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Lamia: An Expression of Commerce, Ambiguous Character and Tragic Romance

Dr. Muna Shrestha
Asst. Professor
Tribhuvan University, Nepal
Mahendra Multiple Campus, Nepalgunj
muna.shrestha123@gmail.com

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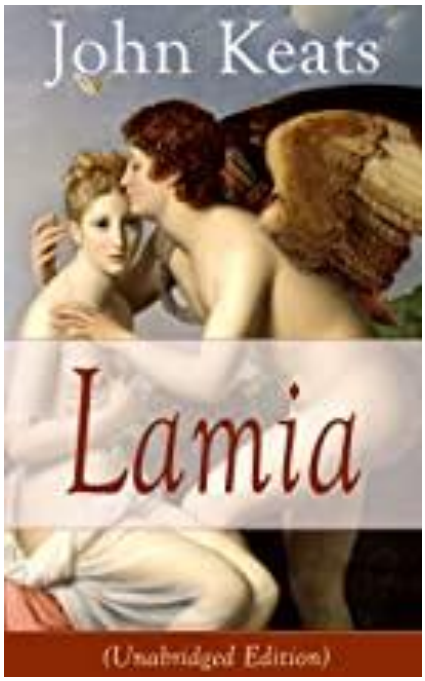

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Abstract

Lamia is John Keats's last narrative poem and during its composition, his anxiety over money vibrates throughout the poem. His representations of money in the poems relate to the larger debate about the effects of trade and commerce on the social, economic and political condition of England. In this longer poem, Keats portrays Lamia as an ambiguous figure of innocence with the power to attack other people's dreams. He takes the image of the serpent-woman who devours men and gives her a face and a voice. She is associated both with the demon and the innocent maiden. *Lamia* is also centred on female experience and based on a woman's feelings about love. Keats's cultured characterization of *Lamia* indicates his shifting

feelings about love. She gives up her physical existence and hides her true identity, but her beloved sees her mere an object to fulfill his desires. His romantic love is egotistical with selfish desires which show they have the different feeling. If love is silliness, then one should dismiss love. But one is suffering by it instead and faces the tragic ending.

Keywords: John Keats, *Lamia*, ambiguous, sympathy, commerce, romance, tragedy

1. Introduction

John Keats, a Romantic poet, was known for his emphasis on nature as an imaginative knowledge of external objects. He believed that imagination was the coincidence and fusion of the expressed and unspeakable. He had a unique perspective of the imagination in comparison to his fellow Romantics. His power to apply imagination to every aspect of life played the vital role behind his poetry. His poetry exposes the unreal fantasies which create our reality that lingers in uncertainty beyond its aesthetic potential. Through his works such as *Lamia*, *Endymion*, *Isabella*, *The Eve of St. Agnes*, *Hyperion*, and the Odes of 1819, Keats immersed himself into an imaginative dream world. His theory of imagination is defined by his expression of the connection between the conscious and unconscious creative mind through his representation of conflict between thought and feeling and reason and consciousness.

In *Lamia*, Keats shows a very much greater sense of proportion and power of selection than in his earlier work. There is more light and shade. He expresses the conflict between the challenge presented by the incorporation of the feminine in poetic practice and the pressure exerted by the patriarchal community to reject the feminine as anything but a mirror of masculine desire. Keats's poetry reveals the limits patriarchal discourse imposes on the masculine, something unappreciated by twentieth-century Keats critics. *Lamia* exposes the misconception about the patriarchal discourse which is based upon the concept that the feminine is able to be controlled and chosen. She is innocent and needs and desires of masculine authority and dominance. She is setting herself up to be rescued and seduced, even as she is described as a saint. If the female is not the mirror of masculine desire, if she is not obedient, she is designated negative Other, or "disturbing power" (Zhang, 40).

According to Jack Stillinger, *Lamia* was written in late August, and perhaps on September 1819, with further revisions in March 1820 (*Keats's Complete Poems*, 474). Accordingly, *Lamia* was written over a year after Keats's poetic intellect had turned against the typical Romance genre, approximately a year and a half after the writing of *Isabella*, almost six months after drafting *The Eve of St. Agnes*, and some three months after composing *La Belle Dame sans Merci* (441, 453, 463). Thus, by the time that he began to compose *Lamia*, Keats had had sufficient time to experiment with the Romance genre.

