

The Meaning of the Orient in Keats's Consciousness: Initial Separateness and Ultimate Fusion

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(Received 2/8/1409; accepted 18/5/1410)

Abstract. This study aims at uncovering the meaning of the Orient in Keats's consciousness as it surfaces in his writings. The investigation discovers more than one Orient in Keats's works. There is a historical, a fictional, and a political Orient. This variety is a direct result of Keats's exposure to different sources of knowledge about the Orient. Historical sources, for example, attach to the Orient ancient wisdom and architectural greatness. The poet's readings of Oriental tales, on the other hand, create in his mind an image of the Orient as an exotic land of magic, beauty, romance, heroic figures and deeds. Moreover, his exposure to contemporary economic and colonial interest in India creates an image of the Orient as a wealthy land of jewels and spices.

The three Oriental realms do not stand separate in Keats's consciousness. They amalgamate into a single whole. The process of amalgamation allows fictional elements in Keats's consciousness to tower above historical ones. History loses shape, force, and importance. All sense of distinction between the different Oriental realms disappears. A large and fluid concept of the Orient finds its way into Keats's consciousness. Geographically, his Orient extends from India as far West as the Atlantic Ocean. Historically, it begins with the First Man and moves up to the poet's own times. And culturally, it is the exotic and wealthy land of magic, beauty, romance, and heroism.

Into Keats's large and fluid concept of the Orient Greece also falls. Greece's geographic proximity to the Mediterranean countries, its past military, commercial and cultural contacts with these countries and the correspondance of the elements of magic, beauty, romance and heroism in Greek myths to these elements in the Orient allow Greece to become part of the Orient in Keats's consciousness. However, the poet's closer and stronger knowledge of Greece, as compared with his scanty and inaccurate knowledge of the Orient, gives Greece a central position among the different Oriental realms in his consciousness. This conception of Greece as a center of a Great Oriental civilization remains unprecedented among the Western European writers, who commonly conceive of Greece as the source and the origin of their different Western civilizations.

Keats's interest in the Orient and the place it occupies in his writings are much wider in scope and deeper in significance than critics and editors of Keats's works have

commonly recognized. While merely observing, and casually commenting on the Orient's presence in the poet's writings, critics have hardly thought it worth studying in detail. The best they can do with it is either to attempt the tracing of Oriental references to their sources, or to use the Orient's presence in the poet's writings to explain or justify some pre-conceived notions about his character or literary product. H. Buxton Forman, for example, finds it sufficient to attribute Keats's tendency towards exaggerated expression of sentiment to his reading of Oriental tales: "We must be content to take with it the prevalent temperament of the lovers in Oriental romances and tales, who faint as a matter of course under due provocation."⁽¹⁾

David Perkins, for another example, senses in the presence of the Oriental element in Keats's poem "The Eve of St. Agnes," echoes of *Romeo and Juliet*, the novels of Ann Radcliffe, and the *Arabian Nights*, and other works.⁽²⁾ Another critic, Jack Stillinger, though more concerned with specifics in the same poem than Perkins, does not go beyond speculating: "there is more than a suggestion of pagan sensuality in the strange affair of eastern luxuries" that the protagonist in the poem heaps in the heroine's chamber "as if by magic."⁽³⁾

While dismissing the Oriental element in Keats's writings in this general and other similar manners, critics have neglected its real meaning in the poet's consciousness. My aim in this study is to remedy such neglect by exploring Keats's concept of the Orient as it inhabits the consciousness that permeates his poems, letters, critical notes and commentaries.

The word "consciousness" takes on, in this article, a sense identical with that which the phenomenological critics of the "Geneva School" of criticism have committed themselves to. The word's most usual sense that indicates a state of subjective awareness of an external or internal state or fact gives way to consciousness as a mental receptacle that contains "words, images and ideas" existing in a state of constant activity.⁽⁴⁾ This meaning of consciousness does not necessarily imply cognition nor awareness. Georges Poulet, a conspicuous critic among the group, discloses their exploitation of this meaning of consciousness, and distinguishes it from awareness, when he writes of "mental objects" rising up from "the depths of consciousness into the light of recognition."⁽⁵⁾

(1) H. Buxton Forman, ed., *The Complete Works of John Keats* (1900; rpt. 5 vols, New York: AMS Inc., 1970), 1, xlix.

(2) David Perkins, ed., *English Romantic Writers* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1967), p. 1173.

(3) Jack Stillinger, *The Hoodwinking of Madeline* (Chicago: U. of Illinois Press, 1971), p.79.

(4) It ought to be noted that this meaning of consciousness is not of their coining for it has its roots in modern psychology.

(5) Georges Poulet, "The Phenomenology of Reading," in *Critical Theory Since Plato*, ed. Hazard Adams (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), pp. 1213-1223.

My use of the term "consciousness" in the same sense as the phenomenological critics actually belongs to my larger adoption of their critical theory that denies a literary work autonomy from both author and reader; for it regards a literary work as an act of the author, part of the process of his consciousness, and it also assumes that literature recreates itself, during the act of reading, in the reader's consciousness. Both author and reader thus fuse into what Poulet calls a "common consciousness."⁽⁶⁾ This consciousness exists only in the text, for it is neither the author's in any personal or psychological sense, nor is it the reader's outside the text.

