CHAPTER I

The Mythic Modes in Literature - A Brief Survey

(From the Renaissance to the Romantic Period)
Mythology is the legacy of the oral tradition of concepts and perceptions left behind by the ancient civilizations. In folk-transmission of the different myths through the different ages, complex psychological processes have instigated their --

Splitting, displacement, multiplication, projection, rationalization, secondary elaboration and interpretation -- 1

The result is that the term 'Mythology', as used in modern criticism, suggests a comprehensive system consisting of aspects of religion, folklore, anthropology, sociology, psycho-analysis, fine arts and literature. The basic myths have gathered about their core multidimensional meanings. They can be described as the embodiments of archetypal, physical and mystical human experiences, as well as the timeless and universal custodians of rituals and customs. For the artist they remain the continuous and evolving medium of both inspiration and expression as illustrated in the following definition --

What is music? What is poetry? What is mythology? All questions on which no opinion is possible unless one already has a real feeling for these things. 2
The 'real feeling' can be equated to aesthetic intensity. Mythology has its foundations not in history but in the realm of imagination. In a definition, Kerenyi stresses the supernatural element —

... an immemorial and traditional body of material contained in tales about gods and godlike beings... tales already well-known but not unamenable to further reshaping. Mythology is the movement of this material, it is something solid yet mobile, substantial and yet not static, capable of transformation. 3

The Oxford Classical Dictionary emphasises the communal genesis of mythology —

Although etymologically the word means no more than the telling of tales, it is used in modern languages to signify a systematic examination of traditional narratives of any people, or all peoples with the object of understanding how they came to be told and to what extent they were or are to be believed, also of solving various other problems connected with them such as their connections with religion, their origin (popular or literary) their relations, if any, to similar stories told elsewhere and their chronology relative or absolute. 4

The definition offered by the Encyclopaedia Britannica relates mythology to religion —

... a sacred history, it relates an event that took place in primordial time,... it is always an account of a 'creation' it relates how something was produced, began to be... 5
A more metaphysical stand is taken by Bronislaw Malinowski in this definition --

... the assertion of an original, greater and more important reality through which the present life, fate and work of mankind are governed. 6

Wellek and Warren bring myth closer to literature by defining it as --

... narrative story, as against dialectical discourse, exposition; it is also the irrational or the intuitive as against the systematically philosophical. 7

Still another aspect is highlighted by Northrop Frye --

... a society's religious beliefs, historical traditions, cosmologic speculations, in short, the whole range of its verbal expressiveness. 8

Thus it is difficult to give a single comprehensive definition of mythology. Mythology contains in its depths the very childhood of human intelligence. We can trace this down to the rudiments of the human imagination which are universal. A study in comparative mythology reveals the tendency of the human mind at a given stage of development subject to similar circumstances to produce similar myths. Such themes as the origin of the world, the land
of the dead, fertility rites, virgin birth and the resurrected hero have a world-wide distribution. There is no human race in the records of which their archetypes cannot be located. Greek, Roman, Norse, Celtic, Hindu, Phrygian, Persian mythologies all contain these themes. The psychological force embodied in each of these themes may differ from one mythology to the other. Mythology, hence, becomes a vital component of modern civilization --

... an active force,... a pragmatic charter of primitive faith and moral wisdom. 9

For the modern man, mythology is an indispensable asset. Though ethnologists protest that to consider these myths as embodiments of truth is a grave error, they all agree that they shed important light on the conditions and motives of the ancient man. Mythology may not explain the why and wherefore of things but it highlights the primary sources to which everything goes back. It proves the existence of imperishable realities in a mortal world. It provides us with the earliest records of the incipient history of the religious, social, aesthetic and spiritual resources of the pre-historic man. It helps us to follow the continuity of thought down the ages and to discern the systematic progress of mankind.
Philosophers suggest various theories for the beginnings of mythology. The two most convincing theories are the **Theory of Deterioration** and the **Theory of Progress**. The former assumes that man in the by-gone days had perfect knowledge of the universe, his place in it, his religious, moral, social and aesthetic conceptions. With the passage of time, his perfect conceptions degenerated and his reason and imagination became diseased, giving rise to unconvincing notions. The latter puts forward the view that man began with crude and bestial guesses at the truth and has with experience developed a superior intelligence that results in finer conceptions of his relationship to the world and his subsequent duties.

