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“Since Merlin Paid His Demon All the Monstrous Debt”: The Celtic in Keats

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“Since Merlin Paid His Demon All the Monstrous Debt”:

The Celtic in Keats

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In partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

by

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ABSTRACT

“Since Merlin Paid His Demon All the Monstrous Debt”:

The Celtic in Keats

By Brandy Bagar Fraley

This thesis argues that the Keatsian critical canon refuses to acknowledge the influence of Celticism in the works of John Keats and that such a gap displaces his poems from their cultural context and also prevents re-readings that might add depth and distinction to his place in the Romantic canon. After discussing the Celticism inherent in the literature, art, and social phenomenon of Keats’s day and briefly reviewing the scarce criticism that exists on the topic, the author reveals the prevalence of Celtic philosophies, figures, myths, and settings in Keats’s poetry. Then, she further argues that Keats through the feminized Celtic influence inverts traditional poetic plot structure by converging both subject and object of desire to, essentially, represent the end of desire. This distinction, she concludes, both exhibits Keats’s handling of the Celtic influence and also reveals a probable cause for the lack of critical debate on Celticism in the work of John Keats.

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CHAPTER ONE: THE CRITICAL PROBLEM AND EVIDENCE FOR THE CELTIC IN KEATS

In the John Keats's poem "The Eve of St. Agnes," the following line describes the conditions of the evening when the lovers Porphyro and Madelaine meet and, eventually, consummate their relationship: "Never on such a night have lovers met,/Since Merlin paid his Demon all the monstrous debt" (170-71).¹ This line deserves special attention because it represents a critical quandary in Keatsian studies: the incomplete, surface acknowledgement of Celtic sources that in reality provide different, darker close readings of some poems and also provide a cultural context in which to read Keats's poetry. The aforementioned line immediately catches the eye of anyone familiar with Celtic culture, as Merlin belongs to an inherently Celtic mythology first discussed by Geoffrey of Monmouth ca. 1138 in his History of the Kings of Britain. Several critics, including Jack Stillinger, Douglas Bush, and the Norton editors, comment on this line in different editions of Keats's poetry. Bush is the sole critic who traces the allusion beyond the traditional Vivien/Merlin tales found in English Arthurian legends and hints that the allusion might stem from a more Celtic rendering of the tale in Daniel's Musophilus (Bush 340). The casual observations on the Merlin allusion in this line, which consist of nothing more than a note of the presence of Celtic influence² rather than a thorough discussion of the nature and impact of the allusion on the poem, take shape as a microcosm of the broader critical problem.

Why ignore such a potentially rich vein of influence? The answer might lie in the fact that Keatsian scholarship focuses largely on the influence of Greco-Roman myth in Keats.

¹ All citations of Keats's poetry are from the Stillinger edition, the definitive edition for many scholars.

² Stillinger, in blatant disregard of Merlin's Celtic roots, writes in the footnotes of his edition that "none of the recorded stories of Merlin fit the allusion here"; Bush only notes that the allusion might stem from the story of Merlin's attempt to move the stones to Stonehenge.

Thomas McFarland's seminal work The Mask of Keats, for example, discusses how Keats speaks from behind the mask of Hellas. Walter Jackson Bate in Keats reveals Keats's voracious desire for Greco-Roman mythology and traces several poems back to mythological sources. Such a move seems sensible, for poems like "Lamia," "Isabella," and "Endymion" in particular beg for this treatment: each is, occasionally according to Keats himself, a retelling of an ancient Greco-Roman myth. However, the collective focus on Greco-Roman influence forms a large gap within Keatsian source criticism. Despite the fact that Keats lived in a culture of Celtic revivalism and that he himself was immersed in Celtic literature, culture, and history, a comprehensive study of the Celtic influence on Keats is called for.

I use the term "Celtic" to refer to events, literature, and art predominantly influenced by or imitative of the lives, mythology, and culture of the people called by the Greeks "the Hyperboreans or Celts, the latter term first being found in the geographer Hecataeus, about 500 B.C." (Rolleston 17). In this discussion, the definition is purposefully broad and intended to encapsulate a wide range of topics to acknowledge the wide-ranging Celtic influence due to the fact that in ancient times, the Celtic Druids did not write down their lore or the history of their culture, and Celtic history, literature, and culture passed from generation to generation by word of mouth. As a result, any record of Celticism is naturally at a remove—or many removes—from its origin. Nevertheless, to this day, Western culture bears the distinct stamp of the Romans and their influence; no less do the Celts bear responsibility for authors like Robert Burns and William Butler Yeats, for holidays like Halloween, and geographical features such as *cairns*, observatories, and even Stonehenge. Part of the reason for this influence lies in the fact that the race mingled with general European culture and passed down stories, literature, art, and culture that spread beyond the Celtic regions of the British isles (Rolleston 9).

A striking example of this Celtic ripple effect is embodied in the poet Edward Williams, born in 1747. Williams, a native Englishman, changed his name to Iolo Morganwg, a Druidic appellation, and reconvened the bardic *gorsedd*—a bardic gathering—atop Primrose Hill in England in 1792. The gathering, called “Gorsedd Beirdd Ynys Prydain [The Gorsedd of the Bards of the Island of Britain],” became one of the attractions at the national Eistenfodd (Library of Wales). Williams himself was not a Celt, much as he might have wanted to be; nor were many of the “druids” and “bards” that took part in the *gorsedd*. But the literature Williams wrote as Iolo Morganwg, a library of forgeries, is rather an emulation of the art of the ancient Celts. The National Library of Wales, which retains the original manuscripts of Williams’ works, admits that while he was “one of the most inventive and prolific forgers in the history of literature,” he was also a “poet and a visionary” who contributed a great deal to the body of work involving Celtic and Druidic lore. Given that Williams did not boast a Celtic heritage, it is notable that events like Williams’s *gorsedd* or works like his poems may still be defined as “Celtic,” influenced by and imitative as they are of the ancient culture and history.

Keats lived in a time when Celticism was current and controversial. Politically, to be supportive of Celticism or of the Irish and Scottish cultures influenced by Celticism was to be slightly radical, given that Wales, Scotland, and Ireland at the time were regarded “as colonies, whose internal culture was systematically downgraded [while] those who celebrated it [were] infantilized and caricatured in unbecoming and trivial stereotypes” (Pittock 106). A literate generation that hungered after classics and the stories of old found a new passion for unknown Celtic stories as retold by Scott, Burns, and Macpherson. *Gorsedd*s convened on hilltops and magazines delved into the finer points of the Gaelic language. Keats himself went on a walking tour of northern England and Scotland in 1818—at the same time the Celtic grammar came out

in *Blackwood's*—and began reading ‘Celtic Researches’ sometime after he met Brown (Gallant 17). So a discussion of Keats and Celticism should recognize a cultural shift from Celtic disinterest to Celtic revivalism that began in the late 18th century and no doubt affected Keats at the time of his writings. It is safe to say that Keats was aware, at the very least, of the history of the Celts, and most likely some of their culture. He alludes to Druids, for example, in “Endymion” and the two “Hyperion” poems (Gallant 7). Moreover, the convening of Edward Williams’ gorsedd, which occurred three years before Keats was born, was only the first of many led by Williams, and it is likely that a *gorsedd* occurred during Keats’s lifetime. As this was a somewhat notable occurrence—a gathering of neo-Druids in England—Keats might have heard some talk about the Celtic traditions inherent in such a gathering, or been exposed in some form to the literature written by Williams. Interestingly, Keats’s travels to Hampstead often took him within a mile of Primrose Hill. So besides potentially hearing about the various *gorsedds* conducted there, Keats might well have seen the site of the famous *gorsedd* himself.

The Ossian Hoax, however, caused a greater societal impact than William’s *gorsedd* thanks both to the skill with which the poems were written and the nature of their forgery. In the 1760s James Macpherson, a Scottish poet, published fragments of what he declared was an ancient poem written by “Ossian, son of Fingal.” The poems caused an instant sensation that was tremendous and far-reaching; many Romantics embraced the work (McGann 33). Controversy raged over the authorship of the poems until the end of the 19th century, when it was finally revealed that Macpherson had forged the works—albeit with genuine Gaelic characters and legends as the subjects. Doubtless Keats heard some mention of the Ossian poems during his lifetime due to their immense popularity and the debate surrounding their authenticity; Gallant maintains that in 1817 or early 1818 Keats read Macpherson’s popular first volume of

supposed translations which, in actuality, was Macpherson's translation of old Gaelic ballads and lays; the influence of that reading appears later in "Hyperion" (Gallant 14). Keats lived in a time of burgeoning Celtic revivalism, where Celtic culture reemerged in periodicals like *Blackwood's Magazine*, in the social machinations of figures like Williams and Macpherson, and most specifically in the literature of the period.

Scott's influence on Keats, indicative of the Celtic vein in literary thought, has been briefly mentioned, but it is helpful to reexamine him in the context of literary Celtic revivalism. Much like Macpherson, Walter Scott sought to recreate the world of the Gaelic past; however, unlike Macpherson, Scott proudly did so under his own identity rather than pretend a nonexistent connection to the past. As Stillinger and Bush have noted, several of Keats's poems, including "The Eve of St. Agnes" and "La Belle Dame Sans Merci," include the plot elements and poetic structure of certain Scott poems, including "Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border" and "Lay of the Last Minstrel." Scott's influence connected directly to the Celtic past; his works were essentially "a more literary rendering" of ancient history (Gallant 15).

Granted, full-scale studies of the 19th century Celtic revival and mythological influence on Romanticism abound, including The Reception of Myth in English Romanticism by Anthony John Harding and Myth as Genre in British Poetry by Paul M. Wiebe. These few ambitious works attempt to cover a variety of influences on Keats's works outside of the usual Greco-Roman mythology. However, these works focus either on Romanticism as a literary movement, on mythological/cultural influence on all of the Romantic poets, or on the Romantic poets themselves as mythmakers. Only one focused study of Celticism in Keats has been recently published, Christine Gallant's Keats and Romantic Celticism (2005). Her book stands alone in the field, but she limits her discussion of Keats and Celticism to faery and faery-land motifs and

as a result the work can hardly be defined as comprehensive. While discussion of the Celtic faery motif in Keats's work is certainly helpful and particularly defines the 'magical' nature of several characters in his poems as well as the settings in which they operate, other Celtic motifs—such as the Otherworld—recur throughout. Additionally, Gallant deals mostly with the recurring Celtic themes and motifs present in Keats's work rather than offering a broader discussion of the Celtic revival as a late eighteenth-century phenomenon. In doing so, she fills only partially the gap in Keatsian scholarship; the influence of Celtic mythology, figures, and deities also reveals motivations, mannerisms, and philosophies embedded within the characters in his poems.

Gallant speaks to the previous lack of discussion regarding Celtic influence on Keats. Despite constant observations and passing comments on the Celtic elements of Keats's poetry, no critic before Gallant has ever laid a practical framework that establishes Keats's intimacy with and exposure to Celtic culture. Not only does Gallant remind the reader of Keats's familiarity with Robert Burns and Scott, both writers who attempted to immortalize the Gaelic tales and traditions that descended from the Celts into their culture, she also points out that books in Keats's personal library such as Lempriere's Classical Dictionary and Tooke's Pantheon both contain information on the pre-Roman Celts (5-6). Gallant also maintains that a "major Celtic presence in Keats's library was Edward Davies' Celtic Researches," which described Druidism and the history of the Celts. It is worth noting that Davies' book showcased the Celts as those who "taught the Greeks religion and philosophy" (9). Gallant's work, then, is helpful in establishing the significant Celtic influence in Keats.

Robert Burns's Poems, too, focuses on "Scottish folk-beliefs" derived from Gaelic tradition (Gallant 16). Keats owned this book, which "relied strongly upon folklore for the

content, language, and sometimes structure of his poems” (16). Gallant points out that Burns himself became an accidental spokesman for the Celtic Revival, sponsored by ardent supporters of Celtic nationalism who encouraged him to collect and edit Celtic folk ballads and songs (17). Many of the poems include folklore, fairy stories, and myths that derive from Celtic mythology. The faery motif in Keats’s poems especially recalls Burns’s works, particularly “Tam O’Shanter,” “Address to the Deil,” and “Hallowe’en” to mind.

Gallant’s work on this topic provides an important foundation on which to explore the significant Otherworld motif in Keats’s works. In addition, however, it is also necessary to discuss how Celtic mythological figures and concepts reveal the transformation of Keatsian heroes from agent to object, supplement the definition of negative capability as the unity of agent and object, and allow for re-reading and re-interpretation of many of his poems in a manner that not only reveals the considerable Celtic vein in Keats’s works, but how that influence underscores Keats’s portrayal of the end of desire and subverts the typical patriarchal poetic form.

