CHAPTER III

THE POETIC IDIOM
OF SHELLEY AND
KEATS
Words strain,
Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
Decay with impression, will not stay in place,
Will not stay still.

T.S. Eliot, **Burnt Norton**

'Style is the man himself!'¹ This definition of Buffon explicitly states that style is the inevitable expression of the emotional and intellectual experiences of a writer — a reflection of the author's mind. The objects and incidents which a writer encounters and which leave a profound impression on his mind are bodied forth in appropriate words. In fact, the poet's idiom reaches an absolute perfection only when the actual and vividly experienced material finds expression in vivid words. Throughout the history of English Literature we come across writers devising methods to mould language in order to suit a particular mode of feeling or experience.

Ben Jonson and John Donne made the earliest attempts to wrench the poetic idiom free from the elegantly exalted attitude of the Elizabethens. Although Ben Jonson recommended a simple and lucid poetic idiom free from the affected literariness of Spenser and the Elizabethens yet his lapses

into classical mythology threw him back on the different forms of poetic ornamentation. Again, Ben Jonson's recommendation that a poet should tighten and discipline his poetic diction for the expression of his feeling was bound to slide into a gaudy phraseology. John Donne, however, shaped an individual style which stood in direct relation to the originating experiences of the poet. He practised with an idiom which had strong sensuous and physical properties. His was an experimentation with words associated with fundamental human activities. His colloquial idiom is derived from his own instinctive reactions and is exactly fitted to his keen perceptions and emotions. It is a reflection of the healthy relation between language and feeling besides an uncontrolled indulgence in personal emotions. Some others who followed Donne's vigorous and undecorated language proved a failure because of the absence of a distinctive mode of feeling and the overwhelming immediate personal emotion. A growing body of opinion, however, was of the view that John Donne's colloquial directness was not a good one. Pope, in particular, complains about Donne's style being 'rugged and unmusical'. It was in the 18th century that the force of this plain and colloquial idiom reached the end of its tether. The 18th century poets recommended a deliberate blending of the poetic
idiom for the achievement of various poetic effects and therefore, prescribed words, phrases, turns of expression, remote from the colloquial phraseology but enriched with foreign idioms and derivatives. The 18th century poets' subject was no longer informed with emotion and therefore their's was a direction back to the earlier poets who used images in order to evoke feeling. Dr. Johnson defending the charge of artificiality against Pope's version of Homer stated that one's literary erudition is acknowledged and accepted only when coloured by an artificial diction and that effectation and elegance were justifiable as 'nature' could no longer stand the test of the time. However, it was against this substitution of an exalted diction bereft of genuine feeling for a natural diction as the genuine expression of a genuine feeling that Wordsworth reacted violently. Instead, he recommended the organic view of style — a language indicating the worth and genuineness of feeling. Although he, himself, was charged of disrupting this relation between feeling and language at times.

Broadly speaking, there have been two views about poetic idiom—one is that the poet's content should be vested in simple and common words associated with the living interests
of people and the other is to clothe the poet's intellectual and emotional experiences in an elegant and affected idiom. A good poetic style is a result of the balance between these two opposite views.

Both Shelley and Keats, in their awareness of the subtleties of language use, followed the Romantic axioms on poetic idiom. Both are, therefore, seen struggling for a precise expression for their content which would recreate in the mind of the reader something akin to their own vivid emotional impressions. Each poet strikes his own way in accord with his different perceptions and emotional convictions. Shelley frequently demands that the language of a literary work should be devised in accord with his content and attempts to express his exploration of the elusive mystical experiences. And, Keats's poetic idiom is a calling back to a less strained manner of writing which would capture his keen sensuous perception with precision and exactness.

The chiaroscuro of agreement and disagreement between Shelley and Keats leaves an unmistakable impression on their poetry, too. The salient tendencies of Shelley's philosophy of art are ultimately determined by his commitment to the amelioration of the social order. As a result of this his
.... Shelley produces words which, though not perfect, are in one way more satisfactory than any of Dryden's long pieces: that is to say, they display a harmony between the poet's real and professed intention...."