The mythological concepts and statements of the primeval man are characterized by an apparent lack of clarity and logic. In order to understand them and use them effectively, the modern man must glean out the method. Mythology is as old as language itself. It is not an external artifice or ornament tacked on to language but a living instrument of active speech. Language and mythology are inseparable aspects of the oral tradition.

Mythologists do not put forward any single theory for the interpretation of the origin and the meaning of myth.
There are, however, certain considerations that they say must be kept in mind while analysing a particular myth —

(1) Determining the geographical region from which the story originated: This means finding out whether the story is Roman, Greek or perhaps Celtic. K.O. Muller laid great emphasis on this aspect.

(2) Determining what class the story belongs to: This requires classifying the story as a true myth, fable of saga. Folklorists and investigators of legends of Medieval Europe and also of other non-classical legends can be given the credit for introducing this aspect. Important among them are Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm.

(3) Finally, there is the application of the comparative method. One should compare the legends of ancient savages and peasants, or of the primitive man with existing backward tribes like Bushmen and Red Indians. J.W.E. Mannhardt and Andrew Lang have done this job brilliantly. Another important aspect is the imagination of two similar peoples. Myth is not a product of reason but of the imagination. The Freud and Jung school of psychologists devotes considerable attention to this. 11
Like other literatures, English Literature, too, has not been an isolated phenomenon. It has been subject to various influences. Dominant among them is the influence of Greek and Roman Literatures. Profound systems of thought, highly philosophical interpretations of life, well-wrought works of art created by the masters have served as beacons of inspiration for English men of letters down the ages.

Themes connected with the Greek myths found literary expression in the works of classical authors between the eighth and first century B.C., Julia W. Loomis lists the more important ones, with their approximate dates, as follows:

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<th>Authors</th>
<th>Work</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Homer</td>
<td>Iliad and Odyssey</td>
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<td>2. (Unknown authorship)</td>
<td>Homeric Poems</td>
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<td>3. Hesiod</td>
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After the Dark Ages, Western Europe rediscovered the classical traditions. The reawakened and stimulated people assimilated the classical arts, ideals and philosophy into their literary, cultural, social, political and even legal systems.

According to Gilbert Highet classical influences pervaded western literature in three ways:

1. Translation
2. Imitation
3. Emulation

Translation of themes, ideals, styles and methods brought these exclusive works within the reach of all and
helped to lay the foundations of great works. Imitation extended the range and opened new avenues as men attempted to reproduce the rarefied standards of the Masters. Emulation resulted in master-pieces. Men produced works that combined the perfection of the Masters with modern ideals.

The Renaissance or 'revival of learning' set in during the early years of the fifteenth century in England. Classical themes were used by men of letters such as Chaucer, Gower and Malory. The doctrines of Hellenism, Platonism and Humanism found their way into English Literature. The age patronized translations. Among others were those by Philemon Holland, North's translations of Plutarch, and Chapman's translation of Homer. The English men of letters derived many themes and conventions from them. The sense of beauty prevailed. Literature, along with other forms of art, was created more for aesthetic pleasure than for moral guidance. Under these influences mythology acquired a respectable status.

In the comparatively relaxed scheme of things and because of the sanction of rhetoricians, it now became perfectly acceptable to blend the antique and the medieval, and also the Christian and pagan elements in literature.
The works of Sidney, Spenser, Lyly and others are eloquent examples of this synthesis. In *The Shepherd's Calendar* Spenser associates Pan, the pagan god of shepherds, with Christ who in the Christian tradition is a good shepherd. *The Faerie Queen* abounds in the use of mythological images and symbols. Acrasio, the sensual mistress of the Bower of Bliss, can be equated with Circe. Spenser's treatment of mythology is elaborate yet subtle. He gives a religious dimension to the classical themes by allegorizing them.

