THE LEAFY PARADOX

A Study of the Tree Image in the Works of Five Major English Romantic Poets

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ABSTRACT

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The present study concerns itself with the exploration of one aspect of Romantic nature imagery, as approached by five major poets of the period. There appeared to be a paradox between the Romantic view of poetic creation as generated by the poet's inward consciousness and the deference paid to the actual image which appears in a natural guise, no matter how richly it is endowed with metaphoric tenor. The varying degrees of intensity and manners of joining symbol and metaphor with vivid nature imagery in the works of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats and Byron were submitted to scrutiny and yielded exciting insights into the uniqueness of each mode of poetic creation.

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CHAPTER I

BETWEEN THE DRYAD AND HER HOST
(Introduction)

It is easy to understand why trees so fascinated early human consciousness. One has only to remember childhood and the rich range of emotion generated by one single apple tree in the backyard! It was a dwelling inside which the child could enjoy the reality of being sheltered, inaccessible from the alien world of adults, and, at the same time, dominating it from a lofty point of vantage. It was a ship in full sail, swaying in every breeze and lifting the young mariner to a communion and oneness with living nature, only dimly sensed at the time, but apprehended by the remembering adult in nostalgic retrospect.

Then there was the fruit: often forbidden, on either moral or hygienic grounds, but when tasted, as it inevitably was, of an ambrosial quality, never equalled by the countless apples, legally consumed in later life.

The tree lasted a long, long time. It was there, to await the visiting adult, after the child had moved away. It endured time and the rigours of the seasons. Its roots, when

seen, were hard, sinuous and serpentine, delving deep into the darkness of inner earth. From them the child's eye followed the trunk, soaring, phallic, bearing the sap of life up to the most delicate leaf and blossom trembling on the tip of the smallest twig.

According to their own genius, races were to interpret and verbalize the range of emotion which every human child experiences when facing the tree. It was inevitable that the Greeks, whose early thought humanized a pantheon, assigned to each tree its Dryad--or, more precisely, Hama/dryad--the in-dwelling, spiritual identity, shaped in human form, just as Naiads must have humanized the rivers and streams.

The austerely literal poet of Genesis places the tree in the absolute centre of primal reality: in the middle of the garden, east of Eden. Two trees grow there--the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

And here the monotheic mind parts company with the joyous Dryad, slipping in and out of the host-trunk. In Hebrew tradition, the king's best-beloved son dies with his golden hair caught in "the thick boughs of an oak". The Gospel writer modulates the image to the tragic intensity of the absolute: God's only-begotten son, too, dies on the tree, only this tree,

bare of foliage and branches, is stripped down to the stark symbol of the cross.

The rood, instead of the leaf and fruit-bearing tree, will dominate the Middle Ages. Every image of growth and fertility is now made subordinate to the concerns of humans, and almost always to the human soul. Even in the vivid representations on medieval tapestries the foliage and flora follows no normal pattern: the seasons are disregarded, primroses bloom at the foot of pear trees laden with ripe fruit, the fauna ranges from the fabulous and allegorical to the humblest denizen of the farmyard, and they all merely frame and enhance human figures, mythical and legendary.

It takes the Renaissance with its Graeco-Roman humanism to bring back the Dryad to her host. The rood can now sprout leaves and shelter birds again. When Shakespeare ponders the coming of old age, he sees "that time of year"

> when yellow leaves, or few, or none do hang
> upon those boughs that shake against the cold,
> bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang.
> (Sonnet 73)

Granted, the image has a metaphoric function--it conveys the sorrow of aging and of approaching death. Yet a more poignantly realistic image of those few last leaves, about to fall, yellow and sear (as they are to such purpose in Macbeth),

has not been penned before or since. Certainly the bare ruined choirs may convey the broken churches from whence the treble-voiced boys have departed, but they are still the same naked branches from which the orioles have gone and which we greet with a sigh each November in Canada.

Even the cloven pine in the Tempest, representing Sycorax and the evil wrought by her, remains a pine, a specific member of the tree family, not just a generalized symbol.

Yet, in Pericles, the image can be manipulated entirely to suit the intent of fable and theme. Antiochus's incestuous daughter is seen as the poison tree, some unheard-of, monstrous growth, outwardly the golden-fruited tree of the Hesperides, but about the roots of which dwell deadly serpents and dragons; but Marina, as she resists the Bawd, is called a young, foolish sapling, to be bowed into acceptance of her fate in the brothel, the natural flexibility of the young tree lending itself readily to the metaphor, almost a proverbial, frozen one.

And so we see the same poet using two opposite approaches to the same image: there is room in Shakespeare's world for the medieval tree growing in the garden of the Hesperides, spelling both enchantment and the serpent's deadly poison to man, and for the little sapling, bent by the storm into future

deformity, to image forth the idea of a young being forced into a life of crippling ignominy. Already, the modulation is present and the paradox shows its complexity.

When Milton transplants the Biblical trees into his own Paradisal world, he endows them with all the texture, colour and scents enjoyed by the child in the backyard. His fruits are of "vegetable gold",[1] the wonderfully compressed image of which conveys the divine and precious quality of eternity and the smell, taste and touch of a ripe orange. There is verdure, foliage, shelter and balm. All of these components of the total tree impression, as perceived directly by the human mind, not distilled into abstraction, matter a great deal to the student of later nature imagery. For Milton the poet uses the pristine eyes of the human child simultaneously with those of the seer. Therefore he is able to call the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the tree of death. Death by sin, of course, but also a reminder that the roots of any tree dwell in the grave from whence springs the force of life. The two biblical trees thus merge into one, knowledge and life springing from one root, and life, inevitably, linked to its denial without which

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[1] Paradise Lost, IV, 220.

it could not exist. The greatest question vexing the mind of humanity is posed: it will be seen exercising the thought of Blake and, in this study, explicitly, that of Byron.

Having mentioned Blake, we must now explain his special position in this study: As a major representative of the period under discussion, almost, one might say, its standard bearer as far as the commitment to the supremacy of the human imagination is concerned, Blake and his work provided us with a starting point; yet a discussion of his poetry could not be made a subject of our specific chapter-by-chapter study, because his use of the tree image is almost exclusively symbolic. By making this statement, we must allow for one notable exception to which Wimsatt draws our attention in his essay, The Structure of Romantic Nature Imagery.[2] Here is an early example of Blake's work in which the image becomes more closely wedded to its actual appearance and "takes on certain distinctly terrestrial hues".[3] These are two of the poems from the quartet

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[2]William K. Wimsatt, Jr., "The Structure of Romantic Nature Imagery" in Romanticism and Consciousness: Essays in Criticism, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 1970), p. 85.

[3]Ibid.

to the seasons, To Spring and To Summer. For our purpose, personified Summer seeking rest "beneath our oaks" and "our thickest shade", seems to lead away from the mighty, biblical trees that inhabit most of Blake's world, and toward those we are to encounter in the landscapes of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley. But this exception, which could almost be placed among Blake's juvenilia only serves to point out the impact of Blake's cosmic symbolism. The tension created by the shaping of the abstraction into a metaphoric vehicle, the tenor of which pays homage to material nature--to Wimsatt's "terrestrial hues", that forms our paradox, is as little apparent in Blake as in the tree references found in Genesis and New Testament parables. Thus the Blakean treatment of our image aptly illustrates one "horn" of our dilemma and therefore serves as a kind of measuring device against which the use of symbol by the poets who will come under detailed discussion can be held in comparison.

In his study of Blake's shorter poems, Hazard Adams[4] considers the tree one of Blake's major symbolic archetypes. According to this writer, the two biblical trees, that of the

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[4]Hazard Adams, William Blake: A Reading of the Shorter Poems (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1963).

Knowledge of Good and Evil and that of Life, are, to Blake, the twofold aspect of the same concept, "one a fallen analogy of the other":[5]

> Self Evident Truth is one Thing and Truth the result of Reasoning is another Thing. Rational Truth is not the Truth of Christ but of Pilate. It is the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.[6]

Adams also draws our attention to the Kabala in which two trees carry similar connotations: there is the upright, Sephirotic tree, the Tree of Life, congruent with Blake's positive symbol of the imagination and the upside down Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, leading downwards into "the abyss of the cyclical material prison".[7] These growths often, as Adams observes, are identified with human bodies: when depicting the Fall into matter, their fruits--or heads--are buried in the earth. Often shown as growing inside the human mind, such plants have little in common with living nature.

The few examples we have culled from the Songs and longer works will illustrate this thesis. It may be noted that the

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[5] Ibid., p. 35.

[6] Ibid., from Blake's "Annotations to Bacon's Essays".

[7] Ibid., p. 36.

discussion of actual instances of the tree image in Blake has been written before the discovery of Hazard Adams's study. Thus, his analysis has provided a welcome support and reinforcement to our findings.

Let us consider these: Bearing no relation at all to physical nature, the Poison Tree in the Human Abstract[8] is rooted in Humility and watered with Cruelty's tears; it spreads the "dismal shade" of Mystery, bears the sweet fruit of Deceit, feeds caterpillars and flies and shelters ravens which, in turn, do not belong to the world of living birds or insects. This tree, by the poet's own intent, is the Human Abstract and grows in the human brain. Though metaphorically it is twin brother to Milton's tree of knowledge, it has not been allowed the freedom of growth, root, trunk, foliage and fruit, granted by the older poet. This tree is unequivocally yoked into the service of the vision, as has been, in Northern Mythology, the age-old ash tree, Ygdrasil,[9] the pictorial representation of

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[8]William Blake, The Complete Writings of William Blake, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 217.

[9]Northrop Frye, Fearful Symmetry (Boston: Beacon Press, 1962), p. 136.

which is as bare of naturalistic detail as the cross itself.

Blake's "Lovely Mirtle Tree"[10] appears to grow in the accepted manner. Yet is is subservient to the vision: free human love must not be bound by the trite bonds of marriage of which the myrtle blossom is the approved symbol. Therefore a new symbol is created, inverting its function--and the blossoms shed by the tree are merely "dung upon the ground".

In this approach to image-making, the abstract does not entirely overshadow physical reality. But in Plate I of Europe (Preludium),[11] the Eve-like female figure rises from the breast of Orc-Adam and becomes the tree of knowledge, but her roots are "brandish'd in the heavens" and her fruits "in the earth beneath", a fit image of the descent into the Hell of matter.

One is reminded of Lady Macbeth turning herself by her invocation to the dark spirits into a hermetically closed alembic of evil, where the gold of grace is forced to the bottom and black gall allowed to rise to the top.

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[10]Blake, "in a mirtle shade" (sic) in Poems from the Note-Book, Complete Writings, p. 169.

[11]Blake, Europe & Prophecy, Complete Writings, p. 238.

In the Book of Ahania,[12] Fuzon, the son battling a cruel father, perishes smitten by a weapon which has been fashioned from the serpent; it is noteworthy that the serpent has been found by Urizen seated "at his dark, rooted oak".

The slain son's last resting place is, archetypally, the tree:

> 2. With difficulty and great pain Urizen
> Lifted on high the dead corse:
> On his shoulders he bore it to where
> A tree hung over the Immensity of Ahania,
> (Plate 3, lines 51-54)

As Urizen sits in a barren land, lamenting his son, from his tears springs a strange crop:

> 3. . . . the horrid plant bending its boughs
> Grew to roots when it felt the earth,
> And again sprung to many a tree.
> (Chapter III, lines 65-67)

> 5. The Tree still grows over the Void
> Enrooting itself all around,
> And endless labirynth of woe!

> 6. The corse of his first-begotten
> On the accursed Tree of Mystery,
> On the topmost stem of this Tree,
> Urizen nail'd Fuzon's corse.
> (Plate 4, lines 5-9)

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[12] Blake, The Book of Ahania, Complete Writings.

But the "pale living corse of Fuzon" remains to be lamented eternally, life in death, a fitting fruit for the tree of eternal ambiguity.

In The Gates of Paradise,[13] the engraved tree beneath which the woman finds her mandrake child weeps poison and bends over the human figure a scaly, serpentine trunk--serpent and tree of knowledge dominating the beginning of human life. The series of engravings follows man through life, into the narrow, stony gates of a Paradise which are labelled "Death's Door". Controlled by the stifling morality of Priests, the initial poison dripping from the tree, this is a world of blind struggle, strife and a dead Saviour. Frye feels that the tree of life represents to Blake the growth of spiritual energy, while the tree of knowledge of good and evil, closely linked with spiritual death, spells the growth of conventional morality.[14] In the light of The Gates of Paradise, they appear to have merged into one. The elements--water, earth, air, and fire each, even the powerful Orc-figure herald nothing but suffering; and the human

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[13]Blake, The Gates of Paradise, Complete Writings, pp. 760-770.

[14]Frye, Fearful Symmetry, Chapter 7, p. 197.

quintessence, a fledgling eros, hatching out of the egg, encounters the female martyr when first he steps into life. The divine image lies in the dust, son raises his hand against father, man uses futile instruments of science to comprehend his situation, and drowns helplessly; as Aged Ignorance, a sinister god-father image, clips his youthful wings.

On the last plate, the serpent-worm coils round the silent mother figure. Underneath we read: "I have said to the Worm; / Thou art my mother and my sister." But above the two, in the grave-like darkness, loom roots and branches of the ever-present poison tree, the Human Abstract of the Songs of Experience. As for the great ambiguity the Tree embodies--knowledge or life, life or death, Blake offers a typically inspired solution: in the Laocoon, written in 1830, he returns the tree into its two entities, and states with superb assurance: "Art is the Tree of Life. God is Jesus."[15] And Jesus assumes his Blakean apotheosis of the source and moving power of the imagination. Then comes the condemnation: "Science is the Tree of Death."[16]

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[15]Blake, The Laocoon, Complete Writings, p. 777. [16]Ibid.

These two brief, late notes sum up the Blakean creed--and the tree is its prime symbol.

To Blake, the perceived object may or may not retain its natural attributes. But in either case, its comprehension must be accompanied by an effort of the imagination, which conjures up the universal and eternal idea behind the particular object. This points to a seeming Platonism in Blake, which would be puzzling in view of his avowed commitment to the particular, were it not for his views of the divine function of human imagination. To quote Frye again:

> To Plato, whose Muses were daughters of Memory, knowledge was recollection and art imitation: to Blake, both knowledge and art are recreation.

This observation is found in the opening passages of Chapter Four of Fearful Symmetry, and the chapter is fittingly entitled "A Literalist of Imagination".[17] As Blake refuses to accept a dychotomy between mental and physical function, between sense perception and imagination, so his presentation of natural objects cannot bear a division between outward appearance and inner reality. The female figure springing from Orc's breast may merge with a tree, and a tree upside down in space, yet she

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[17] Frye, Fearful Symmetry, p. 85.

is human and still at one with the object in nature--a kind of new Dryad who refuses to withdraw her humanity from the host. Whatever manner of perceiving the image under study we shall discover in the hands of other poets, Blake's unique and daring vigour of synthesis must remain a landmark.

When contemplating the thought climate of Blake's times, informed as it was by Locke's and Hume's views which ascribed the functioning of the human mind to a causality of external impressions and associations, we are astounded at the poet's daring originality: " . . . Innate Ideas are in Every Man, Born with him. . . . " and again: . . . Man Brings All that he has or can have Into the World with him. . . . "[18] This revolt against the "Tabula Rasa" school of thought, later upheld and reinforced by the poetics of Coleridge, Shelley and Keats, spanned a century to find powerful allies in unexpected quarters.

The discoveries and theories of a medical psychologist, C. G. Jung and his followers have thrown an added light on the romantic imagination and creativity. In his essay, "On the

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[18]Blake, Annotations to Reynolds, Complete Writings, pp. 459-471.

Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetry",[19] Jung makes a distinction between two modes of artistic creation: the introverted one wherein the artist creates from a consciously defined informing idea and attains a clearly determined objective--and the extraverted which "is characterized by the subject's subordination to the demands which the object makes upon him".[20] This second mode brings forth results which often surprise their maker and which forbid any conscious pruning or addenda. Anyone who has undergone a creative experience of that kind, be it only in a very minor way, will concur with Jung's description of this phenomenon. ("Did I really write this?", we sometimes ask ourselves in amazement, and the stress of the question rests on the "I".) According to Jung, the "I" did indeed "write this", but it was informed by the overwhelming force stemming from that portion of the self which is unconscious. In either case of creation, whether the unconscious or the artist's conscious volition is the moving force, it is the artist's psyche, his Coleridgean primary imagination which is

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[19] C. G. Jung, The Spirit in Man, Art and Literature, Bollingen Series, XXI, The Collected Works of C. G. Jung (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966, paperback, 1971).

[20] Ibid., p. 73.

the source of the creative impulse and idea.

Jung quotes a pronouncement of Gerhard Hauptmann, "Poetry evokes out of words the resonance of the primordial world" and asks what primordial image lies beyond the imagery of art?[21] Practicing what he preaches and, incidentally, defining one of those primordial images, Jung likens the artistic creative urge to our own chosen analogue, the tree, growing from the soil of the mind and drawing nourishment from it. Lending us a further helping hand, he points out that one of the very oldest abstract symbols appears in Rhodesian Stone Age paintings, side by side with realistic representations of animals: it is the double cross contained in a circle.[22]

According to one of Jung's disciples, Dr. Esther Harding, the cross modulates into the tree symbol, associated with the Moon Goddess in Chaldean, Egyptian, Assyrian and Cretan artifacts. (Dr. Harding discounts the phallic connotations of the tree image.) They may appear in symbolic shapes, as in Jung's primordial example, or as leafy and fruit-bearing fertility symbols associated with the Moon-mother, Diana, the dying Attis

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[21] Ibid., p. 80. [22] Ibid., p. 96.

tied to the tree which, here, becomes the mother-image, trees bearing human heads, trees covered in lights--obvious ancestors of the Christmas tree and the Maypole. Dr. Harding cites a beautiful example of the tree in early poetry, in the Hymn of Eridu, thought to be of Chaldean origin:

> Its root (or fruit) of white crystal stretched towards the deep.
> Its seat was the central place of the earth;
> Its foliage was the couch of Zikum, the (primeval) mother
> Into the heart of the holy house which spreads its shade
> Like a forest
>
> Hath no man entered,
> There (is the house of) the mighty mother, who passes across the sky
> (In) the midst of it was Tammuz.[23]

This tree clearly assumes many guises, though stemming from the unified archetype which contains power, growth, initiation, shelter, the mother principle, light, life and death.

Perhaps, with Jung, we must acknowledge that symbol, especially as used by Blake, is to be understood as a means of explaining that which is unexplainable to a given epoch, something for which contemporary humanity has not yet found verbal expression.

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[23] Esther Harding, Woman's Mysteries Ancient and Modern, with an Introduction by C. G. Jung (New York: G. P. Putnam & Sons, Bantam, 1971), p. 57.

"No tree, it is said, can grow to heaven, unless its roots reach down to hell", says Jung in "Aion",[24] explaining the pendulum-like movement of complementary opposites which postulates an Antichrist to the spotless figure of Christ.

In the light of such a use of the term "symbol", and in the light of a Jungian view of the creative process, our Leafy Paradox, as we shall observe it in the works of several poets, will assume the tight logic of the oxymoron: while we shall agree that it is the poet's inward imagination which engenders and dominates the image, we shall observe the image to acquire the hues and texture of physical nature, precisely owing to the existence of the archetypal link.

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[24] C. G. Jung, "Aion", Psyche & Symbol, ed. Violet S. de Laszlo (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1958), p. 41.

CHAPTER II

THE FILIAL BOND AND THE MELANCHOLY CROP

Blake's mythopeia accommodates numinous trees growing in the human mind. With Wordsworth, we enter into a country of broad daylight and solid matter. As observed by Harold Bloom, "no words are more honorific for Wordsworth than 'simple' and 'common'."[1] This simplicity, however, does not lead to a turning away from poetic imagery, as implied by the same author who tends to dismiss the much studied images of the great Ode as a kind of mockery and game: "Like Steven's sequence, The Rock, or Yeats's A Dialogue of Self and Soul, it plays at discursiveness only to mock the limitations of the discursive."[2] Bloom uses this argument as a weapon against what he calls the "odd modern critical dogma that what poetry is about is irrelevant to its aesthetic value."[3] We might attempt an argument in which this dichotomy, especially with regard to Wordsworth's image-making will, in turn, appear to be irrelevant; we might even see the cleavage disappear in a synthesis of the kind

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[1]Harold Bloom, The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry, Revised and Enlarged Edition (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971), p. 126.

[2]Ibid., p. 173. [3]Ibid., p. 172.

posited by Jung in his discussion of the Psychology of the Child Archetype:[4] the synthesis of the unconscious and the conscious which forms an important component of the process of individuation. Both in his "balladic" and philosophical poetry, Wordsworth achieves a merging of image, symbol and underlying psychological association which is one of his major triumphs.

Rather than compare contemporary and conflicting critical views, we will do better to turn to the poet's own theoretical discourse: in his Preface to the Second Edition of Lyrical Ballads (1800), Wordsworth, having questioned the mechanical use of personifications and figures of speech prevalent in the poetry of his day, asserts:

> . . . for, if the Poet's subject be judiciously chosen, it will naturally and upon fit occasion, lead him into passions the language of which, if selected truly and judiciously, must necessarily be dignified and variegated and alive with metaphors and figures.[5]

Fitness, simplicity and the "Common Day" function as

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[4] C. G. Jung, Psyche and Symbol: A Selection from the Writings of C. G. Jung, ed. Violet S. de Laszlo (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1958), p. 129.

[5] William Wordsworth, Selected Poems and Prefaces, ed. Jack Stilling (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Riverside, 1965), p. 452. Hereafter all quotations and direct references to the writings of Wordsworth will be derived from this text.

attendant acolytes subordinated to the divinity of Nature. And, with that word, we enter into Wordsworth's sanctuary: a rural, pastoral background, the simplicity of human needs satisfied in a primitive manner, the starkness of basic family ties and loves, above all the congruity of goodness rewarded or, if doomed, then pitied; the grandeur of unspoiled wilderness are, in themselves, the synthesis of methaphoric vision and the Spiritus Mundi.

Having granted his nature-imagery a place of honour, we must now resolve the problem of Wordsworth's self-avowed commitment to Hartley's epistemological theory, borne out in passages such as the lines addressed to the Derwent, in Book I of The Prelude:

> . . . For this, didst thou,
> O Derwent! winding among grassy holms
> Where I was looking on, a babe in arms,
> Make ceaseless music that composed my thoughts
> To more than infant softness, giving me
> Amid the fretful dwellings of mankind
> A foretaste, a dim earnest of the calm
> That Nature breathes among the hills and groves.
> (lines 269-281)

The early sense impression produced by the murmuring of the waters are here invested with the moving power which engendered the mature poet's musings on the divine calm of Nature and her works, opposed to the petty noises of man-built civilization. Such a passage lends weight to Herbert Read's

classification of Hartley's mechanistic theory as "almost behaviourist"[6] and creates a problem, in view of Wordsworth's own definition of the source of poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings"[7] which comes close to crediting the mind with the ability of creating its own innate stimuli.

In Revaluation, Leavis offers a guidepost out of this impasse: The famous passage from The Recluse in which Wordsworth leads us into the "main region of the song", i.e. the deepest recesses of the Mind of Man, are seen by Leavis as akin to Lawrence's preoccupation with the deep levels, the "springs of life";[8] we may venture to greet here a Conradian quest into the Heart of Darkness. Such a passage allows us, indeed, prompts us to seek, in that Mind of Man, the primordial images which might once have been engendered by simple sense impressions but have now become the great archetypes from which

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[6]Herbert Read, Wordsworth, 2nd ed. (London: Faber Paperback, 1965), p. 108.

[7]Wordsworth, "Preface to the Second Edition of Lyrical Ballads," Selected Poems and Prefaces, p. 448.

[8]F. R. Leavis, Revaluation: Tradition and Development in English Poetry (New York: The Norton Library, 1963), p. 165.

imagination draws its sap.

When faced with the problem of ordering a study of Wordsworth's poetry into a logical sequence, one must turn away from a simple chronological arrangement. The very facts of the brevity and intensity of the great creative period and the subsequent long years of revisions, corrections and echoes create a kind of concentrated effect which, at the same time, and paradoxically, is diffused throughout the more significant poems, regardless of the date of their writing. We have therefore adopted a thematic ordering in which the tree image is handled in several major modes: we shall meet the very dominant note of the tree as an analogue to maternal or parental presences of great power and benignity; the mother-figure will be seen modulating into that of alluring young womanhood--or conversely, the sexual enchantress will mature into motherhood. The solitariness of the tree figure will lead us to the pivotal point of this chapter--the "single tree" of the Intimations Ode, the one instance of a Wordsworthian tree appearing as pure symbol. From there, the Thorn Tree will assume natural hues again, but in a darker, more sinister guise. Finally, we shall consider trees as adjuncts to Wordsworth's protest against human misery and social injustice.

Even though the whole problem of Wordsworth's creative

years and the "falling off" of his genius is connected by Herbert Read with the tragic story of his love for Annette Vallon,[9] there are, in his works, few if any overt scenes and descriptions of sexual love. But, as astutely observed by Harold Bloom the Fragment "Nutting" is rich in sexual imagery.[10] The juxtaposition of the banquet of nuts anticipated by the young boy to tangled wilderness, the erect hazel shoots "with tempting clusters hung", the "virgin scene" which leads the boy into a "play with flowers" and the ensuing rapine and devastation for which he feels a twinge of regret are, according to Bloom a "rude love of Nature, without Wisdom." The image carries more weight than this: Hazelnut trees appear again, in the Prelude, and here, too, the imagery of the female body is apparent:

> . . . I could record with no reluctant voice
> The woods of autumn and their hazel bowers
> With milk-white clusters hung; . . .
> Book I, lines 483-5

From the ravished virgin, the tree presence has become transformed into the fruitful young mother, the provider of shelter and nourishment. Now the bower is autumnal, a place of

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[9]Herbert Read, Wordsworth.

[10]Harold Bloom, The Visionary Company, p. 128 et passim.

fulfillment rather than one of promise.

It is no accident that in the Prelude, where the most touching tribute is paid to the mother figure, the trees assume the dominant role of shade-providing, sheltering presences. The instances of this image are too numerous to quote, but "stately groves of oak" as in Book I, line 84, "living trees" among the devastation of ancient ruins (Book I), the many "sheltering coppices" all bear out the contention that, while rocks and stones assume a male and menacing role, the tree is benign and feminine; in some instances it provides the leit-motif to the note struck by the great passage in which the "infant Babe" is seen nursed in his mother's arms and rocked on his mother's breast (Book II, line 232).

On other occasions the young womanhood of the tree beckons to the maturing youth:

The "lofty elms" in the groves of Cambridge (Book VI, line 73) are the epitome of womblike shelter:

> . . . Lofty elms,
> Inviting shades of opportune recess,
> Bestowed composure on a neighbourhood
> Unpeaceful in itself.

The maternal presences so necessary to the young mind modulate into that other adjunct to growing up: an idealized figure of unearthly feminine beauty--the beloved yet to come,

now a fairy princess of dreams:

> . . . A single tree
> With sinuous trunk, boughs exquisitely wreathed
> Grew there; an ash which Winter for himself
> Decked as in pride, and with outlandish grace:
> Up from the ground, and almost to the top,
> The trunk and every master branch were green
> With clustering ivy, and the lightsome twigs
> And outer spray profusely tipped with seeds
> That hung in yellow tassels, while the air
> Stirred them, not voiceless. Often have I stood
> Foot-bound uplooking at this lovely tree
> Beneath a frosty moon. The hemisphere
> Of magic fiction, verse of mine perchance
> May never tread; but scarcely Spenser's self
> Could have more tranquil visions in his youth,
> Or could more bright appearances create
> Of human forms with superhuman powers,
> Than I beheld loitering on calm clear nights
> Alone, beneath this fairy work of earth.
>
> Book IV, lines 74-84

In spite of Wordsworth's humility in doubting that his poetry will ever "tread the hemisphere of magic fiction", as Spenser's had done--engendered, no doubt, by similar experiences, the "bright appearances" beheld on such occasions have found their expression in the vision of the enchanting ash tree, endowed with all the charms of the goddess of love: there is a hint of artful seduction in "the sinuous trunk", there is luxurious apparel in the clustering ivy--and in the profusion of yellow tassels "tipped with seeds" which denote fertility. There is the seductive song, for the air that stirs the tree

is "not voiceless"; there is even a hint of a sinister master holding the lovely being in his power: he is Winter who has decked this bride for himself--and in outlandish grace, a grace that should only belong to Spring. And the youth, worshipping the bright divinity is in the Spring of life. In a single passage Wordsworth manages to convey the change from childhood to young adulthood by the two images--that of the motherly elms and the beguiling siren figure of the ash tree.