Lamia was written after he was going to Rome and learning about his illness. He was intimately acquainted with disease and experienced a large amount of death in his short life. This gave him an intimacy with death and disease that he put to use in a medical career. He chose to pursue a medical career before he decided to be a poet. This gave him a superior knowledge about health and illness. And he wrote his later poems such as *Lamia*. It was a typically lyrical poem of the romantic era, and an outpouring of the grief and anger that he experienced when his family members died of Tuberculosis.

In 1820, Keats published his last volume of poetry and wrote to a friend that he considered this volume to "be [his] last trial" and that if it failed he would "try what [he could] do in the Apothecary line" (Keats as quoted in Cox 409). At that time, he was seriously ill and thinking a trip to Italy for his health but he behaved as though he was not ill and was merely considering a change in career path. He had done well as a poet but had failed to become wildly successful in his time. At the age of 25, the last volume to be written was the poem called *Lamia*. While this did not turn out to be the last poem he ever wrote, it was the last poem that he completed.

1.2 Story of *Lamia*

One day, the God Hermes is in the forest looking for a nymph. The nymph, he is searching for is said to be the most beautiful in the land, and he wants nothing more than to make her his own. He deeply falls in love with a nymph who hides herself from him. Then he hears a complaining voice of a beautiful serpent who has been cursed into the form of a snake. She tells Hermes if he changes her to woman's body and puts her near where the man she loves known as Lycius, she will make the nymph visible to him. Hermes gladly agrees and the exchange is made. The transformation for Lamia is violent and painful, but once she is transformed, she is strikingly and enchantingly beautiful. Then the nymph becomes visible to Hermes and the serpent disappears.

When Lamia, the serpent-turned-woman was in her serpent state, she had the power to send her spirit wherever she wished. On one of her spirit journeys she had seen a Corinthian youth, Lycius. Now, as woman, she stands at the side of a road along waiting Lycius. When he arrives, she asks him if he will leave her all alone where she is. Lycius falls violently in love with her at first glance. They walk together to Corinth and make their abode in a mansion which she leads him to. There they live together as man and wife, avoiding the company of others.

Lycius and Lamia live happily in their love then Lycius decides they ought to marry and invite all of their friends to the marriage festival. First Lamia strongly opposes his plan, but she agrees on the condition that Lycius will not invite the philosopher Apollonius to the marriage feast. While Lycius is absent inviting all his kinsfolk to the wedding, Lamia, with her magic

powers, orders invisible servants to decorate the banquet room and furnish it with rich foods of every kind. When Lycius' guests arrive, they wonder at the splendor of the mansion. None of them had known that there was such a magnificent palace in Corinth. Apollonius also comes there without invitation.

At the height of the wedding feast, Apollonius sees what Lamia really is, something not human. He begins to stare fixedly at Lamia. Lamia feels discomfort and grows pale but doesn't give any answer of Lycius' questions. The feasting and the music come to a stop. Lycius turns to Apollonius and commands him to stop staring at Lamia. Apollonius answers "Fool, how I can see you to be a serpent's prey. Looking at Lamia again, he utters two words: "A serpent!" After that word, Lamia vanishes. At the moment of her disappearance, Lycius dies.

2. Symbolism of Commerce

In *Lamia*, Keats shows a very much greater sense of proportion and power of selection than in his earlier work. There is more light and shade. Just before he wrote *Lamia*, he had a brain hemorrhage, so he knew that he was dying. His brother Tom had also just died, and another brother George was in financial difficulty. George stole money and went gambling much of the time. When George asked John for money, John had *Lamia* published to provide the money.

Keats and his contemporaries debated on the socio-political issues to find out whether commerce was beneficial to society and the majority of its members. The traditionally 'benign' view of economic endeavour as a civilising activity had been rejected by enlightened thinkers in the mid-eighteenth century in favour of a more systematic and scientific analysis of individual rights, free trade and the satisfaction of wants (Fermanis, *John Keats and the Ideas of the Enlightenment*, 98).The shift from an old 'moral economy' to a new 'political economy' aware that the profit motive of commercial societies could undermine older qualities of independence and communal responsibility. According to Adam Smith, commerce encouraged liberty because each man was governed by self-interest, the division of labour could prove harmful to community and citizenship (98).