Under this conception of literary creation, and literary reception, phenomenological criticism directs itself towards "understanding" the nature and the processes of this "common consciousness." Its sole means for achieving this purpose, beside that of intuitive perception, are the "objective elements" of the work itself. Through examining them a critic is enabled to "attain the subjective principle" inherent in the text.⁽⁷⁾ This principle I will call in this article "Keats's consciousness" even though it is not purely Keats's but rather his and mine fused together over the objective "form" and "elements" of his text.

As it inhabits Keats's consciousness the Oriental element takes an objective form of three different sets. The first set concerns itself with the ancient cities and kingdoms of the Orient both biblical and pre-Christian such as Egypt, Babylonia, Assyria, Judea, Tyre and Numidia. The second set, on the other hand, revolves around the ancient Arab world and culture. As for the third set, it centers mainly on India and its wealth of jewels and spices.

The varied nature of the Oriental element in Keats's writings suggests the poet's exposure to different sources of knowledge about the Orient. As they invade his consciousness, historical, fictional and political pieces of information about the Orient actually create three more or less distinct Oriental realms: the ancient Oriental civilizations, the Arab world and India. These realms, however, do not always maintain their separateness in Keats's consciousness. Objective signs and elements in his literary output disclose the different Oriental realms in a state of fusion. In this fusion rests a peculiar concept of the Orient unprecedented, in some respects, in the European experience of the Orient.

The claim that the three Oriental realms inhabit Keats's consciousness in two contradictory states, of separateness and fusion, presupposes a division in the working of human consciousness. It assumes that consciousness can respond to the world

(6) Poulet, p. 1216.

(7) Ibid. p. 1221.

in two distinct stages: of perception of external forms in their exact state of being, and of fusion of received materials into new forms. Though objectionable to modern philosophical and critical views, this assumption, in Keats's case, is both legitimate and justifiable.

It is typical of modern philosophers and literary critics to assume the simultaneity of perception and creation in the act of receiving the phenomenal world. "[F]rom the moment I become a prey to what I read," writes Georges Poulet, "I begin to share the use of my consciousness" by immediately bringing his own impressions into received materials.⁽⁸⁾ Another modern thinker speaks of his own response to the world as an imposition of "an alternative reading on reality," meaning that his active response to experience does not allow received impressions an unchanged state in his consciousness.⁽⁹⁾

Contrary to this experience, Keats's contact with the world involves an initial state of passive reception that allows external objects of perception a dominance over his consciousness. To this effect Keats writes:

When I am in a room with people ... then not myself goes home to myself; but the identity of everyone in the room begins to press upon me that, I am in a very little time annihilated [Sic] ... [I]t would be the same in a Nursery of children. (To Richard Woodhouse, 27 Oct. 1818).⁽¹⁰⁾

This passive reception of external forms allows them to leave their own marked traces on the receiver's consciousness. Hence, Keats's contact with the Orient allows the diverse forms and shapes that the Orient assumes in different sources to create more than one Oriental realm in his consciousness. The process of fusing the received materials comes next in Keats's reception of the Orient. This second process results in amalgamating the three Oriental realms into a single whole. Therefore, for a thorough understanding of the meaning of the Orient in Keats's consciousness, an investigation of the various imprints introduced through Keats's passive reception of different Oriental sources becomes as necessary as an examination of the total meaning resulting from their fusion.

As it passively responds to historical and visual sources of information about the Orient, Keats's consciousness construes a historical Orient, an Orient that, though

(8) Ibid. p. 1216.

(9) E.H. Gombrich, "From Representation To Expression," in *Critical Theory Since Plato*, ed. Hazard Adams (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), pp. 1168-1175.

(10) John Keats, *The Complete Works of John Keats*, ed. H. Buxton Forman (1900; rpt., 5 vols, New York: AMS Inc., 1970). All references to Keats's poems, letters and critical notes depend on this book and will appear in the text.

not corresponding in every particular detail to a real Orient, has enough of factual truth to suggest powerful exposure to, and retention of, historical material. Keats's readings in the *Bible*, in Mavor's *Universal History* and his exposure to Egyptian pieces of sculpture in the British Museum inform him of an architectural greatness and superb wisdom among the achievements of the ancient Oriental civilizations.⁽¹¹⁾ This initial historical image in Keats's consciousness is coupled with a realization that all wisdom and monumental achievement have long passed away.

Keats's reception of the architectural greatness of the ancient cities and kingdoms of the Orient surfaces in his description of Neptune's palace in "Endymion." The palace's "proud domes," "diamond gleams" and "golden glows" are the most gracious features

of one fair palace that far far surpass'd
Even for common bulk, those olden three,
Memphis and Babylon and Nineveh.

