It was, however, in the seventeenth century that mystical verse flourished in England. Comparatively speaking, it was a period of settled belief. A number of poets belonging to the “School of Donne,” known popularly as the Divine poets of the seventeenth century, distinguished themselves by writing verse that gave superb expression to their religious experience. They were devout Christians and, although not altogether free from doubts and perplexities, their religious moorings were firm; they never crossed the bounds of dogma. That explains why the general tone of their verse is optimistic as far as belief is concerned. Their poems reveal a sensibility akin to the mystical. Intensely and intimately involved with the object of their devotion, they sing invariably in the language of the mystics. Although their terminology is largely Christian, their poems should appeal to people of all faiths.

The Divine poets mentioned above, notably George Herbert, Richard Crashaw and Henry Vaughan, wrote poetry in the ‘metaphysical’ manner of Donne, but this did not stand in the way of their developing individual styles of their own. Their devotional poems are not just effusions but products of craftsmanship, giving the lie to Dr. Johnson’s contention that poetry (as ‘making’) and devotion are incompatible. Donne’s important contribution lay
in the forging of a new poetic language that served as a model for the poets of his “school.” In his hands, poetry acquired a distinctively intellectual tone and this is reflected in the religious lyrics of the Divine poets we have mentioned. Donne himself wrote poems addressed to the Divine, which are a record of his religious experience.

In which my Soul did walk;
And every thing that I did see,
Did with me talk.
The skies in their Magnificence,
The Lively, Lovely Air;
Oh how Divine, how Soft, how Sweet, how fair!
The Stars did entertain my Sense,
And all the Works of God so Bright and pure,
So Rich and Great did seem,
As if they ever must endure,
In my Esteem.
A Native Health and Innocence
Within my Bones did grow,
And while my God did all his Glories shew,
I felt a vigour in my Sense
That was all SPIRIT, I within did flow
With Seas of Life, like Wine,
I nothing in the World did know,
But’t was Divine.

In the eighteenth century the names of William Law and William Blake shine out like stars against a dark firmament of “rationalism” and unbelief. Their writings form a remarkable contrast to the prevailing spirit of the time. Law expresses in clear and pointed prose the main teachings of the German seer Jacob Boehme; whereas Blake sees visions and has knowledge which he strives to condense into forms of picture and verse which may be understood of men. The influence of Boehme in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is very far-reaching. In addition to completely subjugating the strong intellect of Law, he profoundly influenced Blake. He also affected Thomas Erskine of Linlathen, and through him, Carlyle, J.W. Farquhar, F.D. Maurice, and others. Hegel, Schelling, and Schlegel are alike indebted to him, and through them, through his French disciple St. Martin, and through Coleridge – who was much attracted to him — some of his root-ideas returned again to England in the nineteenth century, thus preparing the way for a better understanding of mystical thought.¹ The Swedish seer Emmanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) was another strong influence in the later eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. Swedenborg in some ways is curiously material, at any rate in expression, and in one point at least he differs from other mystics. That is, he does not seem to believe that man has within him a spark of the divine essence, but rather that he is an organ that reflects the divine
life. He is a recipient of life, but not a part of life itself. God is thought of as a light or sun outside, from which spiritual heat and light ( = love and wisdom) flow into men. But, apart from this important difference Swedenborg’s thought and teaching are entirely mystical. He believes in the substantial reality of spiritual things, and that the most essential part of a person’s nature, that which he carries with him into the spiritual world, is his love. He teaches that heaven is not a place, but a condition, that there is no question of outside rewards or punishments, and man makes his own heaven or hell, for, as Patmore pointedly expresses it—

Ice-cold seems heaven’s noble glow

To spirits whose vital heat is hell.

He insists that Space and Time belong only to physical life, and when men pass into the spiritual world that love is the bond of union, and thought or “state” makes presence, for thought is act. He holds that instinct is spiritual in origin; and the principle of his science of correspondences is based on the belief that everything outward and visible corresponds to some invisible entity which is its inward and spiritual cause. This is the view echoed by Mrs. Browning more than once in Aurora Leigh—

There’s not a flower of spring,

That dies in June, but vaunts itself allied.