Lamia represents an attack on luxury in which Keats portrays the object of testing or temptation and the tempter. In this context, the nymph and Lycius are objects of temptation or disobedience to which Hermes and Lamia submission. Lamia herself is both a victim and an agent of temptation. She surrenders to the temptation of Lycius and facilitates the seduction of the nymph. Her role as the symbolic incarnation of luxury and excess – 'Lamia is the fetish – gold, commodity, money, Pythagorean number' – is somewhat complicated by Keats's sympathy for her desire for humanity. Lamia's transformation by Hermes into female form is also recounted in terms of the gold, silver and precious stones. The references to Lamia's 'silver mail, and golden brede', 'sapphires, greens, and amethyst' and 'rubious-argent' (*Lamia*, I, 158, 162,

163) all allude to objects commonly associated in the eighteenth century with eastern luxury and display (Fermanis, 111).

According to Kelvin Everest, substantial criticism on *Lamia* posits that the poem is observed that this poem is "concerned with money" and that "Keats's own anxiety over money during the composition of Lamia vibrates throughout the poem" (Fermains, 99) but Keats represents his view about money in this way that it relays the large debate about the effects of trade and commerce on the social, economic and political condition of England. Marjorie Levinson, who follows Marxist and Freudian principles of fetishism, commodity exchange and symbolic capital, seems curious to know about the mechanisms due to which love and money, pleasure and power, consumption and production are related in the contemporary life. But despite her brilliantly revolutionary answers which are grounded in those principles, she, herself fails to relate those principles to then contemporary understandings of economic exchange.

Similarly, it has been taken from Watkins's *Politics of the Imagination* that Levinson has described the poem's movement as a transition from nature to culture or "from a naturally democratic community to a hierarchical, institutionally articulated formulation; and, from easy, universal prosperity to the image form and its corresponding political structure" (Watkins, 1989, p. 110). She defines the poem as a symbol of evolution of the world from a state of harmony and unity to a modern commercial one where wealth and display play the dominant role.

This poem deals separate but basically related issues of early nineteenth-century political economy: the larger social values of luxury and widespread consumerism. In *Lamia*, Keats rejects the progressive commercialism because of its consequences which works at the expense of public humanist values but gives the result of excessive privatization of human interests (Fermanis, 2009, p. 100). He has taken this thought from his friend Leigh Hunt's *Examiner*. In his article, "Relief of the National Distresses", Hunt suggests thinking of collecting over-possession is like a disease that has not only permeated the whole nation but also polluted the character and nature of the English soul which increase the distresses of the poor people.

The transformation of Lamia also represents excess through the classical association of luxury with women. *Lamia* is symbolized as the commercial elements that destroy the social stability of Crete. Due to her capability, she facilitates Hermes' possession of the nymph and persuades him to change her form into a mortal woman by challenging the natural law. On one side, Lamia is presented as an agent of corruption or temptation in a peaceful world and on the other side, her allegorically serpentine nature is given as the reason of the fall of myth. But due to the connections between her characterization and representations of trade and luxury, it is necessary to supervise the contemporary political and historical controversy (Fermanis, 2009, p. 114).

In this way, luxury which comes in the earlier paragraph as over-possession informs the narrative of *Lamia*. Related to the luxury motif is the nymph who is instrumental to the dramatization of the theme of temptation. However, Keats' sympathy for her desire for humanity complicates the nymph's role as the symbolic incarnation of luxury and excess. At the opening lines of the poem, Hermes sees love with selfish eyes. 'The ever-smitten Hermes' (1: line 7) is described as someone who constantly determines on some 'amorous theft' (1: line 8). He falls in love with nymph and her immeasurable treasure. It is the nymph's economic value which Hermes appreciates and desires and not necessarily the nymph herself. His dealings with Lamia remove the emotional element associated with love. Hermes seems to be so consumed by his desires to obtain the nymph's riches that he neglects to take her wishes into consideration: for him the nymph is a mere valued product to be owned (Schulkins, *Keats, Modesty and Masturbation*,131).