(849-9; bk.3)

Oriental wisdom also enters Keats's consciousness and materializes when Thea's face in "Hyperion," strikes the poet as

large as that of Memphian Sphinx,
Pedestal'd haply in a palace court,
When sage look'd to Egypt for their lore.

(31-3; bk.1)

Keats's recognition of the extinction of these magnificent cultural manifestations of the Orient crystalizes in "Hyperion." On blowing his fierce breath against "the eastern gates" of his palace, Hyperion discovers signs of the ancient Egyptian civilization in the

hieroglyphics old
Which sages and keen-ey'd astrologers
Then living on the earth, with labouring thought
Won from the gaze of many centuries:
Now lost, save what we find on remnants huge
Of stone, or marble; their import gone,
Their wisdom long since fled.

(277-83; bk.1)

(11) For an accredited account of Keats's reading of these books see Robert Gittings, *John Keats* (Boston: Little Brown, 1968), p. 36. As for his exposure to Egyptian pieces of sculpture in the British Museum see Helen Darbishire, "Keats and Egypt," *Review of English Studies*, 3, No. 9 (1927), 1-11.

The extinction of ancient Oriental wisdom, in the passage, suggests an awareness of the historical distance that separates this ancient Oriental civilization from preceding and subsequent times, Keats thus discloses a sensitivity to history during his initial reception of the Orient. This historical sense in Keats's consciousness will, curiously enough, disappear in his fusion of the different Oriental realms into one world. Historical facts will prove less enticing to Keats's consciousness than fictional elements. As fact and history pass through the amalgamating processes of his consciousness they lose shape, force and importance and allow a fictional concept of the Orient a more dominant presence there.

The fictional Orient in Keats's consciousness revolves around the ancient Arab world and culture. It is fictional in the sense that it is construed through Keats's exposure to fictional, as opposed to historical, sources about the Orient. Among these sources come the *Arabian Nights*, Southey's Oriental verse-tales, Beckford's *Vathek* and Fairfax's *Jerusalem Delivered*.⁽¹²⁾ These sources create in Keats's consciousness an image of the Orient as an exotic land of magic, romance, heroism and absolute freedom from moral, physical and religious concerns.

Keats associated the Orient with romance in one of his critical commentaries on the poetry of John Milton. Praising lines of *Paradise Lost*, Keats writes:

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] Pandemonium—

“straight the doors opening” etc.

“rose like an exhalation” etc. (Notes on *PL*)

Though undermined by a deeper response to Milton's genius, Keats's attraction to the romance element in the Arabian tales is most significant because it will allow this fictional Orient precedence in his consciousness over the historical one.

The element of magic in the Arabian tales also constitutes an important part of the fictional Orient in Keats's consciousness. To this element Keats is also attracted. In a letter he sent to Fanny Brawne the poet describes his pleasure and suffering in her love in a manner that discloses his attraction to the magical Orient. He writes of “an Oriental tale of a very beautiful color.” In his narration of that tale he equates himself with a group of melancholy men who

(12) Gittings is also helpful for proofs of Keats's reading of Southey's Oriental verse-tales and Fairfax's *Jerusalem Delivered*. As for his reading of Beckford's *Vathek*, it is my assumption that Keats must have had access to it because his conception of *Vathek* corresponds to this caliph's image in Beckford's novel.

Through a series of adventure ... reach 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 ...

and sends them back to earth "in a magic basket" denied any kind of fulfillment (15 July 1819).

The poet's attraction to the magical aspects of Oriental tales has its causes in the sense of physical and spiritual freedom they impart. In describing the effect that claret has on him, for example, Keats writes in a manner that supports his claim:

The more ethereal part of it [claret] mounts into the brain, not assaulting the cerebral apartments like a bully in a bad-house ... but rather walks like Aladdin about his enchanted palace so gently that you do not feel his steps. (To George and Georgiana Keats, 24 Feb. 1819)

Aladdin's physical freedom, evident in the contrast created between his gentle movement and the bully's violence, finds through the influence of claret, a spiritual echo in Keats. Both Aladdin and Keats seem to be floating with complete freedom and utmost ease.

The association of the Orient with physical and spiritual freedom seems to release the poet from moral concerns. In a letter to John H. Reynolds, Keats narrates the event of his visit to Burns' native place and tomb. He writes of how he finds the tour guide "a great Bore with his Anecdotes" (11 July 1818). In consequence, the poet wishes "to employ Caliph Vathek to kick" the Bore. The kick is a free act of the will allowed to the despotic Vathek and denied the poet in his environment where strict moral codes govern behavior and prevent release of human passions such as anger.⁽¹³⁾

Figuring as a land of romance, magical powers and moral freedom, this part of the Orient becomes also associated in Keats's consciousness with exotic elements and experiences. In "The Fall of Hyperion," for example, Keats wishes to introduce the

(13) William Beckford, *Vathek*, in *Three Eighteenth Century Romances*, ed. Harrison R. Steeves (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1981), p. 133 describes the Caliph's response on discovering the disappearance of a prisoner from his castle, and on finding the dead bodies of his guards instead, as follows:

In the paroxysm of his passion he fell
furiously on the poor caracasses, and
kicked them till evening without intermission.

poet of the vision to a place that has not the "like upon the Earth" (66; bk.1). Therefore, he directs Moneta to administer a drink to this poet, describing it as follows:

No Asian poppy nor elixir fine
Of the soon-fading, jealous Caliphat,
.....
Could so have rapt unwilling life away.