By issue and symbol, by significance

And correspondence, to that spirit-world
Outside the limits of our space and time,
Where to we are bound.

In all this and much more, Swedenborg’s thought is mystical, and it has had a quite unsuspected amount of influence in England, and it is diffused through a good deal of English literature.

Blake, at once mystic and poet, was throughout conscious of his role as a ‘prophet.’ He “conceived that it was his vocation to bring... mystical illumination within the range of ordinary man”\(^2\), and believed that the Infinite is within man’s reach if his “doors of perception are cleansed.” His poems afford sufficient evidence of his unique perception, of his ability to look at life from an unusual mystical angle; his poetic vision conveys a surprise of “revelation.”

Quite often mystics talk in riddles and parables. Even though they may convey their message in simple idiom, the meaning is not always easy to grasp. This is characteristically true of Blake. It is not surprising that he was not understood by the unimaginative lady who declared him mad for having said that he had touched the sky with his finger. His unorthodox views, and the unusual idiom in which he conveyed them, reflect a perception of things that is not spoiled by ‘custom.’ His stress on the cultivation of the ‘Imagination’ proceeds from his concern for man’s spiritual regeneration. He is an articulate mystic of the “psychological type known as ‘visionary’.”\(^3\) Revealed truths come to him in the form of vivid images. He has an intimate
experience of cosmic consciousness in as much as he can see “a World in a grain of sand.” He never doubted his prophetic powers and believed that he held free converse with angels. All such beliefs were grounded in the quality of his visions, which differed from those of his fellow-mystics in being “corporeal” and not just “imaginary.” Gifted with “sacramental perception,” he sees the Infinite in all beings. He looks upon the senses “as the gateway to eternity” and values human love for its essentially divine character.

Blake is at his best in the Songs, which adequately express his vision. He desired that the two sets of songs, under the titles ‘Innocence’ and ‘Experience,’ should be contrasted as they “show the two contrary states of the human soul.” The insistence on this contrast should not blind us to the fact that the two sets together constitute an artistic whole. The full meaning of the poems hinges on the principle of contrast as revealing an integral vision of life in which ‘good’ and ‘evil’ are balanced. Experience and Innocence seemingly run counter to each other but viewed together point towards a higher synthesis embodying the mystical and enigmatic truth at the root of life. Mysticism essentially views both ‘good’ and ‘evil’ as illusory, and Blake’s purpose is to drive this truth home to us poetically. Not interested in describing Nature, he presents in the songs images symbolizing a higher invisible world. His technique consists in juxtaposing the image and the mystical concept whereby he conveys his perception of the spiritual realm. Let us now look at ‘The Lamb’ and ‘The Tyger’ with a view to seeing
how they represent “the two contrary states of the human soul.” The two poems are companion pieces and therefore, are to be read together. The speaker in ‘The Lamb’ is a child who knows the Deity as a protective master. In ‘The Tyger’ the speaker is an adult. The tiger’s “fearful symmetry” suggests to him the terrible aspect of a mysterious power operating in the universe. The images of the lamb and the tiger, juxtaposed together, evoke a sharp sense of contrast between the ‘benevolent’ and ‘malevolent’ aspects of the Deity, who thus remains an obscure and mysterious figure. The speaker in ‘The Tyger’ poses questions that are perplexing and unanswerable. However, read as companion poems, ‘The Lamb’ and ‘The Tyger’ hint at what is not explicable, conveying a feeling bordering on an awareness of the Infinite.

In the Romantic era, position of belief was no more secure; religion came into a sharp conflict with science. A new trend is thus discernible in religious verse, of which Wordsworth could be looked upon as the leading representative. The new note continues to be religious in spirit but there is no firm theistic commitment; secular and humanistic interests also creep in. In Wordsworth, we notice a shift towards theism only in his later phase; his earlier poems reveal him as a “pantheist” rather than a committed Christian, a “Nature mystic” with a marked humanitarian bias. His feeling for Nature is invariably mystical in character. W.R. Inge describes him as “the greatest prophet of contemplative mysticism.” The larger body of his verse is contemplative in mood and in a number of his poems, especially ‘Lines
composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey’, ‘Ode on Intimations of Immortality’ and ‘The Prelude’, the meditative and mystical element is insistent. Throughout, the poet values and stresses contemplation; he often dwells on the significance of the condition of equilibrium, the “wise passiveness” that he considers essential to spiritual growth.