In Book III, the all-important assumption is made through which natural objects are vouchsafed a vibrant life of their own through the ministry of the poet's imagination:

> . . . But peace! Though
> Here to record I had ascended now
> To such community with highest truth
> A track pursuing not untrod before,
> From strict analogies by thought supplied,
> Or consciousnesses not to be subdued.
> To every natural form, rock, fruit and flower,
> Even the loose stones that cover the high-way,
> I gave a moral life: I saw them feel,
> Or linked them to some feeling; the great mass
> Lay bedded in a quickening soul, and all
> That I beheld respired with inward meaning.
> Book III, lines 124-135

This pronouncement sheds a revealing light on our paradox of earthly reality carrying such wealth of metaphoric meaning. We are as aware of the material quality of those loose stones on the highway as we were of the milk-white clusters of nuts

borne by tall, erect hazel wands: yet through their placement in context and through the interplay of emotion-laden language and image they are indeed invested with a unique spirituality. And so, "The moon in splendour couched among the leaves / Of a tall ash . . . " (Book IV, lines 88-89), assumes the personality of the sleeping goddess of love or chastity, but also conjures up the image of a child, asleep in its cradle. This image occurs within the scenes from A Summer Vacation, and in close association with the homely shelter of Mrs. Ann Tyson's cottage, the abode of the "good, old dame" whose motherly presence is woven through this whole section.

It is the poet's awareness of this "filial bond" with the mother figure which lends the tree images, encountered both in the Prelude and in poems to be scrutinized now, their metaphoric weight.

In the contrast to the lonely figure of the old Cumberland beggar, in the poem of that title, the "easy man" sits content under the pear tree, symbol of fruitfulness, which overhangs the garden wall, while those who are robust, young, prosperous and unthinking live "sheltered and flourish in a little grove", as children do, within the circle of their mother's care. To the poet, lost in meditation, the grove is a paradise of

budding young life in Lines Written in Early Spring and it is to join him in the woods that he invites his sister, a wild Lucy-figure whom Nature's maternal care has raised to be "a lady of her own". Children and trees are often associated, and in Her Eyes Are Wild, the mad mother finds solace in the hope that "under the spreading tree" she and her baby will attain peace.

The link between a tree and bird's nest is so obvious as to almost make redundant the type of speculation on which we are engaged. It needs no power of poetic imagination to realize that a tree is a natural place for a nest to be. And yet, in The Sparrow's Nest, the quality of tenderness and loving enclosure is so pronounced in its simplicity that the aura of a sheltering feminine presence and a cherished childhood makes itself apparent once more:

> Behold, within the leafy shade
> Those bright blue eggs together laid!
> On me the chance-discovered sight
> Gleamed like a vision of delight.
> I started--seeming to espy
> The home and sheltered bed,
> The Sparrow's dwelling, which, hard by
> My Father's house, in wet or dry
> My sister Emmeline and I
> Together visited.

The nest is "within the leafy shade", following every child's dream to be "right inside the tree", with its only too

obvious connotations of the wish to return to the womb. Keats, too, reproduced this feeling of being sheltered and enclosed in the leafy isolation, utterly hidden in an airy, unassailable retreat. But to Keats, as we shall later observe, the retreat meant different things than to Wordsworth, who is here all child, connected to the maternal shelter by his "filial link". The eggs are so blue and so bright that they gleam, and with this word, inevitably, is associated the idea of the "vision of delight". As so often to Wordsworth, a certain quality of light and colour engenders the flash of insight by which ordinary things are quickened into "a moral life" such as we have agreed to consider the birth of the metaphor's tenor. Otherwise, why would the young beholder only "seem to espy" the home and sheltered bed of the Sparrow? The sparrow's dwelling is in fact here, why then the uncertainty of the statement? Obviously because the nest represents the child's own home and sheltered bed within his father's house.

The poet's companion on this journey of discovery is his sister Emmeline. In an earlier manuscript the sister's name was Dorothy.[11] The girl-child's reaction to the discovery

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[11] Wordsworth, "Notes," Selected Poems and Prefaces, p. 526.

differs from that of her brother: we learn in the second stanza that

> She looked at it and seemed to fear it;
> Dreading, tho' wishing to be near it;

Here we have a purely feminine phenomenon, delicately and sensitively observed by the poet: the girl trembles between delight and fear, as she faces her own future of child bearing and child rearing. Within the "leafy shade" the two children grow into adulthood, as young Wordsworth did grow under the care of the mother he revered.

In one of the later sonnets, the mature adult, musing on the "unfruitful solitudes" in the wilderness surrounding the River Duddon, finds hope in the sight of

> . . . green alders who have together wound
> Their foliage; ashes flung their arms around;
> And birch trees risen in silver colonnade.
> ("Sole Listener," Duddon, lines 6, 8.)

The image conjures a joyous embrace and an ecstatically sexual movement, for all the trees mentioned are pictured as if in motion--flinging their arms, winding their foliage and rising in a colonnade, with the silver birches especially evoking white, slender and Dryad-like bodies. All this ecstasy is opposed to the previous bleak image of "sullen moss, and craggy mound / unfruitful solitudes, that seemed to upbraid /

the sun in heaven!" The Duddon herself, as though summoning allies against the encroaching barrenness, has "tempted" to rise a presence more homely than the ecstatic orgiasts of the preceding image: "the Cottage, rude and grey" which is inhabited by a loving mother and her "ruddy" children is placed "'mid sheltering pines". Again, as though recalled in a kind of late summing up, the young, female presence engaged in love activity is immediately followed by the fulfilled mother figure who shelters and nurtures.

It seems as though, in this poem, as in the combination of the elms and ash tree from Book 6 of the Prelude, the poet brought forth, through his use of the tree image, the ideal of womanhood he had described in the earlier "She Was a Phantom of Delight". In this lovely lyric, written in 1804 as a tribute to his wife[12] the poet celebrates the combination of spirit-like enchantment and motherly and wifely devotion:

> A perfect Woman, nobly planned,
> To warm, to comfort, and command;
> And yet a Spirit still, and bright
> With sometimes of angelic light.

The same enduring quality of human love strikes a note of

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[12] Wordsworth, Selected Poems and Prefaces, editor's notes, p. 540.

hope in Michael, through the presence of the great oak, the "Clipping Tree". It stands single and solitary, close to the door and has been chosen "for its matchless shade" to provide shelter for the labouring shearers. The image directly succeeds the stanza in which Michael's father's tenderness merges with mother-love:

> . . . For oftentimes
> Old Michael, while he was a babe in arms,
> Had done him female service, not alone
> For pastime and delight, as is the use
> Of fathers, but with patient mind enforced
> To acts of tenderness; and he had rocked
> His cradle as with woman's gentle hand.
> (lines 152-8)

The scenes beneath the oak take place in Luke's later childhood and Michael's gentle parental admonition partake of the shady oak's benignity. Parenthood, not now restricted to the mother figure alone, is celebrated here and it is no accident that the "Clipping Tree" remains as a monument to that enduring parental love, while the "single stone" of the sad ending is "never lifted", representing Luke's failure to keep his covenant with his father--and the old man's despair.

Just as the most profound insights, the "seeing into the heart of things", come to the poet under the shade of the dark sycamore in Lines Written Above Tintern Abbey, so will he still, even at that moment of ultimate vision, pay attention

to the "green hedges" and unripe fruit of the orchards seen from his vantage point, thus building a link between promise and fulfillment.

As parents often do, the sheltering tree can sometimes provide help and protection. In his mockery, Shelley observed Wordsworth's "eunuch-like" reluctance to depict love scenes between men and women. We have already seen that the lover and seducer of Annette Vallon could and did use sexual imagery with a masterly hand. However, it is true, that overt scenes of passion, as well as more harrowing scenes, are often handled through a once or twice removed focus of narration. Wanderers, old sea captains, old parsons are pressed into service to narrate the sad tales of human suffering. In Peter Bell the poet, having accomplished the journey in his "little boat", lands safely in his garden. There, in the shelter of the spreading Weymouth Pine will he relate the story of Peter Bell, with all its horror and sadness. In this benign shade, the tale will be told in such a manner as not to horrify little Bess, the Squire's daughter--even though it will contain much cruelty, violent death and sorrow.

The sheltering presence, motherly or parental, but, in the above-quoted contexts always benign, has one attribute in

common with other tree images which do not conform to the virgin-mother-parent complex. This attribute is its solitariness. As observed by Charles Williams in his essay "Wordsworth"[13] solitary human figures, such as that of the Cumberland Beggar, the Recluse, the alienated thinker in "Yew Trees," the Leech Gatherer of Resolution and Independence all denote awe, sorrow or fear. Many of Wordsworth's solitary trees strike a similar note. This "singleness", this uniqueness, prompts us to turn now to the Intimations Ode.

In this wonderful poem which, though intended to point towards the immortality of the soul, is really a threnody and a lament for the fading of the glory and the dream, the Tree stands alone. It is one of many, but is, of its kind, unique.

Together with the "Single Field", it strikes a note of sadness in that exuberant stanza of laughter and "jubilee". Why, among those laughing Babes and playing children, does the poet whose "head hath its coronal" of joy and bliss, suddenly bethink himself of "something that is gone", "the visionary

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[13] Charles Williams, "Wordsworth", English Romantic Poets: Modern Essays in Criticism, ed. M. H. Abrams (London-Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press paperback, 1960), p. 113.

gleam" that has fled, the glory and the dream not to be recaptured again? Clearly the Tree, that grew out of the same soil which offered the poet himself "fair seed time", cannot stretch its boughs high enough to reach beyond the temporal. The Youth of the following stanza might remember visions of imperial palaces and clouds of glory, yet as Man, he will lose even that intimation of a platonic universal light; so does the lonely tree conjure up an awareness of shadows and prison houses. In this context the tree dominates the stanza: it is the turning point from joy and bliss and childhood to the recognition of mortality--both of man and his vision. In a poem, avowedly celebrating immortality, the tree provides the obverse side of the coin, introducing the tone of regret and earthly mutability.

This is, perhaps the only instance, in Wordsworth's poetry, of the tree image being handled as pure symbol. As all nature in the Ode, this plant's life is rooted in a visionary landscape untypical of Wordsworth's commitment to the stark simplicity of the common day. Here, passion and emotion flow with a strength which make a vigorously symbolic metaphor justified.

Whether the regret is for "growing old" or "growing up", and what is the precise nature of the departing gleam--problems

which so exercise L. Trilling in his "Immortality Ode"[14] need not concern us here. We are concerned with the informing spirit of the poet's thought. To borrow a metaphor from one of its supreme masters: here we find no breach between the material universe and its recreation in the mind of a poet, but "an expansion, like gold to airy thinness beat" in which tenor and vehicle merge through the alchemy of the imagination.

If we accept the solitary Tree in the Ode as one of the several archetypal tree representations in Wordsworth, namely that of sorrow, alienation and loss, we must seek support in his discursive and philosophic verse and in the more usual type of imagery which is firmly rooted in the world of matter.

Let us consider the two opening stanzas of The Thorn Tree:

> There is a Thorn--it looks so old,
> In truth, you'd find it hard to say
> How it could ever have been young,
> It looks so old and grey.
> Not higher than a two year's child
> It stands erect, this aged Thorn;
> No leaves it has, no prickly points;
> It is a mass of knotted joints,
> A wretched thing forlorn.
> It stands erect, and like a stone
> With lichens it is overgrown.

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[14] Lionel Trilling, "The Immortality Ode", English Romantic Poets: Modern Essays in Criticism, p. 123.

Like rock or stone, it is o'ergrown
With lichens to the very top,
And hung with heavy tufts of moss,
A melancholy crop.
Up from the earth these mosses creep,
And this poor Thorn they clasp it round
So close, you'd say that they are bent
With plain and manifest intent
To drag it to the ground;
And all have joined in one endeavour
To bury this poor Thorn for ever.

The thorn tree grows close to an infant's grave. As in the Ode, childhood and the tree are juxtaposed, but in the earlier poem, both tree and child are dead, while in the later one they are triumphantly alive, albeit alive on a plane removed from earthly reality. The living, unique tree (one among many) of the Ode foreshadows mortality. This is conveyed to us from context alone: from its position in the stanza and the modulation of foregoing and subsequent statements. Nothing more is said about it, yet it is doomed to become as the thorn tree which is presented in solid and palpable detail, with all the stark simplicity of Wordsworth's most beautiful writing: it is so old that it not only lacks leaves, but also "prickly points" even though the prickles are tough and would take a long time to fall off. A mass of knotted joints, it has the quality of an old man, twisted by rheumatism, holding himself painfully erect.

Tree imagery is rare in Wordsworth's poetry while rocks, stones and cliffs abound. These constitute some of the most vivid images in the works and are endowed with symbolic meanings of first importance: one has only to recall the numinous cliff in the Prelude which becomes the very embodiment of fear to the boy in the boat, or the stone in the farewell ritual performed by Luke at the bidding of Michael. In the poem under discussion, the tree, by its very age and lifelessness, becomes akin to a rock and this similitude is enhanced by the lichens which cover it, creeping "up from the earth to the very top". There is a hint of sinister female lure in that close clasp which, "with manifest intent" drags it down, to "bury it forever". The aware reader will not fail to sense the implication of the dark earth power at its deadly work here, especially in association with the theme of the poem. After all, the dead baby in the grave nearby was buried there by its own mother and the deed was done in obedience to the ancient conglomerate of tribal morality, guilt and retribution.

The beautiful colours of the moss underneath the Thorn, with their predominant tints of crimson and red, echoing Martha Ray's crimson cloak, offer no relief. Moss blooms in season, as other plants do, and children laugh in jubilee, as do those in the Ode. But in the end, the children grow into the prison

house of earthly life, or lie dead in their graves. And mosses become "the melancholy crop" spattered with blood, burying the tree, as if to punish it for having provided Martha Ray with a branch on which to hang her illegitimate baby.

Perhaps the expression "melancholy crop" may be applied, too, to the thorn tree itself, the tree of death, the provider of thorns for another Son's crown--and he, too, died upon a tree; it is also close kin to the oak, in the boughs of which Absalom died entangled in his golden hair, and to the tree to which the dying Adonis is shackled. This is the kind of deep-seated image which Betty Foy projects as she fears that Johnny might have "climbed into an oak / Where he will stay, till he is dead." There is really no obvious reason for the boy, whether mentally deficient or not, to do any such thing. Even if he did climb a tree, why should he stay there awaiting an untimely end? Wordsworth's "Idiot Boy" behaves with far too much good sense for this. But a distracted mother might easily experience some half-conscious fear of the kind of doom that was known to befall lost sons from times immemorial.

The lonely Yew-tree stands "far from all human dwellings" in the poem entitled Lines. Its boughs are barren and gloomy and to the protagonist, they function as "an emblem of his own unfruitful life". The gifted man who chose a life of solitude

and cut himself off from "the world and human life", fed his "fancy" on visionary views. It is interesting to note the use of "fancy" in connection with vision. The lonely man's visions are implied to have been secondary in quality, not inspired by true imagination; in this poem true human creativity stems from warmth and the labours of benevolence, a love of mankind and an ear to humanity's "small, still voice" which the recluse under the yew-tree had foresworn. Refusing the warmth of a human embrace, he is left to the embrace of the "dark boughs", so barren that they are shunned even by the bees.

If death or a barren existence inform the Thorn Tree and the Yew Tree of the preceding poems, timelessness is the attribute given to the yew trees in the poem of that title. Here we meet a solitary tree figure which inspires awe, as do its peers, but an awe of supernatural life, rather than that of death.

> . . . . . .
> This solitary Tree! a living thing
> Produced too slowly ever to decay;

This is a being rooted in eternity, and one which creates its own universe:

> Which to this day stands single, in the midst
> Of its own darkness, as it stood of yore: . . .

Its existence is a link between the present and the remote past, since its boughs furnished weapons for the Northern barons and the archers of Agincourt, Crecy and Poitiers. To the poet, though he pays it tribute, four other yews are "worthier still of note". They are "fraternal", for their boughs have become intertwined, forming one "solemn and capacious grove". We meet very un-Wordsworthian apparitions within that grove: Fear, Hope, Death-the-Skeleton (conveniently materialized), Silence, Foresight and Time--and it is no accident that these are evoked by Phantasy, that second-rate Fancy which gives the universe fictitious connotations. And so these personifications ought not to be taken as seriously as the description of the trees themselves:

> Huge trunks! and each particular trunk a growth
> Of intertwisted fibres serpentine,
> Up-coiling and inveterately convolved;

If the timelessness of the first yew tree has to be bettered by the foursome, then this is achieved not so much by the fanciful gathering in its temple-like interior, but by the biblical image of serpents coiling up the Tree of Knowledge which embodies all of the personified abstractions. Often the sense of alienation and loneliness modulates into menacing evil, as implied in the serpentine vision just described.

In an early poem, The Evening Walk, the oak "entwines its darkening boughs" issuing in progressively darkening thoughts the culmination of which surrounds the figure of the female beggar. Winter has come:

> And fireless are the valleys far and wide
> Where the brook brawls akin the public road
> Dark with the bat-haunted ashes stretching broad.

A sinister vision indeed: bats flit about, darkening the boughs of naked ashes--which, in an obvious pun link up with "fireless valleys". The beggar mother finds no protection for her infants and, as the trees are barren and dead, so will her breast become their death-bed, as they are "coffined" in her arms. These naked ash trees are first cousins to Goody Blake's "hawthorn lean", blasted by the sea and slow to melt. It is among those hawthorns that Goody Blake seeks to gather a few sticks of wood for her poor fire and it is this hedge which Harry Gill protects in his unreasoning rage, thus condemning himself to a life of everlasting shivers. In both poems the tree serves the poet to express his indignation at social injustice and his compassion for the dispossessed.

In Peter Bell, where compassion with the suffering of animals forms one of the themes, the tree image accompanies the discovery of the drowned man; the trees, seen as a reflec-

tion in the pool are inverted; they accompany the distorted moon, the "ghost-like image of a cloud" and the unspeakable sight of the dead face in the water. Again, the phenomenon is physical: reflections in the water are "upside down" to the beholder on the bank. But here, closely associated with the suffering Ass and death-heralding words, such as coffin and shroud, they show, through their Blakean inversion the distortions of cruelty and coldness of heart. Peter Bell, unable to bear the reality of what he sees, falls into a swoon. When he awakens, he finds himself not only able to look at reality but to draw the corpse out of the water. The Ass is now joyful and will faithfully carry Peter on his search for the victim's family and we are no longer shown the monstrous "inversion" of the trees. As Peter proceeds on his quest, his thoughts move back to the deeds of cruelty he had committed; especially does he remember the "Highland girl" he had ruined.

> Close by a brake of flowering furze
> (Above it shivering aspens play)
> He sees an unsubstantial creature,
> His very self in form and feature.

The aspens grow high above the scene: compassion and remorse has restored Nature to normality; and the shivering of the trees, natural to the species of aspens, ushers in the vision of the dying girl.

The tall elms which shelter Margaret's cottage in Excursion cast "deeper shadows" as her doom becomes more pronounced--and finally the sheltering image is superseded by the young apple tree, the bark of which is nibbled by sheep and which will not survive until the errant husband's return.

> She said, "I fear it will be dead and gone
> Ere Robert come again . . .

The dying young tree echoes and exemplifies the plight of the two abandoned children one of whom, too, is "dead and gone" towards the close of the tale.

It will be seen that the tree image has been made subservient to several basic concepts: that of young womanhood and love, the sheltering presence of motherhood, or, in some cases of parenthood, the gloom of impending or present death, the indictment of cruelty and the archetype of the lonely figure of the thinker. This subservience, however, is in complete harmony with Wordsworth's avowed poetic aim: to achieve a merging and melting into each other of physical reality and its reproduction by the creative imagination. Perhaps we might venture the thought that in this harmonious blending rests the key to and the understanding of what the poet meant by Nature.

CHAPTER III

INCENSE, POISON AND CORDIAL FRUIT

Even though Coleridge's early enthusiasm for Hartley's theory is made obvious by the naming of his eldest son, it is less difficult than it proved in the case of Wordsworth to recognize his early repudiation of 18th century mechanistic epistemologies. Wordsworth's openly acknowledged commitment to associationist views, apparent even in the Prelude, compelled us to seek a bridge with which to link the concept of ideas seen as particles of material sense perception with the "overflow of emotion" obviously deriving from an innate source within the mind.

Wimsatt, in his Structure of Romantic Nature Imagery lends us a helping hand with regard to Coleridge. As he discusses precisely this point, he puts his finger on the exact nature of the difference between Hartley's associationism and Coleridge's growing awareness of another mode of apprehension, culminating in the third Essay on Genial Criticism:

> And already, as early as 1796, Coleridge as poet was concerned with the more complex ontological grounds for association (the various levels of sameness, of correspondence and analogy), where mental activity transcends "mere associative response"--where it's in

> fact the unifying activity known both to later eighteenth century associationists and to romantic poets as "imagination".[1]

Coleridge's own pronouncement in a letter to Sotheby of 1802, serves to support Wimsatt's contention:

> The poet's heart and intellect should be combined, intimately combined and unified with the great appearances of nature, and not merely held in solution and mixture with them.

Here we have the crux of our study and our search, not only applicable to Coleridge: in varying degrees of intensity, and using varying methods, the five poets under scrutiny will be found to strive after this very combination and unification of the appearance of nature with their "heart and intellect".[2]

But a reader of Coleridge whose sympathies tend to follow the research and findings of Jung, finds a key to the poet's own method of unification in that remarkable book, so much quoted, often the target of strenuous refutation, but certainly a milestone in the canon of Coleridgean criticism, The Road to

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[1] W. K. Wimsatt, "The Structure of Romantic Nature Imagery", in English Romantic Poets, ed. M. H. Abrams, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 28.

[2] Ibid.

Xanadu by Professor Lowes.[3] I realize that, in stating this, I court the attack of all those to whom the notion of archetypal links and racial consciousness as applied to literary research, carries connotations of sinister darkness or, according to L. C. Knights, danger of excessive ease or shallowness.[4] But if we accept that the workings of the human subconscious which Jung traces to archetypal concepts are basic ideas born in the dawn of thought, those "momentary gods" of Cassirer's to whose birth that writer attributes the origins of language and myth,[5] then Lowes's "Well", a reservoir of impressions, ideas and insights, stored by the mind and garnered from vast fields of accumulated human experience will become friendly territory. Granted, Lowes's starting point is with the repository of books, notes, maps, all available to the assiduous seeker. But the information accumulated and

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[3] John Livingstone Lowes, The Road to Xanadu: A Study in the Ways of the Imagination, (Boston: Houghton & Mifflin, 1927).

[4] L. C. Knights, "Idea and Symbol: Some Hints from Coleridge", Further Explorations (1965), rpt. Kathleen Coburn, ed., Coleridge: A Collection of Critical Essays, Twentieth Century Views (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1967), p. 113.

[5] Ernst Cassirer, Language and Myth, transl. Susanne K. Langer (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1953), p. 18.

presented to the creative mind of the poet for selection and organization reaches far back, into Myth; the very fact that so many travellers, writers and poets throughout the ages have found certain phenomena or certain legends more fascinating than others" points to a common racial curiosity, a quest into depths which human minds have always probed.

Moreover, Lowes's discrimination between the functioning of these "subliminal" fragments, fished up, so to speak, from the "Well" in various creative situations, casts a clear light on the workings of the "Anima Poetae".

> . . . The subliminal ego doubtless deals the cards, as the throng of sleeping images, at this call or that, moves towards the light. But the fall of the cards accepted, the shaping spirit of imagination conceives and masterfully carries out the strategy of the game.[6]

This is the first modus operandi of the creative mind of the poet and one, which, according to Lowes, informs The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, the throng of sleeping images being based on notions, pieces of information, musings and conclusions, garnered from Coleridge's notes, writings, the proven facts of his prodigious readings, and then "dipped into the subliminal pool".

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[6] Lowes, Road to Xanadu, p. 72.

The second one is exemplified by Kubla Khan--and is seen as an eruption of such fragments, the "Well" taking over entirely and the poetic imagination being made subject to the subconscious.

The tantalizing "note" explaining the absence of Christabel in The Road to Xanadu[7] ends in the following touchingly humble statement: "I wish I did know in what distant deeps or skies the secret lurks; but the elusive clue is yet to capture." Where convinced Freudians would and probably did barge in, boots and all, into regions where angels fear to tread, weaving involuted assumptions on mother fixations or, perhaps on one of the two Saras' latent lesbianism, Lowes acknowledged the depth of mystery surrounding the marvellous fragment. And while we must bow to the justice of his decision--within the scope of his study--we shall venture to include the poem in our discussion: for The Rime, Kubla Khan and Christabel form the great landmarks in one of the two landscapes where grow Coleridge's trees. These landscapes merge into one another, but on their extreme borders, creating a fascinating polarity, there grows the fatal Upas tree on one side and the fragrant Lime (linden tree) on the other; and we feel entitled to visit

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[7] Lowes, Notes, p. 4.

such landscapes, for Coleridge's espousal of the "organic" theory of the working of the human mind grants the actual plant analogue in his poetry a relevance of its own.

As Abrams maintains, Coleridge sets the mechanistic theory on its head by supplanting the vision of idea-particles becoming organized into a coherent entity through repeated association--by the organic view in which the whole of a work of art is present from the moment of its inception, as is the potential plant within the seed.[8]

The passage of "Aids to Reflection" quoted by Abrams receives a kind of reinforcement which is eminently suitable to our own discussion, in Chapter IV of the Biographia: where Coleridge makes a sharp differentiation between his own purpose in defining fancy and imagination and that of Wordsworth; he uses the tree analogue here with trenchant lucidity:

> But it was Mr. Wordsworth's purpose to consider the influences of fancy and imagination as they are manifested in poetry, and from the different effects to conclude the diversity in kind; while it is my object to investigate the seminal principle, and then from the kind to deduce the degree. My friend has

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[8] M. H. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953; rpt., Oxford University Press paperback, 1971), p. 171.

> drew a masterly sketch of the branches with their poetic fruitage. I wish to add the trunk, and even the roots as far as they lift themselves above ground, and are visible to the naked eye of our common consciousness.[9]

One may add that the great poet's "naked eye of common consciousness" sees deeper into the roots of the tree than that of the average man; perhaps these roots take their origin in the "Well", as seen by Lowes, or in Jung's subconscious, racial memory.

Let us then seek both roots and fruitage, the seminal principle and its outward appearance in the first of Coleridge's poetic landscapes, in that of his great "mystery poems" and the prose fragment dedicated to Cain: Incense bearing trees grow in Kubla Khan, while the same biblical cedars and pines assume a sinister guise in The Wanderings of Cain. In Christabel the sinister oak partakes of the nature of the deadly Upas Tree of Java (found in Coleridge's own notes).

There are also the strange, stunted and maimed trees of The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, with which poem we shall begin our journey. The casual reader will immediately shake his head

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[9]Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, Chap. IV, Vol. 1, Selected Poetry and Prose, ed. Elisabeth Schneider (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1951; rpt. 1965), p. 242. Hereafter all quotations and references to prose and poems will be derived from this text.

and wonder what possible chance there is of finding such an image in a poem, explicitly devoted to a protracted sea voyage. Tropical oceans--yes; storms, yes; icebergs, emphatically so;--but where, on a trip which did not include landings on deserted isles, is vegetation to be found? Let us consider the opening verses: the mariner stops the gallant on his way to the Bridegroom's house, obviously in a garden, and this is where the tale will unfold, as the bride "red as a rose" passes into the hall. Swiftly, the story is noted and the land is left behind with the hill, the kirk and the lighthouse top. The ship, incidentally, made out of timber, travels on, while the sun is seen higher and higher above the mast--which once was the trunk of a great and straight-growing tree. So the tree is with our voyagers, in a transmuted form: the mast, acting as the hand of an immense dial, will point out their position in relation to the sun. Indeed, the mast takes on a number of roles, making the ex-tree into another instrument of measurement. The ice floats by "mast-high". Most importantly, "on mast or shroud" perches the friendly Albatross. Coleridge's seafarers follow a common human trend which is to make a home like their real home, in most unlikely places and out of most unlikely material. The former tree which once grew in a forest and sheltered many birds, now, stripped of its bark, naked and

single, still fulfills its archetypal part and becomes the bearer and perching place for a bird. But the Mariner shoots the Albatross, and he shoots it with a cross-bow, a wooden artifact, another reflection of the tree pointing to the rood. For the Albatross is "hung about" his slayer's neck, instead of a crucifix. The sin has been committed and the Mariner's expiation begins. Where the sanctity of natural life has been offended, natural things are denied sap and growth. The tree is now the cross of suffering, bearing the denuded trunk of the mast company, both maimed remnants of things that once lived.