(47-51)

Exotic drinks and narcotics seemingly release the inhabitants of both worlds (the caliphs' and Moneta's) from worldly concerns. While helping Arabian caliphs to dispose of undesirable subjects in their kingdoms, an act that guarantees more happiness and freedom in life, such elements also allow for the introduction of Moneta's poet into the happiness and freedom of heavenly realms. Like Oriental magic, the exotic elements in Oriental life open up for Keats another possibility for physical and spiritual freedom.

An image of the Orient as a land of heroic figures and activities also finds an access to Keats's consciousness. It filters mainly through his readings in fictional writings about the Crusades. The case is especially clear because the references often have religious connotations, are set in battlefields or make a point of alluding to Saladin, the famous Arab warrior who withstood the crusading attacks on Oriental lands.

A good manifestation of this heroic image of the Orient occurs in Keats's play *Otho the Great*.⁽¹⁴⁾ As a sub-plot to the play, a courageous Arab warrior fights on the side of the German emperor Otho in his war against Hungary. The Arab, however, turns out to be Ludolph, the emperor's alienated son, in disguise. Nevertheless, Ludolph's trick occasions a disclosure of the heroic Orient in Keats. The disclosure takes place after the battle when the identity and the bravery of the Arab are discussed among Otho and his men. To the emperor's inquiry of the "quick-ey'd pagan's" whereabouts, Albert, Otho's favorite knight, responds:

Twice in the fight
It was my chance to meet his Olive brow,
Triumphant in the enemy's shatter'd rhomb;
And, to say truth, in any Christian army
I never saw such prowess.

(53-7; 1.2)

(14) The play is a joint work with Charles Brown (Forman's introduction to the play).

To that observation Otho responds: "O, 'tis a noble boy! —tut— what do I say?/I mean a triple Saladin" (50–60; 1.2).⁽¹⁵⁾

Though received through fictional sources, the heroic image of the Orient, unlike magic, romance and exoticism, will retain very little hold on Keats's consciousness. The ultimate fusion of the three Oriental realms into a single whole will prove negligent of Oriental heroism probably because such heroism is more historical than fictional. The sense of freedom it may impart is limited by the moral and religious purposes for which the Crusades were fought. These factual elements seemingly hinder an impartation of the sense of absolute freedom from moral and physical concerns sought by Keats and realized in Oriental magic, romance, despotism and exoticism.

Keats's exposure to contemporary political forces that evince a colonial interest in India for the givens it can afford, creates a third Oriental realm in his consciousness with India as its center and India's wealth of jewels and spices as its main features. This image of India materializes in "Endymion" when Bacchus invades India and Keats describes how "The king of Inde their jewel-screptres vail,/And from their treasures scatter pearled hail" (263,4;bk.4). It is significant that the scattering of hidden treasures comes as a sign of subjugation on the part of India's kings to Bacchus' invasion of their land, for it suggests the influence of Britain's colonial interest in India on Keats's image of that part of the Orient.

The image of India in Keats's consciousness is also exotic. In "The Pot of Basil," Lorenzo's inability to fully and openly enjoy Isabella's company, because of the disparity in their social position, strikes Keats's narrator as a deprivation of an exotic Indian luxury, the embalming of bodies with clove oil:

Though young Lorenzo in warm Indian clove
Was not embalm'd, this truth is not the less,
Even bees, the little almsmen of spring-bowers,
Know there is richest juice in poison flowers.

(13:5–8)

This exoticism suggests that India's image in Keats's consciousness resembles that of Arabia. The physical relaxation and spiritual relief derived from embalming bodies with clove oil are reminiscent of similar pleasures presumably enjoyed by Arabian caliphs through "fine poppies and elixirs."

(15) A corresponding image of the Arabs appears in Edward Fairfax, *Jerusalem Delivered*, trns., ed. Roberto Weiss (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1962), BI, St 25, L.4, when he describes the antagonistic Arab army as "the thousands stout of pagan bold."

The image of India as an exotic country is not the sole resemblance with Arabia. Just as he associates life in Arabia with magic and romance, Keats conceives of India as a fairy land with magical possibilities. Such conception materializes most forcefully in the poet's literary and political satire. "The Caps and Bells," when he chooses to place the fairy world of the poem in India.⁽¹⁶⁾

In midmost Ind, beside Hydaspres cool,
There stood, or hover'd, tremulous in the air
A faery city 'neath the potent rule
Of Emperor Elfinan.

(1: 1-4)

The magical and exotic features of India's image, like their equivalent in the ancient Arab world and culture, will maintain a forceful presence in Keats's consciousness during the second stage of his reception of the Orient.