CHAPTER TWO: CELTIC TROPES IN KEATS

The first extended motif Gallant discusses is that of the faery, the word that “derives from the French word ‘fey’” (1) and implies magic, a magical realm, or magical creatures. She begins her in-depth discussion of this theme with the minor poem “Calidore,” commenting on the “faery hill with water at its foot” and the “island where faeries are dancing in a ring” (43). As Gallant notes, “Calidore,” often considered a direct imitation of Spenser, in fact departs from direct “allusions to classical nymphs, goddesses, or Graces” that are present in The Faerie Queen and instead focuses on the medieval/Celtic faeries that are also a part of the Spenserian tradition. Gallant considers this poem notable since it is Keats’s first “extended rendition of faeries and their realm” (41). Soon, however, Gallant moves from “Calidore” to “Old Meg she was a gipsy,” where she discusses the central figure Meg as “a benevolent, gift-giving” faery (63). One of Gallant’s great strengths in this book is her inclusion of Keats’s minor, epistolary poems; such intimate verses, composed to friends and family and shared with few others, are perhaps more indicative of Keats’s mood, influences, and state of mind than the major works prepared consciously for publication. However, a studious scholar can certainly find traces of the faery in Keats’s larger works and Gallant does so by pointing out that Lamia, La Belle Dame, and even the Titans—who sound “like displaced British Druids” (75)—are creatures of Celtic tradition, sharing in a fey past. Other critics do corroborate Gallant’s viewpoint, even if they do so unawares. In his introduction to the complete volume of Keats’s poems, Stillinger discusses the “actual world...the realm of mortals” versus the “ideal world...the realm of gods and fairies” (xvii) that seems to permeate Keats’s poetry. Likewise, Vendler comments on the “fairy-tale substitution” of a typically Greek world in Keats’s “Ode to Psyche” (58).

When Gallant attempts to discuss the intricacies of the faery motif in Keats's works, she naturally remains within the paradigms of her faery study. She does, however, mention other motifs in passing: the Otherworld, for example, a land typically associated with magic, composes a small section of the book, largely because it is the place from whence faeries come. The presence of the Otherworld in these poems "attempts to show the precedence and superior power of the Celtic to the classical" (Gallant 128). Understanding the Otherworld motif in Keats's poems will not only flesh out the world of the faery presented by Gallant by revealing the impact of the faery upon mortals, but also trace the development of the Celtic Otherworld as a mystical place that not only provides certain figures with undeniable power, but also ultimately acts as the catalyst for the end of desire within the convergence of subject/object in Keats's poems.

In his book, Rolleston describes the Otherworld—sometimes also known as Avalon, Annwn, the land "over the tops of the waves" (Squire 133, 224, 254)—as the source of "an intense...faith" for the Celts and the motivating power behind "a powerful priesthood, a ritual, and imposing religious movements" (82). In other words, belief in the Otherworld provides a basis for Celtic Druidism. In this, the Celtic Otherworld shares many traits with the Greek Hades or the Egyptian Land of the Dead. All of these places, if they can be called that, house spirits and have some involvement with the afterlife and with religious occurrences in mortal existence.

The Otherworld also functions as a depository for departed spirits, particularly when called by the name Annwn, the Welsh term for Hades (Squire 278). Certainly a god or goddess—Pluto, Hades, Persephone in the Greco-Roman myths, Pwyll in the Celtic ones—rules over the kingdom, and occasionally the dead can interact with the living. However, the Celtic Otherworld remains unique particularly because of its intimate, interlocking, and influential relationship with the living world.

Examples of this Otherworld abound in Celtic myth. The ruler of the Celtic Otherworld, Pwyll, Prince of Dyfed, is simultaneously “a mere mortal prince, however legendary, and a ruler in the mystic otherworld” (Squire 278). In most literature regarding the afterlife, according to Squire, such a person as Pwyll would be a “forced reconciliation” of two persons: a deity and a mortal. In stories and legends he is at once Lord of Annwn and ruler of a small kingdom of living mortals (Rolleston 356), but to the Celts a contradiction in these roles simply did not exist because in the tales about Pwyll the Otherworld dictated and influenced events in the mortal world. Often the names Pwyll and Pen Annwn (the Head of Hades) are used interchangeably in Celtic stories and legends to illustrate the man’s dual role as mortal ruler and Otherworld King (Squire 282).

In another example of this unique Celtic Otherworld characteristic, Squire maintains that the Celts once held the very real land of Dyfed (roughly equivalent to the modern-day Pembrokeshire) to be the mystical Otherworld. Once they entered this land and found its inhabitants to be “yet of flesh and blood,” the discovery simply strengthened their idea that the Otherworld was an accessible plane of existence, simultaneously existing within and without the land of mortal men. Perhaps because of this strange duality, Annwn/Otherworld eventually becomes a benign place of magic and wonder rather than a place of death and hardship. Celtic mythological references refer often to “King of Annwn and the fairies” (Squire 390), a magical place of great feasting and merriment. “Castle, serving-man and king vanish” when this magical place is accidentally discovered by mortals, usually leaving the rapt mortal behind to describe the wonders he has seen. This is the faery aspect of Annwn and the Otherworld that Gallant discusses most; she mentions the wish of mortals to entirely abandon the mortal world for the land of faery (53), this magical place so closely interwoven with the mortal waking world.

In many ways, the Otherworld serves the mortal world as a treasure trove of ultimate beauty, emotion, power, and nobility that, in some sense, informs the mortal world and gives it shape if only through oral traditions or literature meant to preserve its beauty. The mortal world does not appear to exist independently of the Otherworld, although in some literature, such as The Mabinogion, it appears that the Otherworld can function independently of the mortal world. Certainly, then, it is easy to see that while in many ways the Otherworld certainly resembles the Greco-Roman afterlife, and on many occasions serves the same purpose, it also differs. The *cairns*—stone monuments ranging from the simple to the extravagant in countries where the Celts once lived—are proof of this peculiar interweaving of the mortal world and the Otherworld. Some scholars argue that, outside of functioning as monuments or travel markers, *cairns* existed for the Celts as markers of those places or events where the mortal world and the Otherworld could merge and become one.³ In other afterlife/otherworlds, particularly the Greco-Roman one, Hades is certainly accessible and involved with the world of the living. Yet Hades, unlike the Celtic Otherworld, does not inform and illuminate life on the mortal plane as the Otherworld indeed does in some tales.

A common mythological tale serves to illustrate the subtle differences between these two mythological settings: the story of Orpheus and Eurydice. In the Greek version of the myth, Eurydice is bitten on the foot by a snake and subsequently dies before entering the world of the dead. Orpheus, her lover, seeks her out and pleads for her life. His request, thanks to his musicianship, is granted—with the condition he does not turn to look back at his wife during their departure. Unfortunately, he disobeys, Eurydice is snatched back into Hades, and Orpheus

³ The Newgrange *cairn* is one of the more remarkable examples of this sort of phenomenon. A rather vast and well-known prehistoric monument older even than the pyramids, the cairn boasts a roof-box specifically designed to allow the sun into the cairn on the winter solstice—a time when, according to the Celts, the Otherworld was particularly manifest to mortals. Some pictures of this remarkable monument are available at <http://www.knowth.com/newgrange.htm>.

loses his love once more. He tries to return for her, but is repulsed by the boatsman Charon (Ovid 10.1-79).

Another version of the tale, told in Middle English, was written ca. 1130 in East Midland. The text, “Sir Orfeo,” survived although the author remains anonymous. In this version, Heurodis (Eurydice) falls asleep beneath a tree, and “fair knightes/Wele y-armed al to rightes” (136-37) come to her in a dream, accompanied by a magnificent retinue of damsels, horses, and men. The leader of this entourage shows Heurodis, “castels and tours,/ Rivers, forests, frith with flours” (159-60) then asks her to meet with him the next day and accompany him back to his castle forever. Orfeo (Orpheus), in the role of jealous and outraged husband, gathers together his men to fight the bold stranger. Ultimately, the queen is “oway t-wight [snatched away]” despite his best efforts, and he relinquishes his kingdom to go search for her. Eventually he comes upon a marauding band of fairies and follows them into this “warld y-nome,/With fairi.” Orfeo plays for the king, who affably agrees to release Heurodis, and the husband and wife return once more to their kingdom (Dunn 216-30).

The Greek tale showcases Hades; the Middle English tale, according to Charles W. Dunn and Edward T. Byrnes, stems from “a Breton lay” and benefits from “a Celtic correlation,” hence the “otherworld lover” and the “Celtic fairyland” (216). The peculiar parallelism and intersection between the Otherworld and the mortal world is made evident in the Celtic version of the tale. In the second tale, Heurodis first meets the faery king in a dream, which is set apart from the typical mortal planes of interaction; she falls into a sleep that is beyond the disturbance of the handmaidens gathered around and only wakes when the dream is finished (70-75). The second time she meets him is on purely physical terms, face to face when she is literally snatched away. No distinction in the poem is made between the dream-faery-King or the physical-faery-

King just as, in earlier tales, no distinction is made between Pwyll and Pen Annwn. Though the faery king is an Otherworldly figure, in this particular tale he is not prohibited through his Otherworldliness by acting upon and working his will in the mortal world.

Moreover, the Faery King's response and eventual largesse is worth noting. He went to some amount of trouble to kidnap Heurodis, and obviously desired her. When Orfeo comes at first to retrieve the queen, the Faery lord wavers and replies with profound aesthetic distaste: "For thou art lene, rowe, and blac,/And sche is lovesum withouten lac" (460-61). Why shouldn't Heurodis return with Orfeo? To the Faery King the matter is simple; she is beautiful, and so belongs with him in a land of supernatural beauty and wonder. Heurodis' aesthetic appeal is in keeping with the Otherworld "so riche and so heighe" (326).

Orfeo's reply to this reluctance on the Faery King's part also shapes the nature of the interaction between the mortal world and the Otherworld. He does not become angry or offended, nor does he dispute the truth of the Otherworld ruler's words. He seems to implicitly agree with the King that beautiful things belong in the beautiful Otherworld. Instead, Orfeo expresses dismay over the King's lie (about giving Orfeo whatever he wanted from the kingdom) by saying, "were it a wele fouler thing/To hear a lesing of thi mouthe" (464-5). Then the harper adds, "What Ich would ask, have Y schold,/And nedes thou most thi word hold" (467-68).

Orfeo's words reveal several peculiarities about the nature of this Otherworld. First of all, it is a *foul* thing to Orfeo that the King would lie. Not a wrong thing, or an immoral thing—the Otherworld in this tale functions beyond those sorts of moral distinctions—but a distasteful thing. Why? Because lying simply does not belong in the Otherworld. In the Otherworld, all the advantage belongs to the King and the ruler of this uncanny and supernatural realm, and honor demands as a result that he pay the price of honesty. Orfeo knows this, and the King

implicitly agrees by his release of Heurodis; by his concessions to Orfeo the faery king acknowledges his own advantage and the generosity his own position affords him.

Ultimately, the Faery King acquiesces to Orfeo's request and keeps his word so that, in this particular tale at least, the Otherworld is constructed not only as a hidden fey place of surpassing beauty and power, but as one of honor and truth: "Seththen it is so,/Take hir bi the hond and go,"(469-70). Interestingly, despite the fact that in this tale Orfeo is the pursuer of his wife and she is the object of his desire, the faery king effectively removes Orfeo from his pursuit upon his arrival in the magic realm. Once in the Otherworld, Orfeo becomes an object himself, at the mercy of the faery king's whims and his ability to keep—or dishonor—his word.

Granted, Keats's familiarity with Otherworld motifs extended beyond the Celtic; it is likely that Hades, Elysium, Atlantis, and other otherworldly locales were all part of Keats's literary landscape. While many of these places certainly share traits with the Celtic Otherworld, the Celtic Otherworld in Keats's poetry possesses two key characteristics: 1) it functions as the home of faeries and of all supernatural power, and 2) it works as that which displaces the object in Keats poetry and strips the pursuer of agency so that agent *becomes* object .

Gallant discusses the first characteristic in her book and treats "Endymion" quite effectively, pointing out the "running Celtic counterpoint" to the overt classical references and the classical tale on which the poem is based (46). While she traces the source for this poem back to "Thomas the Rhymer," an old Scottish tale, Gallant makes clear that the moment of Endymion's and Cynthia's first meeting is a Celtic Otherworld motif: "Flowers blooming in a cave beneath a hill? A mountain nymph spying on them? A trance-like sleep overcoming him at a time when he would surely prefer to be awake and active? Clearly this is fairyland" (52). She then continues to analyze lines 777-781 of the poem, pointing out within them the desire to

abandon the mortal world entirely for the faery (53). “Endymion,” then, exemplifies the Otherworld motif at its simplest: man falls into the magical land and doesn’t want to leave because he feels as if he belongs there. In its most elemental terms, this simple version of the motif imbues Endymion’s situation with fulfilled longing, expressed desire, and sensual enjoyment.