Contrary to this, Keat's poetry remains cherished in its continuous development to come to grips with his continuously evolving vision of the world and critical statements emanating from this source. Pre-disposed to make inordinate transcendental claims for poetry, Shelley consistently seeks to find in natural objects a symbol for his own abstract imaginings and, for an expression of such individual perceptions and feelings, transcends the limits of a conventionally communicable idiom only to provoke the latter-day critique of F.R. Leavis regarding this "weak grasp on the

actual." On the other hand, Keats, with his feet more firmly on the ground, manipulates language to write poetry of concrete solidity exacting from the same critic an appraisal for his "strong grasp upon actualities." Leavis's firm critical discrimination has had wider currency in that all admirable studies on Shelley and Keats have voiced it. In fact, there has been no attempt to differ from this contradistinction between the two even in the post-Leavisian critical investigation. But, while Shelley's fanciful imagination both in his perception and his idiom generated a huge body of critical condemnation, it exerted a stronger influence on the imagination of the people. This becomes evident in T.S. Eliot's regret, "... that Shelley did not live to put his poetic gifts, which were certainly of the first order, at the service of more tenable beliefs." And, likewise, Keats's chief strength becomes the source of his

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4 *Scrutiny, A Quarterly Review* Vol. IV, No. 4, March, 1936. The essay was later published in F. R. Leavis' collection of essays entitled *Revaluations*.

chief weakness in that his poems, spurred by his aspiration toward his avowed aim, remained tentative and unfulfilled explorations and, therefore, came to be accepted with some reserve.

T.S.Eliot's objection to Shelley's poetic idiom was that it did not express what was familiar and ordinary in the reader's experience. He offers, as an illustration, the following lines from Shelley's *Hellas*:

"The world's great age begins anew,
The golden years return,
The earth doth like a snake renew
Her winter weeds outworn,
Heaven smiles, and faiths and empires aevem
Like wrecks of a dissolving dream." 6

T.S.Eliot's critique rests on the comment that "snakes do not renew their cast skins, and do not cast them at the end of winter, and that a seventeenth-century poet would have known his mind on such points." 7 Yet, if Eliot finds Shelley's idiom too far removed from the experience of the common man it is only because the poet was holding on to the main Romantic tenet of organic style. The organic style demanded

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that the poetic idiom should reflect the individuality of
the writer and not be imitative and conventional. The author
realizes and grasps his thoughts, impressions, imaginings
and perceptions through diction and therefore the whole mode
of feeling and thought should be consistent with the language
he uses. This effect would come about when the creative
imagination, stirred to action by a powerful feeling, would
find expression naturally and spontaneously in a language
which is inevitable. Although Shelley remains essentially a
staunch believer in the organic view of style, as this agrees
with his world-view, yet he exhibits a rhetorical tendency
because of his over-indulgence in passionate idealization.
His unrestrained liberation of passions and his longings for
an apocalypse could only end in the verbal exaggeration of
feeling and thought. His social purpose to reform society and
inspire political action in essence remains indistinguishable
from its verbal expression so that every word symbolizes a
world of freedom from constraints imposed by social and
religious codes. Shelley's emotional and intellectual pre-
disposition toward poetry led to a verbal exaggeration of his
feeling and thought. As a result of this, we encounter a
powerful and biting imagery, images of speed and energy, value-
words representing violent action and turbulent emotions. As
Patricia Hodgart points out:
"Compared with the majestic stillness
typical of Wordsworth's natural scenery,
Shelley's world is in ceaseless motion...
His inspiration comes not from the frozen
moments of Wordsworth's 'Spots of time'
but more often from storm and wind."\(^9\)

**Ode to the West Wind** is one such poem, the idiom of which
evokes the violent and unknown powers of Nature. The
energetic action of the 'wind' strikes a perfect chord with
the poet's revolutionary temper and the harshness of language
is the inevitable and irreplaceable expression of this mode
of feeling:

> "Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere;
Destroyer and preserver; hear, o, hear!"\(^9\)

The 'West Wind' is perceived as a symbol of revolutionary
change destroying the old order and heralding a new one and
to
the words are exactly fit the revolutionary spirit of Shelley.
The uncontrollable force of his imagination results in a
rapid movement of his ideas and images which eventually find
an expression in an abundance of similies and metaphors
following one another incessantly. This unrestrained liberation