Works of the Elizabethans were rich, sensuous and laden with personified abstractions and mythological allusions. The mythological apparatus, though used extensively was frigid. The mention of pagan gods and goddesses gave colour, glamour and decoration to the verse but it did not do much beyond that. The ancient legends were read widely and utilised in poetry in a direct fashion by poets like Francis Kynastin and Reynolds. But, their true potential lay hidden beneath their colourful exteriors, undiscovered and untouched. Of course, occasionally this shallow treatment of myth led religious fanatics to read immoral and lawless meanings into them, and then pagan mythology was strongly condemned. But the trend had obviously struck deep roots in English Literature and mythology continued to
be used enthusiastically. Traces of it can be discerned in Milton's poetry. In his attempt to glorify Christ and banish the pagan gods in 'On the Morning of Christ's Nativity', Milton rather ambivalently comments that the shepherds near Bethlehem had no idea 'That the mighty Pan/Was kindly come to live with them below;' In Lycidas he refers to the myth of Orpheus. In Paradise Lost the fallen angels become the heathen gods. Milton's mythologizing instincts surface in the form of veiled references.

Apollo, Daphne, Pan, Cupid, Ceres, Orpheus, Fauns, Nymphs, Satyrs etc. occur frequently in the poetry of the period. Among actual myths, the war of the Titans and Olympians and the Greek cycle of time viz. the primitive Golden Age giving way to progressively degenerating times, were adapted as garbled versions of Gospel truth to represent the revolt of Satan against God and the fall of Eden respectively. The Ovidian tale of the Great Flood was paralleled to the Biblical story of Noah.

The achievement of the age can be described as the identification of the familiar spirit of native folklore and the conscious and unconscious blending of the two. While preserving the superiority of the Christian tradition, pagan culture had found a permanent place in the scheme of
western literature.

The men of letters of the Augustan Age considered themselves to be an improvement on those of the seventeenth century in their treatment of the classics. However, they formed their opinions under certain limitations of which they were not aware. The age was marked by great advances in Science. The thinking of the people underwent radical changes. The baffling universe and its natural phenomena were explained, thus expelling the spirit of wonder from the human mind. Classics were greatly revered but were interpreted to suit the intellect rather than the heart and the imagination. In imitation of the Masters' lofty styles, superior standards of scholarship were maintained by the men of letters. Poetry was composed within prescribed forms and adhered to rules. Great emphasis was laid on correctness and proportion. Literature, by and large, became a specialized technique bound by rules and axioms. Mythology, with its depth of meaning, did not correspond to the new temper and not much attention was paid to it. The kind of genius that understands and appreciates the spirit of mythology did not exist during the Augustan Age.

Dryden and Pope translated Virgil and Homer
respectively. In both cases the narrative and objective passages have been dealt with ease. However, the spirit of the subjective passages, famous for their sensitive insight into archetypal human experiences, is lost in the attempt to reproduce the rational truth within a flawless format.

In poetry, too, the same limitations can be seen at work. The works of Prior, Pope, Dryden, Parnell, Gay and Swift present mythological figures like Daphne, Apollo, Orpheus, Adrianne, Dido, Leda, Venus etc. as though they were city bred eighteenth century characters. Their experiences are treated in a light-hearted and playful manner. Mention must be made of William Blake, the mystic liberator of the human spirit. He believed that he actually saw the angels and the strange figures that his pictures portray. As a poet, he tried to awaken the human mind to the most innocent vision of itself. However, he was limited by his arbitrary methods.

In the Augustan Age, symbolic mythology was not much in vogue. Traces of descriptive mythology can be found, the important contribution of which was to prevent mythology from lapsing into total extinction. Two prose works were Andrew Tooke's Pantheon (which later influenced Hunt and
Keats) and Spence's *Polymetis*. Though much criticized by contemporary critics as 'Undesirable food for the female mind'\(^{14}\) these works served to keep alive the genre in uncongenial times. The works of other prose writers like Johnson, Goldsmith and Fielding contain classical allusions but the symbolic spirit is beyond their reach.