The first stage of that reception has involved both an exposure to historical, fictional and political sources of knowledge about the Orient as well as a creation of three distinct Oriental realms in Keats's consciousness. This stage is instantaneously seconded by a process of fusion in which the three realms amalgamate into a single one. However, this process of fusion is not a result of reflection nor deliberation. It is more of a spontaneous movement of consciousness towards full cognition of the phenomenal world—the Orient in this particular case. In this movement the more enticing elements assert their presence and the less appealing fail to survive. Geographical distances, historical separateness and cultural differences come along with the less appealing features and, therefore, evaporate. The movement of Keats's consciousness towards thorough cognition of the Orient becomes an all-embracing experience that responds to similitudes, ignoring in the meanwhile all differences.

The elimination of geographical distances between the various oriental regions has many manifestations in Keats's writings. One of them occurs in a letter the poet addresses to George and Georgiana Keats after their departure to the American continent. In his letter Keats allows Libya to geographically dissolve and become part of Egypt:

Hydon show'd me a letter he had received from Tripoli – Ritchie was well and in good spirits, among camels, Turbans, Palm Trees and sands. – You may remember I promised to send him an Endymion which I did not – however he has one – you have one. – One is in the Wilds of America – the other is on a camel's back in the plains of Egypt. (Dec. 1818–4 Jan. 1819)

(16) Scholars saw shades of both lines of satire; Gittings considered it a literary satire (p. 372), while Forman regarded it a political satire (introduction to the poem).

According to the passage Ritchie is in Tripoli yet Keats has no reservation in calling the Libyan region "the plains of Egypt." This mix-up occurs even though Keats's knowledge of Libya has neither been superficial nor confused. It happens that he asks Leigh Hunt in an earlier letter: "Where are you now? – in Judea, Cappadocia, or the parts of Libya about Cyrene?" (10 May 1817). This specification of the Libyan region in the Hunt letter suggests that Keats has had a clear sense of different parts of Libya before he wrote the letter to George. Nevertheless, the merging with Egypt occurs, suggesting that the Poet's conception of the two countries is flexible enough to allow the distance between them to shrink and their geographical identities to mix.

The attitude becomes characteristic of the second stage of Keats's reception of the Orient. The three, geographically-distinct Oriental realms of the first stage amalgamate into a single geographic entity during the second. The case is discernible in "Endymion" when Bacchus proceeds in a "wild" dance and enters Oriental regions. His sweeping physical movement embrace Egypt, Abyssinia, Tartary and India and allows them to integrate into one realm. The moon-goddess in "Endymion" describes Bacchus' all-embracing movement in a roundelay, part of it running in the following lines:

'I saw Osirian Egypt kneel a down
Before the vine-wreath crown!
I saw parch'd Abyssinia rouse and sing,
To the silver cymbals' ring!
I saw the whelming vintage hotly pierce
Old Tartary the fierce!
The kings of Inde their jewel-sceptres vail,
And from their treasures scatter pearled hail;
Great Brahma from his mystic heaven groans,
And all his priesthood moans;
Before young Bacchus' eye-wink turning pale.'

(257–67; bk.4)

Apart from Bacchus' unifying movement, the manner in which the different Oriental regions receive this god enforces their geographical integration; their subjugation to Bacchus fuses them into a single political entity. Under such fusion, geographical separateness blurs.

While eliminating the geographical separateness of Egypt (one of the ancient Oriental civilizations) and India (another Oriental realm in Keats's consciousness), Bacchus' sweeping movement over Oriental regions will also embrace Arabia. The moon-goddess continues her narration of the event:

'Over wide streams and mountains great we went,
 And, save when Bacchus kept his ivy tent,
 Onward, the tiger and the leopard pants,
 With Asian elephants:
 Onward these myriads with song and dance,
 With Zebras striped, and sleek Arabian's prance.'

(238-44; bk.4)

In this movement over Oriental regions, Bacchus attracts Arabian horses and Asian elephants into his procession. The act enforces the all-embracing nature of the dance and suggests a correspondent removal of geographical barriers between the regions involved. Egypt, India and Arabia thus merge in Keats's consciousness through Bacchus' "mad" dance.

The geographical integration of the three Oriental realms during the second stage of Keats's reception of the Orient has a correspondent cultural integration. It becomes first evident in the introduction of the heterogeneous Oriental elements (Asian elephants and Arabian horses) into Bacchus' procession and their ability to join the dance in unified movement and absolute harmony. Both unity and harmony suggest a melting away of cultural differences between the various members of the group. Bacchus' "wild" dance thus allows the various Oriental regions to lose their cultural separateness and to become one wild, yet harmonious, mass.