Of Wordsworth’s poems mentioned above, ‘Lines composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey’ is the finest example of his contemplation of Nature. An awareness of the divine spirit inhabiting Nature is conveyed here through a language “deceptively simple.” In a general and non-specific sense, we could characterize this poem as one of meditation. The progress of its theme and its “composition” suggest parallels with the poetry of classical meditation discussed by Louis Martz. The tradition of this kind of poetry goes back to the Christian saint – mystic, Ignatius Loyola, who set the pattern for religious meditation in his Spiritual Exercises. Consistent with this tradition, a poem for a devout Christian became an exercise in divine contemplation, involving the “composition” of a religious scene. This in its turn stimulated a recollection of scared associations leading to a spiritual understanding, culminating in the devotee’s resolve to sustain his spiritual effort: a sequence of the exercises of “memory, understanding and will.” This tradition of poetry set the pattern for combining religious meditation and poetic composition – a valid evidence against the thesis that prayer and poetic activity are incompatible. A pattern similar to that of the poetry of classical
meditation is noticeable in Wordsworth’s poem, although it is not specifically ‘religious’. Instead of a religious Deity, the object of worship is Nature. Wordsworth associates sacred feeling with the Wye Valley, the place that is “composed” in the poem. His recollections promote his understanding and strengthen his faith in Nature, and in the traditional manner of a devotee, he resolves to preserve in his meditations.

To see what is mystical in the poem, let us look at the famous passage that has been widely discussed and quoted and variously interpreted:

To them I may have owed another gift. Nor less, I trust
Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood,
In which the burthen of the mystery,
In which the heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world,
Is lightened; that serene and blessed mood,
In which the affections gently lead us on,
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
And even the motions of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul;
While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things.
The very language of the passage carries the authenticity of a vivid and live experience. The words “body” and “soul” are crucial to our understanding of the experience that is recorded in the lines. Mystics speak of things incommunicable, beyond the domain of the senses and the normal powers of human perception. Wordsworth’s mystical intuition is not of that order. He is essentially a “sensationalist” and his “mysticism is grounded and rooted actually in the senses.” Blake insisted on cleansing “the doors of perception” before we can realize the sense as “the gateway to eternity.” Wordsworth’s experience here proves the validity of Blake’s assertion. His contemplation of the “beauteous forms” and the resultant sensations experienced by him seem to have “blessed” him with a new perception: a heightened awareness of things, or an intense consciousness, in contradistinction to the temporary suspension of the bodily functions. Becoming “a living soul” points clearly to a state of awareness that accompanies deep contemplation. In this state, the poet sees “into the life of things” — a positive gain in terms of expanded consciousness.

In the subsequent lines of the poem, Wordsworth betrays a lack of confidence in the authenticity of his experience. This is understandable. His momentary flashes of insight were not powerful enough to dispel his doubts completely. That explains the wariness with which he states his unsure belief. What he meant by seeing “into the life of things” is, however, made explicit in these lines:
...And I have felt
A presence, that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky and the mind of the man;
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.

The language here is typically mystical. The use of the words “something” (a key-word in the passage), “sublime”, “presence”, “motion”, “spirit”, indicates that the poet is cautiously avoiding theological terms and trying to hint at what he has perceived in his heightened mood. He seems to have had an experience of the mystical type as suggested by the word “felt”, and he is not prepared to state it as a doctrine. He describes it best as a “sense sublime” of the ultimate unity of mind and Nature, the individual and the universe. On the whole, the poem reveals Wordsworth’s reverence for Nature, his concern for suffering humanity and his mystical belief that “all which we behold is full of blessings.”

