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## Fled is that Magic: The Uses of Enchantment in John Keats and Led Zeppelin

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Fled is that Magic:  
The Uses of Enchantment in John Keats and Led Zeppelin

Senior Project submitted to  
Division of Languages and Literature  
of Bard College

by

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## Chapter 1

### Fled is That Magic:

#### The Uses of Enchantment in John Keats and Led Zeppelin

In this project, I will explore what Lester Bangs promotes as, “a new Romanticism built upon the universal language of rock ‘n’ roll.”<sup>1</sup> Musicians of the 1970s self-consciously borrowed on and reinvented Romantic preoccupations and themes, as Bangs suggests. In keeping with this genealogy, John Keats and Led Zeppelin can both be said to practice “magic” on their audiences. Magic provides a language for understanding the shared concerns of these nineteenth century poets and twentieth century rock artists. By magic, I mean their work seeks actively to impact the consciousness of their readers and listeners. The “will” to do so often goes under the name of magic. Our first-hand experience of the power of a poem or song is that it moves us in some way, emotionally or intellectually. Led Zeppelin’s music and Keats’s poems pack their own power into the creative work, continuing to affect generations of people who are attracted to the energies produced in the experience of their creative and artistic output.

What meanings are attached to “magic” in my investigation? The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines magic as: “The use of ritual activities, which are intended to influence the course of events or to manipulate the natural world, usually involving the use of an occult or secret body of knowledge. Also: the use of this practice as a subject of study.”

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<sup>1</sup>From review of Patti Smith, *Horses in Mainlines, Blood Feasts, and Bad Taste*.

For my purposes, the defining characteristic of magic is the *will* of the artist working to “influence” or “manipulate” the reader or listener. Enchantment arises when wonder occurs on the part of the reader or audience. Magic is any force or act that has an impact on an intended person or thing. It is the exertion of the power of the individual will in the universe, or the art of focusing the will to affect change both in the world around you and the world within you. Magic can be an art in the sense that you need to follow your intuition to be creative. The musician uses his trained knowledge of his instrument and his powerful will to manifest what he creates in his imagination into sound waves communicable to other human beings. In Romantic poetry, the magical force is reflected in content and as a design on the reader. Music can induce certain states in the listener—it is a consciousness-altering experience. Artists are highly intuitive people who can tune into profound feelings in their art and take other people with them. Poetry and music become means for voyaging into another world created out of the consciousness of the artist. The reader or listener is “enchanted” by their work. The performance of magic in a poem or song works only before a receptive audience. Samuel Taylor Coleridge explains why Romantic poetry calls for this receptivity:

My endeavors should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith. (*Biographia* 145)

Magic in this sense calls upon what Coleridge refers to “poetic faith” in the reader or listeners who “wills” his or her own enchantment even as the artist creates through an act of will.

Who are the artists that shape my inquiry? Keats, Shelley, and Coleridge all drew upon the language of alchemy to describe the powers of the imagination manifested in their poetry in relation to magic. Keats shares a fascination with magic with other Romantic poets, reimagining mythology and the supernatural as a rich context for the “alchemy” of poetic inspiration. In *Magic and English Romanticism*, professor Anya Taylor maintains that Keats is enthralled by the power of words and the potential, “to carry them out of the limitations of time, space, mortality, and imperfection” (Taylor 248). In Keats’s poems, the speaker departs from conscious reality to enter a transcendent, mythical world.

Percy Bysshe Shelley expresses the power of poetry to transform the consciousness of readers through its enchanted words. Taylor describes Shelley’s conception of the effectiveness of magical poetry: “the spell bewitches, enchants, charms, and magically coerces men and nations. It works more forcefully than action, because it works immediately by enlarging the imagination” (Taylor 218). Shelley displays a preoccupation with the transformation of energies evident in alchemical symbolism. He describes the power of poetry as the product of alchemy:

It transmutes all that it touches, and every form moving within the radiance of its presence is changed by wondrous sympathy to an incarnation of the spirit which it breathes; its secret alchemy turns to potable gold the poisonous waters which flow from death through life; it strips the veil of familiarity from the world, and lays bare the naked and sleeping beauty which is the spirit of its forms. (*Norton Anthology* 847)

So too, in *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge explains his inspiration for writing the poems in *Lyrical Ballads* to be transformative: “to give charm and novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind’s

attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it toward the loveliness and wonders of the world before us” (*Biographia* 145). He emphasizes the imagination, and, like Keats, many of his poems include imaginative flights of a speaker to another realm of consciousness. Coleridge also favors the musical qualities of poetry and their ability to enhance the mood of a poem. Poetry is the very imagination of words as a path of sound through the air. By using our imaginations, we can hear music through reading his verse.