And maimed, too, is the mossy stump of the oak towards which we are ultimately bound. Time, not human cruelty, has stunted that tree, but, with the mast and the crossbow, it has retained a kind of secondary life--that of service. The holy hermit kneels at prayer, using the cushiony oak stump as his prieu-dieu. He is the one who achieves the final synthesis, and it is only fitting that, as all "hermits good" he should live in a forest. As the ship approaches, he sees the mast on which grow, "sere and thin", heat and cold blasted, and wind-torn, the sails which are, naturally, "brown skeletons of leaves". And so the vision is sounded out and completed: the maimed,

enslaved tree of human artifact grows in the wasteland of perilous journeys: in the fair "countrie" of home only time cripples the tree and even then it serves the purpose of Grace. Seen from the vantage point of the living forest--the mast bears dead leaves, as a reminder that, though shriven and destined for final salvation, the Mariner must expiate his sin, by re-living and re-telling it to countless "wedding guests".

If the trees in the Rime can be seen as victims of human sin and instruments of expiation, the oak in Christabel generates its own evil. Lowes quotes this passage from Erasmus Darwin's The Loves of Plants:

> This, however, is certain, though it may appear incredible, that from fifteen to eighteen miles around this tree, not only no human creature can exist, but that, in that space of ground, no living animal of any kind has ever been discovered . . .[10]

This description, according to Lowes, is responsible for the following entry in Coleridge's Note Book: "Upas Tree--a poem or article. Mem." (Note Book in British Museum, 1795-98).[11] No such poem has ever been seen, but the strange poison tree sheds its deadly effluvion in Christabel.

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[10] Lowes, The Road to Xanadu, p. 19.

[11] Ibid.

Here the heroine goes to the midnight wood, "there to pray / for the weal of her lover that's far away." A holy purpose, and yet the oak tree under which she kneels is the epitome of death:

> And naught was green upon the oak
> But moss and rarest mistletoe . . .

The oak has no life of its own. Since "'tis the month before the month of May", it could, in the English climate, be at least expected to bear tender young leaves. But it is bare of any growth, except for the alien covering of moss--denoting the tree's great age and except for the sinister, parasitic mistletoe. Christabel, on her knees, invokes, no doubt, the protection and aid of the Mother of God. But the tree which bears the druidic plant of ancient and bloodthirsty lore, shelters another presence and one that has nothing to do with true motherhood, Heaven and Grace.

The mysterious moon nearby startles Christabel:

> But what it was she cannot tell.
> On the other side it seems to be,
> Of the huge, brood-breasted, old oak tree.

There is irony in this last line: we are shown the oak tree as a mother figure, but in this connotation, it is a frightening, primeval Earth-Mother to whom mistletoe garlanded children could easily have been sacrificed.

It is in the shade of this tree where no wholesome life can exist that Christabel incurs her deadly peril; the only life that can thrive "on the other side of the old oak tree" is a Life-in-Death being, one closely akin to the dice-throwing spectre we have met in the Ancient Mariner.

Her moan cannot be confused with as normal an occurrence as the wind. There is no wind, not even enough to stir:

> The one red leaf, the last of its clan
> That dances so often as dance it can,
> Hanging so light and hanging so high,
> On the topmost twig that looks up at the sky.

A strangely autumnal image for a wood in April. Coleridge insists that "the woods are bare", though buds at least there must have been at that time of year! But, even though it is the spring of the year, death is ever-present within the precincts of that old oak tree. The only leaf, the only thing that has a potential of movement and joy, is the dead leaf of yesteryear, that cannot even dance now, though it "dances so often as dance it can." And its colour is the colour of blood.

As Christabel leads Geraldine through her father's baronial hall, the "brands", dead fragments of trees, shrouded in the white of their own ashes recall the hue of the white mistletoe fruit and there is no benevolence in anything coming from these trees: they break into "A tongue of light, a fit

of flame" as Geraldine passes by. The deadly combination of white and red which limned the image of the oak tree is here repeated in a contrapuntal manner--a delicate and masterly touch.

In Christabel's bedchamber, wooden artifacts, the figures "strange and sweet" have no power, nor has the spiritual presence of Christabel's own mother. Confronted with Geraldine behind whom--we sense--hovers the "huge, broad-breasted" oak-mother with her message of death, neither Christabel's earthly mother, or the mother of God can prevail and the unspeakable (and undescribed) events of that night take their inevitable course.

Christabel may not recall any of it, except that "in the dim forest" she heard Geraldine's moan and took pity on the forsaken maiden.

And now she slumbers in Geraldine's arms, in a bitter perversion of the image of a child with its mother; the experience of demonic possession and perverted love is over. And Christabel dreams. It is not quite clear whether she, with the poet and with us, sees herself, innocent and virginal, praying at the old oak tree. Coleridge makes use of a technique no movie director has bettered since. In a wonderful flashback montage, he reiterates the image of the praying Christabel from

the beginning of the episode. We are not quite sure, nor are we meant to be, whether Christabel, in her dreams, shares our knowledge of the horror, "the sorrow and the shame". Her subsequent reactions to Geraldine in the confrontation with Sir Leoline point to an intermediate position: she half remembers and struggles against the overwhelming evil through the recall of sleep-dimmed memories. For our purposes, it is enough to recognize in the flashback to the old oak tree, the "fons and origo" of all the trouble. The shadows of branches under which Christabel has prayed are "jagged", because the branches themselves are leafless and mossy. Here Coleridge reaches the heights extolled by Hazlitt in his admiration of Shakespeare's description of Ophelia's death:

> There is a willow hanging o'er a brook
> That shows its hoary leaves in the glassy stream.

Hazlitt continues:

> . . . The leaves of the willow are, in fact, white underneath and it is this part of them which would appear "hoary" in the reflection in the brook. The same sort of intuitive power, the same faculty of bringing every object in nature, whether present or absent, before the mind's eye, is observable in the speech of Cleopatra . . . [12]

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[12] William Hazlitt, "On Shakespeare and Milton", Criticism: The Major Texts, ed. Walter Jackson Bate (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1952), p. 308.

The shadows of thick and twisted branches of an old oak, coated by moss and devoid of any leaves that might blur their stark outline, will indeed appear "jagged". That is nature, as the whiteness of the underside of willow leaves is nature; but just as the whiteness chimes in unison with the shroud and wedding-death garments of the drowning Ophelia, so do the jagged shadows of branches project a feeling of danger and foreboding as they hang over the praying Christabel.

Morning has come and the death motif, closely connected with Christabel's dead mother, rings in the daily knell. The confrontation comes, and with it, Christabel's struggle against the spell in which she suffers moments of terrible identification with the serpent-witch. Geraldine controls the scene and those present are all her dupes, Sir Leoline, Christabel herself and their entourage. The only person who is allowed to retain the clarity of his vision is the bard, Bracy, and this only due to a poetic dream: he sees Christabel, in the guise of the dove, around whose neck and wings a treacherous green snake coils, heaves and swells in a half-sexual, half-murderous attack. The ghastly scene takes place exactly where it belongs: in the shade of the death-bearing oak tree. But Sir Leoline has not the poet's votic powers and he mistakes the symbolism of the dream: it is Geraldine whom he sees as the dove attacked by a

snake and it seems, almost, that he identifies the snake with Christabel, thus totally inverting the truth. And so the poison-bearing tree triumphs--at least in the existing fragment of the poem. True motherhood is defeated by the nightmarish, "broad-breasted" oak-mother, the tutelary divinity of the vampire or sorceress or whatever perverted evil Geraldine represents. Sir Leoline betrays his role of father--and the poet completes his work by the seemingly incongruous but wholly relevant "Conclusion to Part II": here parental love is felt with such excess that the innocent child suffers "words of unmeant bitterness"; sorrow and shame intrude into the world of the red-cheeked little boy, and the uncanny affinity of love and hatred, parenthood and perversity replay, in a minor key, the sonorous music of Christabel.

Harold Bloom calls the Ancient Mariner a purgatorial poem but he sees no catharsis, no release from intense suffering in Christabel.[13] G. W. Knight, in his essay "Coleridge's Divine Comedy", concurs: "This (The Rime of the Ancient Mariner) is Coleridge's Purgatorio, as Christabel is a fragmentary attempt

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[13] Harold Bloom, The Visionary Company (New York: Cornell University Paperbacks, 1971), p. 217.

at a little Inferno."[14]

Our study of the tree image bears out such readings: the mast-crossbow-rood-prie-dieu modulation in The Rime follows the pattern of sin and expiation in a poem in which demonic forces are vanquished by angelic powers; the old oak tree conjures up diabolical presences from the darkest recesses of ancient myths and presides over unredeemed and unrelieved agony--a death-bearing Upas tree par excellence.

Before we leave this mysterious landscape, it will not be amiss to visit the desert and the forests in which Cain and his doomed child wander, following the demonic simulacre of Abel.

In both the poetic fragment and the lone prose-Canto II, trees and woods figure prominently. Leaves are the "beauteous boy's" only dress and, in the poem, he is engaged in plucking fruits which grow, with flowers "on many a shrub and many a tree". The vision is paradisal. But it undergoes a change in the opening segment of the Canto: the road through which the child Enos leads Cain travels through a forest of firs and the

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[14] G. W. Knight, "Coleridge's Divine Comedy", English Romantic Poets: Modern Essays in Criticism, ed. M. H. Abrams (London: Oxford University Press paperback, 1960), p. 162.

dew from the forest "drips pleasantly" on the child. Squirrels play among the branches, but--and here we come to limit of Eden and of a child's happiness--they refuse to play with Enos. Perhaps they are frightened by the child who "groans at them" as he feeds them, even as his father groans when he gives him to eat. Sadly, young Enos has only known his father's groans, the only expressions of love he has ever heard. Cain "presses himself against the trunk of a fir", as if communing desperately with fertile life, but such life is not for him. As he passes into the open desert through the low arch of thick black trees, he assumes all the marks of one doomed:

> . . . for the mighty limbs of Cain were wasted as if by fire; his hair was as the matted curls on the bison's forehead; and so glared his fierce and sullen eyes beneath; and the black abundant locks on either side, a rank and tangled mass, were stained and scorched, as though the grasp of a burning iron had striven to rend them . . . .

The encounter with the evil spirit who has taken on the guise of Abel, in order to lure Cain and his son into the realm of the God of the Dead ("The Lord is the God of the living only; the dead have another God") takes place in a wasteland of rock and sand. Young Enos replays the tragic passage of Adam and of Cain: from the paradisal, fruit-bearing tree (almost do we see Milton's fruits of "vegetable gold") he passes into the grove of black firs where there is no fruit fit for humans to eat and

where the little animals shrink from his heritage of sorrow. Beyond the grove, there is the desert of evil and there Enos will become the sacrificial offering to the God of the Dead.

Thick conifers grow, too, in another Eden-like country, but a much younger poet's shaping imagination fashions their image in a very different mould.

What kind of incense bear the trees surrounding Kubla Khan's pleasure dome? Unlike the maimed and stunted trees inhabiting the Mariner's seascape, unlike the sinister oak in Sir Leoline's woods, and unlike their mournful brethren in Cain, they thrive, even though they are part of "forests ancient as the hills".

They blossom, they shed perfumes and they form a "cedarn cover". Life in abundance is the atmosphere these trees create, and life in abundance bubbles and seethes in the poem. Whether with Lowes, we accept Coleridge's own explanation of this fragment's origin as the result of an opium dream, or with other commentators we cast this in doubt, citing modern medical opinion of such dreams is irrelevant. What must impress the reader is the contrast between the dimmed sadness of the introductory note which speaks of "ill health", the "slight anodyne", the "tomorrow yet to come", and the exuberant joyousness of the

poem itself. Whatever clouds may have been gathering on Coleridge's horizon, whatever dark forces were marring his creative genius, it is fitting that this poem with its enchanting music and unsurpassed imagery should have come from his pen, no matter under what circumstances.

And so, after viewing broken visions and poisonous growths, we turn with relief to thick-growing cedars, trees full of incense-bearing blossoms and "sunny spots of greenery". If the incense is to be given religious connotations, then we are in a temple where the altars are raised to life.

True, there are the caves of ice and there are the caverns measureless to man and there is the woman's "wailing for her demon-lover". These things exist in the poem, as they exist in life: rivers flow to the measureless caverns of cold death, but not without having had their chance of bursting into mighty fountains and flinging up large boulders of rock, miraculously transformed into symbols of vegetable fertility, "chaffy grain beneath the thresher's flail". "Ancestral voices" may be prophesying war--and in what period of history do they not?--but the overt vigour of male and female sexuality blossoms with the incense-bearing trees to culminate in the two final images: the graceful damsel with her dulcimer, seen by many as poetic imagination, but who also is all youthful womanhood, and the

exuberant, lone and awe-inspiring Orc-figure of the poet who, in accordance with the postulate of Schelling, controls this universe of nature, life and the human mind.

Lowes maintains that Kubla Khan belongs to the second type of poetic creation, that of the eruption of images and notions from the "deep Well", ordered somehow, without visible control of the conscious mind:

> Now we have yet to see, in Kubla Khan, the unconscious playing its game alone--as it happens, with conspicuous and perhaps unique success.[15]

The success is certainly unique: for we are pitchforked into a world where life and death, pleasure and fear, the male and the female, sexual desire and frustration, poetic inspiration and the poet's fate form an harmonious statement, with not one word or musical stress out of place or superfluous. This divine completeness proves beyond doubt that Coleridge's poetry does indeed combine fruitage, the bole and the roots.

The great "mystery triad", The Ancient Mariner, Kubla Khan and Christabel, reinforced, for our purpose by The Wanderings of Cain spans a range of antimonies in which the tree carries connotations of life and death, hatred and love, sin and redemption.

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[15] Lowes, Road to Xanadu, p. 104.

In the remaining part of this study, Coleridge's tree imagery will be seen as taking on several additional functions: trees will point to a total merging and union with nature, culminating in the pantheistic statement of The Eolian Harp. They will become intimations of human sorrow and doom in earlier poetry and refuges from disaster in the later France: Ode to Liberty. Before this last forceful stage is reached, trees will modulate from conventionally accepted emblems to more significant private imagery, denoting Coleridge's concerns with social injustice and human suffering. A side glance at two rare instances of trees assuming the guise of young feminity will serve to complete the range of connotations and emotions; although unusual in the Coleridgean canon, they will lead us directly to the poet's own interpretation of a private and original view of tree symbolism. We shall complete our scrutiny with two supreme examples of image handling in which trees furnish the ladder by which poetic imagination ascends the heights and transcends time and matter. The order of the poems has been made subordinate to a flow of connective links and we must beg the reader's indulgence if chronology has not been honoured very strictly, though an effort was made to consider the earlier poems at the beginning of this section.

In his essay "The Correspondent Breeze" Prof. Abrams remarks smilingly on the "thorough ventilation" of Romantic poetry.[16] The ever-present winds make the Aeolian harp a favourite image which lends itself particularly well to the enthronement of Nature as creative force. The poet's imagination functions in accordance with Coleridge's view of the "secondary imagination", fusing and synthetising phenomena and forcing the seed of the poem to assume its primarily determined shape. The human mind, here, is merely a splintered-off fraction of the spirit of the universe, very much as seen by Kant.

Ludwig von Ganghoffer, a German novelist of the late 19th century uses a striking image in his novel, Das Schweigen im Walde (Silence in the Forest). There, the Aeolian harp is not merely a musical instrument suspended from the branch of a tree. It is a strangely grown fir itself, its trunk bent low by the force of Alpine gales and nine boughs growing straight upwards in ascending order of tallness. The man who owns the mountain garden where the tree grows, a talented, if misunderstood artist, provides the fir with an assortment of carefully tuned bells--thus completing the image of an unusual Aeolian harp. The

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[16] M. H. Abrams, English Romantic Poets, p. 38.

tree, needless to say, carries important symbolic weight in the novel, representing the artist's alienation, his song in the wilderness and his ultimate destruction and rehabilitation, and is a fit symbol of the subject and object of the creative force.[17]

More conventionally, Coleridge has his Aeolian harp suspended from the tree in the approved manner, but tree there must be, the boughs of which the breeze moves, in order to awaken the harp's song. A humble predecessor to the famous Eolian Harp of the poem of that name, Casimir's "Lyra" is "on a poplar branch suspended". The branch moves softly in the "solemn-breathing air" which has just ended. But there will be no peace for the branch and the poplar. The Latin original sounds the ominous "eheu fugaces" motif: peace will soon depart, with the "flatterer, Pleasure", for the poet hears "in the forest hollow-roaring"--"a deepening sound". Tree, wind, harp, together with heavy, "low'ring" clouds, combine to strike a note of fear and foreboding. Even though only represented by a mere supporting branch and a distant forest, the tree sucks in the sap of surrounding context to merge into a statement of

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[17] Ludwig Ganghofer, Das Schweigen im Walde (Munich: Droemer Knaur paperback, 1968).

sorrow for a fleeting moment of happiness, only too soon supplanted by turmoil and terror.

The early (1793-6) Songs of the Pixies was inspired by the rediscovery of "the Pixies" Parlour, a sandy cave, the ceiling of which was formed by the roots of old trees. Initials of the author and his brothers, carved there in childhood, may have inspired the charming fairy tale set in the form of "Irregular Ode". Here roots, and trees become the milieu in which tiny elf-like beings disport themselves. They live in their cavernous "cell", and retreat there in "the blaze of day", enjoying the shadow offered by the canopy of "huge roots interwin'd with wildest texture, blacken'd o'er by age". The friendly little beings who welcome humans to their abode with such warm hospitality are lent the majesty of age and primal strength through those massive guardians of their home. Roots lend them majesty; the leaves of the aspen, that well known trembler, allow them to achieve a kind of mimicry, offering shelter from prying human eyes:

> On leaves of aspen trees
> We tremble to the breeze
> Veil'd from the grosser ken of mortal sight.

Brought to poetic life through memories conjured from childish scrawls on old tree roots, the sprites move and speak in unison

with nature, indeed an integral part of breeze, root and leaf. Almost, it seems that the vision of oneness so grandiose in the Eolian Harp is foreshadowed by these slight beings from fairyland. At least no pensive Sara thwarts their flight and their merger with breeze and aspen. But in the much more famous poem the great question is posed:

> And what if all the animated nature
> Be but organic Harps diversely fram'd,
> That tremble into thought, as o'er them sweeps
> Plastic and vast one intellectual breeze,
> At once the Soul of each and God of all?
> (Eolian Harp)

The presence of the "beloved Woman" and the lapse into orthodoxy precludes an answer. Orthodox too and reduced to mere emblems are the trees in this poem: the white-flower'd Jasmin and broad-leav'd Myrtle represent respectively Innocence and Love, as we are explicitly told. There is an essential rightness to such firmness in a poem where established religious thought, explicitly, wins over metaphysical speculation. Even here, though the poem thematically opposes such views, the parts and the whole are one--organically merged and fused.

In Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement the same shrubs (and may we be allowed the licence of including them in our study, though botanical purists may object), the Jasmin and the Myrtle assume a more important role. Together

with the tall rose, they represent a happiness sheltered from the toils and suffering of humanity, specifically urban humanity. Just as it brings relief to know that "pensive Sara's" philosophy did not affect Coleridge's thought much beyond the honeymoon and that the great striving for a synthesis between faith and soaring speculation went on, yielding such works as the Dejection Ode, Limbo and Ne Plus Ultra, so it is with joy that we greet a turning away from the use of the common coin of emblem to more private and personal image-making. It seems almost that here the step is made which Richards sees as a transition from Hartley to Kant:

> In Imagination the mind is growing; in Fancy it is merely reassembling products of its past creation, stereotyped as objects and obeying as such 'fixities and definites', the laws of Hartley's Association. The passage of the conception of the mind's doings as Fancy to that of the creative Imagination is the passage from Hartley to Kant.[18]

White Jasmin--the emblem of Innocence, Myrtle--that of Love are mere associative expressions of Fancy. Nothing more is said of them in the rest of the poem, and they owe their glibness to age-old usage of the metaphor. Whether we agree with Richards

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[18] J. A. Richards, Coleridge on Imagination (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1962), p. 59.

that Fancy and Imagination are two different faculties,[19] or with Lowes--that the difference lies merely in the degree of intensity,[20] it will be apparent that the same shrubs which grow in In Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement owe their scent and lushness to a more Kantian mode of creation: here they serve the poet's personal metaphoric vehicle, connoting blessedness and shelter from urban misery and strife: Even though the honeymoon still goes on, even though the Beloved, the "Sweet Girl" is present and even though the poem ends on that note of profound faith and prayer " . . . Speed it, O Father! Let thy Kingdom come!", the trees stand for seclusion, peace and communion with nature:

> . . . our tallest Rose
> Peep'd at the chamber-window. We could hear
> At silent noon, and eve, and early morn,
> The Sea's faint murmur. In the open air
> Our Myrtles blossom'd: and across the porch
> Thick Jasmins twined: the little landscape round
> Was green and woody, . . .

But this little Paradise must be left for a life dedicated to service:

> I therefore go, and join head, heart, and hand,
> Active and firm, to fight the bloodless fight
> Of Science, Freedom and the Truth in Christ.

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[19] Richards, p. 31-5.

[20] Lowes, Road to Xanadu, p. 103.

An unusual trinity, but one Coleridge's esemplastic imagination knew how to fuse together. As he foreswears the sweetness of his retreat in these lines, made abrupt by a conglomeration of brief, harshly Anglo-Saxon monosyllables, his spirit will revisit his sylvan retreat to gain solace from memories:

> Thy Jasmin and thy window-peeping Rose,
> And Myrtles fearless of the wild-sea-air.

Shelter then, solace and sweet seclusion is the aura created by myrtle, jasmin and rose, all three embodying Coleridge's favourite colour scheme, that of green, red and white.

A similar role is played by the biblical Sycamore in a much later poem, Inscription for a Fountain on a Heath (1802). The tree is musical with bees and made akin to its scriptural brethren: "such tents the Patriarchs loved!" It shelters a well and offers shade to travellers, as benevolent as was the Myrtle and the Jasmine and, just as they, intent on preserving the sweetness of fertile life. Turning back to the tree-suspended harp, this sycamore fuses the visual and aural and becomes "musical with bees", enticing more than one sense with its multifarious unity.

Trees grow in abundance in To a Young Friend. The yew and the cypress with their dark greenery create a foil for the red berries of the mountain ash (the picture enhanced by the

fleeting white of the lost lamb). Seemingly, this wood functions merely as a background for sweet and friendly conversation--a kind of welcome to Charles Lloyd, the young friend who is Coleridge's guest. But the ash is half uprooted, and her berries are dripping; in this friendly scene, no doubt they drip with drops of water, splashed up by the torrent. Yet the image underlying that of the red, dripping berries could be blood. This is a strange poem, of not quite formulated metaphor. The poet himself acknowledges that he "essayed to trace" the Hill of Knowledge, but felt but "rudely vers'd in allegoric lore". The attempt did not quite come off: the romantic limbs of the old pine, may inspire romance through juxtaposition with "enamour'd sight" of the next line, or appear full of mystery and foreboding through the wide shadow they cast--especially in the yellow light of sunset; yet the shadow is benign and affords delicious rest to the poet and his friend.

We would be forced to leave this grove, with a feeling that its function is purely pictorial, were it not for those intriguing "stiff evergreens"

> (whose spreading foliage mocks
> Want's barren soil, and the bleak frosts of age,
> And Bigotry's mad, fire-invoking rage)

Though placed in parentheses, as a kind of side idea, these evergreens offer the key to this poem: they usher in the final

verses:

> from the stirring world uplifted high
> (Whose noises, faintly wafted on the wind,
> To quiet musings shall attune the mind,
> And oft the melancholy theme supply) . . .

Yew, cypress, and ash, pine and evergreens are shown us as the raw material of creation, those fragments which the poet gathered before letting them be submerged in Lowes's "subliminal" pool. They will serve to build a "theme" yet to come. Already the evergreens form a link in a way yet undisclosed--with resistance to Bigotry and barrenness of the mind, and the pine's old limbs are "romantic". That pine is seen emerging on several remarkable occasions:

In Hymn to the Rising Sun the pines emit "a soft and soul-like sound". They also appear as dark, substantial and black--an ebony mass. But, like a sudden flash of poetic imagination, the darkness is pierced by crystal shrine of Mont Blanc "as with a wedge". This is a fitting image of the poet's mind, cutting through obscurity and dark speculation.

Such an image is created in France: An Ode, by Woods and Waves. They are free, yielding only to eternal laws as they must be, introducing a paean to Liberty: in the first strophe they recall the poet's untrammelled wandering "where never woodman trod"; the rude shapes and unconquerable sounds assisted

his pursuit of "fancies holy", protecting him from the "guess of folly" by their primeval wisdom, as he was guided by "imperious beeches swinging" and by their solemn music inspired by the wind. Such is Liberty through which man can commune freely with the source of being and attain happiness; this is what Coleridge prayed for when he wished that all may enjoy a myrtle and jasmine-sheltered Cot. But the dream was destined to be broken, for it was not Liberty, but Blasphemy and Disenchantement that arose from events in France. Switzerland, the epitome of national freedom was invaded and the only refuge for freedom of thought remained among the pines and the waves of the final strophe.

The merging of subject and object, as postulated by Richards, becomes even more marked in the few instances in which Coleridge's trees are subsumed by the image of young, sexual womanhood. In Lewti, "the pendent boughs of treasy yew" remind the poet of his love's "[illegible]head fair". The jasmine, in Lewti's bower conjures up the beauty's "bosom white", and the leafy labyrinth surrounding her, becomes one with her inapproachable mystery, for "Lewti is not kind". Similarly, in The Ballad of the Dark Ladie, the opening line introducing the "birch with silver bark, and branches pendulous and fair", is at once an analogue and a contrast to the beautiful girl

whom we meet, "sitting on the moss in silent pain". Though the lady's hair is "jet-black", she is fair and her dreams are centred on her wedding day, where she will be surrounded by attendants dressed in white, as foreshadowed by the silver-stemmed birch.

In another ballad, that of The Mad Monk, the chestnut tree shelters the cave in which dwells the murderer of beautiful Rose. The ballad was meant as a compliment to Mrs. Radcliff, and the second stanza purports to recall "an old Sicilian Song". What it does, in fact, recall is the opening strophe of Wordsworth's Immortality Ode:

> There was a time when meadow, grove and stream,
> The earth and every common sight,
> To me did seem
> Apparelled in celestial light, . . .

And here is the "Sicilian Song":

> There was a time when earth, and sea and skies,
> The bright green vale, and forests's dark recess,
> With all things lay before mine eyes
> In steady loveliness . . .

Somehow, we are tempted to leave the Mad Monk and the unfortunate Rose behind, and see, in this stanza, a lament for the departing gleam, the departing "shaping Spirit of Imagination", mourned so poignantly two years later, in the Dejection Ode. This makes the chestnut tree by the Monk's cave--close kin to that chestnut and pine mentioned in the notes from Anima Poetae:

> The Pine tree blasted at the top was applied by Swift to himself as a prophetic emblem of his own decay. The Chestnut is a fine shady tree, and its wood excellent, were it not that it dies away at the heart first. Alas! Poor me![21]

This sad exclamation is a poignant echo of the involved excuses which preface the poem many lovers of Coleridge's genius consider his glory, Kubla Khan. The terrors of illness, addiction, loss of creative energy rotted the heart of the great chestnut tree-and yet, to the very end how eagerly were its shades sought after!

This, it seems, is another fragment of insight, dipped into the subliminal Well, and emerging in a poem as a portent of gloom, and an analogue to the poet's own despair over the falling off of his creative force--a chestnut rotted at the heart.

As Coleridge openly states in Lines Written in the Album at Elbingerode in the Hartz Forest,

> . . . outward forms, the loftiest, still receive
> Their finer influence from the Life within;
> Fair cyphers else: . . .

In this poem, the fair cyphers are fir groves which shelter moss "heaving in forms sepulchral".

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[21] Coleridge, "Anima Poetae", Selected Poetry and Prose, p. 476.

It is the poet's "low and languid mood" which fashions such funereal shapes, for at this moment, human love has no access to his heart. Nature remains "fair, but of import vague" without the feeling for "friend, fair maid, father" or country.

How such feelings can shape outward images is demonstrated in the two last poems we shall consider. In This Lime Tree Bower My Prison (the Lime Tree being the European, honey-bearing Linden and no relation to the citrus tree of the same name), the trees form a shelter in which the poet is forced to stay, due to an injury. His visiting friends are now roaming the beloved countryside, but, since "dear Sara" had spilled a skilletful of boiling milk on his foot, the poet must remain in his prison-bower. Owing to his wife's carelessness, the poet has lost the opportunity of a beautiful experience:

> . . . most sweet to my remembrance, even when age
> Hath dimm'd mine eyes to blindness' . . .