Whatever may be the source or reason, it is clear that at the end of the eighteenth century we begin to find a mystical tinge of thought in several
thinkers and writers, such as Burke, Coleridge, and Thomas Erskine of Linlathen. This increases in the early nineteenth century, strengthened by the influence, direct and indirect, of Boehme, Swedenborg, and the German transcendental philosophers and this mystical spirit is very marked in Carlyle, and, as we shall see, in most of the greatest nineteenth-century poets.

In addition to those writers which are here dealt with in detail, there is much of the mystic spirit in others of the same period, to name a few only, George Meredith, “Fiona Macleod,” Christina Rossetti, and Mrs. Browning; while today writers like “A.E.,” W.B. Yeats, and Evelyn Underhill are carrying on the mystic tradition.

In studying the mysticism of the English writers, and more especially of the poets, one is at once struck by the diversity of approach leading to unity of end.

We can group together our English writers who are mystical in thought, according to the five main pathways by which they have seen the Vision: Love, Beauty, Nature, Wisdom, or Devotion. Even within these groups, the method of approach, the interpretation or application of the Idea, often differs very greatly. For instance, Shelley and Browning may both be called love-mystics; that is, they look upon love as the solution of the mystery of life, as the link between God and man. To Shelly this was a glorious intuition, which reached him through his imagination, whereas the life of man as he saw it roused in him little but mad indignation, wild revolt, and passionate protest.
To Browning this was knowledge—knowledge borne in upon him just because of human life as he saw it, which to him was a clear proof of the great destiny of the race. He found “harmony in immortal souls, spite of the muddy vesture of decay.”

The three great English poets who are fundamentally mystical in thought are Browning, Wordsworth, and Blake. Their philosophy or mystical belief, one in essence, though so differently expressed, lies at the root, as it is also the flower, of their life-work. In others, as in Shelley, Keats, and Rossetti, although it is the inspiring force of their poetry, it is not a flame, burning steadily and evenly, but rather a light flashing out intermittently into brilliant and dazzling radiance. Hence the man himself is not so permeated by it, and hence results the unsatisfied desire, the almost painful yearning, the recurring disappointment and disillusionment, which we do not find in Browning, Wordsworth, and Blake.

In our first group we have four poets of markedly different temperaments — Shelley intensely spiritual; Rossetti with a strong tinge of sensuousness, of “earthiness” in his nature; Browning, the keenly intellectual man of the world, and Patmore a curious mixture of materialist and mystic; yet to all four love is the secret of life, the one thing worth giving and possessing.

Shelley believed in a Soul of the Universe, a Spirit in which all things live and move and have their being; which, as one feels in the Prometheus, is
unnamable inconceivable even to man, for “the deep truth is imageless.” His most passionate desire was not, as was Browning’s, for an increased and ennobled individuality, but for the mystical fusion of his own personality with this Spirit, this object of his worship and adoration. To Shelley, death itself was but the rending of a veil which would admit us to the full vision of the ideal, which alone is true life. The sense of unity in all things is most strongly felt in Adonais, where Shelley’s maturest thought and philosophy are to be found; and indeed the mystical fervour in this poem, especially towards the end, is greater than anywhere else in his writings. The Hymn to Intellectual Beauty is in some ways Shelley’s clearest and most obvious expression of his devotion to the Spirit of Ideal Beauty, its reality to him, and his vow of dedication to its service. But the Prometheus is the most deeply mystical of his poems; indeed, as Mrs. Shelley says, “it requires a mind as subtle and penetrating as Shelley’s own to understand the mystic meanings scattered throughout out the poem.”

Shelley, like Blake, regarded the human imagination as a divine creative force; Prometheus stands for the human imagination, or the genius of the world; and it is his union with Asia, the divine Idea, the Spirit of Beauty and of Love, from which a new universe is born. It is this union, which consummates the aspirations of humanity, that Shelley celebrates in the marvellous love-song of Prometheus. As befitted disciple of Godwin, he believed in the divine potentiality of man, convinced that all good is to be
found within man’s own being, and that his progress depends on his own will.

It is our will
That thus enchains us to permitted ill—
We might be otherwise — we might be all
We dream of happy, high, majestical.
Where is the love, beauty, and truth we seek
But in our mind?