“La Belle Dame Sans Merci” also contains the Otherworld motif, but in this poem the motif creates tension over unfulfilled longing and a profound sense of loneliness and poignancy. There is no death in this poem, no direct moment where a spirit passes from the mortal realm to the land of the dead, but the reader feels as *if* there has been a death of sorts, and there has been: the death of the agent. The knight himself is trapped in a liminal state, “alone and palely loitering” (2). His whole world, McFarland writes, has been reduced to “wintry prospects without joy” (55). The knight has been stripped of something wonderfully magical: his lady and her love. That La Belle Dame is not mortal is obvious. She is explicitly “a fairy’s child” (14); she sings “a fairy’s song” (24). She feeds the knight strange foods and speaks “a language strange” (27). She is part of the knight’s world—she sits on his steed and accompanies him—and yet is detached from it. Her ability to influence the state of the knight’s world—leaving it bleak and lonely even though she remains set apart physically—recalls the manner in which the Celtic Otherworld can manifest itself within the mortal plane. In many ways, the lady is similar to the fairy king who comes for Heurodis; alien, beautiful, alluring and with her own exotic resources. She causes the knight to dream, but he does not necessarily dream of the dead. He dreams of “pale kings, and princes too” trapped in the same liminal state as he (37). Liminality implies a threshold, a gateway between two separate spaces. The Otherworld, a simultaneous manifestation in the supernatural and mortal worlds, is a liminal setting—so in Celtic terms,

those in liminal states exist within the mortal world and the Otherworld. The knight remains a good example of this principle; he exists on a very physical plane in the mortal world, but his heart, his mind, and his memories are ensnared in the Otherworld with La Belle. The intriguing point here is that even though the Otherworld and the mortal world are entwined, La Belle has blocked the knight, through his relationship with her, from his desire for the mortal world.

Intriguing, too, is the cry of these trapped spirits. They do not warn the knight that he is about to die, or that he has come in contact with the Otherworld. They do not tell him to flee, or to return to the mortal world. They tell him instead, quite simply, that he is “in [the] thrall” of La Belle Dame. And so he is. The real world holds no appeal for him in light of the richly illumined plane of the Otherworld that was once made manifest to him through his relationship with La Belle. Yes, other Otherworldly elements are accessible to the knight: roaming spirits, the bleak and fey surroundings, his memory of La Belle and their liaison. Yet the knight remains enthralled because that most precious manifestation of the connection between the Otherworld and the mortal world remains beyond his reach presumably due to the will of La Belle herself. The Celtic Otherworld lures mortals in and leaves them bereft of desire, of individual agency, when it chooses to veil itself. Moreover, its interconnection with the mortal world ensures that mortals, bound as they are to one particular plane of existence, remain fated to agonize over their inability to fully inhabit both the realm they have fleetingly visited and the mortal realm in which they are left languishing. The “fading rose” on the knight’s cheeks symbolizes many kinds of fading: the fading beauty of the magical realm, the fading of the magic woman who, with shocking suddenness, is lost to him, the fading of his own mortality that accompanies the end of his will to live without her. The knight, an agent of his own desire, ultimately transforms and becomes subject to the whim of La Belle and the Otherworld she represents. The typical plot

structure of the poem becomes inverted by the end; the subject becomes the object, left with nothing to pursue.

A minor note on the knight's loss: the fact that his loss is so sudden, and that La Belle vanishes without any rhyme or reason, supports the whimsy of faery as it relates to the Celtic Otherworld. The very nature of the Otherworld is not malice, but caprice—there is a constant danger of “los[ing] the vision” (Squire 394). Similarly, its denizens can be accused of caprice simply because they act in accordance with their environment. Little proof exists that La Belle Dame is malicious; she never directly harms the knight and indeed seems stricken by grief when she “[weeps], and sigh[s] full sore” (30). Her only direct action against the knight is lulling him to sleep, whereupon he wakes alone. That La Belle so capriciously bars the knight from a relationship with her, the most important manifestation of the connection between the Otherworld and the mortal world, testifies to the whimsy of the Otherworld she represents.

In “The Eve of St. Agnes”—arguably the most powerful representation of this motif—the presence of the Otherworld transforms the poem itself into a supernatural tale of manipulation and control. Porphyro is one of the key Otherworld agents in this particular poem, acting on behalf of Otherworld powers invoked by his beloved. He comes for his beloved Madelaine, who is already “hoodwink'd with faery fancy” (70) that she herself has invoked as another Otherworld agent. Somehow—and this speaks to his Otherworld characteristics—Porphyro is able to slip into this hall full of people where, inexplicably, “all eyes are muffled” (84) and no one notices his passing. Angela, the old woman, worries he will be caught and killed; Porphyro assures her that “[they are] safe enough” (106). Such assurances are characteristic of heroes, but Porphyro delivers on his word. Madelaine, meanwhile, is “sleepy-eyed” due to the “pale enchantment” she has set in motion through her adherence to St. Agnes’

rites (169). Porphyro is subject to the powers Madelaine has invoked, just as she is subject to them, but Porphyro is able to take advantage of them while Madelaine takes a more passive role after the initial invocation.

When Porphyro walks over to gaze at the sleeping Madelaine, the sounds of “the boisterous, midnight, festive clarion,/The kettle-drum, and far-heard clarionet” (259-60) vanish immediately with the shutting of the door, which neatly symbolizes the sudden distancing of the lovers from the mortal world. When Madelaine finally does wake, the nature of her waking is doubtful; she still seems to be in a trance. She “look[s] dreamingly” on Porphyro as if he is an apparition (306). He is, after all, “pallid, chill, and drear” when she looks at him (311). Porphyro seems to belong with the pale, moaning figures of “La Belle Dame.” Moreover, when he and Madelaine consummate their relationship he is “beyond a mortal man impassion’d far” with “looks immortal” (316). Certainly the line can be taken to indicate the wild depth of his feeling for Madelaine, but it can also indicate the fact that he is drawing on the Otherworld powers Madelaine has invoked.

Then, in an action seemingly drawn from countless stories of the Celtic faery kingdom of the Otherworld, Porphyro takes Madelaine and flees the castle. These two lovers slip away from the hall to a vague destination “o’er the southern moors” (351). Often, the Celtic Otherworld is spoken of as being over the sea or over the earth in an unnamed location (Squire 202, 271). Also of note is the mention that, as they flee, “no human sound” is heard (356). The implication that no *human* sound can be heard leads the reader to wonder if, in fact, *inhuman* sounds can be heard. Both lovers now in this enchanted dream-state no longer make human sounds in the human world because a) the mortal world has no ability to hear the Otherworld sounds they

make, or b) through the Otherworld powers invoked they have silenced their own mortal presence.

Finally, and perhaps most telling, is the aftermath of their escape. Madelaine and Porphyro vanish in uncanny silence to their mysterious destination, but all the guests are “long be-nightmar’d” (375). Angela dies, and the “Beadsman for aye unsought for slept among his ashes cold” (378). These images of nightmare and death close the poem, and the chilling connotation is not coincidental; the love story gains from these mental pictures an aura of the supernatural. Obviously a power beyond mortals is at work; the earlier reference to Merlin implies the presence of magic (171). That Porphyro can slip inside a hall of his enemies, find his love and consummate their relationship, then flee silently into the night—leaving those who despised him behind and subject to nightmares—speaks to an uncanny ability on his part.

In “Ode on Indolence” the Otherworld motif is demonstrated to startling effect by the nebulous setting of the poem. The speaker is again in a trance; his eyes are “benumb’d” and his “pulse [grows] less and less” (17), actions that speak to a flagging of desire for the mortal world. He does not die, but remains in a liminal state. In this stasis, where he can feel neither pain’s sting nor pleasure’s flower (18), he sees three figures: Love, Ambition, and “[his] demon Poesy” (30). The speaker makes the reader aware that the poem occurs during a “drowsy hour” of “summer-indolence” (15-6). However, the setting is much harder to pin down. The speaker remarks that the three figures appear “before [him]” (1), but where is he? At one point, the speaker talks of seeing the figures through “the open casement” that “press’d a new-leaved vine” (47). A casement is a window that opens outward on hinges, so common sense would dictate that the speaker is inside looking out at the apparitions. Yet one stanza later the speaker bids the phantoms farewell and says, in defiance of their presence, that their appearance will not

“raise/[his]head cool-bedded in the flowery grass” (52). How can the speaker be inside looking out with his head pillowed on cool grass? Somehow, the speaker is at once set apart from the Otherworld phantoms and yet yoked with them outside. Literally, the speaker resides within both settings at once as subject *and* object. In this case, the speaker himself represents the manifestation of the Otherworld within the mortal world.

What poses as an Otherworld motif in these various works could also be construed simply as the state of liminality that accompanies revelation or self-discovery. However, in all these cases distinctly supernatural figures are involved: benign, supernatural, and sometimes benevolent beings appear where before there were none, various guests have strange nightmares, merriment and feasting abruptly begin and abruptly end, and the speaker returns to the mortal world changed in some way. With the exception of “The Eve of St. Agnes,” all of these moments occur outdoors in a forest or a field, beneath moonlight and surrounded by lush natural flowers and foliage. Altogether, these characteristics clue the reader in to a setting that, in Keats’s poetry, might be Otherworldly and might therefore strip the agent of agency and displace the initial object in the poem.

CHAPTER THREE: CELTIC MYTHOLOGICAL FIGURES AND DEITIES

Many of Keats's poems also offer characterizations of certain Celtic mythological figures and deities. Many might argue that deities from various cultures are in fact interchangeable since they share characteristics.⁴ Lamia, for example, had a place in the Greek pantheon. The daughter of Belus and a queen of Libya, she was given by Zeus the somewhat bizarre talent of being able to remove her eyes whenever she chose. A generally nasty creature, this particular Lamia had many children with Zeus, although most of those children were killed by Hera. The killing of her children drove Lamia to insanity and, as a result, she fell into the habits of thievery and eating children.⁵

Keats's Lamia bears almost no resemblance to her Greek namesake. Keats' Lamia is half-serpent half-woman—although, as Gallant points out, she is missing the multiple rows of breasts (118). There is no evidence that she eats children or steals; when the reader is first introduced to Lamia in the poem, she is in fact bemoaning the fate of being trapped in such a hideous form (41). The reader is introduced to Lamia not committing an atrocity, but rather crying, and the introduction forges her into a more sympathetic character, much like the Celtic Morrigan.

The Celtic deity the Morrigan (or the Morrighu, in some cases) is a goddess of war who often takes the form of “a water-serpent” (Rolleston 126), presiding over and encouraging battles. In a story that strikingly parallels the story of “Lamia,” the Morrigan “met Cuchulain [a Celtic hero] and proffered him her love in the guise of a human maid” (Rolleston 126).

⁴ Julius Caesar himself was responsible in part for this attitude; in writing *The Gallic Wars* he “equates [Celtic deities] with various figures in the Roman pantheon” (Rolleston 86). While this might indeed be true, Celtic deities did have their own distinct characteristics and their relationship to figures in Keats's work should be explored as a means of enriching the poetry itself.

⁵ The Perseus Digital Library of Tufts University provides a striking amount of references to and artwork of Lamia: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/>

Cuchulain did not accept her love, and for a time they became enemies, although later the Morrigan became Cuchulain's ally and his friend (127).

Squire writes that the Morrigan "lived on as late as any of the Gaelic deities" and that her form survived and is still worshipped in many different avatars (53). Therefore, it is possible that Keats heard a tale of the Morrigan, or even that the account of Lamia in Burton's Melancholy was influenced by the Celtic deity as well as the Greek or Roman one. Keats not only makes Lamia a distinctly faery figure in his tale, but also goes to some length to distinguish her from the Lamia of the Greek pantheon. Given Keats's faithfulness to the Greco-Roman in many retellings of myth, this depiction of Lamia is distinctly Celtic in nature.