In *John Keats and the Ideas of the Enlightenment*, the second part of *Lamia* is linked to the luxury motif and even to commerce (116). In this reading, Lamia's palace is shocking, and visitors are amazed at the "ministring slaves", "silken couches", "gorgeous dyes" and "baskets of bright osier'd gold' (*Lamia*, II, 193, 197, 205, 217). Keats here connects Lamia's luxury and possessions from the east and also America, including silk, dyes, gold and exotic trees: "Fresh carved cedar, mimicking a glade / Of palm and plantain" (I, 125–6). Here luxury means as eastern and effeminate, both of which are the overriding qualities of Keats's representation of Lamia, whose dominion is similarly confined to "a palace" (II, 3) where Lycius is tempted into the "dull shade / Of deep sleep" (II, 104–5), completely ignore with the affairs of "the noisy world almost forsworn" (II, 33). According to Jack Stillinger, Keats wanted to make *Lamia* a popular poem and thus he could make money out of it. In this regard, he seems to modify *Lamia* to the taste of reader. His favourable view on *Lamia* can reflect his intention. He considers that, as discussed, *Lamia* has a 'sort of fire' and it will engage the reader (Stillinger, p. 474).

3. Lamia as an Ambiguous Character

Keats represents Lamia both as a woman trapped in a serpent's form and a serpent trapped in a woman's physique. He deliberately portrays Lamia as mysterious and vague. She is good and evil, inhuman and human, a lover and a destroyer. She is associated both with the demon and the innocent maiden. She represents the "Other" here in the third-person perspective. The narrative begins with 'Upon a time' (*Lamia*, I, 1) is a traditional beginning of a fairy tale and it offers an omniscient third-person point of view. Such a view does not change until the reader comes to the line, 'Ah, what a world of love was at her feet!' (I, 21) Then the reader is aware that the story shifts from the un-participating third-person narrating stance to the one which offers the narrator's personal view. Yet the shift happens subtly and in a fluid way. 'Her head but ah, bitter-sweet! / She had a woman's mouth with all its pearls complete' (I, 59-60). The description 'bitter-sweet' bear out the narrator's opposing feelings about Lamia.

According to Rachel, some critics view Lamia as a demon, "an evil embodiment of the wasting power of love, a *belle dame sans merci*" (*Keats, Modesty and Masturbation*, 127). Keats' complex and sympathetic translation of Lamia's character and journey through the poem has often been overlooked by critics who tend to associate Lamia's sexuality with evil. Lamia is actually deprived of her humanity by Lycius' limited and subjective understand of her instead of Keats who in reality humanizes his serpent-woman by giving her a voice to express her predicament. She has the power to attack other people's dreams. On one of her endeavors, she joined Lycius's dream of finding the perfect bride who will offer him the domestic bliss he is yearning for. In order to become Lycius's image of perfection, Lamia feels she must renounce her physical existence and hide her true identity (Schulkins ,129).

The poem does not let us forget that Lamia is both a female and a serpent, innocent and sensuously attractive. Even though Lamia's feminine desires is expressed by her womanly and human voice, Hermes simply sees her as a mere 'smooth-lipp'd serpent' (1: line 83). He views Lamia as a slick-tongued serpent, with the ability to persuade others with specious words. Lamia uses attractive and flattering words to manipulate him to accept her deal of unveiling the nymph for the price of getting a human form. Her bargain transforms her into a woman denotes that she is not depicted as a helpless victim of love, but rather as a strong character that pursues her desires with no regard for others. Her actions do not necessarily come to mislead or harm Lycius, but they rather reveal the desperation of a woman in love (135).

In this allegorical poem, Keats refers to women, as ambiguous. By repeating a key image used in the portrayal of Lamia as serpent, Keats indicates that she recollects her essentially demonic nature. She can evoke the feeling of bitterness as she is a serpent, but she can also be as sweet as a woman. His ambivalence can also be seen in the description of Lamia's beautiful eyes: 'what could such eyes do there / But weep, and weep, that they were born so fair?' (I, 61-62) aptly bring forth sympathy for Lamia in the reader using this image. The narrator again manifests his mixed feelings in the following lines: 'Her throat was serpent, but the words she spake / Came, as through bubbling honey, because she is both evil as a snake and also has a sweet nature. But she is also capable of turning the honey-like words into a trap.