\(^9\) *Shelley: Poetical Works*, p.577.
of passions has been testified elsewhere by the poet himself:

"Less oft is peace in Shelley's mind
than calm in waters, seen."\(^{10}\)

This uncontrolled indulgence of the poet's personal emotions is reflected nowhere better than in the poet's emphasis on weakness and pain in *Ode to the West Wind*. With a prescience for a radical transformation of the world which would lead to an apocalyptic phase, his agitated soul is given over to the sole sentiment of the mutability of its present existence, recalling the past and encroaching upon the future:

"The impulse of thy strength, only less free
Than thou, O uncontrollable! If even
I were as in my boyhood, and could be
The comrade of thy wanderings over Heaven,
As then, when to outstrip thy skiey speed
Scarce seemed a vision; I would ne'er have striven
As thus with thee in prayer in my sore need.
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: timeless, and swift, and proud."\(^{11}\)

The language has a constant and invariable significance as it transforms whatever Shelley sees into a symbolic expression

\(^{10}\) *Shelley: Poetical Works*, p. 670.

of his prophetic function as a poet. Shelley's pre-
dispositions towards the doctrines of perfectibility,
universal benevolence and justice, his defiance of authority
and established religion are effected by his awareness of the
subtleties of language use. His natural world remains alive
with some animating spirit and his language reflects the
wildness and the awesome splendour of the scene reflecting
his own agitated spirit:

"Thus thou, ravine of Arve -- dark, deep ravine --
Thou many-coloured, many-voiced vale,
Over whose mines, and crags, and caverns sail
Fast cloud-shadows and sunbeams:awful scene,
Where Power in likeness of the Arve comes down
From the ice-gulfs that oird his secret throne,
Bursting through these dark mountains like the flame
Of lightning through the tempest;-- thou dost
lie, .."12

Each word in these lines from Mont Blanc evokes terror, a
sense of solitude and the landscape has a sinister life of
its own.

Besides, using an idiom expressive of the poet's strong
human endeavours and aspirations to alter human conditions,
Shelley struggles to express the ineffable and this, too,

12Shelley: Poetical Works, p.532.
gets reflected in the syntactic pattern of his poem. Shelley's poetic idiom represents an attempt to capture the individual writer's personal vision. Seeking Platonic reality, his poetry aspires towards the exploration of the elusive mystical experience which he is always striving to grasp in words. Therefore, it was crucial to the character of Shelley's poetry that its language be metaphorical and figurative.

One can easily retrace the origin of the metaphorical view of language to the German Romantics. The British Romantics, however, with their keen social conscience, found in Rousseau's 'language of the heart' a wealth of material to achieve persuasion in the audience. They prescribed a metaphorical and figurative use of language in a state of passion and took a hard look at the 19th century decorum and all attempts towards a rationalistic contrivance of the poetic language. There the Romantics perceived in this linguistic contrivance a dangerous indication of the 19th century obsession with artificial artistry. Shelley offered a radical novelty of his view of the poetic language:

"You say that words will neither debauch our understandings, nor distort our moral feelings — You say that the time of youth could not be better employed than in the acquisition of
classical learning. But 'words' are the very things that so eminently contribute to the growth and establishment of prejudice: the learnings of 'words' before the mind is capable of attaching correspondent ideas to them is like pos(s)essing machinery with the use of which we are not unacquainted as to be in danger of misusing it. But words are merely signs of ideas, how many evils, and how great spring from the annexing inadequate and improper ideas to words. The words honor, virtue, duty goodness, are examoles of this remark. 13

Shelley's poetic idiom remains abstract and vague because it is informed and nurtured by elusive experiences and emotions. And, because of his abstract approach, the simplest and the common-place objects of nature take on the colour of unreal settings and the poet's perception of nature tends towards vagueness and imprecision. Both *Pymn to the Intellectual Beauty* and *Mont Blanc* are Shelley's attempt to recapture the hidden power in the Universe -- a force to reckon within the 13th century tradition of sublime. However he leans too heavily on the personifying tendencies of the poetic language and the false claim of words to communicate the divine force:

"And what were thou, and earth, and stars and sea, If to the human mind's imaginings Silence and solitude were vacancy?"  