III

The Romantic Revival can be defined as --

...a change from a mechanical conception of the world to an enthusiastic religion of nature... from realism to optimism... from traditional doctrines of literary imitation to conceptions of the naive and original... to dreams of the strange, the beautiful and the ideal... 15

This was a period of upheaval in social, political and philosophical thought in Europe. Rousseau preached the doctrine of nature, Voltaire publicised the significance of liberty, Herder presented the theory of life as an organic whole based on laws and Kant described the authority and the integrity of the individual mind. The Augustan ideals now appeared superficial to the poets and as they interpreted these ideas, a cult of Romanticism gradually evolved and came to the forefront of English Literature with
the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* by Wordsworth and Coleridge in 1798.

The new stream incorporated a reorientation of the English mind and a reinterpretation of the classics with special significance attached to mythology. The ideals and spirit of ancient Greece served as a renewed source of inspiration. The Greek philosophers had been aware of the unity of being, the ancient Athenian state had practised political freedom. Hellenic art represented beauty that did not adhere to rules, and mythology was a manifestation of the strength of the human imagination.

By its very nature and genesis the Romantic Movement was myth-oriented. It subsisted on the myth of a golden past and the noble savage. From myth to mythology is a natural corollary. Rational thinking gave way to individual response. Instinct, intuition, association were used for understanding the world and life. Wisdom and moral sense were no longer guided by the individual's response to the environment around him. Interest in ghost stories, legends, dreams and mythology was revived. The mythological imagination was reborn. Mythology gained in stature because it defined association of the golden past with the present. The universe, according to the Romantics, was alive and vital
and perpetually subject to change. The society before the poet was ugly and corrupt. The artist with his sharpened imaginative and creative faculties had to reform it. The days of the golden past and its noble savage could not be recaptured because man had progressed too far in the scale of evolution to go back to the state of perfect innocence. It was the job of the poet to bring about a union of the Apollonian and the Faustian creeds, and to create a faith that would be acceptable to all.

Thus, literature now became a philosophical and exploratory venture. The deepened layers of experience made the subject matter of the poet more complex and mythology served as a suitable vehicle of communication. The search for the noble savage (the ideal man of primitive society) and for the natural society from which the rational, modern, urban had expelled himself, led the poets to the very heart of mythology. In order to recreate the atmosphere of the Golden Age, which they felt would provide clues for reforming the corrupt modern world, they reinterpreted mythology, thus giving it a symbolic significance. Mythology, so far, had served only as an allegorical medium. Now, it acquired new dimensions and challenges. The concepts and the quest for sublimity rendered in the second half of the eighteenth
century also contributed to it. Translations of classical myths, fables, and legends had enhanced the people's awareness of pagan and non-Christian legacy and provide a framework for their reinterpretation. Biblical High Criticism promoted anagogic and symbolic interpretation of the supernatural and mystical concepts. Interpreted within this framework mythology revealed and defined subtle, complicated and tantalizing emotional situations. The abstractions served as the metaphor and the true meaning which lay beyond the apparent implication had weight and depth. A number of poets employed mythology in their works. However the results were widely disparate.

To use mythology in poetry during this period was also treated as a mark of progressive thinking or at least of detachment from the state religion. The Church reacted strongly to this rather pagan trend. Comprehensive works on each of the three mythological groups viz Greek Oriental and Celtic were produced by Clergymen in an attempt to prove that paganism was later than Judaism and a corruption of it. However, these works were condemned by the then powerful journal *The Edinburgh Review*. Mythology was treated as a subject of great controversy and satire. From the 1790s to 1812 the journal carried several articles on mythology.
The journal, obviously, exercised influence over the literary temper of the day and through its controversies served as the formal source of inspiration to many poets.

Among the first generation of Romantic poets, Coleridge did not use mythology proper in his poems. However, his views on the subject shed important light on the use of mythology by the later Romantics. He describes Greek mythology as —

...fundamentally allegorical and typical of the powers and functions of nature, but subsequently mixed up with a deification of great men and hero worship. 17

Unlike the other Romantics, Coleridge was not instinctively 'Pagan'. The Greek religion according to him was in opposition to the basic Christian ideals. He was influenced by the exponents of German Romanticism and these views were common in it.