The “New Romanticism” of rock and roll conjures similar ideas. I will focus on Led Zeppelin because this group epitomizes ideas I see as originating in early nineteenth century poetic culture with its focus on the alchemical imagination. Led Zeppelin consisted of guitarist Jimmy Page, vocalist Robert Plant, bassist John Paul Jones, and drummer John Bonham. Page made a reputation for himself as a highly reputable and in-demand session player in London before he replaced Jeff Beck in the Yardbirds in 1966. His time in the studio provided him with knowledge of recording techniques and how to sculpt sound as a producer. When the Yardbirds broke up in 1968, Page explains in the recent documentary *It Might Get Loud*, he consciously set out to start a band dominated by a louder, faster, more-raw sound and, “to make people’s ear drums hurt.” Richard Cole, Led Zeppelin’s tour manager, explains the origin of the band’s name: “It was a name that had emerged from a conversation I had months earlier with Keith Moon and John Entwistle [from The Who] in New York while I was touring with the Yardbirds. Moon and Entwistle were growing weary of the Who and were kidding about starting a new band with Jimmy Page. Moon joked, ‘I’ve got a good name for it. Let’s call it Lead Zeppelin, ‘cause it’ll go over like a lead balloon’” (Cole 38). The band decided to drop the “a” in Lead so that Americans wouldn’t mispronounce the band’s name.

Their music depends on a heavy blues sound, repetition, volume, and guitar riffs. The *OED* defines rock ‘n’ roll: “A style of music originating in the southern United States, largely as an amalgam of rhythm and blues, country music, and Chicago electric blues and characterized by a heavily accentuated backbeat and simple melodies and structures.” In this tradition, Led Zeppelin’s sound is distinct for:

Bonham’s drumming (notably in his use of a single bass drum), in combination with Jones’s bass guitar, produced a large, bottom-heavy sound. The bass line was frequently mirrored by the electric guitar, sometimes distorted, playing an octave higher, creating a monolithic and powerful effect . . . Page’s melodic style was firmly rooted in the blues; his main concern was with timbre: he fulfilled the function of both rhythm and lead guitar, and played electric and acoustic instruments as well as pedal steel guitar and mandolin . . . Plant’s powerful voice was also a hallmark of the band’s sound: he had remarkable flexibility as a rock singer, capable of conveying a wide range of emotion with his control of volume, timbre and dissonance. His powerful, exaggerated blues-shouter style has been particularly influential. The band’s sound can be attributed partly to Page’s innovatory production, notably his positioning of microphones, particularly when recording the drums. (Grove Music Online)

The stylistic versatility of Page, Plant, and Jones gave Led Zeppelin a musical flexibility that set the band apart from other rock bands of the period. Led Zeppelin’s manager, Peter Grant, secured them an unprecedented deal with Atlantic Records that gave the band complete creative control over their own music, production, and cover art, as well as the highest royalty rate ever paid to a group of musicians. Page understood the importance of having complete artistic control, and he meticulously crafted the sound and image of Led Zeppelin in his role as the lead guitarist and producer of their music. He created Led Zeppelin with a specific vision: “I wanted artistic control in a vise grip,” Page recalls, “because I knew exactly what I wanted to do with these fellows . . . I knew exactly what I wanted to do in every respect. I knew where all the guitars were going to go and how it was going to sound—everything” (*Guitar World*, April 2009).



In his 1975 interview with Jimmy Page, entitled “Rock Magic,” writer William Burroughs appears cognizant of rock music’s power and influence over society: “It is to be remembered that the origin of all the arts—music, painting, and writing—is magical and evocative; and that magic is always used to obtain some definite result.”<sup>2</sup> What is the magical purpose of music and poetry? With Led Zeppelin, the magical force projected through their music seems to be aimed at the creation of energy within the listener. Burroughs describes it nicely: “A rock concert is in fact a rite involving the evocation and transmutation of energy. Rock musicians can be compared to priests.” Music that is magical in origin and purpose is concerned with the evocation and control of spiritual forces, which ultimately impact the listeners.