And for a corroboration of this airy presence one can but quote from Hazlitt:

"He (Shelley) gives us, for representation of things, rhapsodies of words. He does not lend the colours of imagination and the ornaments of style to the objects of nature, but paints gaudy, flimsy, allegorical pictures on cobwebs of his own brain."

The distance and delay between Shelley's rhetorical language and the object delineated in his poems is the very condition of his indifference and hostility towards the aesthetics of poetry. The full effect of this free play of language is perceptible in To a Skylark in which every attempt to reach the reference is thwarted — the word does not help us to get closer to the referent but only defers the object although every word is seen moving towards it. The poet fails to identify the nature of the 'skylark' in words as he is confronted and confused with a disruption between his language and the event:

14 Shelley: Poetical works, p.535.
15 A Preface to Shelley, p.113.
"What thou art we know not;
What is most like thee?
From rainbow clouds their flow or not
Droops so bright to see
As from thy presence showers a rain of melody."

We do not get a precise image of the 'skylark' since the poetic idiom provides no means of making it precise. The comparisons that Shelley makes enable us to get a number of the birds' features which contribute further to its elusiveness. In fact, these comparisons represent the very search for the expression which will capture and make the poet's experience precise. This process of arresting the fugitive meaning is made explicit in the subjects he chooses, viz: The Cloud, 'The West Wind', — the essential character of which is beyond exact description. The character of such natural phenomenon recedes to a lesser significance as they come to be represented and delineated as airy and unearthly. This process enables Shelley to detach himself from real time so that he is aware only of a kind of timeless movement wherein he can express his longing to perpetuate the sense of permanency in beauty and truth and peace in a moment of timelessness and to highlight the magic dream-world which he

thought poetry was. Likewise, Shelley's subject is ethereal in *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty* where he tries to define the quality of beauty through images which embody the unseen. The poet's Platonic idealism is evident when he defines 'beauty' as 'summer winds that creep from flower' and also as 'moonbeams that behind some piny mountain shower'. Shelley's 'intellectual beauty' is grasped only through its effects upon concrete and perceptible objects. His poetic expression remains informed by his uncontrolled indulgence in personal and compelling emotions which eventually shade off into patterns of language which convey the individual writer's personal vision. Shelley's inability to curb his proclivity to rhetoric and rhapsody came to be regarded as thin, lifeless and abstract:

"Language is alienated or degenerate unless it is crammed with the physical textures of actual experience, plumped with the rank juices of real life. Armed with this trust in essential Englishness, latinate or verbally disembodied writers (Milton, Shelley) could be shown the door, and pride of place assigned to the 'dramatically concrete' (Donne, Hopkins)."

If precision is the warrant of a genuine poetic idiom then it was but natural for the New Critics to lash out at Shelley who resorted to an over-rhetorical verbiage:

"...When my brain gets heated with thought, it soon boils, and throws off images and words faster than I can skim off."

The most threatening and widely acclaimed critical document, highlighting Shelley's effete academicism, was F.R. Leavis's *Revaluation*. Leavis's indifference and hostility are directed towards Shelley's neocolt of the intrinsic significance of poetry, always striving for an external reference for its worth and realization, and his failure for rendering his experiences in precise and definite terms:

"...Shelley's poetry is repetitious, vaporous, monotonously self-regarding and often emotionally cheap, and so, in a no very long run, boring..."

In fact, Leavis applies the same criteria while adjudging Milton, who is disparaged for his weighty phraseology, stylistic grandeur 'eloquence' and 'declamation' which vitiates 'his grasp of sense'.