However, as a poet, Coleridge exhibited a deep understanding of sensuous and philosophic beauty. Even though he did not realize it, the fascinating and enigmatic images of Kubla Khan and the psychic rebirth of the mariner in The Ancient Mariner make him a forerunner of the later intensely mythopoeic poets. This is also suggested
in his translation of Schiller's Wollenstein when he enlarges the original with the following lines --

The intelligible forms of ancient poets,
The fair humanities of old religion,
The Power, the Beauty, and the Majesty,
That had their haunts in dale, or piny mountain
Or forest by slow stream, or pebbly spring,
Or chasms and wat'ry depths; all these have vanished
They live no longer in the faith of reason.
But still the heart doth need a language, still
Doth the old instinct bring back the old names.

( Act II, Scene IV )

William Wordsworth is a poet of nature and the natural man. The Prelude is his poetic autobiography. The poet portrays Nature as a moral and spiritual presence that guides and moulds his mind like a mysterious and profound teacher --

... underneath the pleasant brows
Of cool Lucretilis, where the pipe was heard,
Of Pan, Invisible God,

( Bk VIII, 11. 181-63 )
His university education had made him familiar with Roman history and Roman philosophy. His knowledge of the Roman Stoics, particularly Seneca, served to strengthen his belief in the unity of God, man and the external world. The Stoics believes that man is a part of the physical world which is a manifestation of God. The philosophy is reflected repeatedly in Wordsworth's poetry specifically in terms of the grandeur of nature —

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 in
the mind of man
A motion and a spirit,
that impels
All thinking things, all
objects of all thoughts,
And rolls through all things.

( Lines composed A Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, ll. 93-102 )

In the sonnet entitled 'The World is Too Much With Us', Wordsworth presents the 'Pagan' as a symbol of the ideal beauty and harmony of Hellenic life —
Great God! I'd rather be
A Pagan suckled in a creed
outworn;
So might I, standing on this
pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make
me less forlorn;
Have sight of Proteus rising
from the sea;
Or hear old Triton blow his
wreathed horn.

(11. 9-14)

In *The Excursion* (Bk. IV) Wordsworth mentions the
myths of Prometheus and Tantalus as fictions in form but as
testimonies of eternal truths in substance. He defends
mythology as the language of poetic idealism and imagination.
The rustic Greek who was ignorant and superstitious lived
close to the spirit of nature and received sustenance
from his intimate communion with the divinities, of the sun,
moon, wood and stream.

The passage on the 'unenlightened swains of pagan
Greece' describes their myth-making faculty. According to
the poet, they peopled the Heavens and the Earth with beau-
tiful deities ranging from Apollo 'A beardless Youth, who
touched a golden lute' and Diana 'a beaming Goddess with
her Nymphs' to lesser divinities like Pan 'The simple
Shepherd's awe-inspiring God!' This passage, naturally,
appealed to Keats. He absorbed it fully and echoes of it
can be discerned in his own poetry, especially in *Hyperion*.

Another work by Wordsworth 'Laodamia' contains a beautiful picture of Elysium --

> Of all that is most beauteous imaged thereto
> In happier beauty, more pellucid streams,
> An ample ether, a diviner air,
> And fields invested with purpureal gleams;

( ll. 103-106 )

Wordsworth's use of classical allusions suggests that myths, for him, were testimonies of the invisible presence he believed in. It reiterates his faith in the imagination and in the natural religion. According to Douglas Bush, in Wordsworth's old age, his visionary gleam had fled, and he was 'a lost leader'. However, Wordsworth's major contribution was that he left behind for the younger generation, particularly for Keats, a rich, noble and poetic conception of pagan mythology.

Byron belongs to the second generation of the British Romantic poets. He is among those English men who actually participated in the stirrings of Greek national consciousness. The Greeks list him as a champion of
modern Greece. Many leading Greek poets like Dionysius Solomos, with his 'On the Death of Lord Byron' and Andreas Kalvos with his ode 'To the British Muse' have paid tribute to Byron in verse.