He overcomes his natural resentment against the careless lady, and those lime trees which, like she, immobilized him, by projecting himself to the side of his friends, performing the difficult feat of vanquishing space through the force of imagination. He follows them where the "branchless ash" flings its slim trunk in a bridge-like arch; a pliant and feminine figure,

it has known its share of suffering: its leaves are few and yellow, because the tree grows in damp, "unsunn'd" places. No gale sets these sheltered leaves a-tumble, only the ever-present waterfall, just as no great disaster has befallen the poet, in his sheltered bower, but regret for a missed afternoon of pleasure. Yet, as he follows his friends through such natural images, he communes with them, especially with his "gentle Charles". In a kind of platonic ascension, his spirit soars to an encounter with the Unfathomable:

> . . . yea, gazing round
> On the wide landscape, gaze till all doth seem
> Less gross than bodily; and of such hues
> As veil the Almighty Spirit, when yet he makes
> Spirit perceive his presence.

This is the epiphany which kills futile regret:

> . . . a delight
> Comes sudden to my heart, and I am glad
> As I myself were there!

And the little lime tree bower itself, no longer a prison, takes on the greatness of a whole world, for the poet now uses the inverted telescope of sharpened perception:

> Pole beneath the blaze
> Hung the transparent foliage; and I watch'd
> Some broad and sunny leaf, and lov'd to see
> The shadow of the leaf and stem above
> Dappling its sunshine!

The rich tints of the walnut tree nearby, the black moss of

fronting elms, the branches of which gleam in the late twilight are now precious for they signify that

> No plot so narrow but be Nature there,
> No waste so vacant, but may well employ
> Each faculty of sense, and keep the heart
> Awake to Love and Beauty.

In this poem the trees form the ladder on which the poet's soaring spirit ascends to look "into the light of things".

No more delicate merging of vehicle and tenor, image and informing thought can be conceived than that lone mention of a tree in Frost at Midnight.

> Therefore all seasons shall be sweet to thee,
> Whether the summer clothe the general earth
> With greenness, or the redbreast sit and sing
> Betwixt the tufts of snow on the bare branch
> Of mossy apple tree while the nigh thatch
> Smokes in the sun-thaw; . . .

Taking upon him the part of the fairy-godmother, the loving father pronounces a wish and a blessing over his sleeping infant. The sweetness he promises him has the sweetness of the ripe apple, even though the branch of the apple tree is seen in winter. Yet there is mossy softness on that branch, and the snow adorning it is shaped into tufts--like soft tufts of down to cradle a sleeping baby, or like clusters of apple blossoms, presaging the ripe fruit--which, too is present in the red of the singing bird's breast. The well-known threesome of red,

green and white does more here than simply paint pleasing colour combinations: love, innocence and tender care, fertile life, the song of youth, the flow of the seasons are interfused, not so much by the "secret ministry of frost" as by the shaping spirit of supreme poetry.

Over a century later this theme of unity was taken a step farther--from life on this earth to life eternal by another great poet:

> . . . . . .
> At the source of the longest river
> The voice of the hidden waterfall
> And the children in the apple-tree
> Not known, because not looked for
> But heard, half-heard, in the stillness
> Between two waves of the sea,
> Quick now, here, now, always--
> A condition of complete simplicity
> . . . . . .[22]

From a father's love we are led to the flash of apprehended eternity. But the triune image of the child, the fruit, and the tree remains the same.

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[22] T. S. Eliot, "Little Gidding", Four Quartets (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1959), p. 59.

CHAPTER IV

THE DIMINISHING CIRCUMFERENCE

> The internal nature of each being is surrounded by a circle, not to be surmounted by its fellows; and it is this repulsion which constitutes the misfortune of the condition of our life. But there is a circle which comprehends, as well as one which mutually excludes, all things which feel. And, with respect to man, his public and his private happiness consists in diminishing the circumference which includes those resembling himself, until they become one with him, and he with them. . . . It is therefore that the ocean, the glacier, the cataract, the tempest, the volcano, have each a spirit which animates the extremities of our frame with tingling joy. It is therefore that the singing of the birds, and the motion of the leaves, the sensation of the odorous earth beneath, and the freshness of the living wind around, is sweet. And this is Love. . . .[1]

Here Shelley sums up, as concisely as anywhere in his writings, his religion of eternity. This circle of the soul, containing the inner circle, "the internal nature of each", clearly gains in radiance and generates happiness when diminishing its boundaries in order to merge with and include other auras, most akin to itself. These can be the circumferences of fellow humans, but also, the "spirits" of glaciers

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[1] Percy Bysshe Shelley, "The Coliseum", Selected Poetry and Prose, ed. Kenneth Neil Cameron (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), p. 121.

and cataracts, of things seemingly inanimate, but alive with the purpose and beauty of the all-encompassing One.

It is precisely what Harold Bloom means when he makes Martin Buber's fundamental distinction between the It and the Thou the controlling principle of his study of Shelley's Mythmaking.[2] The basic passage from Buber's I and Thou, as quoted by Bloom, reads as follows:

> I consider a tree.
>
> I can look on it as a picture: stiff column in a shock of light, or splash of green shot with the delicate blue and silver of the background.
>
> I can perceive it as movement: flowing veins on clinging, pressing pith, such of the roots, breathing of the leaves, ceaseless commerce with earth and air--and the obscure growth itself.
>
> I can classify it in a species and study it as a type in its structure and mode of life.
>
> I can subdue its actual presence and form so sternly that I recognise it only as an expression of law--of the laws in accordance with which a constant opposition of forces is continually adjusted, or of those in accordance with which the component substances mingle and separate.
>
> I can dissipate it and perpetuate it in number, in pure numerical relation.
>
> In all this the tree remains my object, occupies space and time, and has its nature and constitution.
>
> It can, however, also come about, if I have both will and grace, that in considering the tree I become bound up in relation to it. The tree is now no longer

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[2] Harold Bloom, Shelley's Mythmaking (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), pp. 1-2.

> It. I have been seized by the power of exclusiveness.
>
> To effect this it is not necessary for me to give up any of the ways in which I consider the tree. There is nothing from which I would have to turn my eyes away in order to see, and no knowledge that I would have to forget. Rather is everything, picture and movement, species and type, law and number, indivisibly united in this event.
>
> Everything belonging to the tree is in this: its form and structure, its colours and chemical composition, its intercourse with the elements and with the stars, are all present in a single whole.
>
> The tree is no impression, no play of my imagination, no value depending on my mood; but it is bodied over against me and has to do with me, as I with it--only in a different way.
>
> Let no attempt be made to sap the strength from the meaning of the relation: relation is mutual.
>
> The tree will have a consciousness, then, similar to our own? Of that I have no experience. But do you wish, through seeming to succeed in it with yourself, once again to disintegrate that which cannot be disintegrated? I encounter no soul or dryad of the tree, but the tree itself.

It will be obvious from the above that the Thou can only exist in relation to the perceiving consciousness, as opposed to the It--a something to be experienced in a one-way process, something which can be referred to in the third person only, whereas the Thou must rest on a two-way interplay between the ego and a responding second person (whether human or part of external Nature, or, as essentially to Buber--God).

It appears that Shelley's spirits which animate glaciers, oceans and cataracts, and in one process of meeting the poet's

mind are the glaciers and oceans, are of the same ilk as is Buber's tree which may "have a consciousness similar to our own", indefinable by experience, but detectable by an active relationship. Having made this point, we must express puzzlement at Bloom's deprecating view of Shelley's prose writings (always excepting his Defence of Poetry) which, in his discussion of Epipsychidion, he dismisses as third hand stuff and inadvisable for any student of Shelley's poetry to read.[3] It is in the concept of the diminishing circumference which postulates mutual circles striving to merge and touch that Buber's ego-thou relationship is echoed and it is here that an explanation may be found for Harold Bloom's own speculation on the contrary view of nature adopted by Shelley, as opposed to that of Coleridge.[4] As Coleridge states in The Ode to Dejection, nature lives only through the human entity. Shelley, more humble, grants the external a spirituality at least equal to that of man and one to be attained by a melting into, an energetic striving for mutual merging--precisely Buber's active relationship, where the I is "seized by the power of exclusiveness"

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[3] Bloom, Shelley's Mythmaking, p. 206.

[4] Bloom, The Visionary Company, p. 286.

and, without relinquishing any experiential manners of perceiving, meets the object in a unified way and becomes involved with it: "It has to do with me, as I with it, only in a different way."

We shall endeavour to show, in this chapter, how this active expenditure of energy operates in Shelley's manner of approaching the tree and related images.

It will be seen that the tree image, in Shelley's vision, often suffers a kind of fragmentation. Rather than complete entities, we will see a detritus of wind-blown leaves and tangled boughs--on some of the most memorable occasions, as in the Ode to the West Wind--subject to violent movement. Our search will lead us from an initial confrontation of the two circles--the poet's soul and the animating spirit of the perceived object, until the almost perfect union in the great Ode and the posthumous Triumph of Life. We shall, finally, seek, in The Witch of Atlas, an explanation as to why the perfection must always remain unattained, and the union in the realm of the "almost".

It is always a self-defeating task, in a study of the kind which I have undertaken, to subject the material to a rigid grouping which would structure an ordered progression of thought. The path which will lead on through the various aspects of

Shelley's "diminishing circumference" is tortuous. Yet some guidelines can be staked out, even though they will fluctuate and never really become partition walls, for the divisions will, of necessity, merge and become blurred. In his discussion of Epipsychidion, Bloom sees this striving for perfect union as a doomed quest:

> Love unites in act, not in essence. The countermyth demands union in essence, and so destroys the poem, in the movement to "one annihiliation". The attempt both to extend and to realize the limits of relationship and expression fails, yet the poem remains.[5]

I have attempted to follow this quest as it grows, not perhaps in intensity, but in personal intimacy: where the controlling idea, the thematic core of the poem becomes merged with the image under study, the interplay of personal aura is different from instances in which either the persona of the story told, or, without any mask, the poet's self, subsuming theme and persona, strives for union. Thus Hellas, a forceful example of persona-merger, will be considered after Prometheus Unbound--and Alastor and Epipsychidion will be seen as hovering between the persona and the selfhood merger. In The Triumph

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[5]Bloom, The Visionary Company, p. 341.

of Life, the great unified image is given to Rousseau and yet his experience is so close to the poet's own, or at least to one of its stages, that I have reserved this poem for the concluding section of this study. This, too, applies to The Witch of Atlas, but for a different reason. Even though the role of the Dryads is entirely theme-connected, their appearance is of such importance to the whole question of the success or failure of ~~the~~ quest, that they must be considered last, since they provide the final answer. And so our study will have come full circle, opening with the theme-link and reaching its conclusion with it.

"Ambiguous man", in Queen Mab, capable of generating the social evils of faith, war, commerce, slavery and tyranny, is mirrored by the multiplicity of the root image of religious error, twining itself round man's coffined "clay" and bearing fruit which will poison generations yet to come--but trees, in Canto IV also present natural harmony, as opposed to human evil:

> . . . the fruits, the flowers, the trees,
> Arise in due succession; all things speak
> Peace, harmony and love. The universe,
> In Nature's silent eloquence declares
> That all fulfill the works of love and joy,
> All, but the outcast, Man. . . .[6]

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[6]Percy Bysshe Shelley, The Poetical Works, 2 vols., I: Lyrics and Shorter Poems (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1935), pp. 80-7.

We are led from poison to ideal harmony and fruition, and again, in Canto V, from fertility to death and back to rebirth. Not only leaves, not only seeds, the whole tree itself, must fall and lie in "loathsome rottenness" for a long time, until it, too, shares in the process of rebirth:

> Till from the breathing lawn a forest springs
> Of youth, integrity and loveliness.

Outcast man and tall tree must suffer the same fate in order to bring about the apotheosis envisioned in the final canto where a Godwinesque Paradise has been born, with Necessity officiating as midwife. Naïve though this dream may seem, especially when viewed from the vantage points of Prometheus Unbound, Ode to the West Wind and The Triumph of Life, yet the here poetic process may be observed in its initial stage. In whatever light we may regard Shelley's social philosophy of that period, we are bound to sense the beginning of the kind of union between the very core of the poem and the imagery which bodies it forth, specifically the imagery concerning this study. To misquote Cassirer (see Chapter 3, Note 5)--"a momentary god" is seen to be born and--the tree has become evolving humanity.

Liberty hides, as yet unacknowledged, where "vine, corn and olive mild grew savage yet", in the Ode to her name. Having flourished in Athenian antiquity, and in republican Rome,

Liberty must flee the "senate of the tyrants" and finally the lone tyranny of the Caesars. It is interesting to note that she finds a shelter in which to lament her defeat among the Northern pines:

> From what Hyrcanian glen or frozen hill,
> Or piny promontory of the Arctic main,
> Or utmost islet inaccessible,
> Didst thou lament the ruin of thy reign
> . . . . . [7]

Yet it is the olive again which heralds Liberty's return in the wreath on "Saxon Alfred's brow" foreshadowing the awakening of the free spirit of humanity. The trees of South and North, olive and pine, just as men of Italian cities and men of England, are joined in their progress towards Liberty's triumph. Trees, too, become fitting vehicles in the poet's search for a new faith and a new divinity.

While the "starlight woods" in Hymn to Intellectual Beauty denote a poet's mistaken search for truth in orthodox religion (I called on poisoned names on which our youth is fed), the giant pines in Mont Blanc have a different though equally numinous role. They are titans and their ceremony harks back to "an old and solemn harmony". Yet the image is consistent with ideas of Christian worship: their "mighty swinging" brings forth

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[7] Shelley, Selected Poetry and Prose.

the vision of some titanic acolytes censing a giant altar. It is interesting to note here that, in a similar image of trees growing in thick profusion and partaking of a kind of spirituality, Coleridge has his "incense-bearing trees" standing still, even though other elements in Kubla Khan, rocks, and water, are subject to most violent upheavals. This would bear out our contention that almost everywhere in Shelley, the tree-image and motion are linked. In Mont Blanc it also joins the rest of nature in an acknowledgment of mutability:

> The fields, the lakes, the forests and the streams (line 83)
> . . . . . .
> Are born and die; . . . (line 96)

And this ephemeral existence is juxtaposed to the Power which "dwells apart in its tranquillity, remote, serene and inaccessible" here symbolized by the mighty mountain. The "flood of ruin" rolls its perpetual stream, a terrible view of the only eternity in the universe, that of destruction. Fittingly, the Titanic pines, seen before as incense-swinging worshippers of that terrible divinity are also victims of ultimate destruction:

> . . . vast pines are strewing
> Its destined path, or in the mangled soil
> Branchless and shattered stand. . . .
> (lines 109-11)

The poet presents two tree-images: the giant pine,

swayed by the wind in prayer to the great power, and the shattered pine--destroyed by that same, unfeeling, unacknowledging, uncaring power. These express a very bitter view of the informing spirit of the universe. Demogorgon is here allowed to merge with Jupiter, combining conscious tyranny with remote and unfeeling Chaos.

Prometheus Unbound, with its mingling of a landscape geographically provable and viable, and the grandiose vision of a universe in which personalized ideas conduct their Olympian affairs, presents the heights of Shelley's theme-supporting image-making, at least where the tree image is concerned. The very first tree we encounter is an organic part of the body of the Earth Mother, rejoicing with her (in reminiscence) in the birth of Prometheus:

> . . . she within whose stony veins,
> To the last fibre of the loftiest tree,
> Whose thin leaves trembled in the frozen air,
> Joy ran, as blood within a living frame . . .
> (Act 1, scene 1, lines 154-7)

The oneness of Nature and her informing Spirit is made organic and physical. The leaves were thin and trembling, and the air frozen (all symbols of despair to Shelley). But when Mercury announces to Prometheus another onslaught of torture, ordained by Jupiter, the sudden death of a tree foreshadows the agony:

Ione: O, sister look! White fire
Has cloven to the roots yon huge snow-loaded cedar:
How fearfully God's thunder howls behind!
(Act 1, scene 1, line 433)

The tree which rejoiced in the birth of the Titan, now partakes of his passion and dies in a blaze of whiteness, that of fire and of death, caused by the thunderbolt of their common enemy. But, according to the function allotted Nature in the poem, trees, too, foretell the coming of deliverance. Toward the close of Act 1, the Chorus sings of the white-thorn which soon will blow, heralding Wisdom, Justice, Love and Peace. Whiteness is used in its primordial dual role: denoting death and rebirth.

The Furies are fled and the next act takes us to the "lovely Vale in the Indian Caucasus". In Panthea's second dream, which she relates to Asia, the lightning-blasted almond tree bursts forth in buds, again stressing the duality of blossom and bud. Though victory is not yet at hand, and the Scythian wind blows down the blossoms, yet each petal bears the message "O, Follow, follow, follow!" Asia takes up the story of the dream, and the call to follow is continued in it, through the wind among the pines, a successor to the death-dealing northern blast.

The inner reality of the forest forms the first stage of the two Oceanides' journey. Since the voyage must take them

"down, down, down" to the caves of Demogorgon, the dense bowers of the forest are a kind of ante-chamber to their goal. Again, as in Alastor, there is the feeling of soft and womblike enclosure, but unlike the earlier poem, this womb is truly maternal, partaking of the benignity of the Earth Mother. Though composed of "each dark tree that ever grew", cedar, pine and yew, it yet holds pearls of dew, single pale anemones, newly blown laurel flowers, and admits the isolated beams of stars to scatter "drops of gold". Truly, the gloom "is divine all round", and the song of the nightingale dominates over its silence. This is a poem of hope, and either possibility posited by Professor Bowra--that of a prophecy or of a challenge still falls under that heading.[8] Whether Shelley thought that a Promethean era would come, provided Love and Reason dominate the earth, or should come, and be striven for, whether attainable or not--his exploration of the depth of human emotions and relationship are positive. The movement is upward: after the overthrow of Jupiter, the Spirit of the Earth complains to its mother of "boughs that bore ill berries in the woods".

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[8] C. M. Bowra, The Romantic Imagination (London: Oxford University Press paperback, 1961; rpt. 1969), pp. 123-4.

These poisonous fruits existed in the same world as the ugly and evil men of the cities and, it is implied, disappeared after the transformation was wrought and human souls could come forward in all their beauty. The bower Prometheus chooses to cradle his happiness with Asia reflects such beauty:

> There is a cave,
> All overgrown with trailing odorous plants,
> Which curtain out the day with leaves and flowers,
> (Act 3, scene 3, lines 10-13)
> . . . . . .
> And there is heard the ever-moving air,
> Whispering from tree to tree, and birds
> and bees; . . .
> (Act 3, scene 3, lines 18-20)

In Act 4, Ione and Panthea share apocalyptic visions of light-endowed beings, all emerging from "openings in the forest". Even the humble myrtle is taken up into this pageant, since it once hid a dagger meant for the tyrant Hippias: it is likened to the beams of light issuing forth from the star upon the forehead of one of those radiant beings. One of them is quite openly "kneaded" from fragments of growing plant life and light:

> The emerald light of leaf-entangled beams
> Round its intense yet self-conflicting speed
> Seem kneaded into one aerial mass . . .
> (Act 4, scene 1, lines 260-2)

and in that strange orb, the Spirit of the Earth lies asleep. Leaves, boughs, forest bowers, form a sheltering, light-interwoven reality, at times imbued with the synaesthetic power

of sound:

> The pine boughs are singing
> Old songs with new gladness.
> (Act 4, scene 1, lines 48-9)

The "Voice of unseen Spirits" thus completes the light-colour--sound continuum--a uniquely joyous and tender note, to be found at its most intense in the two last, triumphal acts of Prometheus Unbound.

The prototype of identification of persona and nature image may be seen in the Fragment from the Wandering Jew.[9] Here, the suffering wanderer feels at one with the "scathed pine" bearing, as the tree does, the Maker's seal. The pine, having escaped complete destruction in a forest fire, stands on a desolate heath proud in death, "a monument of faded grandeur", forever sterile, yet wild and majestic; so does Ahasuerus, denied the natural humanity of death, remain on earth, a "Death-in-Life" figure, yet always steadfast in a Promethean denial of submission. This same proud revolt is seen in The Wandering Jew's Soliloquy, another fragment, possibly intended for the same poem, and certainly bearing out the theme of defiance, fittingly imaged forth by the fire-scathed yet unbowed pine.[10]

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[9] Percy Bysshe Shelley, Lyrics and Shorter Poems, p. 30.

[10] Ibid.

A similar instance of the image-persona union can be found in Hellas. When Mahmud, the scourge of Hellas, arises from his "restless pillow", the uneasiness induced by the Chorus of Greek Captive Women craves alleviation; an expert in dreams is clearly required and the sulton consults Hassan as to the availability of Ahasuerus, the "wise interpretor of dreams". Hassan described the Jew's dwelling: pines of the isle Erebinthus (so reminiscent of biblical terebinths) shelter the caverns from which, if properly invoked, Ahasuerus appears, ushered in by a wind rushing out of the "sighing pine forest". As the boat carrying the seeker approaches, the shadow of these pines will quench the boat's fiery shadow upon the sapphire waters. There is a feeling of tension in these lines, between the violent, flaming approach of the tyrant's emissary, marring the blue of the sea and the calm serenity of the trees which are called upon to counteract the fire and restore the balance; it has been noted by many commentators, especially Bloom, that blue is a prime favourite in Shelley's hierarchy of colour. According to the poet's annotation, the seer will, as do the pines, attempt to counteract the conquering will of Mahmoud in the reasonable way of a wise, but merely human counsellor:

> . . . I have preferred to represent the Jew as disclaiming all pretension, or even belief, in supernatural agency, and as tempting Mahmoud to that state

> of mind in which ideas may be supposed to assume the force of sensations through the confusion of thought with the object of thought, and excess of passion animating the creation of imagination.
>
> It is a sort of natural magic, susceptible of being exercised in a degree by anyone who should have made himself master of the secret associations of another's thoughts.[11]

I assume that the word "confusion" is to be read in its basic sense, of con-fusion, the fusing together of unlike elements and not in the more widely accepted pejorative manner of chaos and loss of control. If this reading be accepted, then the quenching pines and the "sighing pine-forest", a few lines below, are successfully con-fused with the figure of Ahasuerus; the function of the wandering Jew in this poem is not that of a storming, warning and menacing prophet, but of a sage who attempts firmly to lead the sultan towards an understanding of mutability: of the temporal word and the supreme dominance of the spiritual:

> Mistake me not! All is contained in each.
> Dodona's forest to an acorn's cup
> Is that which has been or will be to that
> Which is--the absent to the present. Thought
> Alone, and its quick elements, Will Passion,
> Reason, Imagination, cannot die;

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[11] Percy Bysshe Shelley, Selected Poetry and Prose, p. 503.

They are what that which they regard appears,
The stuff whence mutability can weave
All that it has dominion over--worlds, worms,
Empires, and superstitions. . . . (lines 791-800)

It is significant that the controlling metaphor of this very Propero-like speech is the acorn containing within itself, the potentiality of a whole forest of oaks. And the pines which sigh as they introduce Ahasuerus, echo the sighs of Dodona, for the impermanence of love, when it forgets the laws of mutability.

When Ahasuerus leaves, yielding pride of place to the genuine Phantom, that of Mahomet the Second, the tree image conjured up in the apparition's first speech matches the dark and sinister aspect of the scene. With the Jew, the gentle presences are left behind. Among strange laments and wailing voices, the new dispensation is ushered in:

The autumn of a greener faith is come,
And wolfish change, like winter, howls to strip
The foliage in which Fame, the eagle built
Her aerie, while Dominion whelped below.
The storm is in its branches, and the frost
Is on its leaves, and the blank deep expects
Oblivion on oblivion, spoil on spoil,
Ruin on ruin: . . . (lines 871-8)

This is the death of Islam (perhaps, to Shelley, of all established religion). No wonder the two Mahomets merge into the image of the dry tree trunk which yet will engender a sinister seed capable of entangling the last spasms of a dying,

"weak people". For both Mahomets shall reign together in the land of the dead and the tree is the tree of death.

Were it not for the transparent mask of "The Poet whose untimely tomb no human hands with reverence had reared" which veils the true persona of Alastor and of "the writer of the following lines who died in Florence" who performs the same office in the Advertisement to Epipsychidion, the two poems would form the apex of our study devoted to the union of the poet's selfhood with his images. But in such matters the author must remain the ultimate maker of decisions and since Shelley presented us with a kind of persona, though only thinly disguised, we place these two poems, of utmost importance to our purposes, on the border, as it were, between the two modes of writing.

Alastor is, as Bloom rightly sees it, a poem of a ruined quest.[12] The seeker fails in his attempt to "diminish the circumference" of the distance between souls--and dies in despair. The relationship between soul and the Thou of nature, is insufficient, the opening invocation notwithstanding. The search for the ideal beloved must, of necessity, end in failure.

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[12] Harold Bloom, The Visionary Company, p. 290.

Even though all the seasons are joined in a filial salute to nature in the first stenza, the boughs are bare, their only radiance deriving from their crowns of starry ice. They aptly adumbrate what comes later, and especially since they are the providers of the poet's "untimely tomb" fashioned of mouldering leaves. In all the protagonist's extended wanderings there is hardly a tree which shares in his rare moments of serenity.

> Many a wide waste and tangled wilderness
> Has lured his fearless steps. . . . (lines 78-9)

The tangle of trees and boughs is juxtaposed to the notion of deserts; the wasteland is ever close at hand. Even the "natural bower" in the vale of Cashmire, where the dream finds its questionable consummation, opening almost immediately after a sight of the icy caves of the Indus and the Oxus, heralds a joy of poignant impermanence. Only too soon does the odorous bower change into a scene of desolation:

> The distinct valley and the vacant woods,
> Spread round him where he stood: Whither have fled
> The hues of heaven that canopied the bower
> Of yesternight? . . . (lines 194-7)

This tragic <u>ubi sunt</u> queries the disappearance of the blessed blues of heaven the departure of which transformed bowers of bliss into vacant woods. Nor is the transformation limited to the landscape:

> And now his limbs were lean; his scattered hair
> Sered by the autumn of strange suffering,
> Sung dirges in the wind; his listless hand
> Hung like dead bone within its withered skin;
> (lines 248-52)

The seeker has assumed the aspect of a dying tree, not unlike the dead trunk in the realm of the dead which exemplifies the two tyrants of Hellas. His hair is reminiscent of leaves, scattered by autumnal winds and the withered skin of his hands closely resembles flaps of dead bark hanging on dry branches. True relationship between man and nature was denied and we witness the dying of that vital link which creates the I-Thou of life. It is a protracted agony. The journey in the little shallop takes its improbable course, upstream, and with less magical help than a similar trip taken by the Witch of Atlas. The trees seen on the journey are majestic; old, of "knarled roots" (sic) and "mighty limbs". If they provide sheltered spots even those have lost the odorous friendliness of that first bower. Now the woods are musical, but the trees are "embowering", a word which here conjures up the embalmer's art and the tomb. The Poet is aware that there can be no more joy in his encounter with nature:

> He sought in Nature's dearest haunt, some bank
> Her cradle and his sepulchre. (lines 429-30)

There is cleavage between him and the living world. The oak

may embrace the beech but there is no identification with this consummation for the seeking man. He has cut himself away and where may lie nature's cradle, he can only find his grave. The cedars form pyramids, again reminiscent of embalmed death, while all the trees converge in solemn domes. Ash and acacia are seen as clouds, pale and tremulous and, as identified with the clouds a few lines below--are weird and unearthly. Any other closeness the seeker sees is a parasitic one--sucking tendrils twining themselves, "like restless serpents" round the grey trunks. The dark glen beneath the "woven" canopy of trees is beautiful, with the azure sky darting between the chasms of leaves and boughs. But the poet, when he appears amid this beauty is incongruous, for his hair is thin, the light of his eyes wan and, when he perceives a presence amongst the freshness of leaves, grass and fountain, it is the very essence of his alienation, the Alastor, leading him on in his fruitless quest.

The end awaits at the foot of the "solemn pine". Bright leaves of many colours, red, yellow or ethereally pale precursors of the multitudes of the Ode to the West Wind die here and will form the fitting sepulchre to the Poet, "embowered" by twining ivy, a recurrent death-image. In a last striving effort, he places "his pale lean hand upon the rugged trunk / of the old pine. . . . (lines 633-9) His quest for perfection

in love-fulfillment is a failure, and he has fallen victim to the spirit of solitude. But the last gesture reaches out towards a possible union and, in death, he and the dead leaves become one. Union was only to be achieved in the sepulchre which the leaves sharing in his dying, now provide.