In what follows, I will be working with Romantic constructions of magic and applying them to Led Zeppelin. Although many Romantic poets thematize magic, my main focus will be on the work of John Keats. Following Keats, Jimmy Page was grounded in British folk tradition and fascinated by mythology and the occult, as became increasingly evident from the band's later albums. Magic is crucial to Led Zeppelin’s use of this material, as is their creative interpretation of alchemy as a way to render literal, tangible, and real the products of the imagination.

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<sup>2</sup> William Seward Burroughs was born in 1914 and is known for being one of the principle novelists of the Beat generation. His “cut-up” writing technique scrambles up words and phrases to the point of incoherence, focusing attention on the individual words themselves and the power they contain on the page. Burroughs is thought to have coined the phrase “heavy metal” to describe the genre of music in his 1962 novel, *The Soft Machine*, and asserted that the “amplitude of rock music was a tremendous force for liberation” (Becker). Like Page, Burroughs appears to be fascinated with magic in all its forms.

My project is organized into three sections. The first describes the notion of magic and uses of enchantment in Romantic poetry. The second section focuses on the conception of magic portrayed through Led Zeppelin's image and music. In addition to artist profiles, these sections contain analyses of the poetic and musical works discussed to determine how Romantic poets and Led Zeppelin have attempted to evoke a magical atmosphere in their work. The final section expresses the culmination of the relationship between Romantic poetry and Led Zeppelin through a comparison of John Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" with Led Zeppelin's "Stairway to Heaven." In both works, the artist becomes the one asserting his magical will through his work as well as the individual being impacted by the force of that magic. The ultimate goal is unity of the artists and their audiences, as what follows will demonstrate.

## Section I- Poetry and Magic

### Chapter 2

#### The Alchemical Imagination in Romantic Poetry and Led Zeppelin

The Hermetic philosophy of alchemy is what unites the Romantic poets and Led Zeppelin in my project. Alchemy is an esoteric science and theory of knowledge based on the Hermetic doctrine of correspondences: “As above, so below.” This doctrine is thought to serve as the foundation of all systems of magic and is taken from the *Emerald Tablet*, an ancient Egyptian text attributed to the Greek god Hermes Trismegistus. Hermes Trismegistus, or Hermes the Thrice-Great, was known to the Romans as Mercury, the messenger of the gods, and is associated with Thoth, the Egyptian god of knowledge and learning. Magic recognizes a correspondence between the universe and us, the macrocosm and the microcosm—each individual is a mirror of the divine. That which happens “above,” in otherworldly realms, can also be echoed “below” on earth. Keats demonstrates this notion in his poetry by making the supernatural visible in the real world and embodying divinities in human forms that interact with mortal human beings.

One of the major themes of the Romantic Era was the conflict between the claims of the imagination and the basis of reality. For the Romantics, the Enlightenment had created an objectified world that they could only experience as exiles (*Norton Anthology*). In the eyes of the Romantic poets, reason had failed as the lawmaker and highest authority because it had transformed everything without factual backing into

something untrue and illusory. It had deprived nature of mystery, magic, and beauty, and it had erased ancient religions and mysticism as being nothing more than mythology.

Reason instilled in the Romantic poets a burning desire to re-mystify the disenchanting world. Anya Taylor explains:

In reaction to the inadequacies of these philosophical analyses of language, the poets and imaginative thinkers of the late eighteenth century occasionally turn to metaphors of magic, for magic assumes that words are not themselves material but partake of spirit and that words have an inscrutable power to influence matter, particularly when arranged in mysteriously rhythmic ways and when impelled by ecstatic possessed states of mind.  
(Taylor 5)

In relation to Romantic poetry, magic symbolizes the irrational powers of language over the reader. Such ecstatic states of mind are characteristic of Dionysian ritual, which will be explored later in chapter six. The reader is kept under the spell of the poet, or the enchanter, through the medium of words into his mind. Keats uses magic as a form of liberation from human limitations, and the magic that most often appears in his poetry suspends time and space, personality and the body. Keats's poems are distinct in the poet's chosen method to enchant his reader. He explores visionary states of consciousness that violate the laws of reason. The importance of magic in Keats's poetry lies in its power: a story containing elements with the supernatural will forever remain the unique creation of the poet's imagination.