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Along with Donne and Hopkins who are acclaimed as the prototypes of a genuine poetic idiom, one can see Keats, too, evincing the same sort of 'crystallization' in his poetic language. Their revivification of the common and everyday speech instead of a conventional, stereotyped and pre-conceived style is reminiscent of Keats's complete precision. He makes more startlingly realistic and precise his widely ranging experiences and expresses with poetic discipline his love for the rich luxuries and beauties of the world. Keats was quite aware that poetic language is the product of the tension between the colloquial language and the language which comes into being by the attempt of a poet to bind the common language to his poetic purpose. As long as he remained under the sway of his poetic axiom "that if poetry comes not as naturally as the leaves to a tree, it had better not come at all", Keats's reputation was clouded by hostile criticism for a verbal expression which conveyed his uncontrolled indulgence in factitious and erotic personal emotions. It was his capacity for intense empathy with nature and the life around him which, with the passage of time, led him to restrain his passions or rather led him to a positive evaluation of his unrestrained passions and, thereby, resulted in a definite

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and concrete poetic expression. The greater effectiveness of John Keats's expositions outside the 19th century was possible only when he tore down the stultifying prejudices of the Romantics towards the author's personality. But this aim of Keats to establish a genuine theory of literature was rendered possible only when he turned to develop and revify the poetic language too. This experimentation with the poetic idiom was the denominator of Leavis's eclat for Eliot's critical acumen:

"Sensibility alters from generation to generation in everybody,... but expression is only altered by a man of genius."?

Leavis points out that Eliot figures in the category of 'man of genius' because he acquired and developed the technical virtuosity to 'use words differently'—demonstrating innovative ways of using words that had become inevitable if contemporary poetry were to be written. And, Keats as the great revivifier of language is a man of genius according to Leavis's categorization.

Keats's ability to condense his emotions and make concrete and definite his thought by the aid of a disciplined poetic diction was determined by his proximity to the world

?1The Common Pursuit, p. 11.
of ordinary experience and his efforts to control the tendency towards the marvellous and ephemeral. Guided by a poetic theory which enabled him to take an adequate cognizance of realistic strains led in turn to a tone of stoicism in his expression rather than an elusive expression in an effortless rush of images. And the effects of his straightforward description come about through his awareness of the way language can be manipulated to explore and express realities. Each poem is an attempt to convey his perception of reality whether it is a description of an actual picture or one which is clearly delineated in his mind as a precise vision. Where Shelley's verbal expression is unpremeditated, untouched by reflection, resulting in an ephemeral nature-world, Keats's nature-pictures are accurate, founded on a definite and universal model. Keats's truthful observation and accurate description of the natural phenomenon is rendered in the following lines from *I Stood Tip-toe Upon a Little Hill* where he is on his guard against over-indulgence in rhetoric:

"I stood tip-toe upon a little hill
The air was cooling, and so very still,
That the sweet buds which with a modest pride
Full droopingly, in slanting curve aside,
Their scanty leaved, and finely tapering stems,
Had not yet lost those starry diadems
Caught from the early sobbing of the morn."\textsuperscript{22}

Each word renders nature as she is. Each word is carefully selected and arranged as a painter might do to convey the atmosphere he needs. It is a reality which can be expressed only by a normal language usage. Keats's concept of Negative Capability in which the poet's personality is merged with the object he contemplates was the determining factor behind his sensuous perceptions. This concept encouraged a state of mind which enables him to receive impressions of diverse kinds — his mind simply a receptacle for various experiences:

"... let us not therefore go hurryino about and collecting honey bee-like, buzzing here and there impatiently from a knowledge of what is to be arrived at: but let us open, our leaves like a flower and be passive and acceptive — budding patiently under the eye of Apollo and, taking hints from every noble insect that favours us with a visit."\textsuperscript{23}

This receptivity to the world around him is responsible for the sensuous suggestion of his imagery. Each word in the


\textsuperscript{23}The \textit{Letters of John Keats}, p. 56.
lines below from The Eve of St. Agnes is marked by an
impassioned sensuous contemplation — Keats has the ability
to discover a concrete image to convey the unique quality of
his emotion or thought that he intends to communicate:

"St. Agnes' Eve — Ah, bitter chill it was!
The owl, for all his feathers, was a-cold;
The hare limp'd trembling through the frozen grass,
And silent was the flock in woolly fold."