Epipsychidion, a poem dedicated to that soul within the soul which forever seeks to be united with another spirit, be it human or part of living Nature, brings forth a great flood of images, among which leaves and trees take their proper place: having mused upon the iniquities of monogamy and sexual possessiveness, the poet philosophizes on the premise that suffering and evil are subject to the law of diminishing returns:

> If you divide suffering and dross, you may
> Diminish it till it is consumed away. (lines 178-9)

On the contrary, pleasure and love and thought, grow through division, each "exceeding the whole". Love divided among many objects will, according to this doctrine, provide each recipient with a portion larger than the original sum total. That much has often been claimed for parental love and this may be the reason that some of the images in the poem seem to attract and submerge others into themselves, to coalesce finally into one, radiant entity, not unlike a parent's feeling for each and all

of his children. And so, the poet gathers fragments on the way--he is a moth: the flight of the insect is likened, in turn, to that of a dead leaf's in the "owlet light", a delicious metaphor for dusk, with all its grey and downy softness. It is curious how un-dead Shelley's fallen leaves often are, partaking, as they do, of the motion of wind and air. Here they are suicidal, following the moth's fatal attraction for a lamp, the role of which is taken by the "fiery sepulchre" of the setting sun. True love is being sought but has not yet been found: the dead leaves lead into the wintry forest, inhabited by untaught foresters, as naïve and easily gulled as is the young poet at this stage.

We are in a land of cold and deadly disease: instead of the true beloved, an envenomed figure, endowed with evil strength (electric poison) casts a blight unto the seeker's "green heart". Shelley's technique of metaphor-making expects a conscious effort of the reader. The "green heart", the core of which is pierced by the poisonous sweetness of evil love, is either a young tree, or a whole forest; in either case, leaves are present:

> And from her living cheeks and bosom flew
> A killing air, which pierced like honey-dew
> Into the core of my green heart, and lay
> Upon it leaves; until, as hair grown gray

O'er a young brow, they hid its unblown prime
With ruins of unseasonable time. (lines 261-6)

Leaves--or a young man's hair, grown prematurely gray as a result of venereal disease (a common belief of the period). Youth blighted by the physical encounter with the embodied evil aspect of love in the person of the prostitute in Cambridge, leading to ruin young "untaught foresters" or nature suffering a similar fate when struck by the blight of winter? The "circumference" between the tree-forest entity and the human sufferer is here diminishing to the point of total merging, reminiscent of a similar approach in Alastor.

The intrusion into the "obscure Forest", the "wintry wilderness of thorns" of the long-awaited vision of the true soul sought for by the poet's soul of Emily, completes the cycle. Her very name, like Spring, awakens "fruits and flowers". By implication, the dead leaves and wintry thorns are transmuted into the living fertility of the fruit-bearing tree. The ascent is not yet completed. The various loves of the poet's past life, transformed into heavenly bodies will join him, according to his creed of blissful polygamy, in their adoration of the ultimate vision enthroned on an altar of her own; indeed, the poet himself, in an ecstasy of worship will melt into the image of a fruitful plant; the ultimate in fruit-

ful plants, in fact, the tree that grows in Eden:

> Lady mine,
> Scorn not these flowers of thought, the fading birth
> Which from its heart of hearts that plant puts forth
> Whose fruit, made perfect by thy sunny eyes,
> Will be as of the trees of Paradise. (lines 383-7)

From this peak of ecstasy, the rest of the poem cannot help but be a falling off in intensity, at least where the image of our study is concerned. After this perfect and soaring union of image and image-maker, the "thick woods" which will grace the Ionian island of promised escape seem tame. Nor will they avoid the usual fate of Shelleyan trees: though heralding blissful seclusion they, too, will suffer decay and fragmentation, their leaves identical with the "withered hours" of the two aging lovers. However, this very identification rescues the concept of union for, again, fragments of human life and dying leaves merge into one image.

When the Lamp Is Shattered has received such unflattering attention from such an honorific pen as that of F. R. Leavis[13] that it is almost foolhardy to attempt a glance at this lyric and a search for a further elucidation of our study. Yet the

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[13] F. R. Leavis, Revaluation: Tradition and Development in English Poetry (New York: The Norton Library, Norton & Norton Inc., 1963), pp. 216-220.

location of the "well-built" nest, the home of initially happy love is so obviously a tree that even without the remarkable last stanza the omission of this poem would be impossible. The tree, then, shelters the nest, originally well-built, but foresaken by one of the lovers, leaving "the frailest" to endure the sorrow of loneliness. And what a violent sorrow it is! We are forced to agree with Leavis that it is not quite clear who it is that "leaves the nest", though the departing one is referred to as "love". On the contrary, it would seem that the one left, the sufferer, still loves and he, somehow, becomes merged with the nest, he is at once Love's "cradle, home and bier". There we may find an imperfect attempt at "diminishing the circumference", resulting in a kind of chaos, where, on more felicitous occasions, such as in The Ode to Naples or Epipsychidion, to cite only two, Shelley achieves perfection. This does not detract from the power of the tree image in the last stanza: the remarkable feat here consist of a tree not being mentioned at all, yet overpowering in its presence: the raven's, as well the eagle's nest must be in a tree. Eagles nest on crags, but crags do not rock, therefore the image of the violently swaying branches imposes itself on the mind with complete clarity: and the branches are naked, though explicitly it is only the foresaken lover who is left "naked to laughter".

But the sun is situated in a "wintry sky", therefore the bareness of the branches is, again, implied without direct statement, but utterly obvious. How else could they look, since "leaves fall and cold winds come?" The identification of the sufferer, the nest and the tree may not be as logically defensible as such mergings are elsewhere, but the power of the image cannot be denied.

A closer identification of the poet with the image occurs in Letter to Maria Gisborne, when Shelley becomes the silkworm "in the dark mulberry leaves". A cradle and a winding sheet is being woven at once, just as, in the poem, the warm Italian landscape takes shape in a montage over the harsh scenes of London. In Italy the moon is shining and the fire-flies seem pale by comparison: yet under the dark trees, each becomes as bright as "a little sun". This benign shelter enables the poet to hear the Contadino's song, rude but made sweet "by distance". But his correspondent is forced to gaze upon:

> A shabby stand
> Of hackney coaches--a brick house or wall
> Fencing some lonely court, white with the scrawl
> Of our unhappy politics. (lines 265-8)

The writer of the letter is surrounded by images of fruitfulness and growth:

> I see a chaos of green leaves and fruit
> Built round dark caverns, even to the root

> Of the living stems that feed them; in whose bowers
> There sleep in their dark dew the folded flowers; . . .
> (lines 273-6)

A beloved image of Shelley, this: the soft cavern; the bowered enclosure of leaves and branches sheltering both flower and fruit; or for the silk-worm, the mulberry leaf woven into both cradle and winding sheet. Italy, warm and womblike, is here opposed to the angular harshness of the bricks and dust of London.

There can be cruelty in the Italian landscape, too. Nerves and veins of a being tortured by sorrow are "like sapless leaflets now / Frozen upon December's bough."[1] Here, Among the Euganean Hills, the poet mourns the loss of his little daughter before he turns to loftier themes--a lament for the enslavement of Italian cities. These leaflets, frozen and deprived of the sap of life before they ever reach maturity, aptly depict the dead baby, though in context they are subsumed into the personality of the mourner. We witness here a kind of double merging, the leaflets providing the responding Thou of the lost child to the poet's I.

The music deepens and, with mounting tension, the theme of the forest fire is introduced. The spark of Liberty has been trampled out by tyranny in Padua, as it has been in other cities of Italy. Just so does the Norwegian woodman extinguish the

spark "in the depth of piny dells". But the spark manages to rekindle flames which shake the boundless forest and tear the mighty trunks. The frozen leaflets, image of personal sorrow, modulate into the majestic violence of social upheaval. Here the simile's tenor and vehicle meet so closely as to become an entity. There is the fairly conventional trampling of the spark of freedom by tyrrany, immediately followed by the direct image of the unquenched spark causing a mighty forest fire. Trees form guideposts in this poem, for having progressed from tiny leaflets to burning giants, they lead us to the serenity of "windless bowers" which the poet hopes to build for himself and those he loves, in a sheltered dell, within sound of "old forests", when love and brotherhood have finally prevailed.

The merging process becomes almost perfect in Ode to Naples. Those autumnal leaves sounding like light footfalls of spirits on the streets of Pompey have the quality of the midnight flames flitting over the Emperor's pavement in a Yeatsian Byzantium--a quality which unifies poet, reader and vehicle of thought into a union of almost unbearable totality; only another poet, in an equally inspired moment, could re-word this effect and even then his effort would be redundant. We must accept, and with humility, the final statement of this

first Epode:

> The wreaths of stony myrtle, ivy and pine,
> Like winter leaves o'ergrown by moulded snow,
> Seemed not only to move and grow,
> Because the crystal silence of the air
> Weighed on their life; even as the Power divine,
> Which then lulled all things, weighed upon mine.
> (lines 17-22)

The stony fragments of trees, their white marble reminiscent of the "moulding" of winter snow upon them, remnants of dead sculptors' art in a dead city, so swiftly following in the spirit footsteps of wind-driven autumn leaves move and grow indeed, in harmony and unison with the poet's life controlled, as is the poet by the "Power divine". Yet, being made of stone, they must partake of the quality of weight: but this quality is divine. There is a startled recognition in this incredibly beautiful moment, between the ego of the poet--and with him the reader--and the Thou of the tree--fallen leaf, sculptured form, snowy branch, death, life and growth--and God.

The Triumph of Life is seen by Bloom as the complete denial of the I-Thou relationship. He sees it as a "song of experience" in which the I confronts the unresponding IT.[14] And, in the light of the Inferno-like sequence of images,

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[14] Bloom, Shelley's Mythmaking, p. 144.

re-inforced by the story within the story as told by Rousseau, there is no hope in a world where "God made irreconcilable / Good and the means of good;" (line 230). One is forced to agree with Bloom that there can be no comfort of true relationship in the poem as a whole. Yet there is a fragmented merging of human entity and nature-image which runs against the general theme. Strangely enough, it is not the protagonist who meets a universal spirit, but the secondary figure, the Virgil-like guide, Rousseau. Yet the impact of this union is such that its importance to the poet's own experience must be acknowledged. The guide and the Dante figure merge here: what transformed the guide has also transmuted the soul of the poet. The poet has his vision, as he rests and dreams

> . . . beneath the hoary stem
> Which an old chestnut flung athwart the steep
> Of a green Apennine; . . . (lines 24-6)

The locale of his dream is a great, public highway. Significantly enough, the hurrying multitudes are likened to leaves, flying through the sky. The season is summer, but the leaves belong to "summer's bier", that is, autumn. We shall meet them again, in Ode to the West Wind, a recurring symbol of Shelley's bringing together a feeling of human crowds, flight and death.

There is freshness and there are cool fountains in this world, presumably beside the highway. But the people, some of whom tread on worms and move towards their tombs, do not heed

> Fountains whose melodious dew
> Out of their mossy cell forever burst,
> Nor felt the breeze which from the forest told.
> (lines 68-70)

In this world, there is little scope for humans to confront nature in a direct relationship, for, lost in their aimless rush, they are not aware of its existence, and the "overarching elms", signifying fertile life are left unheeded. The closeness of relationship, indeed of total union, is only vouchsafed the seer, the wise guide, and it is the closeness of death. It is perfectly fitting then, that Rousseau should emerge literally from the root of a tree, presumably the old chestnut tree of the poet's resting place and appear as a kind of emanation of nature:

> That what I thought was an old root which grew
> To strange dostorion out of the hill side
> Was indeed one of those deluded crew.
>
> And that the grass, which methought hung so wide
> And white, was but his thin discoloured hair,
> And that the holes he vainly sought to hide
> Were, or had been eyes: . . . (lines 182-7)

No wonder, Rousseau's first word is "Life". It is, of course, used negatively, for it answers the poet's desperate question:

"Is all here amiss?" Nevertheless, Rousseau, a strangely distorted Dryad-figure, stands for life and understands its ultimate meaning. Unfortunately, he is never allowed to divulge the secret.

Rousseau may be permitted the kind of union which, as the poet knows, is impossible. This can be vouchsafed a spirit figure, imbued with the radiance of a Virgil and the aura of his own thought, the seminal power of which was certainly deeply felt by the poet. When, in Ode to the West Wind, the union is sought with all the impact of utmost striving, it must, of course, be sought in vain.

> Oh! lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!
> I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed.
> A heavy weight of hours has chained and bowed
> One too like thee: tameless, and swift and proud.

The union is sought both with the great power of the West Wind, here assuming the same role of a Spiritus Mundi as has been given the mountain in Mont Blanc, and with the natural object partaking of the swiftness and power of its motion--the leaf, the wave and the cloud--fragments of earth, water and air. Dead leaves, yellow, black, pale and "hectic" red, reminiscent of both death, feverish disease and the various hues of human

races, represent mankind, as they did in the Triumph. They will form the sepulchre of those "winged seeds" which the same power carries to their "wintry bed". The seeds, too, may be seen as tree fragments--and to anyone reared in temperate climates they vividly recall maple seeds, equiped with two large wings and seen sprouting so bravely from soggy lawns as soon as the snow has disappeared. It seems that this northern image obtruded itself on the mind of Shelley, as he composed the poem, steeped though it is in the sun and winds of Italy. In any case, the death-life image, conjured by the leaves-seeds continuum, becomes a whole tree in the following stanzas:

> Thou on whose streams, 'mid the steep sky's commotion,
> Loose clouds like earth's decaying leaves are shed,
> Shook from the tangled boughs of Heaven and Ocean
>
> Angels of rain and lightning; there are spread
> On the blue surface of thine airy surge,
> Like the bright air uplifted from the head
>
> Of some fierce Maenad. . . .

It is a strange tree, growing between heaven and earth, its tangled boughs half streaks of lightining, half spurts of rain, its leaves undistinguishable from clouds and identified with the hair of a Maenad. To enhance this universality, tree-like growths in the sea of "oozy woods" mirror the rhythm of natural mutability on earth. In a great culmination of all

Romantic images in which the Eolian lyre stood for the poetic soul--the instrument played upon by the creative universal power--the forest here becomes one with the lyre, each tree a string producing ultimate harmony: with this overwhelming vision the poet wishes to merge and unite, and no sacrifice is too great to achieve a final consummation. Even death is acceptable, as it is part of this eternal sharing:

> Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is:
> What if my leaves are falling like its own!

Even though the "deep autumnal tone, sweet though in sadness" becomes the dirge over a poet's grave, his "dead thoughts", may seem like withered leaves, but dry leaves burn easily and may spark flames. They can also feed the earth to quicken the life in the "winged seeds" which they shelter. Yet the poet himself, having sent his thoughts on their triumphant journey must fall back bleeding upon the thorns of life, for to the living I a complete merger with the Thou of elemental things is impossible. Why this is so is explained in that seemingly gay and fanciful poem, the Witch of Atlas.

There we find the saddest and the final statement. This poem, with its overall tone of joy, since its protagonist is a being to whom nothing is impossible and whose operations are

benevolent, yet sounds a note of withdrawal. The ultimate has been reached and man can go no further than Shelley has gone in--let us say--the fragment from the Ode to Naples, or in the total dedication of the Ode to the West Wind. As seen by Bloom, the Witch's birthplace and initial abode is situated in "Blake's feminine threefold Beulah state not yet become the upper creative paradise, the fourfold Eden."[15] The one tree met, so to speak, in person in this retreat comes straight from the Italian landscape surrounding Shelley at the time of the writing: it is the cypress, seen on a starless night, with a firefly blooming amidst its boughs. The cypress is traditionally a sorrowful tree, and sorrowful are the Hamadryads who, with their sisters, the Naiads and Oreads offer the Witch companionship. They are refused:

> "This may not be," the wizard maid replied.
> . . .
> The solid oaks forget their strength and strew
> Their latest leaf upon the mountains wide.
> (scene 23)[16]

The explanation does not even require Professor Bloom's indication on how to compute the age of Nymphs. They are, in Greek

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[15]Bloom, Shelley's Mythmaking, p. 189.

[16]Percy Bysshe Shelley, "The Witch of Atlas", Lyrics and Shorter Poems.

mythology, very long-lived, yet mortal beings, their mortality partaking from that of the world they inhabit. Oceans will disappear, eventually, as will and already have fountains. Trees certainly die, though immeasurably later than man. Mutability is the fate of the oak tree nymphs. With Buber, we will not, in Shelley's poetry, separate the components of the Thou: ("I see no dryad, only a tree"). The Witch herself may soar on in her little boat and create for herself a haven above the clouds (and how remarkably stanza XLIX with its solid vapours and dreadful crags of cloud, foretell the vista familiar to any traveller in a jet plane!)

But she will be alone. What can love, must also die. The Witch, seen by some scholars as Poesy or Poetic Imagination, may live on, but not the poet whom death awaits too. The true Thou's of living and dying Nature must ultimately depart and all relationship must always look to its end. We grow a rose bush and, day by day, we watch a bud unfold into a perfect bloom. We look at it, we inhale its scent, we lightly touch the velvety petals and we stand back in sadness, with the unasked question: "and now what?" Shelley's Witch must create for herself a spurious companion, the Hermaphrodite, who can do nothing but be beautiful, sleep or do her bidding--to offset

this tragic helplessness; Shelley himself must, as most humans do, fall back and bleed upon the thorns of life; having granted him a glimpse of relationship the tree-dryad entity must, ultimately, depart.

CHAPTER V

THE DISINTERESTED SACRIFICE

Of all the poets under discussion in this study, Keats and his works best illumine our title. The very adjective "leafy" echoes the early Keats who was not above such epithets as "skyey"--in the manner of Hunt, the mentor of his fledgling days. More significantly, the notion of paradox takes us beyond this experimental stage: the not much older, but far more mature poet of the Odes and the Hyperion poems, achieves a union of disparates and a fusion of opposing modes of thought and vision, unrivalled by his predecessors and contemporaries.

Much has been made of Keats's sensuality: Madeline's gastronomic feast, the prelude to a very concrete, albeit dreamlike, seduction scene, appears with unfailing regularity whenever The Eve of St. Agnes meets the critical eye. Lionel Trilling quite correctly makes a specific point of Keats's open and unashamed appreciation of the pleasures of eating.[1] There is little doubt that the poet's attitude to women was as healthily

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[1] Lionel Trilling, "The Poet as a Hero", Critics on Keats: Readings in Literary Criticism, ed. Judith O'Neill (Coral Gables, Florida: University of Miami Press, 1968), p. 17.

concupiscent as that of any vigorous young man in his twenties. Alas, that his views of the spirituality and intelligence of women fall so far short of his appreciation of their physical allure. Yet, even his savage (and--probably, in the context of the era, justified) aversion to "blue stockings" undergoes the paradoxical change in tune with the attitude we have made the object of our scrutiny: "mawkish" Isabella and "hoodwinked" Madeline--both ladies notable for the sincerity of their affections, if not for the power of their understanding, modulate, as do the perpetual sex objects in the guise of pursued nymphs and sorrowing Indian maidens, to the wisdom of Thea and Moneta and to the Autumn figure--presumably female, patiently and maturely awaiting the last oozings of the press of life. These speculations may appear to be taking us away from the object of the present study, yet they serve to support our contention that Keats, that most concretely sensuous of poets is also the one capable of utter detachment; he is able to assume an attitude in which the subject-entity can be written out, as it were, and the object of contemplation assumes the spiritual, often vatic, attributes of the poetic mind. In this, as Arnold, supported by an assenting chorus of critics has stated, "he is with Shakes-

peare".[2]

We have observed, when studying the work of Shelley, a fretful and feverish straining and striving for an unattainable union between the contemplated "Thou" and the poetic "I", precisely the "irritable reaching out" which worried Keats in his appraisal of his contemporaries.[3] We shall now observe something resembling a union, attained by the obliteration of the questing self; there seems to be a willing sacrifice of the self and a total imbuing of the contemplated object with a spirituality only attained by such a self-immolation; yet, paradoxically, the poetic self survives in and through the object. "Negative capability", as invoked in the letter quoted above, is Keats's recipe for this seeming miracle. A combination of movement and stasis, as most vividly shown in The Ode to a Grecian Urn, the deft and spontaneous use of synaesthesia, are only two palpable methods used; and the word "palpable"

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[2]Matthew Arnold, "John Keats", Essays in Criticism: Second Series (London: MacMillan and Co. Ltd., 1954), p. 71.

[3]John Keats, "Letter to George and Thomas Keats, 21, 27(?) December 1817", Selected Poems and Letters, ed. Douglas Bush (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., Riverside Editions, 1959), p. 261.

here must be seen in terms of Archibald MacLeash's statement on Ars Poetica: "a poem must be palpable and mute".

This immediacy of the impact of words and images which makes for "palpability" in this sense can only be attained when, what is loosely termed "style", and the thematic core are inextricably fused. A. W. Jackson Bate observes:

> . . . the assigned purpose of this essay is to concentrate briefly on the stylistic character of Keats's poetry. Hard put to compartmentalize in this way, I should be forced to resort to the term "honesty". Certainly this is what now appeals to us most when we think in terms of Keats as a whole, especially in context of the letters. . . .[4]

Honesty then, which compelled Keats to regard his Hyperion with a severely critical eye ("too many Miltonic inversions") and to abandon a work which had held so many hopes, combines with another quality sensitively perceived by Middleton Murry--that of a Christ-like humility:

> The notion of Self as an impediment to true being is fundamental and inescapable; and that notion is the essence of the religious conception of the Spiritual life.[5]

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[4] W. Jackson Bate, "Keats's Style: Evolution Toward Qualities of Permanent Value", The Major English Romantic Poets: A Symposium in Reappraisal (1957), rpt. in M. H. Abrams ed., English Romantic Poets (London: Oxford University Press paperback, 1960), p. 340.

[5] John Middleton Murry, Studies in Keats New and Old, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), p. 120.

The reader may agree or disagree with Murry's view that the Shakespearean poet "is witness to the reality of the Fatherhood of God, into whose hands he commends his spirit. . . . He obeys the compulsion of his own total being."[6] But some such total commitment is evident in the poems of Keats and does not come into being by accident. Having discussed a painting by West which, to him, appeared lacking in intensity, he then turns his thoughts to Shakespeare. His reading of King Lear is significant: he sees "a close relationship of Beauty and Truth" and "an intensity capable of making all disagreeables evaporate from their close relationship of Beauty and Truth".[7]

There is no doubt of the presence of "disagreeables" in King Lear. Yet the impact of the Beauty-Truth continuum, as so acutely seen by Keats, absorbs the most harrowing moments into itself, to form a majestic statement of the human condition. One could only wish that our contemporary exponents of "vérité" and our four-letter word litterati (read box-office and publishing successes) would open their Keats and their Shakespeare--perhaps then we would be spared The Exorcist and

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[6]Murry, p. 120.

[7]"Letter to George and Thomas Keats, December 21,27, 1817", Selected Poems and Letters, p. 260.

its pretensions to literary validity.

With honesty comes an obliteration of self, an empathy which enables Keats to identify existentially with external objects: " . . . if a Sparrow come before my Window I take part in its exisitince (sic) and pick about the Gravel".[8]

No wonder that disinterestedness was a virtue so much admired by Keats. "She is the most disiterrested (sic) woman I ever knew--that is to say she goes beyond degree in it. To see an entirely disinterrested Girl quite happy is the most pleasant and extraordinary thing in the world. . . . " he writes of his sister-in-law whom he loves and admires.[9]

We shall scrutinize our chosen image in the light of this "disinterested" self-immolation and attempt to prove that the tree in the poetry of Keats, is, as are most of his images, a kind of non-symbol, a concrete and active entity, often kept in the background, yet reaching out beyond the background of a scene or situation.

The lively sensuality of the image stems from the inordinate love Keats had for trees: his stay in Margate with the ailing

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[8]"Letter to Benjamin Bailey, 22 November, 1817", Selected Poems and Letters, p. 259.

[9]"Letter to Benjamin Bailey, 10 June 1818", p. 277.

Tom was marred by the lack of trees ("this treeless affair").[10] He writes to Hunt (May 10, in a tone of regret): "I could contrive to do without Trees." And goes on: "We intend, though, to get among some trees."[11] And when joining Bailey in Oxford, he exclaims gratefully: "plenty of Trees, Thank God."[12] The whispering of leaves is to him an intimation of movement and infinity: " . . . and when the leaves whisper it puts a girdle round the earth",[13] he muses on discussing the pleasures of reading small doses of great works at a time. In the same letter he virtually lays down the mechanics of his creative work:

> Now it appears to me that almost any Man may, like the Spider, spin from his own inwards his own airy Citadel--the points of leaves and twigs on which the Spider begins her work are few and she fills the Air with a beautiful circuiting.

This is the poetic map of Keats: the creation of his own imagination, coming from within, but structured firmly on the scaffolding of living leaves and twigs; the tree lends the

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[10] Walter Jackson Bate, John Keats (Cambridge, Mass.: Bellenap Press of Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 163.

[11] Ibid. [12] Ibid.

[13] "Letter to John Hamilton Reynolds, 19 February 1818", Selected Poems and Letters, p. 265.

creative mind its support and the creative mind bows to the underlying structure to fashion a finished artifact.

No wonder Keats says of Byron:

> You speak of Lord Byron and me. There is this great difference between us: he describes what he sees--I describe what I imagine. Mine is the hardest task. Now see the immense difference.[14]

His is indeed the hardest task--to submit this creative imagination to the claims of disinterestedness and the sacrifice of self.

We shall have occasion, in the course of this chapter, to refer to a study made by Katharine Wilson, The Nightingale and the Hawk[15] in which the development of Keats's opus is discussed in Jungian terms. This will not create a contradiction between various keys offered to the understanding of Keats by such disparate thinkers as Murry, Bate or Jung. Whether the sacrificial process is seen in terms of Jung's archetypes or in terms of Christian orthodoxy, the idea and process of the Mass

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[14] "Letter to George and Georgiana Keats, Sept. 17, 1819", The Letters of John Keats, edited by Maurice Buxton Forman (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), p. 413.

[15] Katharine M. Wilson, The Nightingale and the Hawk: A Psychological Study of Keats's Ode (London: Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1964).

remains--a sacrifice is made, in which victim and sacrificer are one. This is the crux of the Keatsian paradox of "negative capability": life contains both robins and lions; life must feed upon itself in order to perpetuate itself; in order to create life in art, the artist must, of his own free will, devour himself.

With the young poet, and always in tune with his growth, trees in the early poems go through a Spenserian phase and appear mostly as "woven bowers" and rose-trees "weeping ruddy tears". In Imitations of Spenser,[16] there is a lively sensuality about these bowers, reflected in the little lake, and there is, already, a hint of the Truth-Beauty continuum wherein life and death are closely intermingled: the red petals of the dying roses are called "ruddy tears", denoting blood and sorrow.

The Spenserian strain is deliberately sounded in Armida's and Una's "leafy nooks", but the "shady lanes" in the same poem (To Charles Cowden Clarke) come alive, affording the poet and his friend a pleasant walk and terminating in "open plains".

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[16]All poems quoted and referred to in this chapter are to be found in: John Keats, Selected Poems and Letters, ed. Douglas Bush (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., Riverside Editions, 1959).

In fact, there is hardly an early poem without the whispering of leaves (How Many Bards) and "boughs pavillion'd" (To Solitude). On first acquaintance, these fragmented bits of the tree image seem trite. Yet they evoke a delighted response of the senses, with their intimation of seclusion, coolness, and the faint, persistent and lively sounds of woods. Leaves, while still on their branches, whisper in tune with the song of birds, creating a music of happy fulfillment, or a feeling of flight into the infinite (as in the letter to Reynolds, quoted above). They can also rustle drearily, when the air is cool and bleak, as in Keen, Fitful Gusts. In summer, trees offer cooling shelter to the birds (The Grasshopper and the Cricket). It is interesting to note that in these early sonnets the visual image almost always has the support of aural impressions, an intimation of the much praised synaesthesia Keats was to develop:

> When all the birds are faint with the hot sun
> And hide in cooling trees, a voice will run . . .
> (The Grasshopper and the Cricket)

Even in the sonnet On Leigh Hunt's Poem, "The Story of Rimini", containing a eulogy to the hero of his first poetic adventures, the final comparison of the joys offered by Hunt's poem is to "a region of his own":

> . . . alleys where the fir-tree drops its cone
> Where robins hop and fallen leaves are sear.

None of these images are highly original; yet, combined, they form an unforgettable picture of peaceful forest seclusion. The cones drop, and the robins hop; there is a natural movement in the midst of peace. The compliment to the poem under discussion seems almost extravagant.

A passage in the Epistle To George Felton Matthew, though obviously mannered, and echoing many other voices ("some flowery spot, sequester'd wild, romantic"--Kubla Khan?), begins to strike deeper notes: there we have "oaks that erst Druids knew", trees we shall meet again in the sonnet on Lear and which will assume a crucial weight of meaning in Hyperion. Significantly, we are introduced into a spot of "leafy quiet", absolutely luxuriant in vegetation and colour:

> Where the dark-leav'd laburnum's drooping clusters
> Reflect athwart the stream their yellow lustres,
> And intertwin'd the cassia's arms unite,
> With its own drooping buds, but very white.