In the allegorical introduction to the Revolt of Islam, which is an interesting example of Shelley’s mystical mythology, we have an insight into the poet’s view of the good power in the world. It is not an almighty creator standing outside mankind, but a power which suffers and rebels and evolves, and is, in fact, incarnate in humanity, so that it is unrecognized by men, and indeed confounded with evil:—

And the Great Spirit of Good did creep among
The nations of mankind, and every tongue
Cursed and blasphemed him as he passed, for none
Knew good from evil.

There is no doubt that to Shelley the form assumed by the divine in man was love. Mrs. Shelley, in her note to Rosalind and Helen, says that, “in his eyes it was the essence of our being, and all woe and pain arose from the war made against it by selfishness or insensibility, or mistake”; and Shelley
himself says, “the great secret of morals is love; or a going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action or person, not our own.”

Shelley was always searching for love; and although he knew well, through his study of Plato, the difference between earthly and spiritual love, that the one is but the lowest step on the ladder which leads to the other, yet in actual practice he confounded the two. He knew that he did so; and only a month before his death, he summed up in a sentence the tragedy of his life. He writes to Mr. Gisborne about the Epipsychidion, saying that he cannot look at it now, for—

“The person whom it celebrates was a cloud instead of a Juno,” and continues, “If you are curious, however, to hear what I am and have been, it will tell you something thereof. It is an idealized history of my life and feelings. I think one is always in love with something or other; the error—and I confess it is not easy for spirits cased in flesh and blood to avoid it—consists in seeking in a mortal image the likeness of what is perhaps, eternal.”

No poet has a more distinct philosophy of life than Browning. Indeed he has as much a right to a place among the philosophers, as Plato has to one among the poets. Browning is a seer, and pre-eminently a mystic; and it is especially interesting as in the case of Plato and St. Paul, to encounter this latter quality as a dominating characteristic of the mind of so keen and logical dialectician. We see at once that the main position of Browning’s belief is
identical with what we have found to be the characteristic of mysticism–unity
under diversity at the centre of all existence. The same essence, the one life,
expresses, itself through every diversity of form.

He dwells on this again and again:–

God is seen

In the star, in the stone, in the flesh, in the soul and the clod.

And through all these forms there is growth upwards. Indeed, it is only
upon this supposition that the poet can account for

many a thrill

Of kinship, I confess to, with the powers

Called Nature: animate, inanimate

In parts or in the whole, there’s something there

Man-like that somehow meets the man in me.

The poet sees that in each higher stage we benefit by the garnered
experience of the past; and so man grows and expands and becomes capable
of feeling for and with everything that lives. At the same time the higher is
not degraded by having worked in and through the lower, for he distinguishes
between the continuous persistent life, and the temporary coverings it makes
use of on its upward way;

From first to last of lodging, I was I,

And not at all the place that harboured me.
Humanity then, in Browning’s view, is not a collection of individuals, separate and often antagonistic, but one whole.

When I say “you” ’tis the common soul,
The collective I mean: the race of Man
That receives life in parts to live in a whole
And grow here according to God’s clear plan.

This sense of unity is shown in many ways: for instance, in Browning’s protest against the one sidedness of nineteenth century scientific thought, the sharp distinction or gulf set up between science and religion. This sharp cleavage, to the mystic, is impossible. He knows, however irreconcilable the two may appear, that they are but different aspects of the same thing. This is one of the ways in which Browning anticipates the most advanced thought of the present day.

In Paracelsus he emphasises the fact that the exertion of power in the intelligence, or the acquisition of knowledge, is useless without the inspiration of love, just as love is waste without power. Paracelsus sums up the matter when he says to Aprile—

I too have sought to KNOW as thou to LOVE
Excluding love as thou refusedst knowledge...

We must never part...
Till thou the lover, know; and I, the knower,
Love—until both are saved.
Arising logically out of this belief in unity, there follows, as with all mystics, the belief in the potential divinity of man, which permeates all Browning’s thought, and is continually insisted on in such poems as Rabbi ben Ezra, A Death in the Desert, and The Ring and the Book. He takes for granted the fundamental position of the mystic, that the object of life is to know God; and according to the poet, in knowing love we learn to know God. Hence it follows that love is the meaning of life, and that he who finds it not loses what he lived for

loses what he lived for
And eternally must lose it.