Lamia, of course, is not the only Celtic deity or mythological figure represented in Keats's works. Gallant seems as well to notice the impact of these Celtic figures on Keats's works, although perhaps she attributes them wrongly. In her study of "Hyperion," Gallant comments that Saturn and his fellow Titans resemble Druids, last of their kind in a crumbling culture. Keats did read Davies' history after all, and Davies traced the genealogy of the Titans back through Celtic, not Greek, culture (Gallant 32). Moneta resembles more the last of the Druids within this poem than a version of the Greek Mnemosyne due to uncanny natural powers and divinatory abilities unique to the Celts. For, while most ancient cultures boasted seer/bard/prophet figures, the Celtic bard/druid differs from others of its kind. Ultimately, Gallant claims, Moneta embodies "the attitude of the Celtic bard/[druid], the receptive vessel for the Muse's tragic history of dead heroes and a vanquished people" (131). The overcoming melancholy that pervades the piece, she claims, parallels not the Greek myths but a Celtic culture wherein the very priests and souls of the people have effectively been overthrown by the invasion of other cultures and were rendered obsolete. In a striking visual that bears little

similarity to any picture in Greek mythology, Moneta is even cowed like a Druid priestess in “drooping linens veil’d” that also “[hang] about the golden censer” in her hand (216). While Druids are certainly in some cases rendered as mythological creatures, even in contemporary fiction and research such as Lawhead’s Merlin, Keats’s Celtic source for the Titans could be much closer to Druidism than Gallant assumes.

The Tuatha De Danaan, the Originals of Celtic mythology, seem at first to resemble the Titans that reside within “Hyperion.” Rolleston discusses these figures as representing the “powers of Light and Knowledge”: these people were knowledgeable in science and poetry, fair beyond reckoning, and conceived as striking, magical gods. Ironically, echoing Gallant’s commentary on the Celtic faery motif in Keats’s works, they are much later reduced to the ranks of faeries. Unfortunately, this tribe of gifted leaders is eventually dethroned and conquered by the Milesians, “who had all sorts of relations of love and war with them until quite recent times” (104). Their downfall retains an air of the tragic melancholy that seems to invade “Hyperion,” as they “[recall] the high estate from which they had been dethroned” (104).

The Tuatha De Danaan differ from the Greek Titans in several different aspects. First of all, while the Danaan are certainly conceived of in Celtic lore as deities and presiding spiritual powers, they are also simultaneously regarded as “earth-powers—*dei terreni*, as they are explicitly called in the eighth-century ‘Book of Armagh.’” Their powers come from and are part and parcel of the ground beneath their feet (Rolleston 104). Much like Pwyll, prince of Dyfed and simultaneous ruler of the underworld in Celtic mythology, the Danaan exist in two realms at once.

Both “Hyperion: A Fragment” and “The Fall of Hyperion” deal with the fall of the Titans and use the Greek name for a fallen tribe, yet the identities of these characters resemble the

Danaan in the ancient Celtic stories more than the fallen gods of Greek myth. In each of these poems, Keats continually relates the Titans to earth—the common element of the Celtic Danaan, the *dei terreni*. In “The Fall of Hyperion,” the chronological second of the two Hyperion fragments Saturn, foremost of this fallen throng, is depicted as “listening to the earth” (325). Hyperion’s solar attributes are defined in such a manner: he glows with “earthly fire” (59) that indicates his supernatural presence in a realm less supernatural than the one from which he has descended. Moreover, and more importantly, all the Titans have fallen *down* to an earthly realm (as opposed to falling *into* the magical Otherworld). They are surrounded by the scenery of earth: grass, bowers, trees, stones. Theirs is a natural prison quite different from the unnatural Hell, full of tortures and terrors, imposed on the fallen Greek Titans. Most of the Greek Titans are forced to endure eternal punishments; they lie “in the bottom of [a] pit” due to their “war[ing] against the gods” (Bulfinch 193). A certain malevolence accompanies the fall of the Greek Titans, and they are subjects not only of wrath, but of malicious treason. In this case the fallen gods become not only victims but prisoners as well, humiliated for the mirth and amusement of their captors.

The fall of the Tuatha De Danaan is not so much a fall as a gradual fading, and their fading (in being barred from their home) mirrors the fading of the knight in “La Belle,” who is fading due to the flagging of will to live in the mortal world.. Their race is not doomed to eternal punishment after a violent and climactic battle. Rather, the Danaan are gradually worn away or sent into hiding by constant wars, troubles, and the intermingling with the Milesians who eventually scatter them. The Milesians are not “on the side of the powers of darkness,” nor do they intend to deliberately overthrow “the lords of light and beauty” (Rolleston 138). Notably, the Titans that Keats depicts in his two poems—although they possess Greek names—are a

fading race: sorrowful, bitter, and shrouded in “gloom and sorrow” (Keats, “The Fall of Hyperion,” 91) and Keats is steadfast in his depictions of them from the first “Hyperion” to the second “Fall of Hyperion.” The Titans are not already ended, imprisoned in hell; the reader witnesses their slow decline and descent into shadows and faeries—the transformation that takes from them “the immortal fairness of limbs” (3.125) to “fallen Gods” with a presence no more substantial than “pale and silver silence” (2.379, 356). The transformation is most notable through Keats’s employment of colors in the poem. In the first book, when the Titans still retain a measure of their power, the colors range from “flaming” to “gold” to “blood-red” and indicate life, vitality, passion (l. 177, 179). In the second book, the vibrant colors have faded to black (113), jet (115) and “pearl” (284). By the third book, colors have faded to “white” (81), “silvery” (102), and “gray” (114). The evolution of colors follows the fading of the Titans from gods to faeries.

The term faery here is purposeful, and quite accurate; the Titans’ identity as faeries is emphasized particularly by the scenery surrounding their fall; they have not fallen to an underworld or hellish prison, but to a place that bears characteristics of the Keatsian Celtic Otherworld, full of green grass, shading trees, and life-giving, if unnaturally perfect, scenery: the “shady sadness of a vale,” not the dark torments of Hell (Keats, “Hyperion,” 1). This place is one of regret and melancholy; faery realms typically function outside of mortal time and are replete with whimsical sorrow over the passing of ages and waning of the faery creatures (Gallant 3). Keats’s Titans are a race destined to fade away into the shadows, to operate behind the scenes. Similarly, the Tuatha de Danaan retain a magnificence despite their displacement by the Milesians; they continue to function almost as oracles and prophets—using their attributes “to help or to hurt” (Squire 132)—once their faded powers have forced them to flee from

common view.⁶ The Celtic influence recreates the Titans not as damned creatures but as fallen gods, making their doom more tragic.

Moneta, in “The Fall of Hyperion: A Fragment” is a similar figure, singularly exemplifying the nature of the fallen Titan race and further revealing the distinctly Celtic, not Greek roots, of her conception. Moneta resides in a “horned shrine” (136) that still connotes her deity and has become a mystical force despite the fading of her peers’ position and power, a “High Prophetess” (145) residing in a cold and alien Otherworld where seekers must come for aid. Moneta’s “sooth voice” (155) bestows knowledge upon the speaker of the poem, and she allows him, through powers that seem almost magical, to revisit the past and her own memories.

Throughout the poem Keats also refers to Moneta as Mnemosyne. Mnemosyne in Greek mythology is a Titan, one of the elder gods. Moreover, Mnemosyne eventually has children with the usurper Jupiter; these children eventually grow up to become the Muses. Keats’s Moneta does bear some similarity to the Greek Mnemosyne; she is, after all, the guide to memory and recollection. However, Keats’s Moneta still retains her power and her dominion, and she has nothing to do with Jupiter. The fact that Keats even calls this shade Moneta, in addition to Mnemosyne, indicates a desire on his part to separate her from the traditional Greek mythology and, instead, to reapply Celtic connotations to her identity. Even Stillinger notes that the identification of Moneta with Mnemosyne in the poem might be a mistake since the two scarcely parallel each other (478), although the name Moneta does carry Greco-Roman connotations as well. Interestingly, though, Keats chooses the name to which both Celtic *and* Greco-Roman meanings might be applied. Applying Celtic connotations to Moneta reveal the degree to which

⁶ A strange incidence of this phenomenon occurs in Hubert d’Arbois de Jubainville’s Cycle Mythologique Irlandais, where he refers to the Tuatha de Danaan creating a fruitful harvest.

she has been stripped of her agency; once a mover of destiny, she now functions at the behest of those who come to request her wisdom.

Of course, outside the pantheon of Celtic mythological figures, a fringe of pseudo-mythological figures exist. Merlin is one of these figures, and so his brief appearance in “The Eve of St. Agnes” is worthy of analysis. Merlin, as mentioned before, is a figure rooted in Celtic legend. In old Cymric tales Merlin, known as Myrddin, is a bard and prophet, originally assumed by some to be a Druid. Geoffrey of Monmouth most likely changed the Celtic name of the figure from Myrddin to Merlin/Merlinus (Squire qv). Later, Merlin’s Druidic associations evolved and he became a magician, a prophet, and a seer as well as a typical bard or priest of the in the works of Malory and Tennyson.

However, it is possible that Keats had some access to the Celticized bard/druid Merlin. Monmouth was popular in England during Keats’s time, and given that Keats refers to Stonehenge in several works, the possibility that he read Monmouth is high, particularly considering Monmouth’s discussion of Merlin as the figure who originally brought the stones of Stonehenge to England. In his History of the Kings of Britain, Monmouth relates the ‘creation’ of Stonehenge:

Merlin laughed at their vain efforts [to move the stones] and then began his own contrivances. When he had placed in order the engines that were necessary, he took down the stones with an incredible facility, and gave directions for carrying them to the ships, and placing them therein. This done, they with joy set sail again, to return to Britain; where they arrived with a fair gale, and repaired to the burying-place with the stones” (Monmouth ch. xii).

In this case, though Merlin's machinations to get the stones to Britain are not necessarily arcane, the reader is assured that it is only through 'contrivances' on his part that the stones get to Britain. Presumably he not only bears sole responsibility for moving the stones but has a great interest in moving them. Given that the stones of Stonehenge have throughout history been associated with ritualism and the occult, Monmouth's discussion of Merlin as almost a father of these stones lends the magician/bard an arcane mystique that cannot immediately be dismissed.

Moreover, much later in the history, Monmouth relates the nature of Merlin's conception. Merlin's mother was visited several times by an unnaturally beautiful man who eventually impregnated her. In Monmouth's account, Maugantius points out that "in [a] book concerning the demon of Socrates" there exists a discussion of the demonic incubi, supernatural spirits whose intent is to sleep with and impregnate women. The men agree that Merlin's conception was supernatural and most likely demonic.

Bush refers to both Monmouth's incarnation of Merlin as the power behind Stonehenge as well as his existence as a demon's child in his Selected Poems and Letters of John Keats; he implies that Monmouth's tale is the source from which Keats's Merlin allusion stems. First, Bush's observation intrigues because it differs from the other critical observations on this line, which trace the mention of Merlin solely back to Malory or Tennyson, although they also occasionally present Merlin as a demonic figure. Secondly, Merlin pays his demon a "monstrous" debt. There is very little about the Merlin-Vivien relationship in legend that speaks to debt. The two are a couple in Le Morte D' Arthur, and while Merlin does annoy his lady by "lay[ing] about her to have her maidenhood," (103), she wants to be free of him and, as a result, traps him inside a rock. Interestingly, Merlin prophesies at one point that he will be "put in the earth quick" (Malory 102), so perhaps his debt is not to Vivien, but to the 'demonic' prophecy he

has invoked. This interpretation of the allusion, especially given the Celticized Merlin, proves specifically important to the later interpretation of the characters in “The Eve of St. Agnes” by revealing not only Porphyro, but Madelaine as Otherworld figures. Thus, Keats’s possible use of Monmouth as a source for this allusion impacts the portrayal of characters in “The Eve of St. Agnes” and ultimately turns the poem into a description of passion, manipulation and invoked powers wherein Madelaine relinquishes the agency she has invoked to Porphyro, who can manipulate what he did not on his own pursue.

Many of Keats’s poems, including “Endymion,” “Calidore,” “The Eve of St. Agnes,” and “La Belle Dame Sans Merci” present a very specifically characterized male figure. These male figures seem to share several common traits: they are mortal, strong in their own right, passionate, and vulnerable to and completely dominated by both good and bad women. The love and hate of women for these men determines the course of these characters’ futures. The knight in “La Belle Dame” is left forlorn and alone because the woman he loves has forsaken him; the quality of his existence is determined by the fact that he has simultaneously lost the object of his desire and become subject to an Otherworld agent who manipulates him. Similarly, Lycias in “Lamia” structures his entire life around his love to the point that, when their marriage feast ends in tragedy, he dies immediately thereafter. In “The Eve of St. Agnes,” on the other hand, Porphyro functions more as a counterpart to La Belle, using his own presence and abilities to manipulate a beloved one. McFarland argues that the construction of these characters allows for a consummation of erotic desires. In other words, this type of driven, passionate and desiring character is unique to Keats—and can easily pursue, and then become subject to, Otherworld manipulation.