Alchemy corresponds to Romanticism in that both are founded upon the absolute unity of existence and the imagination's power to unfold a vision of the One from the many, creating as it were a new and infinitely precious reality. The concept of alchemy

comes from the Arabic word for the Philosopher's Stone (Roberts).<sup>3</sup> The Philosopher's Stone is understood as the goal of the alchemical quest and the principle capable of achieving the spiritual regeneration of man. In this way, alchemy represents the quest for sacred awareness. In her article, "Beautiful Circuiting: The Alchemical Imagination in English Romanticism," psychologist Maureen Roberts claims: "The psychological equivalent to the Philosopher's Stone is the undivided self," for poets such as Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats (Roberts 1). The union of self and nature is fundamental to the quests of both alchemy and Romantic poetry. The difference between alchemy and Romanticism is that instead of being projected literally onto external reality, the Romantics experience this transformation within the imagination; it is more closely related to individual self and consciousness. It is through the imagination that the self assimilates the conceptual dualities of experience. Shelley and Coleridge view the imagination as alchemical in its functioning mode. Coleridge describes the magical aspect of the imagination in his conception of the ideal poet:

He diffuses a tone and spirit of unity, that blends, and (as it were) fuses, each into each, by that synthetic and magical power of which we have exclusively appropriated the name of imagination. This power [is] first put in action by the will and understanding, and retained under their irremissive, though gentle and unnoticed, control. (*Biographia* 150)

The poet here is identified as an alchemist, unifying everything into the one.

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<sup>3</sup> Dr. Maureen Roberts is a psychiatrist in the tradition of C.G. Jung. In 1998, she began her practice helping artists diagnosed with schizophrenia cope with their illness without medication. She founded the Schizophrenia Drug-free Crisis Centre in Australia to provide educational courses and therapy. She asserts that people labeled "mentally ill" are in fact experiencing a spiritual emergency or a "self-rebirthing process" that leads to becoming "whole" with the universe. See

<http://www.psychiatrywithsoul.com/About.html>

In “A Defence of Poetry,” Percy Shelley describes the two classes of mental action: “[One is reasoning, and the other is] the *poesein*, or the principle of synthesis, and has for its own objects those forms which are common to universal nature and existence itself” (*Norton Anthology* 838). Using this analogy, Shelley portrays the alchemical synthesis of separate elements into a single whole. The Renaissance alchemist Paracelsus explains the philosophical basis of alchemical practice as, “the essential correspondence between the synthetic principles of Nature and the inner impulse toward integration and wholeness” (Roberts 1). Similarly, the Romantics seek to unite the inside with the outside; they yearn for a union between the subject and the object.

Led Zeppelin also participates in a reactivation of alchemical themes and symbols during the 1970s. “Alchemy” is the term Page uses to capture the process of gathering and transforming the energy of each individual artist’s work to create a greater whole in the group: “The four elements of Led Zeppelin making a fifth is magic into itself. That’s the alchemical process” (*Guitar World*, January 2008). Page admits to employing the English magus, Aleister Crowley’s, ideas about magic in his daily life, which impacted the music he was producing.

Edward Alexander Crowley was born in 1875 at the height of the nineteenth century occult revival in England. Crowley was supposedly so misbehaved as a child that his mother took to calling him “the Great Beast 666 (after the monster in the Book of Revelations),” a name which Crowley later took to calling himself (Schick 94). While attending Cambridge in 1896, Crowley had an unspecified mystical experience that led to him dropping out of school and devoting himself to the study of the occult. He joined the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, the prestigious occult society that included

members such as William Butler Yeats and Evelyn Underhill, but quickly fell out of favor with the other members. Crowley then joined the *Ordo Templi Orientis*, a Masonic group founded in Germany that taught the techniques of sex magic. Sex magic invoked Dionysian rituals in its use of various types of sexual activity in pursuit of religious and spiritual truths. In 1907, Crowley established his own magical order, the Argentium Astrum, known as the A.A. (Carr-Gomm 435). He became notorious as “The Wickedest Man in the World” and the “King of Depravity” for his use of hallucinogenic drugs and sexual activity within a ritualistic setting to unlock the doors of the hidden “True Will” (*Aleister Crowley Society*). According to Crowley, the ultimate goal of magic is to understand the universe and one’s place in it, symbolized by the “True Will,” which is a subjective goal for every individual. The “True Will” equals spiritual perfection, the synthesis of a human’s life, comparable to the Philosopher’s Stone in alchemy. Central to the goal of understanding the self and the “True Will” is the belief that the macrocosm is reflected in each individual thing. In *Magick in Theory and Practice*, Crowley approaches ritual with an alchemical understanding of the universe: “It is the uniting of the Microcosm with the Macrocosm. The Supreme and Complete Ritual is therefore the Invocation of the Holy Guardian Angel; or, in the language of Mysticism, Union with God” (*Magick* 22). Using the force of his “True Will,” Crowley explains, “[Man] may thus subjugate the whole Universe of which he is conscious to his individual Will . . . For the whole will of every man is in reality the whole will of the Universe” (*Magick* 10). Led Zeppelin approaches magic in terms of Crowley’s assertion of the will as the primary moving force in the universe. In his book, *Led Zeppelin-1975*, rock journalist Stephen