Christina Rosetti says:

For life with all it yields of joy and woe
And hope and fear...
Is just our chance o’ the prize of learning love.

This is Browning’s central teaching, the key-note of his work and philosophy. The importance of love in life is to Browning supreme, because he holds it to be the meeting – point between God and man. Love is the sublimest conception possible to man; and a life inspired by it is the highest conceivable form of goodness.

The essential unity of God and man is expressed more than once by Browning as when he speaks of God as Him.

Who never is dishonored in the spark
He gave us from his fire of fires.

Browning is at one with all mystics in his appeal from the intellect to that which is beyond intellect; in his assertion of the supremacy of feeling, intuition, over knowledge. Browning never wearies of dwelling on the relativity of physical knowledge, and its inadequacy to satisfy man. This is perhaps best brought out in one of the last things he wrote, the “Reverie” in Asolando; but it is dwelt on in nearly all his later and more reflective poems. His maxim was—

Wholly distrust thy knowledge, then, and trust
As wholly love allied to ignorance!
There lies thy truth and safety. ...

Consider well!

Were knowledge all thy faculty, then God
Must be ignored: love gains him by first leap.

Another point of resemblance with Eckhart is suggested by his words: “That foolish people take evil for good, and good for evil.” Browning’s theory of evil is part of the working-out of his principle of what may be called the coincidence of extreme opposites. This is, of course, part of his main belief in unity, but it is an interesting development of it. This theory is marked all through his writings: and although philosophers have dealt with it, he is perhaps the one poet who faces the problem, and expresses himself on the point with entire conviction. His view is that good and evil are purely
relative terms (see The Bean-stripe), and that one cannot exist without the other. It is evil which alone makes possible some of the divinest qualities in man – compassion, pity, forgiveness patience. We have seen that Shelley shares this view, “for none knew good from evil”; and Blake expresses himself very strongly about it, and complains that Plato “knew nothing but the virtues and vices, the good and evil... There is nothing in all that... Everything is good in God’s eyes.” Mysticism is always a reconcilement of opposites; and this, as we have seen in connection with science and religion, knowledge and love, is a dominant note of Browning’s philosophy. He brings it out most startlingly perhaps in The Statue and the Bust, where he shows that in his very capacity for vice, a man proves his capacity for virtue, and that a failure of energy in the one implies a corresponding failure of energy in the other.

At the same time, clear knowledge that evil is illusion would defeat its own end and paralyse all moral effort, for evil only exists for the development of good in us.

Type needs antitype:
As night needs day, as shine needs shade, so good
Needs evil: how were pity understood
Unless by pain?
This is one reason why Browning never shrank from the evil in the world, why indeed he expanded so much of his mind and art on the analysis
and dissection of every kind of evil, laying bare for us the working of the mind of the criminal, the hypocrite, the weakling, and the cynic; because he held that—

Only by looking low, ere looking high

Comes penetration of the mystery.

There are other ways in which Browning’s thought is especially mystical, as, for instance, his belief in pre-existence, and his theory of knowledge, for he, like Plato, believes in the light within the soul, and holds that—

To Know

Rather consists in opening out a way

Whence the imprisoned splendour may escape,

Than in effecting entry for a light

Supposed to be without.

For Keats, the avenue to truth and reality took the form of Beauty. The idea, underlying most deeply and consistently the whole of his poetry, is that of the unity of life; and closely allied with this is the belief in progress, through ever-changing, ever-ascending stages. Sleep and Poetry, Endymion and Hyperion represent very well three stages in the poet’s thought and art. In Sleep and Poetry Keats depicts the growth even in an individual life, and describe the three stages of thought, or attitude towards life, through which the poet must pass. They are not quite parallel to the three stages of the
mystical ladder marked out by Wordsworth in the main body of his poetry, because they do not go quite so far, but they are almost exactly analogous to the three stages of mind he describes in Tintern Abbey. The first is mere animal pleasure and delight in living—

A pigeon tumbling in clear summer air;
A laughing school-boy without grief or care
Hiding the springy branches of an elm.