The removal of cultural distinctions between the different Oriental regions under Bacchus' authority becomes possible through a kind of cultural conformity that suggests itself to Keats and engulfs both Bacchus and the Oriental regions. This conformity is first discernible in Keats's preference for the Orient as a fit domain for Bacchus' activity, despite other possibilities. Among these possibilities come "the Wilds of America," a region of the world constantly present in Keats's consciousness because of his brother's intention to emigrate to it.⁽¹⁷⁾ Another region of which Keats is highly conscious is his own "native land" that he adopts as a source of poetic inspiration at the expense of other more tempting regions.⁽¹⁸⁾ These two parts of the world, despite their strong hold on Keats's consciousness, fail to convince him of their suitability for Bacchus' excited and unrestrained activity. The Oriental regions alone become a fit domain for Bacchus' dance. The choice indicates that in Keats's consciousness there must be a connection between these regions and Bacchus' activity.⁽¹⁹⁾

(17) This specific reference to "the wilds of America" occur in the letter to George and Georgiana Keats, Dec. 1818 - 4 Jan. 1819.

(18) Keats's commitment to the "muse" of his "native land" occurs in the opening lines of BIV of his "Endymion."

(19) This suggestion does not necessarily negate the well-known Oriental origin of Bacchus' myth. Keats's decision to retain the geographical location when he adopts the myth is in itself a choice related to processes of his consciousness.

This connection seems to be of cultural conformity between both purpose and nature of the god's dance and Keats's conception of the Orient. While associating the Orient with magical and exotic experiences, Keats also discerns similar characteristics in Bacchus' movement, for "A three days journey in a moment done" (253; bk.4). This magical journey is also exotic. Bacchus' "jolly" procession sings: "For wine we follow Bacchus through the earth;/Great God of breathless cups and chirping mirth" (235.6). This pleasure-seeking purpose of the dance becomes even more explicit when a retiring member of the group confesses: "I've been a ranger/In search of pleasure throughout every clime/Alas, 'tis not for me!" (274-6). Nevertheless, other members of the group continue their indulgence of the exotic and sensuous pleasures provided by Bacchus' activity. Silenus is "Tipsily quaffing" and Bacchus exposes "His plump white arms, and shoulders, enough white/For Venus' pearly bite" (213.4). This wild, excited, pleasure-seeking and exotic nature of the dance conforming as it does to the image of the Orient in Keats's consciousness allows for the cultural fusion of all members of the group, Greek and Oriental, including Bacchus himself.⁽²⁰⁾

The resemblance between Bacchus and the Orient is not an isolated instance in Keats's consciousness. It actually belongs to a larger conception of Greece as a center of a great Eastern civilization that attracts and unifies the surrounding Oriental regions in its geographical, historical and cultural spheres. This conception of Greece surfaces once in "Endymion" when the hero of this long narrative poem, in a moment of anxiety, hears the beating of his own heart allowing the poet to make the following commentary:

This still alarm,
This sleepy music, forc'd him walk tiptoe:
For it came more softly than the east could blow
Arion's magic to the Atlantic isles;
Or than the west, made jealous by the smiles
Of thron'd Apollo, could breathe back the lyre
To seas Ionian and Tyrian.

(357-63; bk.2)

The passage equates Greece and its adjacent Ionian seas with the remoter Tyre both geographically and culturally. It depends for that on a conception of Greece as

(20) Although Bacchus is the Roman god of wine whose counterpart in Greek mythology is Dionysus, Keats in "Endymion," definitely conceives of Bacchus as the Greek, not the Roman, god of wine, for in his preface to the poem he writes "I hope I have not in too late a day touched the beautiful mythology of Greece."

an Eastern civilization with myth and magic as characteristic features. The equation occurs at the expenses of historical verity. The two countries were more of competitors in trade and dominance over the Mediterranean sea than allies.⁽²¹⁾ While such competition would more likely place them at odd ends from each other, it does not. In Keats's consciousness history loses shape, force and importance. Fictional elements, more often than not, tower above factual truth. Magic through its presence in Greek myths and Oriental tales seems to operate as an amalgamative force that allows the two civilizations, the Greek and the Tyrian, to become one regardless of their cultural differences, geographical separateness and history of unfriendly relationship.

The amalgamative force resulting from the subjugation of history to myth in Keats's consciousness continues to operate and to attract other Oriental regions and civilizations into Greece. Syria becomes part of Greece through the intervention of Greek myths. In "Endymion" the hero is invited to taste a biblical meal but on the following terms: "And here is manna pick'd from Syrian trees,/In starlight, by the three Hesperides" (452-3; bk.2). The Hesperides' original occupation was to guard, at the western end of the world, the golden apples which Gaea gave to Hera when she married Zeus in Greek mythology. Keats has the Hesperides extend their activity further east and gather manna from Syrian trees. He thus allows a biblical experience in biblical lands to merge with an ancient Greek myth in complete oblivion of geographical separateness, historical differences and cultural distinctions. The fantastic aspects of Oriental history (the falling of manna from heaven) seems to be largely responsible for the merging with Greek myths. The two civilizations, the biblical and the Greek, equally have their share in supernatural experience, a fact that allows for their amalgamation in Keats's consciousness.

Other Oriental civilizations, beside Tyre and Syria, also melt into Greece through similar, though not identical, forces. Egypt, Turkey and Numidia in Keats's fragment of "The Castle Builder" become part of Greek culture.⁽²²⁾ The theme of this poem revolves around the poet's desire to create an ideal world of artistic beauty. His imagination conceives of its components as a mixture of Turkish, Egyptian, Numidian and Greek elements.⁽²³⁾ Transforming his own room into the desired world, the poet conceives its floor to be Turkish for the moon should display "glassy diamonding on Turkish floor" (3-7). The curtains, on the other hand, Keats wins

(21) See *The World Book Encyclopedia*, 1986 ed., for more details.