According to Warren Stevenson, the serpent was a symbol of benevolence and good fortune for the Greeks and the Egyptians. A universal reading of the serpent is not certain. That the patriarchal use of the serpent is meant to be negative is clear from Appollonius's use of the symbol when he exclaims to Lycius, "'And shall I see thee made a serpent's prey?'" (11:298), but Lamia sees her serpentine shape as a "wreathed tomb." Appollonius' use of the serpent image is meant to refer to Lamia's misbehavior, but Lamia's reference betrays the patriarchal construct of the feminine as evil. She expresses her oppression as she says to Hermes, "'1 was a woman, let

me have once morel A woman's shape'" (1:117-118). Her serpentine form can be seen as a disguise of her true nature (Zhang, 202).

Keats alerts about Lamia's real nature, her status as deceptive shape-shifter, her associations with demons and madness. When she foams at the mouth during her transformation, the foam makes the very grass fade and die. There is a clear suggestion that she puts Lycius under a magic spell: when he first meets her and loss of consciousness. He is 'tangled in her mesh' (Lamia, 1, 295-7), a victim, and she is in complete control. Lycius is the dreamer, Lamia the dream. Hence the fundamental passivity of his relationship to her, and his later attempt to "return" to the world of human affairs.

Lamia's external appeal is ambiguously powerful, and her beauty renders her as a supernatural goddess worthy of love and worship, this image is balanced by Keats's reference to Lamia's gloomy tapestries. The allusion to Lamia's body 'touched with miseries' (1: line 54) and her weeping eyes and pleading words shift the reader's emotions and sympathies but due to her changing position, reader also keeps the different view on Lamia's figure and her human appeal. Keats appears to excuse Lamia's deceiving words by arguing that 'the words she spake', are 'for Love's sake' (Lamia, 1, 64–5). Her actions do not necessarily come to mislead or harm Lycius, but they rather reveal the anxiety of a woman in love (Schulkins, 2014, p. 135). Yet, her passion for Lycius displays her single-mindedness.

The ending of *Lamia* is also ambiguous. John Whale believes that Lamia is dead (Whale, p. 88) but Fogle equates perhaps Lamia only vanishes and she may resume a serpent's form again (Fogle, p. 69). The ending is very dubious because one cannot be sure where Lamia disappears. Her disappearance is like her indeterminate identity and makes the reader puzzled. Instead, the narrator seems sympathetic to their love and hopes that their secret love will not be revealed. But Keats' attitude toward his characters is somewhat ambiguous because he doesn't show the family and parents of Lamia.

Lamia herself becomes a symbol for a fluid reality involving both good and evil and is perhaps best understood as signifying the raw potentiality of being itself. Both Apollonius and Lycius fail to recognize Lamia as "potentiality," and both are implicated in her destruction through the immature belief that they can confine her reality to one set mode of existence. By embracing only one aspect of Lamia, each fails to confirm her entire being. Both identifications, that which labels Lamia good and that which labels her evil, freeze her in the present, making her reality something deadly static (Porscha Fermanis, 111).

4. Tragic Romance of Lamia and Lycius

The story of *Lamia*, which Keats found in Burton resembled those of *Isabella* and of *The Eve of St. Agnes* in representing two lovers united by a secret and mysterious bond. When narrating the poem, Keats shows his contradictory idea about love and such a view is manifest by *Lamia*. That is to say, *Lamia* is based on a woman's feelings about love. Keats's sophisticated characterization of Lamia indicates his shifting feelings about love.

The opening scene introduces the theme of romantic love. It functions to uncover the selfishness and presents the idea that immortal love can be achieved in the dream world of gods. But here is also the description about the love of Hermes and nymph. Nymph has inestimable treasure and he has temptation of her wealth, so he is ready to change Lamia from serpent to women (Lamia, 1, 85-6). His bargaining with Lamia shows his perception about the love of the nymph which is just like an easily purchasing object and it also removes the emotional element associated with love. Hermes looks so eager to obtain her riches that he neglects to take her wishes into consideration (Schulkins, 2014, p. 131).