This lovelorn character type created by Keats relates to Celtic mythology in a very strange but profound way. An appropriate example here is the Celtic hero Cuchulainn, whose Greek equivalent would most likely be Achilles. Cuchulainn is a mortal child of miraculous birth who also happens to be powerful and constantly victorious in battle. Interestingly, though, his love life and the work of women dominate much of his legendary exploits. Married to his beloved wife Emer, for whom he fought countless battles and solved countless riddles, he also has a child by an enemy named Aife and ends up in a tryst with the goddess Fand. Like Porphyro and the knight in “La Belle Dame,” Cuchulainn is willing to risk all, even his very life, for the woman—or in this case, women—that he loves.

Moreover, his mother, Dechtire, occupies a significant place in his legend. The Morrigan (or Morrighu), a goddess, falls in love with, hates, and then later befriends him. He learns his venerable battle skills, the very essence of his manhood, from Scathach, “who taught him all her war-craft.” And, ultimately, the woman Medb/Maeve—“Queen of Connacht, [who] had never forgiven him for keeping back her army from raiding Ulster”—is his undoing. Cuchulainn, a figure revered by the Celts as the closest mortal to a god, lives a life in which women function as the main motivators and movers of action (Squire 158-88). Women create the paradigms within which Cuchulainn functions. In essence, Cuchulainn is a male, but the society he lives in is hardly patriarchal. Women create the action and often propel it. The Tuatha de Danaan is a mixed group composed of both male and female members and, as is the case with Cuchulainn, females often determine the ultimate course of action. The goddess of war, the Morrighu, is strikingly female. In his book Celtic Identity and the British Image, Murray G.H. Pittock remarks that “feminine qualities” permeate Celtic culture and mythology (79-80). The Celtic cultural identity, according to Pittock, is one that is at its core feminized.

Keats's male characters bear a strong resemblance to the Cuchulainn Celtic figure. Women determine the course of action, if not by their own activity, then by their very being. Madelaine's existence as Porphyro's beloved is enough to summon his desire; meanwhile, she very actively invokes the rites that allow him passage. When Lycius is in a room with Lamia, he "scarce [sees] in all the room another face" (240); Lamia directs his way of seeing. While the women may not necessarily act physically upon their male counterparts, the female presence in the poem creates the paradigm within which men act. In this way, Keats's male characters often resemble Cuchulainn.

Notably, too, the males in Keats's poems often act in feminized ways—not because they are in love, but because they are often lovesick, following in a long literary tradition of anguished, fetishized *female* lovers like Juliet, Elaine of Astolat, and Dido; the knight in "La Belle Dame" is pale and forlorn, Porphyro's heart flames with love and he grows pale at the sight of his lover, Lycius dies after Lamia disappears. These men are all characterized by a startling lack of desire, suffering either for what they pursue and cannot have, or by the sudden shift in role from pursuer and agent to passive object. The Keatsian hero often suffers for or because of his lady, anguishing over her the way the Lady of Shallott/Elaine of Astolat languishes over Lancelot.⁷ In this, the Keatsian hero resembles another sort of lover—the courtly lover made popular in medieval literature and in many Arthurian sagas. Notably, in a great deal of literature devoted to courtly love in the middle ages, the material comes from Breton minstrels and Monmouth's Historia Regum Britanniae" (Kibler 1), so even the courtly lover ideal made popular in medieval literature might have some roots in Celticism. Either way Keats's writing, so unique among the Romantics for its distinct presentation of suffering, female-driven, erotically charged

⁷ The story of Elaine/The Lady can be found in various Arthurian tales, most notably in Malory and Tennyson's later poem "The Lady of Shallott."

males, inverts typical patriarchal structure—dependent on the acquisition of an object, and on the relationship of a subject to an object—by recreating the male as the personification of annihilated desire.

Aside from the suffering male, another Celtic figure that might have had some impact on Keats's writing—and might have, in many ways, influenced his poems and his conception of himself—is the Druid bard Taliesin. Taliesin appears most famously in the Mabinogion compiled by Lady Charlotte Guest, although his story is the only one not found in the 14th century The Red Book of Hergest from which the rest of the Mabinogion is drawn. (Rolleston 412). Given the Celtic Revival and “agreeable sensations” (Pittock 35) that followed in the wake of Macpherson's Ossian poems, it is plausible that Keats had access to, or at least had heard of, the Mabinogion. Scholars know for certain that he had heard of the druids; he mentions them repeatedly in his poems and learned of them through Davies' Celtic Researches. Plausibly, Keats was acquainted with Taliesin, perhaps one of the most famous druids; at the very least, however, Keats was acquainted with the Druidic and bardic characteristics that the name Taliesin implies.

Nearly a Christ figure due to his miraculous birth, mighty powers, and sacrificial death, Taliesin is the epitome of the druid bard (Rolleston 416-417). He prophesies the future, comforts his people, and ushers them gently into the future. Nor is Taliesin an entirely mythical or fictional construction. While it is doubtful that the bard witnessed the creation of the world or underwent a miraculous birth, “there was a real Taliesin, a sixth-century bard to whom were attributed, and who may have actually been composed, some of the poems in the Book of Taliesin” (Squire 318). Regardless of how the real Taliesin and the legendary one might overlap, the figure of Taliesin epitomizes the bard as he existed in Celtic culture.

To a degree, the Celtic bard was both chief poet and storyteller. Charles Squire comments on the literary focus and desire of the Celtic bard:

Like the Vedic brahmans, the Greek and Latin poets, and the Norse scalds, the Celtic bards—whether Gaels or Britons—imagined the sky, the sun, the moon, the earth, the sea, and the dark underworld, as well as the mountains, the streams, and the woods, to be ruled by beings like their own chiefs, but infinitely more powerful; every passion, as War and Love, and every art, as Poetry and Smithcraft, had its divine founder, teacher, and exponent; and of all of these deities and their imagined children, they wove...poetical and allegorical romances (32-3).

Bards were, in many ways, the keepers of their culture, and they are responsible for many of the lays and ballads handed down through the years to finally end up in the hands of such men as Scott and Burns. The lay that influenced the author of “Sir Orfeo” might well have come from a Celtic bard.

Taliesin, of course, was a bard among bards. Prime bard of Britain, he advised rulers, made prophecies, and guided the course of his people the Celts. He is most famous for the following mythological poem, a statement of his identity that is at once “magnificently pagan, and quite a storehouse of British mythology”:

I will praise the Sovereign, supreme Lord of the land,
Who hath extended his dominion over the shore of the
world.

Stout was the prison of Gweir, in Caer Sidi,
Through the spite of Pwyll and Pryderi:

No one before him went into it.
The heavy blue chain firmly held the youth,
And before the spoils of Annwn woefully he sang,
And thenceforth till doom he shall remain a bard.
Thrice enough to fill Prydwen we went into it;
Except seven, none returned from Caer Sidi.

Am I not a candidate for fame, to be heard in song
In Caer Pedryvan, four times revolving?

[...]

I will not allow much praise to the leaders of literature.

[...]

When we went with Arthur, of mournful memory,
Except seven, none returned from Caer Vandwy.⁸

I will not allow much praise to those of drooping courage. (Squire 320).

Regardless, the Celtic bards were not just bards. They were, in a manner of speaking, “Druidical disciples” (Gallant 33) who absorbed not only the literature, but the secret religious knowledge of their people. Taliesin speaks in the aforementioned poem as a godlike figure, with the inherent authority such a position conveys—as the receptacle of his people’s knowledge and as the speaker responsible for teaching it. Gallant quotes Davies, whom Keats read, in this regard: he believed that bardism and druidism were interchangeable terms (33). Yet not all

⁸ Squire notes that this particular version of the poem is drawn from the collaboration of four different translators in an effort to create an intelligible version; among other things, Taliesin’s verse is well-known for its obscurity and unintelligible allusions.

druids were necessarily bards, nor were all bards necessarily druids. Druidism involves both religion and philosophy; Caesar noted that the Druids taught both the immortality and the indestructibility of the soul (Rolleston 39-40) and that, although well-educated, Druids would not commit their teachings to writing. Druids were also, perhaps unfortunately, associated with human sacrifice—particularly the wicker-man sacrifices, wherein giant wicker cages were filled with victims who were then burned alive (Squire 37-8). Nevertheless, human sacrifice was not specific to the Celts, and Druidism remains a vital part of Celtic culture.

Taliesin in particular personifies this dichotomous juncture—he is druid *and* bard, recorder of history as well as the shaper of his people’s spiritual vision. He is an admonisher, a visionary, a writer, a historian, and a spiritual guide. In many ways also, he is a vessel of all those who have come before him—a receptacle for the culture of his people. Gallant writes that “the Celtic bard who held such a central place in his ancient society particularly appealed to late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century poets whose own position in society was increasingly dwindled and neglected” (35). Furthermore, Gallant adds, “the Celtic bard was an emblem of resistance, an explicit counterpoise to the distant and respectable Homeric bard of classical Greece favored by the English upper class” (35). It stands to reason that Keats, himself a Cockney born within hearing distance of Bow’s Bells and tormented by critics and antagonists throughout his life for his low social station, identified with the Celtic, rather than the classical Homeric, bard figure. A study of Keats’s identification with the poetic bardic figure as well as the self-actualized connotations implied by that figure might be of great interest to postcolonial scholars, particularly those interested in studying the revolutionary Celtic revival and its impact on 19th century society. Also, Keats identification with the poetic bardic figure might further reveal his desire to converge the agent and object of his poems.

Keats himself, after all, felt a calling toward a specifically bardic role as a poet. In fact, in his letter to Richard Woodhouse on 27 October 1818 he writes that “as to the poetical character...it is not itself—it has no self—it is everything and nothing—It has no character—it enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated—It has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen” (Bush 279). These comments almost speak to Taliesin’s earlier poem, in which the poet is part of all things, good and evil, high and low. To that degree, the poet has no ‘self’, no individual identity that influences or channels his poetry—he instead attempts to abandon self, and perhaps erotic agency, in order to become his subject, to become the poem he is writing. This concept has long been a stumbling block to critics who attempt to read Keats’s enchanting and tragic biography into his work, but Keats’s stated desire was to achieve the sort of self-annihilation that could make poetry possible. Keats once remarked in a letter to Shelley that his “Imagination is a monastery and [he] is its Monk” (Bush 298). In his own way, Keats is proclaiming himself Druid of his own imagination, keeper of those secrets of literature and culture within his own mind—much indeed like the speaker in “Ode to Psyche” declares himself priest and devotee of the sight he has just witnessed.

To Keats, poetry was more than a mere entertainment or way to spend the time. Like many of the other Romantics, he considered poetry a receptacle of philosophy and thought as well as a purveyor of beauty. Poetry in Keats’s eyes was something which could affect others, and the poet was merely a vessel for the ideas that flowed through the pen and onto the page. Indeed, the very idea of negative capability⁹ that Keats is so famous for exemplifies the very role of the Druidic bard Taliesin, a role that involves “[not] a unity solely of the object itself, emerging untrammelled and in its full significance, but a unity also of the human spirit both

⁹ This concept is discussed most famously in Bate’s essay “Negative Capability.”

within itself and what was at first outside it” (Bate 52). Taliesin, after all, is not remembered for any cogent identity of his own—although the story of his supposedly miraculous birth is intriguing—but rather for the things he observed and the events that effectively shaped his identity over countless years. Thus, the very call that Keats makes for poets to release themselves into the object of beauty they are creating is, in fact, an imitation of the bardic call for both Druids and bards to do the same. Little wonder Keats was so enchanted with the Druids, spiritual guides and teachers of truth and beauty to their people.

The poem “Ode on a Grecian Urn” embodies the Druidic call to abandonment of self. On the surface, the poem depicts an urn embossed with a pastoral scene. For Keats the object of this action—his famous idea of negative capability—was not to literally transform into the subject of the poem, but to abandon self in such a way that intimacy with an object (even an object of art, which is often considered unreachable) is possible. In the poem, particularly, the urn is an inanimate object that only speaks through the scene impressed upon it. The urn has no identity beyond the story it tells: of a processional, of lovers about to kiss, of priests and shepherds. To that end, Keats was a Taliesin, able to tell stories that he may or not have witnessed, able to create beauty he may or may not have known—simply because he annihilated his identity in favor of his subject, allowing the subject to speak through him as the urn speaks through the scene it represents.