(22) The title "The Castle Builder" is not of Keats's coining. See Gittings, p. 36.

(23) Numidia is an ancient region in North Africa corresponding roughly in area with modern Algeria. See *The World Book Encyclopedia*.

from Egyptian lands; for "The draperies are so, as tho' they had/been made for Cleopatra's winding sheet" (26.7). And he also introduces "Greek busts and statuary" into his ideal world of art.

However, before fully embracing this world that his imagination has created by reconciling Turkish, Egyptian and Greek elements, Keats also introduces Numidian cultural elements into the image. He begins by considering the possibility of existing in a world of Gothic art and proceeds by juxtaposing this latter concept of art against the Attic one. Attributing Gothic art to Siamese origin, Keats defines the "Attic taste" in terms that combine Greek and Numidian elements:

Therefore 'tis sure a want of Attic taste
That I should rather love a Gothic waste
Of eyesight on cinque-coloured potter's clay,
Than on the marble fairness of old Greece.
My table-coverlits of Jasons' fleece
And black Numidian sheep-wool should be wrought,
Gold, black and heavy, from the Lama brought.

(35-41)

Keats treats the Numidian sheep-wool and Jason's fleece as Attic elements. North African cultural characteristics merge with Greek elements in his consciousness.

In this merging of Greek elements with Egyptian, Numidian and Turkish cultural aspects, Keats seems to have fixed his mind on the historical era when Greece was militarily and culturally involved in these regions and he has totally ignored the intervening period when they became politically and culturally separate.⁽²⁴⁾ The poet's lack of commitment to historical facts allows these various civilizations to become one with Greece. And though he chooses to call this civilization "Attic," he has defined it earlier as "eastern."

The blurring of cultural distinctions between Greece and the ancient Oriental civilizations repeats itself between Greece on the one hand and both India and Arabia on the other. The blurring takes place on the Greek setting of "Endymion" where heterogenous Oriental elements inhabit that setting. For example, a girl from India lives side by side with the Greek girl Peona in a manner that is perfectly natural and acceptable to the inhabitants. The attitude materializes when Endymion warns the two girls of the danger awaiting them if they were to approach the Cypress grove:

(24) Greece's involvement in Egypt came in 305 B.C., in Numidia around 450 B.C. and in Turkey between 1200-500 B.C. The involvement in Numidia was indirect for it came through Numidia's alliance with Carthage in its war against Greece.

Turn, damsels! one word I have to say
 sweet Indian I would see thee once again
 It is a thing I dote on.

(907–11; bk.4)

Similarly, Arabian horses inhabit Endymion's world without the poet having to justify or explain their presence. The attitude surfaces when the hero of the poem casually says: "I, who, for very sport of heart, would race/With my own steed from Araby" (53.4; bk.1). This process of attracting adjacent cultural elements into the Greek world emphasizes Greece's central position in Keats's conception of the Orient. Greece figures in that conception as a center of a great Eastern civilization that fuses the surrounding Oriental regions geographically, historically and culturally.

The fusion of Greece and the Oriental regions into a single Eastern cultural mass is usually coupled in Keats with a heightened awareness of a distinction between this mass and another one to which the poet attributes the appellation "west." This awareness materializes when Keats frequently juxtaposes these two cultural masses only to discover their separateness or to emphasize a sense of competition in their relationship with each other. A good manifestation of this attitude occurs in "Endymion" when the "east" blows "Arion's magic to the Atlantic isles," and the "west," "made jealous" by the act, has failed to "breathe back the Lyre/To seas Ionian and Tyrian." (357–63; bk.2). This polarization of East and West enforces Greece's central position and amalgamative role in Keats's consciousness, for it releases the Greek culture there from its ties with the Western cultural mass.

Greece's cultural connection with the civilizations of Western Europe is indisputably recognized in the writings produced by both sides, the Greek and the European. Using these writings to support his argument about "the demarcation between Orient and West," Edward Said cites in his book *Orientalism* many authors who either divorce Greece from any Eastern ties or claim for it Western cultural connections.⁽²⁵⁾ Among the first group comes Aeschylus who portrays in his play *The Persians* the struggle between Greece and Persia revealing in the meanwhile the sense of disaster overcoming the Persians when they learn that their armies, led by King Xerxes, have been destroyed by the Greeks. According to Said, this destruction and the feelings of loss and emptiness it generates in "Asiatic" armies seem "to reward Oriental challenges to the West."⁽²⁶⁾ Similarly, Greece as a representative of his Western frontier, Euripides in the *The Bacchae* portrays a conflict between the "Orient" and the "West" in which the latter decides to take "Oriental mysteries" more seriously.⁽²⁷⁾

(25) Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), p. 56.

(26) Said, p. 56.