In spite of that, the story of Hermes and the nymph gives a glimpse of the fairy tale of romance after its happy ending, whereas the story of Lamia and Lycius's cannot maintain it. Their love is amongst mortals, but the absence of real romantic element increases the negative force and brings their destruction. Lycius only has selfish desires of inner wealth and pleasure. He keeps the narrow concept to her and misrepresents reality in this way which only suit to his own personal wishes. It makes clear that Lamia can be interpreted as a victim of her own romantic perception so Keats ridicules at Lycius's limited and romantic view and keeps sympathetic understanding to Lamia (132).

For Keats, love is a form of imagination. He lets Lamia dream of love and then her passion for Lycius displays the doubtful side of being in love. When Lamia sees Lycius, she begs him to look back at her and not to desert her. She says, 'will you leave me on the hills alone? Lycius, look back! and be some pity shown' (I, 245-46). If Lycius does not turn back but ignores her words, Lamia will suffer. She takes the initiative and, she makes herself suffer from love. Keats appears ironical and even satirical about love and tries to show the agony following from love. For him, love is nonsense and also an ambivalent feeling from which one cannot escape. Lamia seems to understand Lycius' psychology well and knows that he loves her at first sight by her singing (I, 249) and beauty (I, 251-53). Then Lamia starts to work upon Lycius' feelings.

According to Van Ghent, Lamia is the central character who wins Lycius's heart, takes him to an obscure place and deceives him and, therefore, she comes out as the goddess of death, while Lycius is nothing but a "sacrificial victim" (qtd. in Schulkins 136). But she is not evil and

dangerous for him because she only loves him and when he observes her divine appearance, he plans his own ideal thoughts on her shadowy figure and believes that she is the form of his delight as an ideal wife. But the fact is that Lycius is unable to see her clearly, always as her back is turned to him.

Whereas Warren Stevenson qualifies Lycius's love as "cynical" (Werner, W. Beyer, '*Keats and the Daemon King'*) which seems unsustainable. Lycius simply desires to marry her and make their love known to the world. He wants social recognition because he wants to use Lamia's beauty for his own fame that will arouse jealousy in people, thereby raising the level of respect. He wishes for a wedding celebration; at first, she is distressed by this idea and pleads with him to change his mind; but at last submits to his wishes (141).

He invites all his friends, but Lamia doesn't invite any-one, and also begs him not to invite his former tutor, the philosopher Apollonius. But, now he becomes cruel and taking delight in her sorrows, as a madman. He looks like a demon and subduing his beloved to accept his tyrannical rule (142). She suffers from lovesickness since she 'whisper'd' in a 'trembling tone'. She is also 'anguished and has a 'frail-strung heart'. These are typical symptoms of a person who is in love. She is not manipulating Lycius at this moment. But she is assuring her true love for him. The foreshadowing of Lycius and Lamia's doomed love tells the reader more about their complex character. The narrator repeats the forecast for their love: 'For all this came a ruin' (II, 16). They live happily in the palace and will not have any 'ruin' if the 'thrill of trumpets' (II, 27-28) does not happen. A sense of reality, the symbol of the thrill of trumpets, creeps in their love and ushers in the motif of illusion and reality.

A spiteful person Apollonius does not feel ashamed of it as he tells Lycius that "yet must I do this wrong / And you forgive me" (II, 168-69). Due to his aggressive character, he doesn't make the peaceful atmosphere but only bring up conflicts. By using the word sage Keats address Apollonius as the symbol of cold philosophy (Warren Stevenson, ""Lamia": A Stab at the Gordian Knot",241), reason, and reality. He satirizes Apollonius and thinks he is unimaginative. He is like a snake and is capable of harming Lycius (Susan Parry, *Keats's Lamia*, 179). He insists on revealing Lamia's secret to Lycius as a serpent and fixes his gaze upon her and Lycius feels the terror of Lamia. For the first time, he forgets his own egotistical needs and tries to remove her fear by holding her pale and icy hand (Schulkins, 2014, p. 143). At this time, he realizes the pain and fears of the woman. Until now, he notices Lamia only as a mere ideal and sees her as "Not mortal, but of heavenly progeny" (II, 87).