Then follows simple unreflective enjoyment of Nature. The next stage is sympathy with human life, with human grief and joy, which brings a sense of the mystery of the world, a longing to pierce it and arrive at its meaning, symbolised in the figure of the charioteer.

Towards the end of Keats life this feeling was growing stronger, and it is much dwelt upon in the Revision of Hyperion. There he plainly states that the merely artistic life, the life of the dreamer, is selfish; and that the only way to gain real insight is through contact and sympathy with human suffering and sorrow; and in the lost Woodhouse transcript of the Revision, rediscovered in 1904, there are some lines in which this point is still further emphasised. The full realisation of this third stage was not granted to Keats during his short life; he had but gleams of it. The only passage where he describes the ecstasy of vision is in Endymion (bk. i, 1. 774 ff.), and this resembles in essentials all the other reports of this experience given by
mystics. When the mind is ready, anything may lead us to it—music, imagination, love, friendship.

Feel we these things?—that moment have we stept
Into a sort of oneness, and our state
Is like a floating spirit’s.

Keats felt his passage was inspired, and in a letter to Taylor in January 1818 he says, “When I wrote it, it was a regular stepping of the Imagination towards a truth.”

In Endymion, the underlying idea is the unity of the various elements of the individual soul; the love of woman is shown to be the same as the love of beauty; and that in its turn is identical with the love of the principle of beauty in all things. Keats was always very sensitive to the mysterious effects of moonlight, and so for him the moon became a symbol for the great abstract principle of beauty, which, during the whole of his poetic life, he worshipped intellectually and spiritually. “The mighty abstract Idea I have of Beauty in all things stifles the more divided and minute domestic happiness,” he writes to his brother George; and the last two well-known lines of the Ode on a Grecian Urn fairly sum us his philosophy—

Beauty is truth, truth Beauty, that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.
So that the moon represent to Keats the eternal idea, the one essence in all. This is how he writes of it, in what is an entirely mystical passage in *Endymion*—

...As I grew in years, still didst thou blend
With all my ardours: thou wast the deep glen;
Thou wast the mountain-top, the sage’s pen,
The poet’s harp, the voice of friends, the sun;
Thou wast the river, thou wast glory won;
Thou wast my clarion’s blast, thou wast my steed,
My goblet full of wine, my topmost deed:
Thou wast the charm of women, lovely Moon!

In his fragment of *Hyperion*, Keats shadows forth the unity of all existence, and gives magnificent utterance to the belief that change is not decay, but the law of growth and progress. Oceanus, in his speech to the overthrown Titans, sums up the whole meaning as far as it has gone, in verse which is unsurpassed in English—

We fall by course of Nature’s law, not force
Of thunder, or of Jove ...
... on our heels a fresh perfection treads,
A power more strong in beauty, born of us
And fated to excel us, as we pass
In glory that old Darkness ...
... for ‘tis the eternal law

That first in beauty should be first in might.

This is true mysticism, the mysticism Keats shares with Burke and Carlyle, the passionate belief in continuity of essence through everchanging forms.

In the following Chapters we shall undertake a closer and more detailed examination of the major themes with which Patmore and Thompson were concerned as mystical poets. We shall be mainly concerned with the quality and character of the mysticism which they exemplify as poets individually and also with the stages of their progress on ‘The mystic way.’ In this context it would be useful to distinguish first between the two important types of mysticism—transcendental and immanent. Transcendence involves the concept of a Deity beyond the reach of human understanding, of a Pure Being unchangeable, not involved in the dynamic process of Becoming. The mystic aspiring to the transcendental state is painfully aware of the great ‘distance’ that separates him from his goal; he has to divest his mind of all the images of the phenomenal world before he can hope to attain the Great Beyond, the Royal behind the appearances. Immanence, on the other hand, looks upon the Divine as the living principle penetrating the natural world, and as the indwelling Spirit discoverable in the very soul of man. The distinction between the two attitudes is, however, by no means absolute; the language of some of the mystics confirms their complementary character⁸. Transcendence
and immanence, in fact, are not exclusive of each other; they acquire significance in their synthesis when the Deity is seen as Love, distant but approachable, and also as the Inner Being hidden in the depth of the soul. Personal communion is then the ultimate and inevitable goal of the mystic drawn, to the Divine by love rather than by an intellectual urge. Whatever goal a mystic sets for himself—the attainment of the Transcendent, the realization of the One in the Many or the state of divinity attainable through an inward transmutation of the human personality, he has to ‘work’ towards it patiently and steadily, the path being beset with difficulties and trials.