The tactile suggestion of the imagery is once again the
warrant of the vividness of his perception. The sensuous
aspects of diction are given further prominence in his
description of the dainties in the same poem:

"While he from forth the closet brought a heap
Of candied apple, quince, and plum, and gourd;
With jellies soother than the creamy curd
And lucent syrops, tinct with cinnamon."

Such proficiency to give sensuous pleasure to the oral and
aural senses is what is held as the sine quo non of an
effective style by Middleton Murray:

"You are an artist, you feel superbly, you are
plastic; that is, when you describe a thing
you see it and touch it with your hands: that
is real style."
In fact, he tightens and disciplines his poetic diction even when the subject is ethereal. We are given a physical sense of abstract ideas in the sensuous garb of concrete imagery and personification. In *Ode on Melancholy* he gives a concrete and life-like image by crystallizing his idea of the mutability and transitoriness of earthly joy:

"She dwells with Beauty — Beauty that must die; And joy, whose hand is ever at his lips Bidding adieu; ..."27

The sensuous aspect of Keats's versification is laudable because his whole mode of sound-turns is consistent with and has an immediate reference to his subject matter. It neither obscures nor falsifies his experiences and is the quintessence of absolute exactness of language.

Keats's poetic theory and practice was a dialectical tension between the desire to accept life as it is with a total receptivity and responsiveness to varied experiences and the almost uncontrollable impulse to the Romantic mode of feeling wherein one constantly recalls the past and frets about the future. The tensions arising from this incompatible position — his awareness of the mutability of human life and his craving for a permanent kind of truth and beauty —

is reflected in the paradoxes and related oays of tension within his poems. His poems express his emotional and intellectual dispositions in a dialectical structure. The *Eve of St. Agnes* weaves a pattern of contrasts between youth and age, warmth and cold, joy and sorrow and vigour and decay. The best illustration of this pattern of interwoven paradoxes is *Ode on a Grecian Urn* where Keats's contemplative and comprehensive experience that only an ambivalent and dialectical syntax can grasp his world-view which is in essence paradoxical and contradictory.

"Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness!
Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,
Sylvan historian, who can't thus express
A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme."  

Keats like a realistic, descriptive writer manipulates language to express static and the silent quality of the object of his contemplation — each word contributing to the majestic stillness, slow time of the 'Urn'.

Yet, in the concluding lines of this stanza this original emotion of serenity and calm which demanded on identical kind of an expression gives way to a linguistic expression reflecting a scene of wild commotion and noise:

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"What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?
What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?"

The aptness and suggestiveness of this pattern of contrasts between animate and inanimate, audible and inaudible, mortal and eternity, ephemeral and durable is seen at work throughout the poem.

Shelley's *A Lament* and Keats's verses entitled *Stanzas* reflect further their individual thoughts, feelings and perceptions through their awareness of the way language can be manipulated. Both poems deal with the potential tragedy of human nature — the transience of life and a sense of nostalgia for the past glory. However, Shelley's poem is no longer seen to present his passionate idealization but is an expression of the essential tragedy of life suppressed initially by his apocalyptic expectations. And, Keats's *Stanzas* is closer to the world of ordinary experience. Shelley's apocalyptic and prophetic vision seems to have fizzled out and his language is exactly fitted to his over-indulgence in melancholy. His idiom reflects both his turbulent emotions and patterns of language which call up gloomy sights, pictures

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of death and ruin and terror embodied in the moral order:

"O world! O life! O time!
On whose last steps I climb,
Trembling at that where I had stood before;
When will return the glory of your prime?
No more — Oh, never more!"

Shelley's nostalgic notes are of an idealistic nature and the features of pessimism and timidity are clearly associated with the words. The emphasis on weakness and pain gets easily reflected in:

"O world! O life! O time! ...
Oh, never more!"

On the other hand, Keats's Stanzas remains an expression of what is familiar in the reader's experience — a composite picture of the certainties of the everyday world. Keats's awareness of the nature of the world is accompanied by his feeling of deep acceptance and his language conforms to his mode of feeling. Keats makes a plea for tolerance and maintains a tone of stoicism. The sense derived from the simple, objective description reveals the author's mellow, infinite tolerance. Each word in the poem inspires the reader with a sense of calm:

30 Shelley: Poetical Works, p. 643.
"In drear-nighted December,
Too happy, happy tree,
Thy Branches ne'er remember
Their green felicity;
The north cannot undo them,
With a sleety whistle through them;
Nor frozen thawings glue them
From budding at the prime."