As a poet Byron could not help fusing together the antique Greek sentiments with modern Greek ambitions. The past glories of the nation meant that the modern Greeks should be capable of attaining freedom now --

Ancient of days! august
Athena! where,
Where are thy men of might?
Thy grand in soul?
Gone -- Glimmering through the
dreams of things that were
First in the race that led to
Glory's goal,
They won, and pass'd away; is
this the whole?
A schoolboy's tale, the wonder
of an hour!

(* Childe Harold's Pilgrimage,
Canto II, Stz. 11 *)

Though Byron went to Harrow and Cambridge, he made little use of the opportunities there to study the classical languages. However, with his remarkably retentive mind, he managed to imbibe much of the classics. He claimed that he was so fascinated by *Prometheus Bound* that it had influenced almost everything he had written.
Sir Walter Scott once commented on Byron --

'Lord Byron was also a traveller, a man whose ideas were fired by having seen in distant scenes of difficulty and danger, the places whose very names are recorded in our bosoms as the shrines of ancient poetry'. 19

Byron translated his experiences into vigorous poetry --

Fair Greece! sad relic of departed worth!
Immortal, though no more, though fallen great!
Who now shall lead thy scattered children forth,
And long accustom'd bondage uncreate?

(Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto II, Stz. XXXIII)

While Byron was in Greece, Lord Elgin removed some of the statuary from the crumbling Greek monuments and had them shipped to London. Byron denounced him violently --

Let Aberdeen and Elgin still pursue
The shade of fame through regions of Virtue
Waste useless thousands on their Phidian freaks,
Misshapen monuments and maimed antiques;
And make their grand Saloons a general mart
For all the mutilated blocks of art.

(English Bards and Scotch Reviewers, ll. 1027-32)
In *The Siege of Corinth* Byron gives a moving account of the influence of his surroundings on a modern Greek who is sensitive to the history of the nation and conscious of the spirits of the great warriors of the past who live on—

> The very gale their names seemed sighing;
> The waters murmured of their name;
> The woods are peopled with their fame.

(Stz. XV, ll. 407-410)

Mythology, for Byron, was a tool for the expression of thoughts that were essentially his own, for he was rooted in reality, in the present. This makes him different from Keats who was aware of another permanence. While recreating the mythology of ancient Greece, Keats succeeded in establishing its relevance to any age. In fact Byron wrote about him—

(Keats) without Greek

Contrived to talk about the Gods of late,
Much as they might have been supposed to speak,

(Don Juan, Canto XI, Stz. LX)

Shelley has frequently been described as the solitary intellectual and aesthetic poet of grand cosmological
visions. A voracious scholar, he read and re-read the classics until they became indelibly imprinted on his mind. Phrases, ideas, images, characters, scenes etc. became part of his own thoughts. Homer, Aeschylus, Plato, Theocritus, Aristophanes and Lucan were much more than models to imitate. They were companions in nobility and depth of thought. In the preface to *Hellas*, the poet wrote —

> We are all Greeks. Our laws, our literature, our religion, our arts have their roots in Greece. But for Greece — Rome, the instructor, the conqueror, or the metropolis of our ancestors, would have spread no illumination with her arms, and we might still have been savages and idolaters. 20

Shelley was an atheist. In *Queen Mab* he denounced religion and commented thus on mythology —

> 'Though taintest all thou look'st upon! — the stars,
> Which on thy cradle beamed so brightly sweet,
> Were gods to the distempered playfulness
> Of thy untutored infancy; the trees,
> The grass, the clouds, the mountains, and the sea,
> All living things that walk, swim, creep, or fly,
> Were gods: the sun had homage, and the moon
> Her worshipper.

(Section VI, 11. 72-79)
Shelley's reinterpretation of mythology is much more subjective than that of the Renaissance poets. In *Adonais*, he uses the myth of Adonais and Venus to create a lament for the untimely death of Keats. His gift for picture making leads to a fresh, vital and decorative myth-making aptitude. Instead of describing Keats as an Arcadian shepherd, Shelley says --

...the quick Dreams,...
Who were his flocks, whom near
the living streams
Of his young spirit he fed.