Perhaps it is possible in some circumstances to ascribe the characters and figures in Keats’s works to other, less Celtic origins. Keats often retained Greek names for his creations, after all. Yet almost in spite of their appellations these characters do not often act in Greek ways, and in their purest form resemble Celtic archetypes as opposed to Greek ones. Lamia, the stereotypical male Keatsian hero, Merlin, and Moneta bear striking resemblances not to deities

and heroes of Greek mythology, but rather to distinctly Celtic figures: the Morrigan, Cuchulainn, Myrddin, and the Druids. Even Keats himself, in explicitly defining the role of the poet in his letters and thus defining himself, conforms not to the strictly literary and Homeric definition of a bard but to the spiritual, self-annihilating Celtic one. Moreover, his characters glean their identities to some degree from the natural world around them—a world created by Keats that is inherently Celtic, populated by and composed of items and objects sacred to this ancient people.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE NATURAL CELTIC WORLD

Keats enjoyed trees, and he often uses them as metaphors. In a letter to John Hamilton Reynolds on Feb. 19, 1818, he writes:

Man should not dispute or assert but whisper results to his neighbour, and thus by every germ of Spirit sucking the Sap from mould ethereal every human might become great, and Humanity instead of being a wide heath of Furse and Briars with here and there a remote Oak or Pine, would become a grand democracy of Forest Trees (Keats, Selected Poems and Letters 265).

Interestingly, the trees mentioned here were also sacred to the Druids for their religious, medicinal, and mystical properties.

Keats references the oak several times, most prominently in the aforementioned letter and also in his sonnet “On Sitting Down to Read King Lear Once Again.” In both references, the oak is a good creation, rare and connected with eternity and universality. The oak of his letter to Reynolds symbolizes the unusual great human amidst a sea of the typical; the tree here is stately, notable, and something to be aspired to. In the “King Lear” sonnet, Keats writes that his desire is to wander “through the old oak forest” and eventually catch fire with his vision and his dream (11). The oak in Keatsian terms, then, is a tree representing creativity, ambition, forcefulness and—to a degree—renown.

The Roman Pliny mentions the profound reverence the Druids held for the oak tree: “Here we must mention the awe felt for this plant by the Gauls. The Druids—for so their magicians are called—held nothing more sacred than...the oak. But they choose groves of oaks for the sake of the tree alone, and they never perform any of their rites except in the presence of a branch of it” (Pliny XVI, 249). In The Celtic Druid’s Year, John King points out that oak has,

throughout civilization, functioned as a symbol of deity, power and strength. He also notes that no culture has been so closely tied to the oak as the ancient Celts and their Druids, and that the Goidelic language pronounced oak as ‘doo-r’ or ‘der,’ which might explain the appellation that the Druids originally bestowed upon themselves. Either way, the oak was revered in Celtic culture more than any other for its symbolic superlative values of strength and deity; appellations for the tree include “the king of the forest,” and the tree remains associated with Beltane, the Druidic festival for fertility and renewed growth (Sacred). An old poem from The Poem Book of the Gael venerates oak as giver of life-warmth and stability (Graves 171). In Keats’s poetry the oak represents many of the same values, and in the sonnet the speaker’s creative awakening can only take place when he is in the forest of this powerful, impressive tree, just as the Druids’ times of learning and initiation occurred only in oak groves.

The oak is not the only distinctly Celtic tree given attention in Keats’s work.¹⁰ “Lamia” references two trees in particular: cedar and willow. During the marriage feast, Lamia’s head is adorned with “the leaves of willow” (2.224). In another poem, “Endymion,” Peona watches over Endymion as “a willow keeps/A patient watch over the stream that creeps/Windingly by it” (1. 446-48). In both cases, willow is synonymous with enchantment and death. In “Lamia,” the willow binding her head is suggestive of the imminent disaster to come in which her true self will be unveiled and then vanish. While what happens to Lamia after her disappearance is not exactly known, the exposure of her true nature implies certain death to the love and relationship between her and Lycius. Moreover, Lycius dies shortly after his beloved is exposed to the wedding crowd. In “Endymion,” while Endymion does not die, he does fall into a trancelike sleep. In “Sonnet to Sleep,” Keats compares sleep to an “embalmer” (1) and remarks that sleep

¹⁰ The oak is prevalent in several different Greek, Roman, and Egyptian myths. However, its importance in the Celtic mythology is unparalleled because only the Celts formed the entirety of their religion and lifestyle around the different types of trees.

“seal[s] the hushed casket of my soul” (14). In the case of this sonnet, sleep certainly correlates to death and to enchantment, even if the period of enchantment is impermanent. Many times Keats introduces his Otherworld motif by presenting a nightingale, a visitor, or a willow as a catalyst for enchantment. The enchanted victims, drowsy and sleeping, soon wake to find themselves in another land.

Again, Keats use of the willow parallels the Celtic symbolism associated with the tree. First of all, the willow strongly connotes the female (Graves 170). In many cases, “Endymion” and “Lamia” included, a woman either wields or wears the willow. However, this particular tree also connotes death to the Druids. King comments that the willow links strongly with witchcraft, and also with death—who, interestingly, is feminized in many Celtic legends, further supporting the link between these multiple symbolic meanings. Moreover wicker, the word meaning willow reed, often served as the wood for wicker cages during Druidic human sacrifice. The Celtic conception of willow does not differ from Keats’s conception of the tree; the presence of this particular flora serves as an appropriate backdrop in both these works to highlight either a sense of impending doom, or impending enchantment.

Keats delves even deeper to use a strikingly Celtic plant in his works: the hawthorn. In “Ode to a Nightingale,” Keats describes a speaker surrounded by “white hawthorn” (46). Ironically, the speaker “cannot see what flowers are at [his feet]” (41) and is surrounded by dimness and shade, yet he remains vividly aware of the white hawthorn. Moreover, in a poem where the flora and fauna are oft referred to in vague terms—“boughs,” “fruit tree,” “trees,” and “beechen green”—the hawthorn is distinguished from its surroundings. The tree appears at the very moment the speaker identifies with the nightingale’s song, envies it, and realizes that while the bird’s song is immortal he remains “half in love with easeful Death” (52).

The hawthorn, as King mentions, is associated with both bad luck and chastity. Ironically, both meanings apply in this poem—the hawthorn is the tree anchoring the transitional moment of the ode. The speaker, lost in his reverie, is both immersed in the purity and the beauty of the nightingale’s song; he is simultaneously the victim of ill fate when, snatched back to his “sole self” (72), he realizes that the attainment of such beauty is only temporary and that the song is fading even as he listens. The hawthorn, often used to ensure the beauty of young virginal girls among the Celts, symbolizes the purity inherent in the nightingale’s song, a purity that is only temporarily available to the speaker. His plaintive cry at the end of the poem—“Do I wake or sleep?” (80)—reveals his desperation to separate the pure beauty of his reverie from the mortality of his own life. Simultaneously, the “many branches and twisted tangle” of the tree, which connoted bad luck to the Druids, exemplify the complexity inherent in the speaker’s attempt to become one with the nightingale; the desire remains so complex as to be impossible to grasp, and as a result the speaker returns, woeful, to his mortal place on earth away from this pure realm of creativity. Thus, the hawthorn is in several ways the perfect choice to visually anchor this poem, representing at once the purity of Art in the nightingale’s song and also the ill luck of hearing it only to intimately understand one’s mortality and impossibility of emulating something so pure.

Keats references several other trees sacred to the Druids in his works, including cedar, hazel, and yew. Hazel and rowan in Druidic lore are often associated with wisdom, hence their use in “compelling demons to answer difficult questions” (Graves 167) as well as in divination. The yew is traditionally considered a “deadly” tree, particularly in opposition to the life-giving ash (Graves 168). Appropriately, the yew appears in Keats’s “Ode on Melancholy,” a poem in which he advises the reader to “make not your rosary of yew-berries” (5). Hazel appears in “To

Autumn,” a poem that meditates on the changing of seasons and the inherent wisdom of the fall’s “patient look” (21).

Even apples, mentioned among other places in “Ode to Autumn,” have particular Druidic significance; apples were considered the celestial fruit of the Danaan, and later became a symbol of death and taboo after the demise of the woman Ailinn (Squire 102, 189). Apples also represent choice and, in some tales, healing (Sacred). Again, “To Autumn” mentions apples in several lines, most notably because apples are popular for cider-making in the fall. Still, the connotation of the apple tree as a divine fruit in a poem where the figure of Autumn is an immortal “gleaner...drows’d with the fume of poppies” (17, 19) bestows a deity and holy immortality upon Nature and the seasons.

Certainly the trees mentioned in Keats poetry are not all distinct to Celtic mythology, though only the Celts came up with the Ogham, a sacred “old alphabet” based on the holy trees and similar, in function, to the Elder Futhark of Norse runes. However, the Celts remain the only culture to worship trees as near-deities, “tear[ing] down [some] branches” and avoiding others to commemorate festivals, incantations, and celebrations (Squire 408). Moreover, the Celtic Ogham is an “old alphabet” sacred to the Celts and similar, in function, to the Elder Futhark of Norse runes. Composed of twenty-five distinct characters, the alphabet is also called “the tree alphabet” because each character simultaneously represents the name and inherent characteristics of a secret tree (Graves 156). Keats’s particular choice of trees meaningful to the Celts and the Druids, as well as his placement of said trees at key symbolic moments in his poetry, indicates a use of tree symbolism that extends far beyond allusion. Having read Davies, he was aware of the Druids and of their objects of worship; worship of fetish objects, including stones and trees, continues among the “Gaelic counties” today (Squire 414). All of these trees mentioned in the

poems are not native to England, and chances are small that Keats would have encountered all of them except through literature and study.

However, Bate maintains that during Keats's walking tour of Scotland with Brown, the poet was impressed by the variance, plentitude, and beauty of the trees (358). Moreover, Keats had the opportunity during this trip to see the trees near "the Druid Circle" (mentioned also in "Hyperion") and other Celtic sights (358). At the very least, Keats's exposure to the Druids through Davies supplied him with a coherent knowledge of the trees sacred to the Celts, and he was able to observe these trees in their proper Celtic context during the Scotland trip.

Also of interest within Keats's poetry is the prevalence of the bower as a setting. Bowers, of course, are made of trees: common dictionary definitions refer to them as "a shaded, leafy recess" or "an arbor" ("Bower"). Squire maintains that the bower, or sheltered enclave of trees, bore special importance to the Druids because they celebrated their four most sacred holidays—Beltaine, Midsummer, Feast of Lugh, and Samhain—within bowers (406). In Celtic terms, the bower is not merely a hideaway for lovers; the arbor functions instead as a place of great spiritual significance and also, simultaneously, as a locus for community.

The word "bower" pops up in several of Keats's poems. In book one of "Endymion," Peona leads her ailing brother to "her favourite bower's quiet shade" where he partakes in "magic sleep" (437, 453). Earlier, the word even becomes an adjective: Peona's destination is "a bowery island" (428). The bower in this case is a place of healing and quiet communion between brother and sister.

The bower in "Sonnet to Sleep" serves a similar purpose. The speaker's eyes are "embower'd from the light" (3); sleep exists as a shaded arbor that shuts him away from the world and even from himself. The quiet, tender nature of the bower in "Endymion" extends to

this poem as well. The bower remains a place of peace, mystical quietude, and rest for the soul and body. Interestingly, in this poem, the speaker is quite alone except for the presence of sleep itself.

In slight contrast, in “To My Brother George (epistle),” the bower becomes associated with faeries and a realm beyond “the mortal eye” (44). Keats writes of what the poet, lost in his reverie, can see: the bowers of supernaturally beautiful ladies, glorious festivals, and “gay knights” (27). In this particular piece the bower is not the quiet place of healing in “Endymion,” but instead a place of magic, immortality, and celebration. The theme repeats itself in the poem “Written on the Day That Mr. Leigh Hunt Left Prison.” In this poem, Keats contrasts the dull cruelty of prison life with “the bowers fair” (9), full of flowers and genius, in which Hunt’s imagination resided during his captivity. Here the bower again is a place of celebration and linked with the notion of genius, creativity, and supernatural activity. These uses of the word “bower” align strikingly with the Celtic context of the word. In most of Keats’s poems, the bower is either a place of creative energy and intellect, or a quiet, sacred space devoted to healing and introspection. Similarly, the bower was a sacred place to the Druids who believed they gleaned their knowledge, energy, and spiritual strength from the branches that embraced them.

Of course, both Shakespeare and Spenser made liberal use of the word, which might account for Keats’s fondness; Gallant points out that the use of such terms on both Shakespeare and Spenser’s part can be attributed to a “long folkloric tradition” of faeries and faery realms rather than any classical interest (41). Therefore, the context of the word “bower” in Keats’s poetry can, along with the significance of particular types of trees, reveal the Celtic influences

therein. In many ways, Keats's poetry seems to be responding in a sense to the Celtic connotations of the word as it occurs throughout Shakespeare and Spenser.

The collective works of John Keats are replete with Celtic influences. Examined as whole, and in context with his letters and contemporary events, the manifestations of this influence within his motifs, characterizations, and settings, are quite striking. However, privileging the Celtic narrative in Keats's work involves much more than merely sifting the various influences and identifying those which appear to be somehow Celtic in nature. Rather, having identified the plethora of Celtic influences within the work of John Keats, the scholar realizes that these influences profoundly change the mood, the meaning, and even the key themes of individual works. Gallant offers such Celticized explications of many Keats poems in her book, although her treatment of the poems tends toward an examination of motifs or themes rather than an overall close reading or interpretation. In the next section, I will examine several Keats poems in the light of these Celtic influences.