Almost, this image harks back to some Wordsworthian sylvan scenes, but with an added lushness of colour and sensual appeal in the love union of vegetation. But the stanza ends with a wish, meant to be ironic, yet sounding an underlying note which is typically Keatsian:

There must be too a ruin dark and gloomy,
To say "joy not too much in all that's bloomy".

Notwithstanding this sincerity, Keats is already capable of a detachment which makes him smile at such dreams and enables him to introduce the counterpoint to rich, physical sensuality: the insight that "all that's too bloomy" should not be relished too highly, for this would be tantamount to a denial of his vision of Truth and Beauty--seen as the fullness of life. Almost, we may look forward to the lush seclusion of Madeline's chamber, with the icy storm without, and the dissolute kinsmen snoring in her very castle.

In his search "of luxuries bright, milky, soft and rosy" (I Stood Tip-Toe), it is inevitable that Keats should encounter the usual "o'erhanging sallows" (willow branches overhanging a stream), bowery greens, low-hung branches, "boughs all woven round", all of which provide a background for his Fauns and "Dryades". But, true to the spider technique, these Arcadian visions are, as it were, ushered in by tree and branch images--the web firmly anchored on "twigs and leaves". Trees and the notion of poetry are inextricably mingled:

For what has made the sage or poet write
But the fair paradise of Nature's light?
In the calm grandeur of a sober line
We see the waving of a mountain pine;
And when the tale is beautifully staid
We feel the safety of a hawthorn glade.

Shades of Hartleyan associationism might be said to haunt this passage and many similar ones in the poem. This is not surprising; in spite of his negative view of some aspects of Wordsworth's work, Wordsworth certainly is one of Keats's presiding geniuses. Of all the great Romantics, only Keats could be said to have equalled his august predecessor's commitment to and love of Nature in the simplest, rural and sylvan sense. This, too, may it be said parenthetically, adds to the intriguingly paradoxical quality of his work and personality: He did not, as his senior had, enjoy a "fair seed time" amid the grandeur of the English Lake District. Born and bred in or close to a great city, his love of green, wild and growing things was fostered in the rural nooks of Hampstead where nightingales could still be heard in his days; but much of his formative years were spent in the squalor and gloom surrounding the hospital where he trained, Mr. Abbey's counting house and his parents' livery stables.

The associationism of Keats is as marked a departure from 18th century mechanistic ideas as was that of Wordsworth.

In Chapters II and III, I have attempted to reconcile the respect paid to Hartleyan associationism by both Wordsworth and Coleridge with both these poets' belief in the creative role

of the human imagination. In both cases, though by different means, we were able to reach the conclusion that their type of associationism, far from resting on mechanistic sense impressions, led them to a delving "into the main region of the song", that is, into the deep recesses of their own mind and memory.

Katharine Wilson comes to our assistance as she invokes the support of James Caldwell to explain these thought-links, in Jungian terms:

> It may be that all original art has much of this (association of ideas) in it since all fresh intuition, all imaginative impulse comes from the unconscious and Jung holds that the way the unconscious moves is by association.[17]

Extolling the beauties of Sleep and Poetry, in the poem by that name, Keats uses the "leafiness of dales" as an analogue to the refreshing qualities of sleep; then comes the encomium to poetry which is "fresher than berries of a mountain tree". The coral-like berries suspended in clusters amid the leaves of the mountain ash have indeed a quality of unequalled freshness. This juicy crispness is echoed further in the poem by "apples red" on which the poet wishes to feed, prior to his enjoyment of the more intense pleasures of love, to be con-

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[17] Katharine Wilson, The Nightingale and the Hawk, p. 17.

summated "in the bosom of a leafy world". Again, the background of the scene becomes one with the actors, and the leafy bosoms are only too easily linked with the white-shouldered enchantress, all only a step removed from a bite into a fresh, red apple. These are the joys of youth:

> A laughing school-boy, without grief and care,
> Riding the springy branches of an elm.

In a beautiful fusion, the poet's youth and relish of life, literally rides upon the springiness of the branch of a tree.

But the poet must "bid these joys farewell":

> Yes, I must pass them for a nobler life,
> Where I may find the agonies, the strife
> Of human hearts:

The obvious echo of Tintern Abbey signals the preoccupation of the era--yet in Keats the leading images are never allowed to fade from the picture. The young romantic felt a compulsion to pay tribute to the prevailing mode of writing--thus the introduction of the charioteer in lines 125-50. But, at least to this reader, this seems to be an intrusion. Much closer to each other are the schoolboy riding his springy branch and the thoughtful man who sees the shapes "of delight, mystery and fear" passing away into the "dusky space" darkened by mighty oaks. The tree image faithfully follows the poet's thought process: after the unhappy tirade against the Augustans, comes

the invocation and critique of living poets who are enjoined not to relinquish "the regions where no more the laurel grew". The lake poets are dwelling in a "thick brake", perhaps invoking a picture of unnecessary gloom; those who work through strength alone, using "ugly clubs" (Byron?) delight in "trees uptorn, darkness and worms." Clearly the uprooting of trees was, to Keats, tantamount to a denial of love and hope. For love--the Paphian myrtle, tree of Venus, engenders a lighter mood with its "sprouting green" and all that remains to be done to put Poetry in her rightful place is to "clear away the choking thorns / from round its gentle stem." But this task is fraught with danger: Might not the young poet be called presumptious?

> Will not some say that I presumptuously
> Have spoken? that from hastening disgrace
> 'Twere better far to hide my foolish face?
> That whining boyhood should with reverence bow
> Ere the dread thunderbolt could reach? How!
> If I do hide myself, it sure shall be
> In the very fane, the light of Poesy:
> If I do fall, at least I will be laid
> Beneath the silence of a poplar shade.

This spot under the poplars is a fitting resting place for the laughing schoolboy who learned about life from swinging upon an elm branch; and the poplar-shaded spot will become the very fane of Poesy, through the presence of this sacrificer-victim.

Endymion is seen by many critics as the turning point of a great, if brief poetic career. One is tempted to dismiss Notcutt's thesis of the poem seen as a search for true, new poetry (as opposed to the mannered art of Pope and Dryden)--the elusive Cynthia being its embodiment--even though one must agree that the Circe episode in Book bears strong resemblances to certain passages from the Dunciad.[18] The very impact of the poem seems to point away from allegory and to the use of symbol in the Jungian sense, to explain concepts as yet not grasped by humanity.

Seen in this light, Endymion's quest, whether for the ideal and spiritual love, only attained through the commitment to human affection and compassion, or for the ideal Muse of Poetry--again only within reach of one who has undergone the full ritual of elemental tribulations--or, as Katharine Wilson sees it, the quest for the complete Self--must be illumined by images which are in tune with the poet's self-obliteration. This is certainly true of tree images. As always in Keats, they are intensely alive and to be apprehended by the senses;

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[18] H. Clement Notcutt, An Interpretation of Endymion (New York: Haskell House, 1964).

they owe nothing to the personal emotion of either poet or persona, yet they form an integral part of his experience and his ego.

For the purpose of our study, Endymion presents a formidable challenge. The Latmian shepherd prince is a denizen of the forest; therefore, trees grow in his country in bewildering profusion. A detailed glance at each sylvan entity would inflate the length of this study out of all manageable proportion and so a kind of synthetic and comprehensive reading must be attempted. For this purpose, the Jungian concept of the Manddla will serve as a starting point. A Manddla, as seen by Jung, is a symbol for wholeness, for entity-whether presented as a dot, a circle or a quaternity. It appears in the dreams of clinical subjects who have never heard of their significance and it abounds in all religions. The forest and the trees in Endymion can be seen as such entities:

> Trees old and young, sprouting a shady boon
> for simple sheep (Book I, line 4)

and

> even as the trees that
> whisper round the temple (Book I, line 26)
>
> even the freshness of the heaven above
> is
> edg'd round with dark tree tops
> (Book I, line 85)

The forest, composed of young and old trees, forms the wholeness of an enclosure which limits the world of Endymion before he sets out on his quest. It is sheltering and benign, as has been seen above; it is bounteous with "precious fruit" yet it can be sinister in its seclusion, having "gloomy shades" where men and sheep may become lost.

This enclosure becomes deified when, in the grand Hymn to Pan, the forest is seen as the palace of the God:

> O Thou, whose mighty palace roof doth hang
> From jagged trunks and overshadoweth
> Eternal whispers, glooms, the birth, life, death
> On unseen flowers in heavy peacefulness.
> (Book I, lines 231-4)

Thus, the wholeness of the forest sheltering human and animal life, becomes exalted to the dwelling place of the deity. Trees are now sacrificial offerings:

> O thou to whom broad leaved fig trees even now foredoom
> Their ripened fruitage; . . .
> (Book I, lines 251-2)

In the use of the verb to "foredoom" in the midst of joyous worship, there persists the knowledge that to be sacrificed means to die. The mountain pine nods in the wind to hasten the arrival of the "forester divine"; and the forester's function can be the cutting down of trees, just as winds may become destructive storms. Playful fauns and satyrs perform their services at Pan's bidding, while pelting each other with

forest fruits--"silvery oak apples and brown fir cones". Like berries and red apples, in Sleep and Poetry these fruits of forest trees link the vision of youth and careless enjoyment with the transient nature of such stages of being--leading, as they do, to the stanza in which Pan is apostrophized as a preserver from harm and danger:

> O Hearkener to the loud clapping shears,
> . . . . . .
> Winder of the horn
> When snouting wild-boars routing tender corn
> Anger our huntsman. . . . (Book I, lines 279, 281-2)

We have here a signal example of what Katharine Wilson, following Jung, calls "an impure symbol", one "contaminated with unconscious accretions".[19] Both these seemingly pejorative adjectives carry no negative meaning in this context: a contaminated symbol, in the Jungian sense, means a symbol which retains accretions from the unconscious. In Keats, as Miss Wilson states when studying his use of the nightingale image, these symbols preserve their objective reality, while rich in such accretions. One is reminded of Lowe's fragments "fished up from the unconscious", except that their source, to the latter critic, was an accumulation of fragments of randomely gathered knowledge and information,

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[19] Katharine Wilson, The Nightingale and the Hawk, p. 122.

while Jung delves more deeply into the archetypal subconscious. Thus the concrete image of acorns and fir cones, thrown about by satyrs "pelting each other on the crown" yield a concrete image, making even the fauns and satyrs assume the guise of playful village boys; yet they are still mythical figures, and they present guideposts in a journey from youthful abandon to the cares and worries of maturity; that knowledge is ever-present in the reader's mind, yet neither poet nor protagonist obtrude.

Endymion meets Peona in "a bowery nest". (Book I, line 539) He is lulled to sleep by her calming presence (Peona often enters the scene within the mandala of the leafy shelter). It is not to be wondered that trees appear in his tree-surrounded dream. But they appear in strange company:

> O magic sleep! O comfortable bird,
> That broodest o'er the troubled sea of the mind,
> Till it is hush'd and smooth. O unconfin'd
> Restraint! imprisoned liberty! great key
> To golden palaces, strange minstrelsy,
> Fountains grotesque, new trees, bespangled caves. . . .
> (Book I, lines 452-7)

To a youth born and reared in a forest, trees are old hat. When it comes to dreaming of new lands to conquer, if admitted at all, those old friends of his childhood must be different, "new", perhaps even "grotesque", as the stone sculptures of sophisticated fountains doubtlessly are. One might venture to see here the youth's impatience with parental figures and their

boring authority.

It could be added that, to the poet, orphaned early, the concept of a substitute parenthood must have been a familiar one. We find an echo of this in "the foster-child of silence and slow time", where both these attributes assume the shaping role of mentors to the urn, true child of an artist's imagination. A youth does not often regard the mentorship of foster parents with an appreciative eye. It will take a long journey to convince Endymion of the worth and beauty of the shelter and safety offered by these presences of his childhood.

Yet the awakened Endymion, as he now proceeds to pour out his longing to Peona, cannot escape the conscious appreciation of the enclosing trees, after all, his only notion of home: The deep hollow which houses the well in which he first saw the embodiment of his dream, "The same bright face I tasted in my sleep" (Book I, line 895) is sheltered by bushes and trees leaning "all round athwart" and forming a close roof over the retreat. Shelter, protection and refreshment of "dew drops, dewy buds and leaves"--form a unity of a caring love--a unity which the questing spirit of youth must break and relinquish. The quest begins "through wilderness and mossy oaks" and "woodlands dun". There is a feeling of gloom among the guardian figures who seem to be aging--just as in youthful eyes, family

seniors seem much older than they really are, especially during the rebellious, "leaving home", stage. Only the "wild rose" (Book II, line 55), which yields the bud sheltering the heralding "golden butterfly", offers a note of hope, in tune with the accepted function of the rose--to be a harbinger of love.

This relief is short-lived. The weight of the tree presences, coupled with the mysterious beckoning of the unattainable moon, becomes too oppressive to be borne, and finally the youth flees

> Into the fearful deep, to hide his head
> From the clear moon, the trees and coming madness.
> (Book II, lines 217-18)

But he discovers that the regions underground are subject to the same laws as the world above, as he finds "a mimic temple complete and true", a temple which holds the statue of "quiver'd Dian".

More searching into the "self" is required to make the statue quicken with the life of the longed-for object of the quest. But Endymion is no Alastor. A Keats may willingly sacrifice his selfhood to create brilliant life in poetry; but he will not allow himself to succumb to solipsistic solitude. Instead of dwindling and pining away, Endymion realizes that salvation lies in the very past he has forsaken: he implores

the goddess to let him "see his" native bowers. (Book II, line 331) And the goddess begins to move, if still dimly, from statuesque coldness. She is now "the Woodland Queen" and, significantly, her crescent glimmers through a dark tree. Clearly, separation has mellowed the quester's revulsion against the authoritative figures of his childhood. Now they work benevolently, with the longed for vision, rather than against it.

"Thick myrtle branches" beckon him to find his way to the upper world, fittingly introducing the garden of Adonis. Being of the realm of Venus, the myrtles shelter the cloyingly sweet home of a "pouting", home of a youth, white-armed, white-ankled, rose-lipped--whom only our knowledge of the legend forces us to accept as being of the male gender.

Luckily for our study, the tree image in this garden of sweetness is confined to some marginal "sallows", yet even this omission may be put down to the credit of the poet: the refreshing astringency of a growing tree has no place in the saccharine softness encradling the sleeping Adonis, significant though the passage may be to the totality of Endymion's experience.

Leaving Adonis and Venus to their raptures, Endymion plunges into the depths of the earth once again. There he envisions streams and waterfalls which all, significantly,

remind him of trees: spouting columns of water rise to "a poplar's height", falling fountains are reminiscent of "weeping trees" and "stubborn streams" collect and mimick the wrought oaken beams. A longing for home, ever-present in every wanderer's heart is struggling to reach his consciousness through the familiar images.

Almost these parental figures herald the appearance of mother Cybele and the fatherly gesture of Jove who, just in time, provides transportation in the guise of an eagle.

Of course, the eagle lands Endymion in "the greenest nook", a "jasmine bower" and there the ecstatic encounter with the embodiment of his dream takes place. These trees have their uses, after all, one almost hears the young man say who forgets that they were only recently driving him into madness. They cannot even be said to fall into stereotype. Not always sheltering and protective and old, they also serve to represent young inexperience: Endymion makes fun of his past chastity, and even Pallas (who might not be so very chaste after all, only clever in keeping "her love unknown") smiled at his tying up his hair with fingers "cool as aspen leaves".

The image modulates into one of fertility. After the loved one has vanished once more, Endymion muses on the supreme value of love.

> . . . essences
> Once spiritual, are like muddy lees.
> Meant but to fertilize my earthly root
> And make my branches lift a golden fruit
> Into the bloom of heaven; (Book II, line 905)

This beautiful image seems, to this reader at least, a falling off for Keats. The merger of the human figure with a metaphoric tree smacks of other types of treatment, quite foreign to the inobtrusive sense-idea structure we have so far observed and admired. This feeling is partially compensated by the lovely "bloom of heaven"--where the delicate bloom of shifting colour at sunset and sunrise carry through the idea of blossom and fruit, and overall fertility.

We find this quality again in the apostrophe to the Moon in Book III. The trees here appear as members of a primal congregation of worshippers, something far beyond the confines of remembered human history:

> O Moon! the oldest shades 'mong oldest trees
> Feel palpitations when thou lookest in:
> O Moon! old boughs lisp forth a holier din. . . .
> (Book III, lines 52-4)

It is left deliberately open to question whether the "oldest shades" are those cast by the trees lit up by moonlight, or some mysterious presences joining created nature in their ceremony of worship.

Young Endymion joins the timeless congregation, but his

worship befits his age:

> No apples would I gather from the tree
> Till thou had'st cool'd their cheeks deliciously
> (Book III, line 147)

The moon, in this connection with cool-cheeked apples, bears out his statement--a few lines below: "Thou wast the charm of women, lovely Moon!" Female beauty, the dream-beloved, and fresh fruit have already been seen in juxtaposition in Sleep and Poetry. In his longings for this lost love, Endymion speaks of "her soft voice" on which he hung like fruit among green leaves". (Book III, line 271)

These reminiscences are made doubly poignant as they are voiced in the undersea world, prior to the meeting of Glaucus. A longing for home and the only natural setting for the fulfillment of his dream is always attended by nostalgic memories of trees.

It may be argued that now, in the story of Glaucus, trees lose their symbolic weight. On the surface the very same boughs and bowers surround sinister Circe and her lures. But they are only lures to the young fisherman who has not Endymion's woodland background. The symbol remains a mere image, without subconscious accretions of early loves, loyalties and rebellions. The trees may be fresh (Book III, line 420), but to Glaucus they are merely a "mazy forest-house", presaging

the bewilderment and despair to follow.

Book IV, the chapter of resolutions, with its opening apostrophe to England, inevitably ushers in the note of primeval forests--both a "wolfish den" and the abode of the "first Druids". Here the Muse may sit "rapt deep in prophetic silence". The note struck in this passage is reminiscent of the old forest shades of moon devotees--and Latmos and England find themselves linked in a similar attitude of primeval worship. But even the old forests need the vivifying presence of human love, as laments the Indian maiden further on. This is why Circe's forests stayed silently within the range of background decoration. The foresaken maid sings her song of sorrow, "sitting beneath the midmost forest tree", as if seeking support from that venerable presence.

Even in her "roundelay", trees perform their function of mentors and guideposts. They point out the seasons--as does the holly and the tall chestnut; they signify normalcy against excess, as in the passage where the Satyrs of Bacchus leave their "forest haunts", their "nuts in oak-tree cleft", and their "kernel tree" for the ecstasy of wine and the orgiastic journey.

And the song expires in the "wind that now stirs / About the crisped oaks full drearily. . . . "; the seasons bear out

the maiden's personal despair.

As the final apotheosis approaches, we meet a kind of summary of the tree language studied throughout: more ordeals must yet follow, and Endymion journeys on through wide forests and thick branches; but the vision of Mercury appears "beyond tall tree tops". These signal a journey in the heights: Endymion and the maiden now travel in winged steeds, lost in a sleep which is full of dreams; yet they are never far from home: the clouds appear like "weeping willow", Endymion sees himself searching for the golden apples of Hesperus, the seasons dance about him--the whole of existence becomes transmuted and yet remains earthly and human, full of trees and fruit and leaves.

But the Indian maiden is forced to leave; Endymion has yet to pass through the Cave of Quietude, his Chamber of Maiden Thought; only when leaving this retreat of momentary recollection, can he fully accept his mortal fate. He now calls upon his earthly love to share human life on earth. And the feast to which he invites her is one of "forest fruit" and their home will be "where dark yew trees drop their scarlet berry cups of dew". There is here an acceptance of the tears and blood of humanity.

Death, too, must be faced; it appears towards the close of the book, in the "deadly maw" of the cypress grove into

which Peona and the fair Indian temporarily disappear. This occurs shortly before the maiden's triumphal transfiguration which is foreshadowed in the brilliant passage a little earlier. Endymion, still lonely and despondent, stands among "dead leaves", but he looks upon the tree on "the very bark of which" he discovers the crucial sign:

> A crescent he had carv'd, and round it spent
> His skill in little stars. The teeming tree
> Had swollen and green'd the pious charactery.
> (Book IV, lines 788-90)

"The pious charactery" was a dedication of the tree to Diana. Carved on the old tree trunk which yet "teems" with life, the symbol has swollen and plumped out into something natural and living--as finally the quest bore luscious fruit in the synthesis of the human maiden and the dream-goddess.

The tree home, the enclosing mandala is, once again, raised to the status of temple, as the choir of Cynthia is heard "far swollen, soft and full, through the dark pillars of those sylvan aisles." (Book IV, line 969) The great encounter and transfiguration takes place, watched by sympathetic Peona to whom the final promise is made:

> . . . we shall range
> these forests, and to thee they safe shall be
> As was thy cradle. . . . (Book IV, lines 993,4)

Swiftly, the forest comes forth to enfold temple, and home,

young love and the cradle of childhood. Yet, never forgetful that one must not "joy too much in all that's bloomy", Keats refuses to let the poem sound out its last note in unalloyed bliss; this would be false to his conception of the quest, of growing up and of life. Peona is sent home in wonderment--and her path leads through "the gloomy wood"; separation and uncertainty of her brother's faith is her lot, and what hope of future reunion there is, must be overshadowed by this "wonderment" and the darkness within the enclosure which is her world.

Endymion offers the seeker examples upon examples of that Keatsian use of imagery in which the object stands alone, yet is inextricably linked with the thematic core. We have seen the tree image, as no doubt many other symbols subjected to scrutiny do to embody one comprehensive view of Endymion, namely the "Bildungsroman" aspect in which a young being embarks on the quest for fulfillment and maturity: parental figures, sexual longings, the interplay of dream and reality are all fitly imaged forth by the trees of Latmos and England.

Endymion, then, may be seen as a kind of learning situation, the "vale of soul-making" through which both the poet and his reader must go in order to reach the status of Soul: "There may be intelligences or sparks of the divinity in

millions--but they are not Souls until they acquire identities, till each one is personally itself."[20]

Endymion is a school, both for poet and reader; the education undergone by the maturing quester works for both. So many aspects of life have been explored in the some, very special manner that, what is to come now will be a culmination and a crowning.

Somewhere, between the schoolroom of Endymion and the enchanted glades of the Odes, there grow the lively "larchen trees", sisters to Meg Merrilies, called into being for the pleasure of the poet's own young sister, while he was on his northern walking tour. They are brave, lithe, bright and gay, as is their indomitable patroness, the red-cloaked, tall gypsy.

With the brief poem "In Drear-Nighted December", we enter into Keats's stage of fulfillment:

> In drear-nighted December,
> Too happy, happy tree
> Thy branches ne'er remember
> Their green felicity.

The tree is happy, lacking a human capacity for regret and lacking human memory. It cannot express that blissful "feel of

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[20] "Letter to George and Georgiana Keats, 14 February--3 May, 1819", Selected Poems and Letters, p. 288.

not to feel it"; this function is left to the poet who deplores that it "was never said in rhyme". Another happy paradox is created in which the tree is allowed its vegetable insensibility, while expressing the poet's sorrow. The same tree returns again, even happier than its living cousin, in the leaf-fringed legend of the Grecian Urn:

> Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed
> Your leaves nor ever bid the Spring adieu;

The first tree was happy because unable to remember spring, when facing winter in a denuded state: this one never will become denuded, living, as it does, in the world of eternal Spring.

It is only in the last stanza that the frozen quality of that Spring is stressed--for the "forest branches and trodden weed" are caught up forever in the "Cold Pastoral". In order to escape mutability and death, life must suffer suspension in rigid marble. Leaves do not fall, but neither do blossoms change into fruit; maidens never age, but neither will they experience the fulfillment of love.

The Odes are particularly apt illustrations of the notion that Endymion may be seen as a laboratory where the great images were worked out, to be perfected in later poems. Thus the tree-composed temples and fanes we have met, re-appear again, in

masterly compression:

In Ode to Psyche, Eros and Psyche are couched in blissful slumber in a very Endymion-like retreat, in the forest:

> On deepest grass, beneath the whisp'ring roof
> Of leaves and trembling blossoms, . . .

but the poet wishes to build Psyche a fane

> In some untrodden region of my mind,
> Where branched thoughts, new grown with pleasant pain
> Instead of pines shall murmur in the wind:
> Far, far around shall those dark-cluster'd trees
> Fledge the wild-ridged mountains steep by steep.

We are now clearly in the region beyond the Chamber of Maiden Thought wherefrom open dark passages into what we can only call the unconscious. But the temple to Psyche, that part of the mind which consciously loves and worships is sheltered by whispering pines and the trees--albeit "dark cluster'd" and obviously aware of dangers beyond their fringe, are still performing the function of guardians and protectors, as they always have. This is more than a metaphor--this, again, is the projection upon natural objects of the poet's insights and sensibilities.

In Ode to a Nightingale, the reader ceases to think in terms of metaphor. The nightingale, though, addressed as "Dryad of the trees", is a very real bird and her habitat is pure reality--but of that quality which makes the dreams of

childhood come true. The nightingale inhabits a "melodious plot / of beechen green, and shadows numberless".

Who has not, looking up into summer trees, seen himself as a denizen of these "plots", dappled over by a pattern of shadow and sunshine (here it would be moonshine), woven by the moving leaves? The very word "plot" with its solid, earthy connotations, makes the dwelling place of the nightingale a home of palpable reality. But the plot is "melodious"--filled with song--almost appearing to have walls built of sound. Nor are our other senses left out: as the mood darkens and the light fades, as we lose ourselves in "verdurous glooms", we become aware of the "soft incense hanging upon the boughs". The freshness of breathing vegetation scents the evening air so concretely that we sense almost materialized globes of perfume hanging on the branches. We have watched, with Coleridge, "incense bearing" trees, and with Shelley, mountain pines swinging their censers. Here there is a sensual awareness of the smell, almost to the point of seeing its shape. Trees, the habitation of nightingales, together with the nightingale, embody the enchantment--and the verdurous plot echoes the ambivalence of the mood--for a plot can also be a grave and the darkness is "embalmed".

The woodlands are sinister in Ode on Melancholy: deadly

nightshade, woolfsbane and poisonous yew-berries are made into a rosary for some devotee of death: But Keats is no devotee; just as in Ode to a Nightingale, he resolutely turned his back on the rich temptations of Easeful Death, so these poisons are abjured, as soon as their bright images appear.

The love of trees so apparent in the poet's verse and letters did not permit him often to imbue their image with darkness. Much better to let the nightingale vanish into "the next valley-glades" where one may be sure no poison trees grow. Much better to turn away from death-bearing berries with the firm injunction:

> No, no, go not to Lethe, neither twist
> Wolf's bane tigh-rooted, for its poisonous wine,
> Nor suffer thy pale forehead to be kissed
> By nightshade, ruby grape of Proserpine;
> Make not your rosary of yew-berries.

Much better to enjoy another product of the tree world (perhaps botanically speaking we are taking a liberty here--yet grape-vines do resemble small trees), the "blushful Hippocrene", and "Joy's grape bursting against a palate fine".

It is significant, in this context, that the poem in which reigns a sinister and destructive female presence, La Belle Dame Sans Merci, is almost totally devoid of trees. The barrenness of the "cold hillside" is stressed by the "wither'd sage"--and naturally, in the sear landscape no birds can sing,

for where would they go for their nesting places?

Lamia, located on the highway and in an urban milieu, has no place for trees except in the introduction. The nymph, beloved by Hermes, dwells in Cretan forests, yet the god's disappointment in love makes him jealous of the "very trees". The serpent herself dwells in a "dusky brake". But the nymph of Hermes blooms for him in "printless verdure", and finally flees with him into the "green-recessed woods". Nymph-like herself, the transformed Lamia meets her lover on the threshold of a wood near Corinth. Yet the woods to her are "the serpent prison-house", as much as was her former shape. On the edge of the highway from port Cenchreas to Corinth she awaits her lover and there she finally meets him. Lycius sees her as a wood nymph: "Stay! though the greenest wood be thy domain". Weaving her enchantment, Lamia withdraws her favours at first--for nymphs cannot "breathe below in human climes and live!"

However, with an eye to the main chance, she soon relinquishes her teasing tactics and agrees to join Lycius in Corinth. Trees and streams are left behind. Only pretense remains:

> Fresh-carved cedars mimicking a glade
> Of palm and plantain, met from either side.

The banquet chamber in which Lamia's wedding is to be celebrated

is no more a forest glade than Lamia is true woman or nymph. Sham and deceit is the order of the day: both lady and "carved" trees mimick a reality they can never attain. The garlands brought in for the wedding guests come from "vales deflower'd, or forest-trees branch-rent". In this masterful line there mingles the degradation of rape and the pain of childbirth. No wonder, the poet proposes a wreath of willow (the weeping tree) and of adder's tongues for the bride. Sparse though they are, tree images in Lamia sound deepening notes of sorrow and fear, leading up to the final scene of horror.

