

## Lamia. Narrative structure.

Keats narrative frame work series of  
negative capability.

(The details of the Pattern in the narrative poems of Keats are almost unvariably the same. To begin with, the lover falls into some kind of 'sworn' or 'sleep' (compare also the poet's 'draconian' at the beginning of Nightingale ode from this state he awakens into enchantment. This enchantment is connected with a 'lady' who may or may not be supernatural - if she is really an enchantress, like Lamia. The whole experience is intensified and the outcome is disastrous. While the trance intoxication lasts every sense is indulged - Keats always introduces flowers, fruits, warm music and perfume, the warmth and colour of summer are always suggested, and erotic experience is always the 'supreme sensuous culmination'. At last, suddenly, and without warning the trance is over and the lover awakes to a world not only deprived of beauty but transformed into something repellent or hostile).

Perhaps the emotional pattern appears in its purest form in 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci'. The lover confronts us, pale but with the rose of former ardour still fading on his cheek; he has been lulled to sleep by his enchantress in the midst of summer warmth, fragrance and ~~midst~~ <sup>melody</sup> of summer ~~melody~~; and he awakes after a hideous nightmare to find himself on the cold



kill side. Such concentration is rare. In the other narrative to introduce extraneous to introduce extraneous elements for the purpose of filling out and decorating his story. Nevertheless the sequence of images in all the central episodes remains same.

In 'Lamia' the sequence is identical. Whether he was fully aware of it or not, Keats was almost certainly attracted by Burton's synopsis of the Philosopher story because it presented him with a situation which allowed him to dwell at length on the obsessional sequence of emotions with all its customary physical accompaniments. Burton's account in the Anatomy of melancholy mentions love and "great content" followed by an awakening in which those experiences become mere illusions, the victim Lycius is young and susceptible to "passions of love", the fatal woman is "Phantom" whose apparatus of enchantment includes singing, weeping and feasting. — Burton also gives Keats two important new elements — the figure of the reasoning Apollonius and the fact of the suffering of the enchantress — which were to have a profound effect on his poem.

In Lamia plot and the usual emotion sequence are two sides of a single



coin. Lycius on meeting Lamia falls into swoon; he passes from it to a new world, for the accompanist~~s~~ her through Corinth to the enchanted surroundings of her magic palace; and, while there happiness (Laughed) last, their senses are indulged by magic, fragrant summer warmth and erotic pleasure; when the spell is finally broken the "mystles sicken" the music dies, and the "flush" of love is replaced by the Pallor of death. In all his narrative sense of the poems Keats has expressed his sense of the harsh contrast between the ideal and the real by means of the symbolism.)

Whatever its incidental advantages, then, a sketchy narrative framework — like the frames and twigs on which the spider is at liberty to spin in its own course for his expressing emotions, some episode that will express and objectify them satisfactorily. Thus it is not quite enough to say that the web is the thing, without adding that any web has a characteristic pattern. How much Keats' pattern matters is brought home when we realise that the distinctive equality of the writing always forces the pattern on our attention, whatever range of extraneous material there may be in the poem. This quality is apparent in the first part of the "Lamia" where



Keats describes the beauty  
and horror of the snake.  
When the tension between delight and pain  
is, at its height Keats' web" is most intri-  
cate, "interweaving" like Lamia herself  
"lustrous with the gloomier tapestries" with  
showing itself "rainbow-sided, touched with  
misery", and deriving its peculiar signifi-  
cance and strength from the poet; inability  
to ~~up~~ unpurple bliss from its neighbour-  
ing pain

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