Keats's plastic form is made more explicit in
To Autumn. It is his deliberate attempt to renounce the
Miltonic false manner and recharge language with natural
vitality. To Autumn is free from the Romantic pain and
satiety, offering a lucid expression to the author's world­
view in that it is written in a mood untroubled by the
sadness at the transience of beauty. Each word reveals the
author's meek acceptance of life as it is. The harmony and
serenity of the scene is so subtle that it immediately
evokes the sense of richness and the rarity of the writer's
attitude to life:

"Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;
Consoiring with him how to load and bless
With fruit the vines that round the thatch­eves run;
To bend with apples the moss'd cottage­trees.

31Keats:Poetical Works,p.436.
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core:
To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells
With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,
And still more, later flowers for the bees,
Until they think warm days will never ease,
For summer has o'er-brimm'd their clammy cells.*

The poet rejoices in the beauty of autumn which is sober and subdued and each word —— 'mists and mellow fruitfulness', 'to load and bless', 'to bend with apples the moss'd, cottage-trees', 'fill all fruit with ripeness to the core': 'to swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells', 'o'er-brimm'd their clammy cells' —— conveys the warmth and richness of the autumn season. The idiom conveys the ripe fruitfulness and perfect calm and contentment. Conceived in greater simplicity, the precision in the description of the autumn season puts a clear picture with an economy that becomes inevitable in a plastic style. The sense derived from the simple objective description reveals the author's mellowness, calmness and contentment. The poetic idiom presents the richness of the season which works in the reader the very emotion that the writer aimed at producing -- serenity contentment, death as a part of life which inevitably leads to a philosophic calm and contentment.

This revivification of the common and everyday speech was preceded by Keats's critique of Milton enriching the poetic diction with merittrious derivatives and foreign idiom. Keats came to grips with the problem of poetic language at the time when he was writing Hyperion. During his composition of Hyperion he had made Milton his model but soon realized that any attempt to follow such a model would not only lead to pastiche and strained rhetoric but would also be against the demands of genuine art. He, therefore, gave up Hyperion:

"I have given up Hyperion — there were too many Miltonic inversions in it — Miltonic verse cannot be written but in an artful or rather artist's humour. I wish to give myself up to other sensations. English ought to be kept up."

"I have but lately stood on my guard against Milton. Life to him would be death to me. Miltonic verse cannot be written but in the vein of art."

Keats felt that Milton's grand style had lost touch with the vitality of common language. Milton's majestic diction and poetic ornamentation is artificial and conventional and is

33 Letters of John Keats, p. 292.
34 Ibid, pp. 325-326.
too far removed from the experience of the common man. It is a superficial idiosyncrasy where the poet is detached from complete involvement as the immediacy of experience is lost. Keats, therefore, turns to Chatterton who, according to the poet, had revitalized the wealth and suggestion of common words:

"I always somehow associate Chatterton with autumn. He is the purest writer in the English Language. He has no French idiom, or particles like Chaucer -- 'Tis genuine English idiom in English words." 35

The views of Shelley and Keats regarding poetic idiom stem from their reconsideration of the Wordsworthian theory of poetic diction. Wordsworth suggested a healthy relation between diction and language against the mechanical and contrived style of the neo-classicists which had no true originating emotion behind it. Besides this he launched a protest against the formalized poetic language of the 18th Century and recommended the language of common man as the best model for the poet. Shelley in the usage of his poetic idiom pleaded a perfect harmony between the writer's temper

and his language. His idiom, therefore, remained spontaneous, unpremeditated and consistent with his particular emotional experiences and mode of feeling. His language reflects the violence, turbulence, wildness of his revolutionary spirit and is consequently vague, imprecise and elusive. Keats, however, straining to control his rhetoric and to eschew the elaborate imagery, tried to find a concrete image characterised by complete economy and precision to convey his comprehensive world-view.