Davis interviewed Jimmy Page:

Magic is a system of will and of strength. That's what interests me about magic. I can't produce material magic, real magic, so what we offer is the illusion of magic—mechanical devices that perform illusions while we play music. And in my own mind, the difference between the illusion, and the reality, of the lasers, and the theremin, and all that is . . . hazy. What's a laser beam? Magic, isn't it? (161)

Page claims that the illusion of magic is created during live performances through the use of amplified instruments. The poet and musician use the “True Will” to produce the fifth element of alchemy, the power of poetry and music over the audience. As the producer of Led Zeppelin, it is Page's “will” that is being exerted through their music.



## Chapter 3

### The Living Powers of Language

In Romantic poetry, magic can have a definite result within the poem, but it also has one that affects and lingers with the reader. The poet participates in the realm of magic through the living power of language and the act of animating the world through his words. Romantic poetry instigates a reorientation of reality. The tools of poetry, such as imagery, sound, and the resonance of each thought with the other ideas expressed in the poem, all serve to bring the action described in the poem alive again. Melody, rhythm, and syntax charge language with a certain energy. Specific rhyme schemes and meters evoke certain associations within the reader's mind. Language is chosen very effectively to create a mood, and formal technique becomes a tool for the poet to elicit the reaction he wants from his reader. Poets like Shelley, Coleridge, and especially Keats, extend language through sound and imagery. Keats displays a trust in the power of imagery to arouse pleasure and pain in his reader. He sets out in his poetry to have a tangible impact on the emotional state of his reader. For the Romantics, because the imagery and tone of a poem could convey more than ordinary words can express, poetic language is used to describe what would otherwise be inexpressible and to evoke a feeling even though the moment itself may have been beyond words.

Keatsian negative capability grows out of the Romantic rebellion against Enlightenment in that its core value is the ability of the poet to live in doubt. Keats defines "Negative Capability:" "I mean Negative Capability, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact &

reason” (*Norton Anthology* 942). Negative capability allows Keats to imagine other realms including the supernatural. Anya Taylor describes the effect negative capability has on the reader: “Veering from gullibility to skepticism and back again, we are kept in a pleasurable anxiety” (Taylor 56). The reader remains engaged in the poem, which depicts disparate images and fuses them together within the same work, provoking a realization on the behalf of the reader about the underlying unity of the universe. In a letter to Richard Woodhouse written on October 27<sup>th</sup>, 1818, Keats describes the poetical character: “It does no harm from its relish of the dark side of things, any more than from its taste for the bright one, because they both end in speculation.” Keats’s definition of the poetical character as having no identity relates to the image of the Philosopher’s Stone discussed in the previous chapter because both are unlimited and cannot be constrained to a single form. The self is both a unity and synthesis of opposites—it is the One that is both everything and nothing, that which has no stable identity.

Traditional magical lore is based in stories that carry the same power as myth, using symbols familiar to the collective human psyche. In utilizing classical mythology, Keats engages with communal experience in the attempt to transmute familiar myths into new meanings. “Ode to Psyche” is structured around embodied forms that bring the speaker in contact with the mythological. The speaker decides to restore the cult of the pagan goddess Psyche after having a vision of her. The poem is an invocation to the goddess that portrays the transformative effect Psyche has on the poet’s mind. The speaker requests: “O Goddess! hear these tuneless numbers, wrung / By sweet enforcement and remembrance dear” (1-2). The “tuneless numbers” signify that the music of his verse will not be heard by anybody else because he is creating an internal

song, just like the reader in his private reading experience. Keats employs incantatory language to evoke a magical experience rooted in pagan mythological consciousness. He contrasts the present age to a belief in an enchanted existence during ancient times symbolized by the goddess Psyche: “Too, too late for the fond believing lyre / When holy were the haunted forest boughs, / Holy the air, the water, and the fire” (37-39). To Keats, nature appears alive with divinities, and the woods portrayed in the poem evoke a pre-existing natural religion. The alliteration in the description of the forest has an echoing, incantatory effect so that the reader unconsciously participates in the magic by reading the words, which induce a trancelike state. The “fond believing lyre” evokes the piped music of the past as well as the nostalgic, devoted believer in the ways of magic and the world of gods and goddesses. The audible lyre of the ancients has fallen into disuse in contemporary times, and the poet must revitalize Psyche’s cult using his own language.

