet  
Pour'd on his hair.

(191-5; pt. 2)

In this Oriental atmosphere that he sets up by using Lamia, her palace, her slaves and her magical powers Keats brings both action and emotional entanglement to their crisis. Lamia's Oriental pavilion witnesses her ultimate separation from Lycius. Apollonius, Lycius' guide and instructor, makes his appearance among the guests and discloses Lamia's superhuman identity. The disclosure causes her to wither away from human eyes. At losing her, Lycius dies a human death, and her Oriental palace and pavilion disappear. Keats sets up this climactic and eventful moment in an intense Oriental atmosphere revealing how powerful his artistic manipulation of the Oriental element has grown. He can use it for different and contradictory purposes, to envision union and separation, fulfillment and disruption.

lates its presence to assert the vision's transitory nature; Lamia's Oriental palace witnesses her fulfillment with Lycius and her separation from him. Keats's manipulation of the Oriental element for different, and sometime contradictory, purposes discloses not only his increasing imaginative dependence on it, but also the persistence of his lately developed control. Keats's attraction to the Orient survives his reluctance to identify with it but only as a controlled artistic process.