The bleak and treeless La Belle Dame Sans Merci and Lamia whose tragic mimicry cannot bear the presence of trees, support our contention that Keats saw growing things as one of the ways of saying yes to life and to a loving union of man and nature. Long before the smiling and sorrowful Ode to Autumn was written, he thanks a friend profusely for "a dish of filberts".[21]

The dish of hazelnuts, relished with Keats's frank enjoyment of good things to eat and to drink, modulates into a spirited metaphor in which the nuts become "archangelical acorns" and men of understanding and sensitivity "ethereal

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[21] "Letter to John Hamilton Reynolds, 3 February, 1818", Selected Poems and Letters, p. 263.

pigs" feeding upon them. In this very same letter, Keats follows a train of thoughts which culminates in his memorable critique of Wordsworth, refusing to be "bullied into a certain Philosophy engendered in the whims of an Egotist". "We hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us . . . " he continues, true to his role of the squirrel ("the ethereal pig") feeding upon his archangelical acorns, spiritualizing and recreating into abstract thought such mundane objects as a dish of hazel-nuts--as we shall meet them, ripening into fullness and plumping out their shells in Ode to Autumn. There is a serene happiness in this one of the last poems, penned by an already ailing poet. Yet the lesson to be learned is clear: The fruit he sees is filled with "ripeness to the core". Perhaps "his presider", as he hoped to call Shakespeare, was leaning over his shoulder as he wrote, and a line, so much and so justly admired, hovered into his mind: for there is a close connection between the doomed Hamlet's "readiness is all" and those apple trees laden with fruit, yet bent under their burden and looking towards the stubble plains "while barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day". Fruits ripen and hazelnuts plump their shells, but the nuts end up as somebody's dessert, and the apples are pressed into "last oozings" by the cyder press. The gentle acceptance of the end and its inevitability pervades the poem,

and especially the plant imagery it includes, as though this serene resignation flowed into it from "this living hand, so warm, and capable" so soon to disappear "in the icy silence of the grave".[22]

A deep note is struck by the tree image in Hyperion.

> Sat gray-hair'd Saturn, quiet as a stone,
> Still as the silence round about his lair;
> Forest on forest hung about his head. . . .
> (Book I, lines 3-5)

It has been noted previously that Keats uses the very "to hang" with extraordinarily effective nuances: in Endymion soft voice "hung upon the boughs". Incense"hangs upon the boughs" in Ode to a Nightingale.

Sense impressions hang from branches, thus assuming the material immediacy of concrete objects. Here, these hanging forests may be seen as great woods growing on mountain ranges, or as a kind of cosmic crown, about the brows of the dethroned king of the universe. Trees in Hyperion are majestic--fitting companions to the old gods now facing extinction. Their age is reflected in the "aged boughs" through which Thea leads Saturn, "the cumbrous boughs"--beneath which, towards the end of the

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[22] John Keats, "Lines Written in the M.S. of 'The Cap and Bell'", Selected Poems and Letters, p. 250.

fragment, the "awful goddess" Mnemosyne appears, to assist at the difficult, painful and cosmic birth of Apollo into godhood. Trees partake of the prevailing gloom: "Thick night confounds the pine-tops / with the clouds." (Book II, line 80) The twice repeated phrase in Book II, lines 116 and 122: "there is a roaring in the bleak-grown pines." ushers in the utterance of Saturn. All the power of a storm moaning through the branches of a great tree, the painfully twisted shape of a pine, grown and distorted on a bleak, unprotected hillside are here merged into that simile--fit vehicle for the pain, sadness and rage of the despairing, vanquished Titon.

The supremely beautiful image of the "tall oaks" is repeated with a slight alteration, in the Fall of Hyperion; we shall take the liberty of quoting both versions in full, in order to bridge the gap of time between the two fragments.

> As when, upon a tranced summer-night,
> Those green-rob'd senators of mighty woods,
> Tall oaks, branch-charmed by the earnest stars
> Dream, and so dream all night without a stir
> Save from one gradual solitary gust
> Which comes upon the silence, and dies off,
> As if the ebbing air had but one wave.
>
> (Hyperion, Book I, lines 72-78)

> As when upon a tranced summer night
> Forests, branch-charmed by the earnest stars,
> Dream, and so dream all night, without a noise,
> Save from one gradual solitary gust
> Swelling upon the silence; dying off;
> (Fall of Hyperion, Canto I, lines 372-6)

The difference between green-robed senators of the woods, tall oaks--with their deliberate elaboration--and the simplicity of "forests" may invite complicated speculation. But, in the context, it is not difficult to sense the reason for which Thea's words would be compared to oaks in the earlier version and to a comprehensive forest in the latter. Oaks always held a place of honour in Keatsian woods: we meet them, in connection with Druids in the early epistle to Matthew. The old oak forest sings a note of Celtic mystery in the sonnet On Re-reading King Lear. Perhaps the notion of senators in their robes became incongruous in the tale of primeval, cosmic strife. Perhaps those all-including forests were meant to sound the counterpoint of the "trees of every clime" the quester-poet sees in his dream before they give way the "carved sides of the old sanctuary"; the same relationship is established between the feast of divine left-overs in the opening section and the strange vessels and strange jewelry, in their state of derelict antiquity.

In both versions of the quoted passage, the trees are

"branch-charmed by the earnest stars". The web of imagination is caught on the leaves and spikes of the living tree, the stars--serious and solemn in the very act of creation and union, are at one with the earth-plant, sharing the branches and sharing the light.

As Thea confronts Saturn, kneeling at his feet, his reply spans the immensity between this cosmic union and earthly suffering. Saturn's words "Fill'd the mossy glooms around, / even to the hollows of time-eaten oaks", . . . ". These oaks are now subject to the mutability of organic life and death, and the poet who contemplates the scene receives the central insight of his quest:

> Methought I heard some old man of the earth
> Bewailing earthly loss; nor could my eyes
> And ears act with that pleasant unison of sense
> Which marries sweet sound with the grace of form,
> And dolorous accents from a tragic harp
> With large limb'd visions. More I scrutinized,
> Still fix'd he sat beneath the sable trees,
> Whose arms spread straggling in wild serpent forms,
> With leaves all hush'd; his awful presence there
> (Now all was silent) gave a deadly lie
> To what I erewhile heard; . . . (Canto I, lines 440-50)

We have here an extraordinary example of a synthesis of traditional symbols, for those oaks with their "serpentine" branches, point also to the trees that grow in the world of Blake, both pictorially and poetically. The poet, following

Moneta's interpretation, her "humanizing to his ears" of the titanic experience, now understands the voice of the wind as it "blows legend-laden through the trees". (Canto II, line 6) He is now aware of the oneness of suffering and guilt, as trees are simultaneously prophetic, sorrowful, ominous and always--all-knowing, fit brethren to the archetypal tree of Eden. Such vision can only be vouchsafed the quester who, like Endymion, has succeeded in his search for total selfhood in which the conscious I has come to terms with the great well of the unconscious. With uncanny insight did Keats furnish The Fall of Hyperion with the subtitle of Dream.

In this totality, divine might is given "a deadly lie", yet the lie contains the truth of another divinity about to assume power--perhaps the divinity of the "blazing Hyperion", as yet undefeated, or of the new-born Apollo. Since his maker did not complete his "Dream", the quester--and we, with him--will never know. But the union of suffering divinity and mankind in the great figure of the defeated Saturn remains, ushered in by the trees "branch-charmed by the earnest stars".

This is the very heart of the mystery. No wonder the poet, in noble humility, saw himself, in the preceding Canto, "like a stunt bramble by a solemn pine" (line 293), puny

humanity side by side with Moneta, the figure in which Memory and Imagination are conjoined. In order to follow the awesome presence into the abode of the sorrowing Titans, the quester had to solve his own mystery and to ask his own questions. This could be only attained by the supreme sacrifice:

> If thou canst not ascend these steps
> die on that marble where thou art. . . .
> . . . . . .
> and no hand in the universe can turn
> Thy hourglass, if these gummed leaves be burnt
> Ere thou canst mount up these immortal steps.
> (Canto I, lines 108-9, 117-19)

The poet does mount in time and is saved, to ask his questions and receive his answer, the key to which is compassion with the suffering of the world. But the sacrifice of "gummed leaves", the burnt offering of tree fragments stands fast, in its own right, not a metaphor but an embodiment of its creator and his destiny.

"If Poetry comes not as naturally as the Leaves to a tree it had better not come at all."[23] This poetry certainly does come as naturally, it lives and dies as do the leaves. So, too, paradoxically, must the nightingale die, as must any bird: yet it lives on with Ruth, the Emperor and the Clown; and so do

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[23] John Keats, "Letter to John Taylor, 27 February 1818", Selected Poems and Letters, p. 267.

these burning leaves of self-immolation live on, even though a twenty-six-year-old man was buried, over a century ago, "amid the alien corn".

CHAPTER VI

EMBLEMS OF DEEDS

In the journal-letter to his brother George (September 17, 1819), Keats states: "You speak of Lord Byron and me. There is this difference between us: he describes what he sees--I describe what I imagine. Mine is the hardest task; now see the immense difference."

Compared to the acknowledged lion of the literary world--and a world far exceeding the boundaries of the British Isles, young Keats was a nobody; Byron dubs him "a tadpole of the Lakes" for daring to criticise the heroic couplet in Sleep and Poetry,[1] and dismisses the volume containing Lamia, Isabella and The Eve of St. Agnes as "Johnny Keats's p-ss a bed poetry".[2] Yet this very junior poet has enough sound self-respect to see nothing incongruous in brother George's comparison.

And, unknowingly, yet unerringly, he hits the very centre of the difference. In the famous Memoirs, Byron, still incensed by the young unknown's attack on his Augustan idols uses very

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[1] Leslie A. Marchand, Byron: A Portrait (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc., Borzoi Books,), p. 323.

[2] Ibid., p. 332.

explicit language to demolish "Jack Keats or Ketch or whatever his names are." " . . . why this is the Onanism of Poetry. . . . " And again, in a subsequent letter: "such writing is a sort of mental masturbation--he is always f-gging his IMAGINATION. I don't mean he is indecent, but viciously soliciting his own ideas into a state, which is neither poetry nor anything else but a Bedlam vision produced by raw pork and opium".[3] How unjust this judgment was, Byron generously later acknowledged himself:

> My indignation at Mr. Keats's depreciation of Pope has hardly permitted me to do justice to his own genius, which, malgré all the fantastic fopperies of his style, was undoubtedly of great promise. His fragment of Hyperion seems actually inspired by the Titans and is as sublime as Aeschylus.[4]

Byron's final assessment of the work of Keats, as supported in Don Juan may not be relevant to our study, but had to be included to clear our appraisal of a personality in which generosity and a certain cruelty mingled so strangely. Yet that Keats's total and self-immolating commitment to his own imagination could only appear grotesque and almost obscenely solipsi

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[3]Leslie Marchand, Byron: A Portrait, pp. 335-336.

[4]Ibid., p. 347.

to a man of Byron's temperament is hardly surprising. "Lord Byron describes what he sees--not what he imagines" is Keats's contention.

Here we meet the crux of the difference between Byron and his contemporary poets: his own solipsism is undeniable, and his personality lurks behind those of the Childe, the Corsair, Lara, Manfred, Don Juan and erupts on frequent occasions into first-person musings on society, morals, religion, and numerous other concerns which, at the time of writing, exercised his powerful mind. It is his own total personality which controls his poetry, not the free-flowing force of the imagination which, at its most intense, leaves the personal ego far below.

When Byron, as has been observed by Wilson Knight "creates emotional shapes outside his own experience",[5] he dwells in the realm of philosophy, theology and geographical differences, imbuing his Moslems, Christians, and South Sea Islanders with a sincere authenticity; it could be said that he translates men of Byronic temperament and concerns into varying sectors of

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[5]G. Wilson Knight, "The Two Eternities: An Essay on Byron", The Burning Oracle (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939), rpt. in Paul West, ed., Byron: A Collection of Critical Essays, Twentieth Century Views (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963), p. 16.

time and space, saluting the differences, yet maintaining the personal qualities. And so his use of the imagination partakes not of the transcendent, but springs from a sound understanding of human motivation, shaped, but not basically altered, by varying types of environment.

With some notable exceptions, which will be observed further in this chapter, Byron uses the tree image to serve the purposes noted above.

Until now we have seen the paradox of the poetic mind functioning as "the spontaneous overflow of emotion", that fountain erupting into the outward world from individual and intellectual sources, yet granting the outward world its proper hues and texture. Byron, in this respect, does not follow the pattern of his contemporaries. He "describes what he sees", and what he sees is a world in which natural images can be made subservient to an intellectual thesis, but hardly ever tend to fuse with that thesis and the mind which engenders it: "My tendency is to philosophise / On most things from a tyrant to a tree." (Don Juan, Chapter VI, LXIII)

For from plunging headlong into the very being of his image, this proud swimmer from Sestos to Abydos, never floats on the billows of the imagination, but uses the image as a springboard for "philosophising", for discursive illustration

and example. His talents lie not in the direction of negative capability, if by this we mean a Keatsian surrender of self. Byron's detachment is the ironic one of the amused observer, especially in his later works, or that of the philosopher-poet to whom nature furnishes tools and illustrations with which to elucidate his thought. His trees are, indeed, "emblems of deeds". (Bride of Abydos, line 2)

When considering the poetry of Shelley and Keats, it was possible to adopt, as controlling device, the growing intensity of a specific thrust. In Byron, the fluctuating approach to imagery makes this type of ordering impossible. Nor is it quite satisfactory to adopt a chronological order, since many poems were written, or started and composed simultaneously with others. Even the distinct watershed between Byron's earlier work and the phase we might call "post-exilic", while showing a darkening of tone and mood, does not provide a clear-cut division.

We have therefore followed, to a degree, Leslie Marchand's arrangement in which the Oriental and Other Tales, Childe Harold (which work shows the dychotomy between pre- and post-exilic writing most clearly), the Speculative Dramas and Don Juan are

treated separately.[6] Of necessity, three of the shorter poems, such as The Dream, The Destruction of Sennacherib and one of the Italian longer works, The Prophecy of Dante are mentioned in juxtaposition with some of the major points under discussion, because of a marked similarity or interesting contrast in the handling of relevant imagery.

Except for the Bride of Abydos,[7] the opening lines of which have furnished this chapter with its title, the trees that grow in the Oriental Tales, if mentioned at all, form merely a part of the natural landscape. It is in Mazeppa and in The Island that they assume a poetic growth as well.

The Island, at least to this reader, curiously foreshadows both the tone and situation of Don Juan. True, the serious and the pathetic vastly overpower the smiling mood, yet it is unmistakably there, in the apparition of Ben Benning who heralds the attack of the forces of law on the newly-gained mutineers' paradise. Here, too, the woman is a beautiful child of nature who rescues "her boy" from death but, unlike poor Haidée, manages

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[6] Leslie Marchand, Byron: A Portrait.

[7] All references to poems have been taken from The Poetical Works of Lord Byron (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952).

to live with him happily ever after. No wonder that the trees which fail the lovers of Don Juan through their very absence (as shall be seen when that poem comes under our scrutiny), are bountiful on Neuha's island and represent life in all its happiest aspects: the palm is called "the loftiest dryad of the woods" and provides, severally, according to its varieties, many bounties:

> The cava feast, the yam, the cocoa's root,
> Which bears at once the cup, and milk and fruit,
> The bread-tree, which, without the ploughshare yields
> The unreap'd harvest of unforrow'd fields
> And bakes its unadulterated loaves
> Without a furnace in unpurchase groves, . . .
>
> (The Island, Stanza XI, lines 258-63)

The unspoiled paradise of his century's dream is here recreated by a poet who presents this wish for a return to the gentle savagery of a tropical Eden as an excuse for the Bounty mutineers.

When Torquil follows Neuha to her undersea refuge, a kind of primal womb which offers shelter and life, a feast of the fruits of palm trees awaits him, prepared in advance by the provident "nereid". And so, even the ocean which, in this poem, mostly represents the principles of horror and death, is made subservient to life through the magic of love and with the assistance of the fertile bounty of earth-grown things.

While the gentle climate of the Pacific isles could bring forth such beneficent and bountiful trees, the same image presents

a sterner aspect in the wilds of Central Europe.

Mazeppa's ghastly voyage takes him through wild northern woods. The striking observation must be made that Byron, that avowed admirer of lush and sub-tropical "climes", manages to be remarkably accurate when devoting himself to the forests of Eastern Poland:

> We near'd the wild wood--'twas so wide
> I saw no bounds on either side;
> 'Twas studded with old sturdy trees,
> That bent not to the roughest breeze
> Which howls down from Siberia's waste,
> And strips the forest in its haste,
> But these were few and far between,
> Set thick with shrubs more young and green,
> Luxuriant with their annual leaves,
> Ere strewn by those autumnal eves
> That nip the forest's foliage dead,
> Discolour'd with a lifeless red,
> Which stands thereon like stiffen'd gore
> Upon the slain when battle's o'er.
>
> (Mazeppa, Stanza XII, lines 464-77)

> 'Twas a wild waste of underwood
> And here and there a chestnut stood,
> The strong oak and the hardy pine;
> But far apart--and well it were
> Or else a different lot were mine--
> The boughs gave way and did not tear
> My limbs . . .
>
> (Ibid., Stanza XII, lines 481-8)

There follows a reference to wounds "already scarr'd with cold", fitly foreshadowed by those patches of lifeless red provided by the dead leaves, and likened to congealed blood on a battlefield; then we are offered the scarcely seen, but clearly heard and

sensed, presence of hungry wolves. The whole menace of a night in the immense wastes of central European forests is brought forth by nature imagery which is entirely true to life, yet always serves the narrative purpose. Oaks and horse chestnuts and pines really grow sparsely in the plains of the Ukraine and Volhynia, Siberian winds really do howl through them and twist trees out of shape, wolves certainly roamed in packs in the days of Mazeppa, and the scene provides a background much in tune with Mazeppa's terrible plight.

The use of the colour of autumn leaves, so striking in Shelley's Ode to the West Wind, serves Byron equally well: the dull red of the leaves and "stiffened gore" echoes the lines in The Destruction of Senacherib:

> Like the leaves in the forest when Summer is green,
> That host with their banners at sunset were seen
> Like the leaves of the forest when Autumn hath blown
> That host on the morrow lay wither'd and strown.

In Hebrew Melodies as well as in The Tales, tree imagery, when true to the natural object, becomes the "emblem of deeds", fitly echoing either the protagonist's plight, or the thematic thrust, as promised in The Bride of Abydos:

> Know ye the land where the cypress and myrtle
> Are emblems of deeds that are done in their clime?
> (Bride of Abydos, Canto I, lines 1, 2)

The cypress of death and the myrtle, dedicated to Venus,

form a kind of paradigm to the poem in which death and doomed love are inextricably mingled. We do not see them grow; their essence only is present to introduce the theme.

Similarly, Dante sees an apotheosis of his country as a majestic tree:

> The genius of my country shall arise
> A Cedar towering o'er the Wilderness,
> Lovely in all its branches to all eyes,
> Fragrant as fair and recognised afar,
> Wafting its native incense through the skies.
> (The Prophecy of Dante, Canto IV, lines 74-8)

The emblem becomes pure metaphor; but within the context of the poem, and through its biblical overtones it recalls the tall cedars of Lebanon and assumes the grandeur of inspired prophecy. This is Dante who is speaking, and of majestic events to come; symbolic cedars, especially when described in terms which could be equally aptly applied to a beloved woman, are exactly what we have a right to expect in a poem which contains several tender invocations to Beatrice.

It is only when the emblem becomes a teacher's blackboard and the poet turns didactic that the force of the image loses impact. This happens in Parisina, where the thick foliage under which the lady meets her lover and the bough for a nightingale to perch on are merely commonplace, and the final tree grows only in the land of parable:

Yet Azo's aged was wretched still.
The tainted branches of the tree,
If lopp'd with care a strength may give,
By which the rest shall bloom and live
All greenly fresh and wildly free;
But if the lightning in its wrath
The waving boughs with fury scathe,
The massy trunk a ruin feels
And never more a leaf reveals.
(Parisina, lines 577-86)

One may be tempted to continue irreverently: and the moral of the story is, do not chop off your son's head, even if, etc., etc. This is a far cry from Byron's own use of the image as symbol on other more felicitous occasions where the tree is, frankly, placed in the realm of the spirit. It seems that Byron cannot have it both ways. When he causes his trees to grow, as he can do so well on occasions, they still merge with his story and perform their function of "emblem of deeds" to the full. They strain and strive in vain when called upon to flourish as pure metaphor and on solid earth. It is as a writer of allegory that Byron does not succeed.

Trees grow abundantly in the regions visited by Childe Harold on his Pilgrimage. Poetically, they perform several functions: in the opening Cantoes, they serve to point out the contrast between the grandeur and goodness of nature and man's foibles and baseness. With one notable exception this remains almost exclusively their role in a retelling of the poet's first

youthful and happy journey. The notes deepen on the other side of the watershed created by the trauma of a meteoric rise to social eminence followed by an abrupt fall, several disastrous love affairs and an unhappy marriage, terminated by divorce. While the combination of actual described objects and their emblematic functions still persists, the train of thought engendered has acquired depth and a certain darkness. Over and over again we shall meet images provoked by poetic thought, without an outward stimulus, or, if engendered by external impressions, they will be forced into a symbolic role much more fully than in the opening Cantoes. While we pursue this modulation in intensity, we must beg indulgence in grouping references according to this progression, rather than respecting the numeric order of stanzas.

In Canto the First, trees provide luxuriant "glens" and appear as "cork-trees hoar", to form a contrast to the baseness of a nation's enslavement, as the Childe sets foot in Portugal. Nature, represented by "vales that teem" with fruit and the "shaggy steeps" of mountains is lofty and majestic and bountiful--only men are paltry and of mean stature; assassination is rife, and even Great Britain fails to protect her subjects abroad, for

reasons of political expediency.[8]

A different note is struck when Childe Harold finds himself in Spain. The vicissitudes of Spain's heroic history and the indomitable pride of her people evokes the wonderful paean beginning:

> And must they fall? the young, the proud, the brave?
> To swell one bloated chief's unwholesome reign?
> No step between submission and a grave?
> The rise of rapine and the fall of Spain?
> (Canto I, Stanza LIII)

And the salute to heroism includes the brave women of Spain:

> Is it for this the Spanish maid, aroused
> Hangs on the willow her unstrung guitar,
> And, all unsexed, the Amlace has espoused,
> Sung the loud song and dared the deed of war?
> (Canto I, Stanza LIV)

The virgin turns into a virago, echoing Lady Macbeth's self-evoked "unsexing". Yet, unlike for that ferocious figure, we feel sorrow for the inevitability of this sacrifice: the guitar, instrument of love music is unstrung and now hangs on a willow tree. The image evokes the poignancy of that other Shakespearean heroine, singing of a willow tree, shortly before her innocent death and of the third one--whose drowning is shadowed by the

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[8] "Notes to Childe Harold", The Poetical Works of Lord Byron, p. 874.

"hoary leaves" of a willow tree. Sorrow, the graceful silhouette of a weeping woman, the sadness of a woman's fate are all embodied in one brief line which shows most tellingly to what penetrating and all-enclosing use Byron, at his very best, can put the nature emblem.

These heights are not often reached in Childe Harold. The poem abounds in leaves of Daphne's plant, and olive branches, signifying the conventional fame and peace connotations. Occasionally the image strikes a spark of originality, though never equalling the willow image described above. But we do meet "Freedom's stranger-tree" growing "native of the soil" (Canto I, Stanza XC) in some distant future when "the Frank robber is turned from his spoil" and Spain has regained her independence. The emblematic plant is a stranger to Spain in captivity, yet grows "native" in that freedom-loving land. It will flourish and cease to be a stranger when freedom downs once more.

True vegetation assumes the role of companionable nature. Where there are "Forests brown", or where one may roam in "forest's shady scene" there can be no solitude and so, though only lightly sketched, the woods assume an aura of life and friendliness.

There are cypress groves in Albania, bringing rural peace

into the confines of cities; groves "crown tufted hills" which is an image beloved by Byron. The diadem of trees on a hill has occurred as setting the mood in the autobiographical Dream.

May we be permitted a digression here (after all, digressions are in the Byronic tradition)? Curiously enough, Byron comes closest to a plunge into Jungian depths in this much later poem. On the gentle hill where we first meet the two young lovers, there is a

> peculiar diadem
> of trees, in circular array so fix'd
> Not by the sport of nature, but of man;

The man-made circle of trees almost like a mandala, encloses the totality of youth and girl, boding ill to their love. And indeed, man-made conventions can be said to be responsible for their parting: the boy, much younger, is smilingly rejected by the girl who--eventually, "was wed with One who did not love her better;" Even though the trees form an actual part of the landscape in the opening scene, Byron's insistence on their artificiality and peculiar arrangement, may be seen as deliberate. It is, therefore, interesting to note that an image considered a very common dream symbol by a modern thinker, finds its place and plays a significant role in a poem purportedly based on a dream. The mature poet's innate feeling

and perception is here at work.

In Albania, the crown of trees signifies solace and shelter, as it surrounds a hospitable convent and provides the blessing of shade and rest:

> Here in the sultriest season let him rest
> Fresh in the green beneath those aged trees
> (Canto II, Stanza L)

Aged trees and venerable monks combine in their ancient task of providing solace to the weary traveller.

No travelogue through Greece can possibly lack "sweet groves" and "olives ripe" and, again, as noted for the Portuguese canto, Nature forms a contrast to man's foibles. The blythe bee still builds a fortress on "honey'd Hymettus," but only the bee remains a "free-born wanderer". Man is enslaved--only nature defies slavery:

> Each hill and dale, each deepening glen and wold
> Defies the power which crush'd thy temples gone.

The maturity and philosophical range of the two later cantoes, as opposed to the early promise of Cantoes I and II is apparent: There is a "post-exilic" self-realization, always a key to Byron's view of external truth which cannot fail but add depth to his handling of the tree image. Society and human love have betrayed the Childe, and in spite of strenuous denials, the Childe suffers the vicissitudes of the poet's fate. The

bitterness of this collapse of happiness is enhanced by the fact that much of it the persona-poet owes to himself; solace is to be found only in the wilderness of unadulterated nature:

> But soon he knew himself the most unfit
> Of men to herd with Man; with whom he held
> Little in common; (Canto III, Stanza 12)

A powerful statement of this affinity with nature is made in the stanza which follows:

> The desert, forest, cavern, breaker's foam
> Were unto him companionship; they spoke
> A mutual language, clearer than the tome'
> O his land's language. . . . (Canto III, Stanza 13)

If Tintern Abbey can be seen as a kind of opening hymn to the romantic response to nature, an answer to human questions and a consolation of human woes, then this passage in Childe Harold places Byron, at least on this occasion, within the same tradition. Nature offers companionship, refreshment, consolation, and contrast to the weakness of humanity as a constant source of strength.

Even on the fields of Waterloo, when mourning the heroic dead, especially Lord Howard (towards whom Byron harboured conscience-stricken regret: he had once given offense to Howard's father), the poet turns to nature imagery:

There have been tears and breaking hearts for thee
And mine were nothing had I such to give
But when I stood beneath the fresh green tree
Which living waves where thou didst cease to live. . . .
(Canto III, Stanza XXX)

Again, the growing tree is used to counterpoint the sad results of human folly--Nature's life continues, while a young man lies mouldering under the sod. Mourning and sorrow merge into a kind of universal despair and this appears as a poison which saps Life from the root:

There is a very life in our despair
Vitality of poison--a quick root
Which feeds these deadly branches. . . .
(Canto III, Stanza XXXIV)

The tree will wither long before it fall. . . .
(Canto III, Stanza XXXII)

Man, attacked by "vain longing", is like a tree which rots within, yet the sorrow itself assumes the tree-disguise too, rooting and branching poisonously in the human mind. Blake's "poison-tree", the Biblical tree of knowledge and life are present in these intermingling images, to be treated more analytically in the later Mystery Plays.

It is fitting that another Wordsworthian passage should herald the land of La Nouvelle Heloise and Rousseau's "love of ideal beauty":

Are not the mountains waves, and skies a part
Of me and of my soul, as I of them?
(Canto III, Stanza LXXV).