(Stz. IX, ll. 73-76)

Shelley wrote a group of mythological lyrics in 1820 viz 'Arethusa', 'The Cloud', 'The Hymn to Apollo' and 'Hymn of Pan'. Shelley's hymn is different from Keats's rather mystical rendering of the same subject. Shelley's poem has a rather allegorical twist that may represent the disillusion of the idealist.

In *The Witch of Atlas* Shelley mythologizes rather purposefully. The ideal woman, the cave, the veil, the boat, the stream are given a metaphysical significance in relation to the many-faceted theme of beauty, love and imagination. The witch lives on Atlas' mountain. She is the daughter of the sun, the god of poetry. The cave is
the soul within which are visions of love, thought-stirring odours and life-giving liquors. There are also some scrolls 'the works of some Saturnian Archimage' that guide men on how they may recreate the golden age of innocence.

*Prometheus Unbound* presents Prometheus as the ideal and imaginative man and Jupiter as the evil and tyrannical man. The Earth is the corrupt stage of superstition and suffering. The play concludes with the dethronement of Jupiter and victory of love in the soul of Prometheus and the energies of the world being directed to the good of man. Prometheus is set up as a Christ figure and can be sentimentalized.

Shelley, along with Keats, can be said to have established the mythological genre in the nineteenth century. Shelley’s individual contribution, however, lies in the reinterpretation of the older mythic patterns into new iconoclastic and symbolic systems. Unlike Keats, Shelley does not believe in the exclusive power of mythologizing. His mythic patterns represent his search for the forms they can change into or pass beyond.

Lesser Romantic poets like Southey (*The Laba the Destroyer, The Curse of Kehama*) Hunt (*The Nymphs, Hero*
and Leander, The Story of Rimini) Peacock (Rhododaphne) 
Hartley Coleridge (The Vale of Tempe, Diana and Endymion) 
Mrs. Tighe (Psyche) and Lord Thurlow (Adriane Angelica) 
also employed mythology in their works.

Leigh Hunt belonged to Keats's circle of friends and 
shared with him his leanings towards sensuousness, romance 
and mythologizing. Hunt too, read Keats's boyhood favor- 
rites viz Lempriere's Classical Dictionary, Andrew Tooke's 
Pantheon and Spence's Polymetis.

In his preface to The Story of Rimini he wrote --

...the Grecian mythology... requires more 
than mere scholarship to understand -- as the 
elevation of the external world and of accomplished humanity to the highest pitch of the graceful, and as embodied essences of all the grand and lovely qualities of nature. 21

Even though Hunt had a clear perception of the aesthetic 
and spiritual significance of mythology he lacked the 
sensitive insight and psychological depth of Keats and 
Shelley and could never aspire to similar poetic pinnacles. 
His mythology contains no explicit symbolic pattern. His 
only poetic achievement is in terms of visual descriptions.

Thomas Love Peacock treats the philosophy and reli- 
gion of remote pagan culture in his works. His chief
fascination lay in magic, mystery and beauty. In *Rhododaphne*, he borrows from a number of myths and old fables such as the Apuleian version of the story of Psyche in which a god builds a supernatural palace in order to make love to a mortal. Other stories are present, too, and the link between them is their evocation of the natural cycle of the year, summer and winter, or of the daylight and the darkness. The two heroines of the poem represent the two faces of Proserpina who is both the daughter of Ceres and the wife of Pluto. The poem's hero is Orpheus who visits the underworld to rescue Eurydice and she is also his Muse. This configuration of myths is also present in the works of Byron and Keats. However, inspite of such similarities, Peacock is ranked as a lesser poet. His problem was that as a result of intellectual cross-pressures he could not fully reconcile myth with poetry. His use of mythology is muted and half-hearted.

The lesser poets fostered the growth of Romantic Hellenism. The mushroom growth of their mythopoetic works proved that the genre established by Shelley and Keats had struck deep roots in the British soil and the mythological impulse reasserted itself in a remarkably conspicuous and creative fashion.
Notes and References


3. Ibid., p. 3.