CHAPTER FIVE: RE-READING AND REVISIONING

The first of these poems, Keats's "On Sitting Down to Read King Lear Once Again," is a popular sonnet in the Keats canon, if for no other reason than that it symbolizes, or seems to symbolize, the 'beginning' of his poetic career. Bate's and Ward's thoughts on this particular work seem indicative of the general trend of critical thought and interpretation. Bate argues that this poem in particular manifests Keats's poetic consciousness "operating subterraneously" and signifies "another development," the new line of thinking and philosophy that would lead Keats to become a poet among poets (235). Ward also acknowledges that this marks Keats's attempt to "make a new start," but further points out that the sonnet exemplifies a peculiar kind of poetic anxiety and impotence for Keats, "the disparity between his own achievement and Shakespeare's tragic stature" (158). Ultimately, in current critical terms, the "King Lear" sonnet exemplifies the beginnings of Keats's self-awareness and anxiety as a serious poet with an overwhelming cultural-poetic heritage to uphold.

Careful attention to the Celtic connotations in "On Sitting Down," however, reveals to the serious reader that Keats confronts in this poem a heritage that extends far beyond Shakespeare. The beginning of the poem offers a series of images: "golden-tongued Romance," a "serene lute," and a "fair-plumed syren" (1-2). All these images, the lute in particular, connote the classical, the epic. Yet the speaker demands after the list of these images that they "leave melodizing" and then "shut up thine olden pages and be mute" (3-4). The call of the speaker demands a cease to these classical, epic images and a turn away from the previous grandeur as he bids them farewell in favor of a new "dispute/ betwixt damnation and impassioned clay" (6). The speaker shifts in this poem from ethereal, gilded, images to gritty, earthier ones.

At this point, the speaker mentions Shakespeare; the speaker intends to work through this debate by “assay[ing]/The bitter-sweet of this Shakspearean fruit” (8). In this case, through a careful reading, the Shakespearean work itself is not the *cause* of the speaker’s internal debate, but rather the vehicle through which he confronts it. His call for change occurs immediately, before the mention of Shakespeare in the poem, and Shakespeare’s play functions as the catalyst through which this change might be wrought.

At this point in the poem, another series of images appear, strikingly Celtic in nature. Keats cries out for the “Chief Poet” and “ye clouds of Albion.” The cry for a chief poet, besides pointing back to Shakespeare who no doubt fits the description, also seems to recollect the Celtic bard Gallant deems so central to Romanticism (35). The Celtic bard represents an entirely different sort of history than Shakespeare does, and indeed acts as an “explicit counterpoise to the distant and respectable elements” of the past (Gallant 35). These images function as the speaker’s desire to confront a past that overwhelms Shakespeare and England’s other literary giants and extends into medieval and Celtic culture, perhaps even the very basis of England itself.

Moreover, the “Albion” reference is telling. A more archaic name for the island of Britain, Albion stems from the word *Alba*, the name of the isle inhabited by the Gaelic gods (Squire 192). Eventually the gods had to leave Alba, or go into hiding as *sidhe* (136) as mortals took over their home. The name Albion hearkens back to a distinctly Celtic past peppered by the Tuatha de Danaan and the Gaelic gods, a past that reaches far beyond Shakespeare and his plays. That Keats would invoke this particular name for Britain in the poem is unusual, given the name’s distinctly Celtic roots. Moreover, the juxtaposition of “Albion” with the “Chief Poet” reference forces the reader into a time frame that includes not only Shakespeare and the

nineteenth century's other venerable forbears, but their medieval heritage as well. The speaker goes on to call both the Chief Poet and the clouds of Albion "begetters of our deep eternal theme." He is not merely crediting Shakespeare, in this case; again, Shakespeare is merely the catalyst. In this line he is not referred to by his playwright name, but as "Chief Poet," keeper of a nearly-sacred bardic office. That Shakespeare held this office is notable, but not particularly relevant—the office itself matters more than its holder. That this office, and Albion itself, begets an eternal theme certainly points to a heritage, but not necessarily the more recent classical heritage that critics claim. The heritage the speaker points to here is far deeper, far more Celtic, in nature—the heritage of primeval Britain itself, the Britain that once was Albion/Avalon.

The speaker follows this invocation of a cultural past by mentioning his future wanderings through "the old oak forest." The oak in Celtic lore, and in the Druidic ogham, is a tree of knowledge, power, and revelation. The meaning certainly fits here, for it is in this forest that the speaker hopes to "not wander in a barren dream" but instead "fly at [his] desire." The poem ends with the hope that the speaker, consumed, will not burn up in the fire of his inspiration but instead rise like the phoenix to do as he wishes.

This new interpretation of the poem does not deny the general critical view that Keats establishes a new poetic beginning for himself within this poem and also tackles the poetic heritage left by Milton, Shakespeare, and Chaucer. Rather, this new reading reveals the speaker confronting not only that limited English heritage, but the heritage of Britain itself. In fact, this new reading forces the reader to contemplate the question of what it means to be an English poet and bear not only the weight of recent forebears, but of their venerable forebears as well—to take one's place in not only a tradition of literature, but a veritable mythology formed from time immemorial. Ultimately, too, this poem might serve as a warning about the complete

annihilation of the individual desire for the poet, which can force the poet to succumb to the weight of the past rather than abandon desire to become the object of his poetry.

“There is a joy in footing slow across a silent plane” is another poem that, like “On Sitting Down,” recalls the reader to a primeval, Celtic past. However, this poem calls attention to the danger of too much enchantment with the past. The poem has received little critical attention, perhaps due to its style and somber, reflective tone. Keats wrote it on his walking tour of Scotland, and for that alone it merits a mention in Bate’s biography (357). Still, the poem reflects, appropriately enough, on the act of reflecting. On the surface, the poem appears little more than a thoughtful reverie on things past. The speaker, “footing slow across a silent plain,” remembers events from a time long gone, and comments on the reverie of those enchanted by the past and its inherent dangers (1). The poem ends with the fervent hope that man might not “lose his mind on mountains bleak and bare” but instead keep “his inward sight unblind” (46-7, 51). The poem is a tribute to and warning against the past all at once, a comment by the speaker on the beauty of reflection and its inherent dangers to the present.

The poem itself contains several blatant Celtic references. The speaker refers to a “heath where Druids old have been” and “the bard’s low cradle place” (4, 29). This poem is also notable because of its conspicuous lack of Greek and Roman references. Instead, the poem is replete with images of nature: “light hether-bells” and “sandy fern” mingle with “black mountain peaks” and “blue tides” to create an elemental backdrop of primal colors and forms on which the images of the past, “patriot battle[s]” and “mantles grey...rustl[ing] by” play like old movie scenes (2,5, 14-15, 18-19). According to the speaker, this Celticized past is a place of healing and helps where man can go to cleanse “the worldly heart” and soothe his mind. These scenes of recollection are, in fact, so appealing that they can cause man to “forget his mortal

way.” This past, then, full of Druids and bards and natural scenes of wild beauty is above “the sweet and bitter world,” but also threatens to preclude the objects of the present.

The important element in this poem, of course, is the nature of the past that the speaker discusses. This past is not the Greek and Roman past of “On Reading Chapman’s Homer,” a tribute to the classical monuments of another culture. The past in “There is a joy” is distinctly British, inhabited by Druids and bards, encompassed in the primal, achingly beautiful scenery of Britain and the surrounding islands. This reading of the poem salutes the deeply embedded Celtic primeval past and its impact on the soul of man, while “On Sitting Down” contemplates a literary ancestry that extends to the very soul of Britain, far beyond Shakespeare and Milton. The next poem, however, does neither of these things. Rather, Celtic influences on “The Eve of St. Agnes” create a chilling tale of manipulation and control that also exemplifies Keats’s Romantic spin on the nature of the Celtic Otherworld.

The hall itself, wherein the main events of the poem occur, bears many marks of an Otherworld motif: dancers in “plume, tiara, and all rich array” mingle with each other to share “looks of love, defiance, hate and scorn” (38, 69). An entire world is encapsulated here within these castle walls, locked away from a vague and indefinable outside world where nothing intrudes to break the spell of magic—magic that is soon, albeit through stratagem, made manifest for the young Madelaine herself after she chooses to participate in the rite.

Angela, the old crone who inhabits the castle, is herself reminiscent of the Celtic faery creatures, particularly the older ones who “[have] an eerie touch of the unearthly that is untrammelled by human moral codes, sometimes even an imitation of the sinister” (Gallant 63). These faery creatures, stemming from Celtic lore, descended through myth and legend to become similar figures in songs and children’s tales, and Angela with her “ivory-headed wand” perfectly

fits this bill (92). She does not abide by the regular rules of the castle inhabitants, and in fact subverts them in her support of Porphyro, an enemy of most within the palace walls. Angela, too, is the device through which Porphyro achieves his aims—she is the one who allows him entrance to Madelaine’s room and effectively helps to ‘produce’ the magic of St. Agnes’ Eve. Madelaine bears no physically active role in getting Porphyro to her room, but through the invocation of Otherworld powers she gives him the abilities he uses to do so.

For this reason, Porphyro and Madelaine, shoulder the bulk of Celtic connotation in this tale, for it is Porphyro and Madelaine that Keats associates so strongly with Merlin. The Celtic associations of Merlin’s name here, traced earlier, are undeniable. Merlin, at least in the Celtic tradition, is a strong, dangerous figure. The Celtic Merlin functions as bard/druid and is a near-elemental force to be reckoned with—so much so that he remains the central figure of the tales that discuss him.

Keats compares St. Agnes’ eve to the night that Merlin “paid His demon all the monstrous debt” (171), which might well imply the debt Merlin paid to his prophecy in its fulfillment. Certainly Madelaine cannot be entirely compared to Merlin; she is an innocent from the very beginning of the tale, she lives, indeed, “like a saint” and, while she does in certain instances show some initiative, she remains passive throughout most of the poem (222). Keats takes pains throughout to paint Madelaine as a pure, virtuous character. However, her virtue does not prevent her from setting the wheels in motion, and she is responsible for the invocation—the prophecy, as such—that brings Otherworld powers into play. In this aspect, Madelaine herself bears a striking resemblance to the arcane Merlin descending from the Celtic tradition: she meddles with forbidden things and pays the price of the magic she has summoned with her adherence to the rites.

One important note: that Porphyro and Madelaine are being associated with dark activities and demonic happenings does not imply that Porphyro or Madelaine are demons themselves. While Otherworldly characters have access to a wide range of seemingly supernatural abilities—the invocation of rites or the manipulation of supernatural power—those characters are not necessarily subject to Judeo-Christian appellations like “demon,” “good,” or “evil.” Yet in this particular poem, Keats uses the word “demon” in the allusion. This particular twist—the use of a Judeo-Christian term to refer to a Celtic, Otherworldly character—reveals a key truth about Celtic influence on Keats: it is not (necessarily) an element simply swallowed and then regurgitated. Rather, the Celtic influence on Keats (whether conscious or subconscious) is always uniquely flavored by two distinctly Keatsian traits: his desire to annihilate self in the becoming of the poetic object, and the convergence of subject/object within his poetry (which might also necessarily equal the undoing of the agent). So calling Porphyro or Madelaine or even the invocation itself demonic isn’t necessarily a description of a malign Otherworld; rather, “demon” might be a suitable Judeo-Christian description in Keats’s eyes of the magical self-annihilating actions taken by Porphyro, an Otherworldly figure, or by Madelaine in invoking the rites.

Intriguingly, most critics either do not note this allusion in reference to Porphyro or Madelaine, or choose to skip over its implications. McFarland is hardly the only critic to speak of “flaming Porphyro” as a heroic lover, a character whose deeds and love for the meek and unassuming Madelaine are to be admired, or Madelaine as the passive, virtuous saint. McFarland even goes so far as to recognize Porphyro as a triumphant mask for the suppressed eroticism of Keats himself, and also to propose that “The Eve of St. Agnes” functions as a poem about the positive side of the erotic (as opposed to “La Belle Dame,” which portrays the

opposite). This critical interpretation idealizes Porphyro and also idealizes the relationship between Porphyro and Madelaine as one of love and happiness wherein eroticism is realized in an innocuous and healing manner. Structurally, however, Keats uses both of these poems to displace Madelaine, Porphyro, and the knight from their individual agency, and to move them from subject to object. The knight pursues La Belle, but his pursuit severs him from the mortal world and leaves him trapped in a state of subjection to the whim of La Belle and the Otherworld. Porphyro sets out seeking Madelaine, but the means through which he gains his love are invoked by Madelaine and he is subject to them. Madelaine herself invokes rites as an agent and then becomes subject to them. In all these poems, the agents of erotic desire become subject themselves to Otherworld powers—as a result, desire ends, and they remain trapped in a liminal state.