(27) Ibid, p. 57.

Said's interpretation of ancient Greece's hostility to the Orient as a sign of political and cultural separateness finds support in more explicit remarks by modern European writers. Paul Valéry, for example, writes of how the "Greek and the Romans showed [Western Europe] how to deal with the monsters of Asia."⁽²⁸⁾ Implicitly, he not only assumes Greece's separateness from Oriental countries, but he also claims for it Western connections. Similarly, Sir Hamilton Gibb emphasizes Greece's cultural isolation from the Orient when he laments how "Oriental philosophy has never appreciated the fundamental idea of justice in Greek philosophy."⁽²⁹⁾ His lament indicates that he, like other European writers, considers the two civilizations, the Greek and the Oriental, as different and unrelated.

Despite this dominant opinion and Keats's more than likely exposure to some of its shadings, Greece continues to hold on to its connective links with the Eastern cultural mass in his consciousness.⁽³⁰⁾ In the opening lines of Book IV of his "Endymion," the poet juxtaposes the Greek civilization for a source of poetic inspiration against his own cultural resources:

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 talks 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 cry'd in vain,
 "Come hither, Sister of the Island!" Plain
 Spake fair Ausonia; ...

Still didst thou betake
 Thee to thy native hope.

(1-17)

The earlier polarization of East and West (of Arion's magic and the Atlantic isles) repeats itself on this occasion. Greece's mythical elements such as the song of the nine muses and Apollo's garland, constitute an "eastern" frontier in a competitive battle between Greece and the poet's native land.

(28) Ibid, pp. 250, 1.

(29) Ibid, p. 281.

(30) The exposure is more than likely because Keats has read Fairfax's *Jerusalem Delivered*, a book that brings the issue to a crisis when it relates a rumor that reaches the Crusaders about Greece's participation in the war on behalf of the Arabs and they refute it under the conviction of Greece's belonging to the Western cultural mass.

However, more significant, at this point, than mere reminiscence of earlier attitudes is Greece's attempt to attract Britain to its cultural sphere on the claim of blood ties. Greece's claim of sisterly relation with the British isles suggests Keats's exposure to the dominant opinion of Greece's attachment to the West. His rejection of such claim, evident in the glorification of his native resources against the Greek offerings, points out his singular opinion in this respect. He deliberately divorces Greece from its Western attachments and persists in linking it to the Eastern mass, thus allowing it to continue its amalgamative role among the different Oriental regions and civilizations there.

Before it began to play such a role, Greece had found the different Oriental regions and civilizations inhabiting Keats's consciousness in a state of separateness. This separateness comes in Keats's direct response to different sources of knowledge about the Orient. The initial passivity of that response allows three distinct Oriental realms, corresponding in nature and scope to historical, fictional and political sources, to materialize in Keats's consciousness. It takes a correspondence of Greek myths to some aspects of Oriental tales to set on a process of fusion in the poet's consciousness. With Greece playing a major amalgamative role in the process the three Oriental realms fuse into a single whole. The geographical and historical distances separating their various regions and civilizations shrink and disappear. Their cultural characteristics and peculiarities merge and blur. In the ultimate result of the fusion rests a broad and fluid concept of the Orient.

This concept of the Orient in Keats begins with a conception of Greece and the surrounding shores and islands as a center of a great "eastern" civilization. Geographically, this concept embraces the whole Mediterranean area including Syria, Tyre, Judea, Libya, Numidia, Egypt and even Abyssinia — and extends as far east as India. Into that sweeping geographical concept, Turkey, Tartary and Persia also fall. And within its broad and fluid range the historical separateness and cultural distinctions of these various kingdoms tend to disappear.

Beginning with the mythical times of Greece, Keats's historical concept of the Orient embraces the subsequent biblical eras, the times of Arabian caliphs, the Crusades and extends to the poet's own time with its colonial interest in India. Despite the sense of historical sequence implicit in this broad concept, such sequence is actually alien to Keats's consciousness. His historical concept of the Orient is fluid enough to allow the mythical times of old Greece to merge with biblical history and with his own times as well; the Hesperides may pick manna from Syrian trees and the poet dreams of introducing ancient Greek and Numidian elements into his room for the purpose of creating an ideal world of art. The poet's occasional references to Ara-

bian Caliphs or Saladin show an interest in these figures and their activities rather than their factual sequence in history.

A kind of cultural conformity between Greece and the Orient suggests itself to Keats and liquifies his cultural concept of the Orient. The correspondence of the magical and exotic elements in Oriental tales to their counterparts in Greek myths gives these elements dominance in Keats's consciousness over other cultural characteristics. With the dwindling away of the architectural greatness, ancient wisdom and lore of the Orient. Keats's cultural concept of the region becomes as of an exotic land of magic, romance, and absolute freedom from moral, physical and religious concerns. Keats's concept of the Orient is thus characterized by a great deal of geographical, historical and cultural broadness and fluidity. Greece's central position and amalgamative role among the various Oriental regions and civilizations lends this fluid concept a peculiarity unprecedented in the European experience of the Orient.