Though mystics may vary in their modes of apprehending Reality, and correspondingly in the images they use to signify the goals they pursue, all of them essentially go through an experience which is of a psychological and spiritual character. The phases of this experience—the slow shifts and transitions—are suggested by the very accent and tone of the mystic’s language and the evidence is further available from the images mystic poets employ as appropriate to these phases. Christian mysticism describes the three distinguishable phases of the mystic’s spiritual advancement as the Purgative, Illuminative and Unitive stages of the Mystic Way. Evelyn Underhill, departing from this practice, introduces a fivefold distinction: “The awakening of the Self to consciousness of Divine Reality”; “Purgation: a state of pain and effort”; “Illumination: a state which includes in itself many of the stages of contemplation, ‘degrees of orison,’ visions and adventures of
the soul described by St. Teresa and other mystical writers”; “Purification of the Spirit or Dark Night of the soul”; “Union: the true goal of the mystic quest.”\textsuperscript{9} Such diagrammatic representations are based on the assumption that the mystic’s progress to the final goal conforms to a universal pattern. However, the individual experiences of every mystic need not strictly conforms to the exact sequence of these phases; all the phases need also not be represented in the life of every mystic.\textsuperscript{10} Purgation presupposes a certain degree of initial spiritual awakening and involves a conscious effort on the part of the mystic to purify his powers of perception; It consists in “a gradual detachment from the things of sense, and a desire for the things of the spirit.”\textsuperscript{11} In the phase of Illumination, the aspiring mystic feels a sense of participation in divine life; he has an immediate awareness of the divine presence and feels no longer alienated from God. The third and the last phase marks the end of the mystical adventure—the union of the individual soul with the Divine. Christian mystics, while talking of this union, stress that it should not be mistaken for complete identification with the Divine. Union, according to them, has to be construed as the soul’s experience of the \emph{constant} presence of God.

Strictly speaking, it is difficult to find an infallible evidence of the Unitive stage in the language of mysticism even when it takes the form of poetic communication. When mystics are at one with the Divine, they tend to be least communicative, for the experience of the final Beatitude is ineffable.
Poetic language may, however, barely hint at what is incommunicable, belonging to the order of experience which actually transcends all the known forms of linguistic communication.

Of one phase of the mystical experience, however, which is described as ‘the dark night of the soul,’ we find plentiful evidence in Christian mystical literature. This phase is supposed to follow the stage of Illumination and precede the Unitive experience. In this phase, the mystic finds himself ‘alienated’ from God. Deprived of the “visionary glean,” he has to suffer the ordeal of separation from the Beloved; he goes through an experience of extreme spiritual anguish. The vision over which he had exulted during the phase of Illumination is apparently withdrawn from him to his notification and despair. Actually, however, he is engaged in the last battle that must ensure his triumph over mortality. He has to know the pains of a ‘mystical death’ only to be blessed with the Unitive experience, which marks the final fruition of his spiritual effort.

**REFERENCES**


8. The famous Dutch mystic, Ruysbroek, emphasizes “tranquility” and “activity as the dual, complementary characteristics of the Absolute. His accounts of the spiritual adventure present a beautiful synthesis of the transcendental and immanental positions. See Eveylyn Underhill, Mysticism, p. 37. & p. 304.

9. For details, see Eveylyn Underhill, Mysticism, pp. 169-70.

10. Itrat Hussain, commenting, for example, on the mysticism of Thomas Traherne, states: "We do not find the three stages of mystical life—purgation, illumination and union—in any marked degree or in regular order in Traherne’s life.” Se his Mystical Element in the Metaphysical Poets of the Seventeenth Century, p. 294.