If the reader, however, reads Porphyro through the lens of Merlin, a much different, more manipulative character starts to emerge. Porphyro is, after all, a schemer; he begs, manipulates, and plots his way into Madelaine's room not just for a tryst, but to persuade her into thinking he is her magically-ordained soulmate (presumably because he does, in fact, adore her), although he only gains the ability to do so through the rites his beloved has invoked. Angela decries him as wicked. He consummates his relationship with Madelaine while she is still entranced, reminding her only *after* their coupling that his presence is not a dream. Even more telling, as Porphyro flees the castle with Madelaine, nature becomes disturbed: the wind whips the arras and rugs about. No “human sound” echoes throughout the place, but the deliberate way Keats phrases the comment makes the reader wonder if inhuman sounds are indeed occurring. The aftermath of the lovers' flight, too, is horrid. The Baron and his guests have nightmares, Angela dies, and the tale ends with the beadsman who remains “for aye unsought for...among his ashes cold” (378).

Who else but an Otherworld character in Keats poems, taking advantage of the interconnection between the Otherworld and the mortal world, or forcing a connection between those worlds, could achieve such an end? In effect, Porphyro schemes his way in, seduces an entranced maiden, convinces her to accompany him to his own territory, and departs the castle leaving a storm, nightmares, and dead bodies in his wake. Madelaine, despite being portrayed as an innocent and virtuous maiden, invokes the rites which allow these events and her own manipulation to occur. Regardless of the erotic, voluptuous, and sometimes tender diction with which Keats conveys these events, they are nevertheless more disturbing than romantic—which is telling, since the plot of any romance (courtly or otherwise) requires an agent and an object of desire. Many critics argue that Keats attempts to reveal the romantic elements within an otherwise disturbing scene, but perhaps a more accurate representation is that Keats was thoroughly aware of the aspects of this inherently Celtic mythos and chose deliberately to note them, rather than romanticize them, within the work. Keats was not a man to use allusion lightly. The result is not a story of love fought for and gained, but a disturbing piece about the nature of obsession, the manipulation of the erotic, and the willful mastery of a woman caught in the powers she summoned. Viewed from that angle, “The Eve of St Agnes” becomes a marvelously more complex read: chilling, dark, and mystical to the reader expecting the simple desire-fulfillment structure of a romance plot.

Obviously, regard for Celtic influences can change the readings of Keats’s poems. The poems such as “On Sitting” and “The joy of footing” remind the reader of a Celtic past that extends significantly beyond the literary majesty of Shakespeare and Milton. “The Eve of St. Agnes,” in which Porphyro parallels in many ways the Celtic Merlin, becomes a dark poem about controlling, manipulative passion and desire. The study of the Celtic influence on Keats

obviously demands similar re-readings of other poems. The study of the Celtic influence on Keats obviously offers a fresh look at the works of the 19th century poet, but perhaps the current gap in scholarly criticism regarding the topic speaks to an even more pressing problem regarding the discourse(s) surrounding Keats's poetry and the Keatsian canon itself.

CHAPTER SIX: THE CANONICAL QUANDARY

This scholarly gap should be troubling if only for the simple reason that all the elements regarding Celticism are firmly in place. Critics such as Bush have noted Celtic allusions in Keats' poetry, although they have not discussed the implications of such allusions. The implications of this disjuncture become more disturbing upon closer examination of the critical discourse on Keats's poetry. Scholars have scrutinized Keats's poetry from every theoretical angle imaginable and made statements about Keats's poetry that are as varied as the theoretical schools from which they spring. Yet each theoretical school, and each subsequent analysis of Keats's poems, suffers from the Celtic gap in criticism because each one looks, directly or indirectly, to Greco-Roman sourcing in their interpretations of the poems. Charles I. Patterson's The Daemonic in the Poetry of Keats looks to Greco-Roman myth as the inspiration for Keats's monsters, villains, and creatures. In The Masks of Keats, Thomas MacFarland discusses Keats's poetic persona in terms of "the mask of Hellas." Granted, an implicit understanding of the Greco-Roman in Keats's poetry cannot be ignored. What should disturb the scholar is that *no* implicit understanding of the Celtic in criticism regarding Keats's poetry, outside of Gallant's, exists. The Greco-Roman influence on Keats's poetry permeates and influences this discourse; the Celtic influence on Keats's poetry does not.

One possible answer for this critical neglect might be found in the major differences between the Celtic influence and the Greco-Roman influence on Keats's poetry. Pittock, whose comments were discussed earlier in regards to the strong presence of the feminine in Celticism, offers an explanation for the uniqueness of Celtic myth in a book chapter entitled "Gendering the Celt." However, perhaps the Celtic influence in Keats has been ignored precisely because of the way it manifests itself: over and over, Keats uses the Celtic as a way to represent the end of

erotic desire and agency and, in doing so, annihilates the traditional patriarchal narrative structure.

According to Pittock, Celticism in the 19th century—the time of Keats’s writing—evolved into a feminized mythology and a feminized influence, and has remained so until the present day. Among the reasons for “the softening of the Celtic image,” he explains, include the degradation of the noble savage Celt to a “feminine dimension,” the destruction of the potential for heroic action, and most importantly the detachment of Celticism from its “British present” and its revision as “a harmless pageant” (61). From the early eighteenth century to the present, Pittock suggests, literary, artistic, and cultural evidence argues that Celticism was not only neutered, but re-gendered as a feminine culture, a feminine mythology, and a feminine influence. The result of such a gender shift, he further claims, is that Celticism changes “from territoriality to mere psychology” (64) and gains attributes such as “romantic defeat, a ‘feminine ideal’ which is seen as deeply internalized...possessiveness and carnal knowing” (64). Perhaps Pittock’s most potent idea in this case is that the feminization of Celticism occurred because of a divorce between Celticism and cultural identification with Celticism as part of the English or British past. It might be fair to say that the reduction of the Celtic to folklore, myth, and faery—and the severance of it from a sense of British national identity—played the largest role in the re-gendering of the Celtic.

In contrast to this description of feminized Celticism rendered by Pittock, Greco-Romanism is often presented as inherently masculine. Celticism underwent a gender shift due to a divorce from the cultural “British present”; Greco-Romanism, on the other hand, never became separated from British or European culture but, to the contrary, integrated itself into the Western way of life. Political structures, territorial boundaries, architecture, literature, and art in modern

Western society bear the characteristic of ‘Western-ness’ themselves, and demonstrate the integration of the Greco-Roman with the Western cultural ideal. Granted, perhaps a few elements of Greco-Roman culture (such as folklore and some select characters from the culture’s history) have been ‘staged’ or made into a pageant, but by and large the values, principles, and philosophies of Greco-Roman culture has been incorporated fully into the modern Western identity—the set of values, principles, and philosophies of duty and democracy that largely shape the Western world of Keats’s time and of ours today. Thus, Greco-Romanism never undergoes the gender shift of Celticism and can retain its masculinity.

In The Romans, Antony Kamm refers to Greco-Roman culture as having a “talent for organization” and being “ruthless,” and also brilliant in “administration” (1, 102). Historian Michael Grant, in The Roman Emperors, offers a discussion of Greco-Roman culture that traces back the characteristics of the culture as a whole (good, bad, and very ugly), to the rulers of the time—all of whom were men. In these cases and more, the Greco-Roman culture is given male attributes and male descriptions that further assert its cultural masculinity. So then, if one of the major differences between the Celtic influence and the Greco-Roman influence is gender, and Celticism specifically has been neglected in critical analysis of Keats, then what does such an omission say about the nature of the Keatsian critical canon?

In her article “Women Do Theory,” Jane Flax makes the controversial statement that “what society esteems varies from culture to culture; but if you look at the spheres of power, you’ll find that all who have it are male” (10). In academia, business, politics, and perhaps even sexual relationships, the power-bearers are typically men, or at least are those who think in a masculine manner. Flax tempers this statement by pointing out:

Feminist theory names [a] structure “patriarchy,” and assumes that it is a historical force that has a material and psychological base. What I mean by ‘patriarchy’ is the system in which men have more power than woman, and have more access to what society esteems (10).

Later in the same paragraph, Flax further defines patriarchy as a “unique constellation of social problems” that come together and as a result, consciously or otherwise, oppress women. Perhaps the Keatsian canon suffers the Celtic gap not from overlord men bent on exorcising the feminine from the canon, but rather from its function as a natural outcropping of patriarchal society. That is, the Keatsian canon suffers the Celtic gap because of the radical inversion of narrative and plot that Keats’s use of the Celtic influence implies. Plot, too, can be patriarchal. That is not to say that all plots have men as central figures, but that plot can be based on the quest of erotic desire to gain an object, which is a patriarchal motif. Recurrently, Keats strands the subject of erotic desire and rips from him the object of his desire, forcing the agent to become an object himself. As I have argued, what begins as a quest of erotic desire in “La Belle Dame” ends with the knight stranded in a liminal state achieved by his transition from agent to object. In this Keats is distinct, and uses the Celtic influence as a catalyst to radically refigure the patriarchal plot structure by representing, through his agents-turned-objects, the end of desire. This radical plot inversion made manifest through his use of the feminized Celtic, might further explain this critical gap in a traditional, patriarchally-dominated canon.

In “Oppressive Texts, Resisting Readers, and the Gendered Spectator,” Mary Deveraux offers a few solutions to the patriarchal concerns inherent both in art and literature. One option, she claims, is the option explored in this discussion: “re-reading, or reading against the grain” (301). In this case, the scholar must return to Keats works with a fresh pair of eyes and read

outside of what the patriarchal discourse provides. In the critical Keatsian discourse, the exploration of a few choice elements and allusions reveals a deliberate shift in the content of the poems, the cultural heritage they reveal, and the Romantic recreation of the Celtic influence.

The second solution Deveraux offers is somewhat more drastic: “a call for a new type of art” (301). Here Deveraux demands an absolute “revision of the canon” that would, theoretically, offer an alternative to scholars interested in themes, motifs, and ideas that fall outside the typical patriarchal canon. Unfortunately, in terms of this particular discussion, the idea has two distinct flaws: 1) the competition of two different Keatsian critical canons would likely only create confusion and, in the end, relegate certain groups of statements—such as the feminized Celtic—to the backburner where they would wither away once more, or 2) the revised canon would overshadow the original canon, which certainly contains good and valid statements necessary to the study of Keats’s poetry.

Ultimately, a re-reading of the existing canon is by far the most logical tactic and allows the scholar to unearth meanings and contexts that might have been discarded (or perhaps were never noticed) by the various patriarchal academic canons. In terms of the Keatsian critical canon it certainly seems the most fruitful, and perhaps the efforts of this discussion and of Gallant’s comprehensive study will prompt a further reinvigoration of Keats scholarship outside the traditional, masculinized influences on Keats. A rereading of the major poems, like “The Eve of St. Agnes,” can contribute to a slow refashioning of the current identity of John Keats as a poet, and of the philosophies that underscored his poetry. The application of these same analyses, in light of the Celtic influences on Keats’s poetry, could change the interpretations and context of almost every poem in the canon, as well as the analysis of how Keats’s formed and

shaped his influences, albeit gradually—particularly in lieu of the fact that in the case of most Keats poems, these Celtic influences have not been considered at all.

After all, consideration of Celticism reveals Keats as a poet with a cultural heritage far above and beyond the contemporaries that are cited as his inspiration, a philosophy that stretched to the ethereal reaches of the Otherworld, and a development that included not only the synthesis of Celtic elements, but the incorporation of the Celtic into his own works as well.

Bate, in his biography of Keats, offers the following comment on what makes the study of this particular poet so vital:

The life of Keats provides a unique opportunity for the study of literary greatness and of what permits or encourages its development. The interest is thus deeply human and moral, and in the most capacious sense of both those words. For, to begin with, we have to do with a type of poetic genius that—whatever the handicaps or restrictions with which Keats starts—quickly acquires a personal relevance to a wide variety of readers.

If these characteristics make the study of Keats so important, and also contribute to his individuality amongst the Romantic poets and, indeed, of the great English poets, then it stands to reason that all the influences on him, particularly those that might significantly impact his work or his development, should be taken into account as well. Only in properly addressing all the significant cultural influences on Keats can critics, or even readers, be able to understand his place in literary history, the qualities that made him so unique, and the characteristics that continue to draw scholars and readers to his poems over and over again.

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