He criticizes Apollonius but he replies that he will save Lycius from being of a serpent's prey. Then he repeats the word "serpent" and Lamia vanishes with an awful scream. After that Lycius realizes the value of Lamia's human feelings which leads to his death on Lamia's

disappearance. He senses her pain in the most extreme and intimate manner and feels her heart and soul rather than focusing merely on her external appearance. However, Lamia is also a woman who has emotions and needs- she is not just a repulsive creature. He realises that Lamia is a separate individual whose existence is not centred on him alone. When Lycius is unable to accept the loss of his dream, he dies in a fury of grief and in this way their romance ends in tragedy (John C. Whale, "John Keats", 88).

The poet wants to say that things aren't as simple as they appear to be. Lycius is characterized as a romantic dreamer, a male lover, who fails to see his lover as an individual other. He sees her more as a part of his dream than his reality. What seems to lie at the heart of Keats' romances, and more specifically in *Lamia*, is that romantic love is nothing more than a selfish feeling that comes to satisfy personal desires without any regards (131).

5. Conclusion

John Keats did not, by any definition, live a life that most would call happy. For most of his life, though, he seemed to try to make the best of it. Disease took away his family, his future as a poet and the potential of him ever marrying the woman he loved. However, after the death of his brother, he slipped into depression. While not obviously terminally ill himself, Keats wrote his last poem *Lamia* full of imagery and an expression of commerce, ambiguous character and tragic ending of love. The poem, while still a typically lyrical poem of the romantic era and an outpouring of the grief and anger that Keats experienced when his family members died of Tuberculosis.

Lamia is viewed in a very similar but more complex fashion. Because of unavoidable circumstances, Keats and Fanny Brawne were separated and that was the real beginning of Keats's agony. *Lamia* reflects Keats's disorder of feelings about love and Fanny during the period of separation from her. Because of the promise of money to George, marriage to Fanny was for the time impossible, but Keats found that attempts to detach himself from Fanny both emotionally and imaginatively were also impossible. His passionate love for Fanny Brawne diverted him from the very literary achievement that might provide financial security necessary for marriage. Lamia is a strong reflection of Keats's love for Fanny but emphasizes particularly the mutual misgiving and fascination Keats felt.

We find his expression about the importance of money, suffering of love tragedy and dubious nature of human beings in *Lamia*. Using metaphor: 'love is like a doll dress'd up' he tells the reader that love is lighthearted, and one does not have to treat love very seriously but needs to protect it. Love is divine things and due to which a person feels holy but appears foolish to others. It is also clear from the poem that the dreams of immortal lovers are real, but the dreams of mortals are illusory and unreliable. Hermes and nymph are immortal, so they don't

suffer, and their wishes are also easily fulfilled. For Lycius and Lamia in the mortal world, by contrast, Love is complex which makes their lives full of suffering and miserable.

We can say that *Lamia* has generated more allegorical readings than any other of Keats's poems with the numerous contrasts like dream and reality, imagination and reason, poetry and philosophy. The three main characters, Lamia, Lycius and Apollonius, have respectively been read, as poetry, the poet, and the philosopher. It also expresses a conflict between reality and the imagination. But who is responsible for the disaster which happens to Lamia and Lycius? In spite of good intention, Apollonius seems responsible, but he doesn't want to harm Lycius. He wishes to protect Lycius from falling prey to Lamia. And Lamia who is a serpent and loves Lycius also has no means to harm him. If Lycius had decided not to make the marriage public, the disaster would not have happened. But it is not wholly Lycius' fault because his decision of marrying Lamia publicly is prompted by Lamia's distrust of his love. All the three characters' relationships are interconnected and become very complex and ambivalent. At the end, no one is a winner, but everyone seems to be a loser. It is nobody's fault. Every character simply realises his or her dream or does his duty.

The poetic element employed by Keats enables him to create the appropriate thematic setting for his narration, evoke the expected emotions of the reader, and serve as the moral story of reality and love. He is able to educate his reader on interpreting between realities and appearances as well as acknowledging the defying power of imagination. *Lamia* shows how male idealization imposes on and limits women's sexual identity. Against general readings of Lamia's sexual character as the root of evil, what the analysis denotes is that *Lamia* places the spotlight on Keats's sympathetic but ambiguous representation of Lamia. Though the ambiguity is recognized, the nub of the argument is that Keats does not portray female sexuality as demonic—women as the Other which may be allegorically extended to all those common people who had been Othered in England during the Romantic era.

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