Even though Byron turns away from such musings saying, "This is not my theme", (Canto III, Stanza LXXVI) the very tribute paid to Rousseau belies this statement. A sincere identification with nature and all her manifestations is abundantly present. The following stanzas heighten the feeling of oneness, and a pantheistic adoration informs lines such as these:

> . . . from the high host of stars
> to the lull'd lake and mountain-coast
> All is concenter'd in a life intense
> Where not a beam, or air, nor life is lost,
> But hath a part of being and a sense
> Of that which is Creator and defense

The spirit of Rousseau permeates the countryside. Clarens, the locale of La Nouvelle Heloise almost becomes the seat of divinity: "Clarens, by heavenly feet thy paths were trod." (Canto III, Stanza C)

Ideal love, embodied either in the protagonist or their maker deifies the place where "thy trees take root in love".

The stanzas in the third Canto which are dedicated to Rousseau become an ode to Love. This love is of a universal, all-embracing nature and the tree image is made subservient to this point:

> All things are here of him; from the black pines
> Which are his shade on high. . .

> . . . ; and the wood,
> The covert of old trees, with trunks all hoar,
> But light leaves, young as joy . . .
> (Canto III, Stanza CI)

The spirit of Rousseau is at one with his work and the soil from which it has sprung.

Canto the Fourth, especially the Roman stanzas, stress even more forcibly this pattern of the outward world being used to highlight musings on humanity.

The freedom fighter, Rienzi, "the last of the Romans" should have a garland made of the leaves put forth by freedom's "wither'd trunk". From Rienzi being styled "a new-born Numa", the train of ideas leads to Egeria, thought in some myths to have been the consort of that early Roman monarch. Byron himself, as he apostrophizes that puzzling deity of Nemi woods, wonders about her true nature:

> . . . whate'er thou art
> or wert--a young Aurora of the air,
> The nympholepsy of some fond despair; . . .
> (Canto IV, Stanza CXV)

But Aegeria signifies black poplar and Egeria was closely associated with the priesthood of Nemi, the dynastic (and deadly) succession of which was closely linked to the sacred oak and its branches. Byron sees in her love encounter with Hyppolitus--or Virbius--a replaying of the Diana-Endymion myth

(and to many scholars today, Egeria represents simply another embodiment of Diana-Artemis), a union between the divine and the human, and since the immortal nymph is, in many versions of the legends, the nymph of the oak tree, we may recognize a rephrasing of the Endymion myth, accomplished through the medium of the tree image.

But while Keats is able to send off his seeker after the ineffable into some unspecified regions of eternal bliss to be shared with his beloved, no embodiment of myth can sever the always discursive Byron from the dark earth. He knows that Love--seen as an ideal is not "the inhabitant of earth" and human affections "run to waste" and breed "trees whose gums are poison". (Canto IV, Stanzas CXX to CXXIV) They spring beneath the step of Passion which "vainly pants for some celestial fruit forbidden to our wants". To the mature man, whose love life ranged from youthful disappointment to bereavement and the trauma of "forbidden" erotic experiences, love is "an unseen seraph". It cannot survive in a sin-infested world:

> Our life is a false nature; 'tis not in
> The harmony of things,--this hard decree
> This uneradicable taint of sin,
> This boundless upas, this all-blasting tree
> Whose root is earth, whose leaves and branches be
> The skies which rain their plagues on men like dew--
> Disease, death, bondage--all the woes we see,

> And worse, the woes we see not--which throb through
> The immedicable soul, with heart-aches ever new.
> (Canto IV, Stanza CXXVI)

To Coleridge, the upas tree of Java became transmogrified into the malevolent oak tree of Christabel. Here this plant of horror assumes a Blakean universality; it is boundless and embraces both earth and sky, enclosing man's "immedicable soul" in a nightmare of despair. There is, in The Pilgrimage of Childe Harold, a judicious balancing of the symbolic and the descriptive in the use of nature imagery--from the lovely, sorrowing willow image in Canto I to the poisonous world-tree, raining tragedy on sinful and doomed man.

The enchantment of Venice brings on thoughts of home. In Byron, associations of ideas almost foreshadow the stream of consciousness which flows through contemporary writings. To follow his thoughts from Venice, through Shakespearean reminiscences, to England is an experience similar to that which dazzles and enchants the reader of Joyce into saying to himself: "I am beginning to think like Mr. Bloom--no, rather this is the way we always think!" And, as they do to Joyce's Dublin Ulysses, certain connotations immediately bring sorrow; the thought of England is a thought of exile and sin

The thorns which I have reap'd are of the tree
I planted: they have torn me and I bleed.
I should have known what fruit would spring from such a seed.
(Canto IV, Stanza X)

To Shelley, the thorn tree is life itself, and the suffering it engenders is unmerited: "I fall upon the thorns of life--I bleed." In Byron, the same notion assumes the note of individual self-accusation. This tree need not grow in everyone's garden; it is of the sinner's own planting. The Scottish fundamentalism of the poet's childhood, combined with a courageous acceptance of responsibility brings forth this tree image; the innate toughness and realism so surprisingly displayed by the author of so many tales the world deemed romantic par excellence invests Byron's use of symbol and emblem with a most satisfying credibility.

The juxtaposition of dead and buried heroes with growing trees is repeated again on the battlefields of Thrasimene:

Here aged trees rise thick as once the slain
Lay where their roots are. (Canto IV, Stanza LXV)

Living nature once again carries the weight of a symbol, as life renews itself eternally where death once held sway.

The protagonist's opening speech in Manfred poses the dilemma, later to be explored by Cain: "The Tree of Knowledge is not that of Life." (Act 1, Scene 1, line 12) Here is the formulation of Byron's nagging spiritual doubt and despair.

To know is to sin and to sin is to fulfill oneself; this is the poet's guiding principle. Both Manfred and Cain are committed to incestuous love, and even though Cain can plead the innocence of inescapable necessity, he, too is made to shudder in horror when Satan tells him that, to his children, such love will be a guilty one. Therefore, knowledge of good and evil, the two inevitably cleft asunder by the numerical growth of mankind and the increasing complexity of human needs, can only signify a commitment to death--if self-identity is to be preserved. And so Manfred willingly accepts death, because "since that nameless hour"--presumably the hour of his great sin, good and evil, fear or love have lost their power over him. But such immunity is a denial of life. When contemplating suicide on a cliff of the Jungfrau, Manfred sees himself at one with dead nature:

> To be thus,
> Grey-hair'd with anguish, like those blasted pines,
> Wrecks of a single winter, barkless, branchless,
> A blighted trunk upon a cursed root
> Which but supplies a feeling of decay,
> And to be thus, eternally be thus,
> Having been otherwise! . . .
> (Act 1, Scene 2, lines 66-71)

The imagery recalls that of Alastor, while pointing out the significant difference in approach: Shelley's doomed protagonist dies, touching the tree and is buried under its decaying leaves,

becoming one with dying nature; Manfred only sees himself "like" the blasted pines. Byron, as he frequently does, "philosophizes upon a tree", but he does so with depth and grandeur. The "single winter", the haunting crime which caused the death of a beloved being has made Manfred similar to the dead trees. The blasted pines hark back to the biblical Tree of the opening lines: indeed, the tree of knowledge is not that of life--but of death. The image pervades the poem: the phantom of Astarte bears the same stigma:

> Can this be death? there's bloom upon her cheek;
> But now I see it is no living hue,
> But a strange hectic--like the unnatural red
> Which Autumn plants upon the perish'd leaf.
> (Act 2, Scene 4, lines 98-101)

Both Shelley and Byron liken red Autumn leaves to the "hectic" red of fevered cheeks, which is not surprising in those days of so many deaths caused by the then incurable tuberculosis. It is strange that Keats, his dying brother's nurse and the victim of consumption himself, avoided this particular image, perhaps because of his innate love of trees and autumnal scenes.

But in Heaven and Earth, actual nature and nature put to metaphoric use become almost indistinguishable, fitly imaging the transient state of all life--moments before the flood.

Forests are doomed; they will disappear shortly and so, in the mind of the despairing Japhet, the very thought of forests presages doom:

> . . . Peace! What peace? the calm
> Of desolation and the stillness of
> The untrodden forest, only broken by the
> Sweeping tempest through its groaning boughs;
> (Part I, Scene 2, line 59)

As he approaches the cave on Caucasus, the sight of great mountain trees takes on the function of those previously only seen in his mind:

> Here in your rugged majesty of rocks
> And topling trees that twine their roots with stone
> In perpendicular places . . .
> . . . . . .
> Ye look eternal! Yet, in a few days,
> Perhaps even hours, ye will be changed, rent, hurl'd
> Before the mass of waters.
> (Part I, Scene 3, line 109)

The silence of foreboding was to Japhet as threatening as the stillness of a forest before the storm. Now the actual trees, vividly solid with their twining roots anchoring them fast to mountain rocks reiterate the same note: the groan of the imaginary boughs will soon be echoed and amplified a thousand fold by the rending and hurling of broken forest giants. Indeed, the chorus of Spirits passing from the cavern makes their fate quite explicit:

Cedar and pine shall lift their tops in vain,
All merged within the universal fountain,
Man, earth, and fire shall die . . .
(Part 3, Scene 3, line 103)

Towards the close of the drama, we see it happen. The agony of drowning men finds expression in the Chorus of Mortals:

The loathsome waters in their rage!
And with their roar make wholesome nature dumb!
The forest trees (coeval with the hour when Paradise upsprung
Ere Eve gave Adam knowledge for her dower,
Or Adam his first hymn of slavery sung),
So massy, vast yet green in their old age
Are overtopp'd,
Their summer blossoms by the surges lopp'd . . .
and a woman laments "the pleasant trees that o'er our noonday bent".

The tree leitmotif is used in this Mystery Play with a fine musical ear. From the imagined forest awaiting the tempest, we are led to the confrontation with the actual, growing trees who, to the certain knowledge of Japhet and the reader, are about to face the universal and ultimate tempest of the flood. The theme swells and grows, and crashes into the final song of holocaust, with, as it were, the note of woodwinds counterpointing two opposite themes: that of the dying world of peaceful domesticity--through the "pleasant trees" overshadowing human dwellings--and the tragic melody of the primal tree, the origin of human fall and sin.

Cain, though thematically preceding Heaven and Earth, must be considered now, for it is in this play that the theme of the Paradisal Tree is most searchingly explored.

Cain is called, by the author, "a Mystery". As is made clear in the Preface, the sub-title is intended to place the play in the category of medieval Mysteries and Moralities. But this can also be seen as one of Byron's attempts to come to grips with the basic mystery of existence and, probably, the chief obstacle barring him from embracing some form of Christianity. The figure of Cain, doomed to sin, was one with which Byron could easily identify. It is the obverse side of the coin--which features Don Juan, debonair, young and forever miraculously extricated from adversity. These two are, to misquote Kipling, "brothers under the skin", and come into the world almost simultaneously--not by accident. Don Juan, too, like his maker, is doomed to sin--if cheerful adultery can be considered sinful, as it must have been by the unhappy lover of an array of married ladies, who, at the close of his life, dreamed of a peaceful reunion with his wife. But the poet has an indulgent smile for his Don's peccadilloes, just as he was quite prepared to enjoy the amenities of his role of cavaliere servente to the Countess Guiccioli at that time of his career.[5]

Yet Cain poses the same question with the seriousness of tragedy. Cain too, by the very nature of his situation foreshadows the great sin which Byron, in his own judgment, shares with Manfred--that of incest. Evil exists and is not a matter for laughter. Why has it been accepted by the Creator? In Cain there is never a doubt as to the presence of the Creator. The doubt rests with the attributes of the All-Powerful: can ultimate goodness admit the existence of sin, pain and suffering? The question is focused on the central image of the poem--that of the Paradisal Tree.

Cain refuses to join in the family worship, for he questions the necessity of death. Eve explains it as the just punishment for the primal sin: "The fruit of our forbidden tree begins to fall."

To Adam, there is a question too: "Oh, God! why didst thou plant the tree of knowledge?" But Cain wonders why the "tree of life" was not plucked too?

After all, the tree of life was also the tree of knowledge--both are good, so "how can both be evil?" The tree was planted in the centre, in close proximity to the dwelling of Adam and Eve. Why were they subjected to this temptation? Why put a tree to such use, when all the gardens of Eden abounded in its

brethren, docilely bearing rich fruit for the use of the living? In Cain, the tree embodies the great existential questions, and, in itself, unites the two antinomies of life and death, death being brought about by knowledge.

Led by Lucifer, Cain obtains an all-inclusive view of the universe. The "innumerable lights" of stars seem familiar to him:

> Why, I have seen the fire-flies and fire-worms
> Sprinkle the dusky groves and the dim banks
> In the dim twilight, brighter than yon world
> Which bears them. (Act 2, Scene 1, lines 128-9)

Lucifer replies: "Thou hast seen both worms and worlds / Each bright and sparkling."

And so the darkness of space is made close to Cain by the familiar image of woods in the twilight, the tree here creating a cosmic link, providing solace and dispensing knowledge, faithful to its primal role.

Yet, when confronted with Lucifer's statement that all creation, being made for Adam, fell with Adam ("Had Adam not fallen, all had stood."), Cain rails against the "lying tree". To have the animal world condemned to death without allowing it the taste of the apple appears to him the ultimate cruelty. But then, the tree lied: it promised knowledge, yet "we know nothing!".

Lucifer offers no solace, but has an answer, the only answer Cain will receive:

> It may be death leads to the highest knowledge
> And being of all things the sole thing certain,
> At least leads to the surest science; therefore
> The tree was true, though deadly.
> (Act 2, Scene 2, lines 165-8)

The tree which grows in the centre of Eden bears life and death at once. For this Lucifer hastens to disclaim all responsibility. And mankind will continue to exclaim in agony, with Manfred: "The tree of knowledge is not that of life!"

Thus the cosmic search provided no conclusive answers, Lucifer only being willing to leave Cain with a larger question:

> Evil and good are things in their own essence
> And not made good or evil by the giver,
> But if he gives you good--so call him; if
> Evil springs from him do not name it mine
> Till ye know better its true fount; and judge
> Not by words, though of spirits but the fruits
> Of your existence such as it must be.
> One good gift has the fatal apple given--
> Your reason: . . . (Act 2, Scene 2, lines 452-60)

Knowledge then, the one attainable fruit of the fatal tree is a boon, even though that other fruit--life--is only granted in a limited way. The sorrow of this limitation is made obvious by the cypress tree, mournfully overshadowing the sleep of the infant Enoch, as Cain finds him on his return to earth. "A gloomy tree, which looks as if it mourned "O'er what it shadows;

wherefore didst thou / Choose it for our child's canopy?" This is Cain's question to Adah who explains that the tree shuts off the sunlight most effectively. Cain has a sense of foreboding, as he gazes upon the sleeping child--the complete innocent who had "not plucked the fruit" of that other tree.

Yet the shadow of the cypress was invested with knowledge. Soon, young Enoch was to share his parents' banishment and sorrow. The dark tree of prophecy partakes of the doom engendered by the archetypal question tree.

It is not by accident that, when beginning our tree-directed search through the cantoes of Don Juan, we meet our image in close conjunction with a sarcastic reference to Wordsworth: let us quote the stanza in full:

> Young Juan wandered by the glassy brooks,
> Thinking unutterable things: he threw
> Himself at length within the leafy nooks
> Where the wild branch of the cork forest grew;
> There poets find materials for their books,
> And every now and then we read them through,
> So that their plan and prosody be eligible,
> Unless, like Wordsworth they prove unintelligible.
> (Canto I, Stanza XC)

We have, as no doubt Byron had, met many young men seeking solitude within leafy nooks, from the poet of the Prelude, to Endymion on Latmos, not to mention the seeker-victim of Alastor. Byron's creations themselves are not immune from this fate

common to all young men who are longing for their real or imaginary lady-loves, or "outcasts of their own dark mind". Manfred and Childe Harold pursue their doomed quests through many forest-enclosed solitudes; we are on familiar ground, yet now we are invited to enjoy the situation with a chuckle, rather than pursue it with compassion and terror. Don Juan's musings upon "himself and the whole earth", taking him directly to the memory of "Donna Julia's eyes" must lead us to the identical conclusion with that of the poet's:

> If you think 'twas philosophy that this did
> I can't help thinking puberty assisted.
> (Canto I, Stanza XCIII)

So the leafy nooks, carefully localised in Spain where cork trees grow, create a friendly, if conventional background to a well-known situation. But the novelty of this treatment lies precisely in that tone of indulgent amusement.

But on occasions, even in Don Juan, our image assumes a weighty note. In their island Eden, Haidée and Juan cannot bear to be apart from each other:

> The tree cut from its forest root of years
> . . . . . .
> Would wither less than these two torn apart.
> (Canto IV, Stanza X)

And Eden, even a sea-shore one, must have a tree, if only a

metaphoric one. But, unfortunately, the landscape offers no shelter of trees: "They should have lived together deep in woods", notes the poet. But they are in Lambro's house, and Haidée has her terrifying dream, only to wake up to a more terrifying reality. The idea of safety and shelter in the woods, and of tragedy where this is not forthcoming is an old one: many a young hero and many a loving couple found salvation among trees, or grew up within their protection--from Parsifal to Snow White. Such use of the stuff of legend and fairy tale lightens and leavens this story in which biting satire mingles with the picaresque; a scathing judgment of the poet's own era, is woven round the adventures of an indestructible, if venial Prince Charming.

Poor Haidée, daughter of a Moorish mother, embodies the life-asserting bounty of the olive tree, but also springs from a soil which has nurtured "many a poison-tree", therefore her reaction to her lover's wounding and abduction must be an extreme one: passionate love and fiery despair destroy her, but she falls, still an integral part of nature--"like a cedar". The antinomies of love and sorrow, life and death are here bodied forth by a masterly combination of tree imagery. As Haidée dies, taking her unborn child with her, she is seen as

a blighted "blossom and bough", "the bleeding flower and blasted fruit of love"; the metaphor of the nature figure is worked out in delicately traced detail to a beautiful completion.

While trees serve a metaphoric function only in Canto IV, they resume their lively role of background and shelter in Canto V and it is no accident, perhaps, that Juan escapes captivity in the harem without leaving any dying victim behind, but to the sound of laughter. The orange and jasmine groves through which he is led to the inner sanctum of Gulbeyaz actually bloom and scent the air no less effectively than the heartening smells of cooking food, so badly craved by Juan and Johnson.

When Dudu makes the startling discovery as to the true nature of her bedfellow, she uses the beneficent trees to bamboozle the Mother of the Maids. She relates a dream of pleasant woods, a golden apple she picked and a bee which flew out of it and stung her to the heart--and let Freudians do what they may with this dream imagery! Suffice it to say for our purpose, that the story is believed--and once more trees, if only seen in a dream (and even in a dream that did not really take place), perform their function of sheltering and saving the hero.

In the Cantoes devoted to the siege and sack of Ismail,

such gentle presences have no place, nor do they grow in snowy Russian capitals or in the haunts of the beau monde in London.

But as Byron muses on the motivation of Adeline, intent upon preventing the Duchess of Fitz-Fulke's conquest of the Don, he uses a strange image to prove his hatred of "argument":

> 'Tis sad to hack into the root of things
> They are so much intertwisted with the earth
> So that the branch a goodly verdure flings,
> I care not if an acorn gave it birth.
> (Canto XIV, Stanza LIX)

It is certain that his ensuing discussion of Adeline's methods, which includes the hilarious refusal of Lord Henry "to interfere" is a "branch of goodly verdure" and leads our interest well away from any psychological acorns, which, anyway, are quite obvious from the surface growth of that particular tree.

There is not a moment in this Canto when we do not smile--even the ominous tree of knowledge, given such weighty treatment in Cain here connects with "Eve's millinery", the fig leaf:

> The earliest knowledge of that tree so knowing
> As far as I know that the church receives.
> (Canto XIV, Stanza LXXVIII)

Throughout the length of this lengthy poem, the tree image--whether used as symbol or descriptive background, never loses its connotation of beneficence and fertility and most

often strikes the appropriate note of smiling observation. Even when dealing with sorrowful situations, as in the death of Haidée, it never fails the positive, uplifting melody it has been given to carry.

It is significant that Cain was written at the same time as the Cantoes of Don Juan saw the light of day. The mystery play can be seen as the other side of the coin of Byron's art--and the tree image accurately epitomizes this "unity in diversity".

Only a Byron could have written--at the same period of his career, too--two poems in which a controlling idea was treated in such disparate, yet not contradictory ways: since to him self-realization was the ultimate goal of both life and work--even if it had to be attained at the cost of guilt and despair, his Cain had to take humanity into eternal exile because he could not accept the justice of knowledge and death inevitably conjoined; therefore he sinned against the Ultimate Power but remained himself. And at the same time another of Byron's creations, his lovable, amoral hero, a sinner without compunction, can be sent on a never-ending quest. The Tree of Death, Life and Knowledge brooded over the tragedy of Cain; Don Juan meets the leaves of that ominous trees functioning

as costume for the array of bewitching Eves who preside over his adventures. Cain and Don Juan, Childe Harold in all his moods--Manfred and Beppo--these dual moods and modes of writing can be found in the poet's fascinating, tragic and ironic life story. We must agree with this clinching statement:

> He lives that eternity which is art. He is more than a writer: his virtues and vices alike are precisely those entwined at the roots of his poetry. He is poetry incarnate. The others are dreamers; he is the thing itself.[9]

According to one critic, then, Byron is one of the great Romantics, not only because of his work, but because of the strangely congruent tragedy and irony of his life. This voice is not always in accord with other critical views.

C. M. Bowra, for instance, in his concluding chapter of The Romantic Imagination, makes the following statement:

> In it (the Romantic age) five major poets, Blake, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats, despite many differences agreed on one vital point: that the creative imagination is closely connected with an unseen order behind visible things.[10]

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[9] G. Wilson Knight, "Two Eternities", Collection of Critical Essays, Twentieth Century Views, p. 16.

[10] C. M. Brown, The Romantic Imagination (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949, paperback, 1961), p. 271.

About Byron, whom the author considers not in agreement with the poets cited above, he remarks further:

> . . . Byron, while sharing many of their subjects and tastes, denied the importance of the imagination, and did not believe in any transcendental order.[11]

The accuracy of this view is obvious to a student of Byron and the writers to whom he is being compared. Yet the "sharing of tastes and subjects" seemed to us important enough to turn to his work in our final chapter, both in order to provide a kind of control and comparison and to find enough things in common which might justify such a juxtaposition. As has been seen in our study there are moments, in the opening Canto of Childe Harold, in Don Juan, and in the Mystery Plays, when Byron comes close to his contemporaries in either a subtle blending of the "seen" with the "unseen", or a bold use of the tree image as controlling symbol which far remove him from the stiff personification of his admired 18th century poets whom Wordsworth so severely criticized.

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[11] C. M. Brown, The Romantic Imagination, p. 271.

Whether he wishes to admit it or not, Byron's creative imagination is at work, while his subject matter and the courageous assertion of the freedom of the human spirit in face of a hostile society and universe do not permit his omission from a scrutiny of his era.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

As this study progressed, we found ourselves faced with the curious phenomenon of our chosen analogue controlling the shape of the work: in other words, our scrutiny of trees grew like a tree itself, sprouting unexpected branches and rooting in surprising layers of soil.

We have seen Shakespeare planting trees that could be faithful images of the natural object, while carrying a wealth of disparate, symbolic fruit. We have stood in awe before Milton's Paradisal tree, weighty with cosmic meaning, yet bearing something remarkably like our daily acquaintances--peaches or oranges. We have then turned our attention to the era under scrutiny.

Bloom has this to say about the poets of that period:

> . . . what allies Blake and Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats is their strong mutual conviction that they are reviving the true English tradition of poetry which they thought had vanished after the death of Milton, . . . [1]

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[1] Harold Bloom, "The Internalization of Quest. Romance", Romanticism and Consciousness: Essays in Criticism, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 1970), p. 5.

The awe-inspiring trees of Blake became our starting point. Here the tree was pure symbol, internalized and spiritual, growing and rooting both in the Garden of Eden and the inmost depths of human consciousness. Since the object of our study was the explaration of an image which retains its physical attributes while being capable of metaphoric function in varying degrees, Blake's poetry could only be a starting point and--almost the instrument of measuring the metaphor's internalization.

I realize that, by making a connection between any of the English Romantics and the theories of Jung, I must incur the censure of any disciple of Harold Bloom to whom the two modes of thought are mutually exclusive:

> Possibly because of the clear associations between Jung and German Romanticism, it has been too easy for Freudian intellectuals to confound Romanticism with various modes of irrationalism.[2]

Yet Jung's analytical view of the collective unconscious and racial memories was of considerable assistance as we faced various problems which confronted us in the course of this study.

Any student of Blake will be struck by a feeling of

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[2] Ibid.

recognition when reading the following pronouncement: "No tree, it is said, can grow to heaven unless its roots reach down to hell." Here Jung, in his Aion,[3] discusses Christ as the symbol of self and explores the concepts of good and evil, from early patristic writing to the findings of modern psychology. His conclusion linking the archetypal shadow to the negative aspects of the total self concurs with Blake's stance against orthodoxy. Jung's tree, it might be said, reaches from Innocence to Experience, through the living plant entity, similar to the state of Beulah. And so, both through the image used and the conceptual value, the writings of Jung appeared to be relevant to this study.

Specifically, Wordsworth's overt commitment to an almost mechanistic theory of association had to be reconciled with his use of the image in which the empiric world merged harmoniously with its equivalent created by the poet's imagination. In this we were assisted by Wordsworth's own critical pronouncements, by views of modern scholars and the clinical findings of Jung.

These also provided useful guideposts into the study of Coleridge's use of the image, especially when that study was

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[3] C. G. Jung, Psyche and Symbol, p. 43.

subjected to the light of Professor Lowes's Road to Xanadu.

An approach to Shelley's forceful striving after a complete merger of not only metaphoric tenor and vehicle, but of either the creative self or the persona was made easier by some penetrating insights of Martin Buber; some glances at Jung and mainly the letters and critical pronouncements of Keats himself were our main guide to the formulation of a view of this poet's cheerful sacrifice of the ego to the thing created.

There is a difference in intensity in the use of the tree metaphor between the four first-mentioned poets and Byron. This whole study was devoted to studying their varying approaches to the use of nature imagery and the differences are great--only with Byron, the metaphor becomes a mere simile--where the tree is frankly "like or as" some inner reality and does not reach into that reality's depths.

Yet in all five poets under scrutiny we have met trees which triumphantly carry the double burden of natural growth and deeper poetic truth: whether like Keats the poet describes what he imagines, or like Byron--he writes of what he sees; yet there always is a strong bridge between the two modes of reality: when Wordsworth sees a thorn tree, his creative imagination imbues the gnarled shape with a life in harmony

with its outward appearance--and when Coleridge sees a bird on a wintry bough the colour combination makes the apple of summer as true as if summer were here; Shelley's withered Rousseau emerges from a withered root, fit image of a failed life, and "gummed leaves" burn on the altar of Keats's self-immolation. Even Manfred, creation of the "detached" Byron who is said to descry the importance of imagination, can identify with dead pines, blasted by one cruel winter. Fresh or growing, green or withered, autumnal or of the spring, beneficent or malevolent--maternal or virginal--the trees of the Romantic poets live in both "palpable" worlds--that of earthly vigour and that of spiritual splendour.

In his penetrating study "King Lear as Metaphor",[4] L. C. Knights directs our attention to the differentiation made by Martin Foss between the notion of symbol and that of metaphor. To the static symbol, Foss opposes metaphor seen as "a process of tension and energy. . . . " This ceaseless demand for an expenditure of energy we meet when confronted with Romantic

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[4] L. C. Knights, "King Lear as Metaphor", Myth and Symbol: Critical Approaches and Applications ed. Bernice Shore (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1963), pp. 22-23, citing Martin Foss, Symbol and Metaphor in Human Experience (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949).

nature imagery seems to offer a key to the understanding of the paradox we have studied: we must, at all times, as does each of the poets, in his own way and with varying degrees of intensity, forge the bridge between the appearance of the living, natural tree and its relevance to persona, theme or the poet's confessional mood.

Over a century and several world catastrophes later, they point directly to their spiritual descendants: when the Great Rooted Blossomer, Yeats's chestnut tree, engenders the question: "how can we know the dancer from the dance?", existence and essence merge, as they do in Wordsworth's single tree, "of many one" and in the oaks of Hyperion.

Shelley's tangled boughs of heaven, inextricably joined with the hair of a Maenad, are close kin to Leonard Cohen's sky tree in Prayer for Sunset:

> The sun is tangled
> in black branches,
> raving like Absalom
> between sky and water,
> struggling through dark terebinth
> to commit its daily suicide.

The son victim hangs on the tree, the dying man and god; Absalom and Christ are present in the overtly natural image of the setting sun and the darkened boughs. We must agree with Harold Bloom:

For the English reader this age (Romanticism) may be defined as extending from the childhood of Blake and Wordsworth to the present moment.[5]

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[5] Harold Bloom, "The Internalization of Quest. Romance", The Romantic Consciousness, p. 4.

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