Psyche represents the emblem of personal consciousness. She is able to inspire the poet internally by occupying his mind and transferring to him her abilities of imagination and unlimited knowledge. Through Psyche’s power to animate the mind, the poet undergoes an expansion of thought to encompass all possible things. He wants to worship the goddess in some untouched region of the imagination, where his branched thoughts will experience unlimited growth and replace the physical trees of his surrounding environment. His mind will create a new landscape: “With the wreath’d trellis of a working brain, / With buds and bells, and stars without a name” (20-21). In that state, the poet’s mind would be eternally productive and infinitely creative, so that his thoughts “will never breed the same” (63). The Psyche embedded in his mind actually becomes the poet’s psyche.

In many of his poems, Keats displays an interest in the folklore of England, particularly in those tales rooted in the supernatural and the superstition of the people. “La Belle Dame sans Merci” and “The Eve of St. Agnes” address old superstitions in the specific supernaturalism that shapes each narrative. In “The Eve of Saint Agnes,” Keats employs Christian ritual superstition as a catalyst for the poem’s supernaturalism that rests on its taking place in the past, a time when superstition played a larger role in the daily lives of people. Believing the impossible as possible calls for the imagination at its full stretch. In order to enter the realm of the poem, the reader must suspend his disbelief. Keats, like Coleridge, invites us to enter an imaginary world where, “in sooth such things have / been” (81-82).

Keats writes “The Eve of St. Agnes” in Spenserian stanzas, and the poem’s archaic rhythm helps establish the medieval setting for events that violate the reader’s sense of reality. There was once a widely held superstition that if a chaste, young woman shows proper devotion to Saint Agnes through set rituals, she will receive a vision of her future husband while dreaming on the eve of the saint’s holiday. In this poem, St. Agnes could represent the supernatural being who has the power to cast Madeline under her spell. The ritual dream state is portrayed as an expansion of consciousness during which Madeline has idealized visions of her lover, Porphyro. She appears under the influence of some unknown power: “While legion’d fairies pac’d the coverlet, / And pale enchantment held her sleepy-eyed. / Never on such a night have lovers met, / Since Merlin paid his Demon all the monstrous debt” (168-171). Madeline is held under a spell that keeps her asleep. The reference to Merlin and his Demons gives an ominous overtone to the dream. Images of “legion’d fairies” and “pale enchantment” bring further

associations of sorcery to the dream. Keats foreshadows the budding danger in the plot from the beginning through a progression of images of cold and death: “Ah bitter chill it was! / . . . Numb were the Beadsman’s fingers, while he told / His rosary” (1, 5-6). The forces governing the natural environment literally impact the fates of the characters in the poem. Madeline awakens to the unattractive reality of her dark chamber and ominous atmosphere of the castle. She compares the real Porphyro to the vision in her dream:

“How chang’d thou art! how pallid, chill, and drear!  
“Give me that voice again, my Porphyro,  
“Those looks immortal, those complainings dear!  
“Oh leave me not in this eternal woe,  
“For if thou diest, my Love, I know not where to go!” (307-316)

Her attempt to enact this ideal in reality could potentially result in her death.

The conclusion of the poem returns us to the imagery of darkness and bitter chill with the deaths of Angela and the Beadsman and the tryst of the ghostlike figures, Madeline and Porphyro. It seems as though the supernatural events of Madeline’s dream have bled into reality: “They glide like phantoms, into the wide hall; / Like phantoms, to the iron porch, they glide” (361-362). Keats conveys the ghosts’ sense of movement, and the readers also glide with the phantoms out of the world of the poem and back to their own reality:

And they are gone: ay, ages ago  
These lovers fled away into the storm.  
That night the Baron dreamt of many a woe,  
And all his warrior-guests, with shade and form  
Of witch, and demon, and large coffin-worm,  
Were long be-nightmar’d. Angela the old  
Died palsy-twitch’d, with meager face deform;  
The Beadsman, after thousand aves told,  
For aye unsought for slept among his ashes cold. (371-378)

The poem concludes with imagery that has supernatural implications, leaving the reader unsure if the events of the poem were caused by the presence of magic.

In “The Eve of St. Agnes,” Keats references the title of another medieval work: “an ancient ditty, long since mute, / In Provence call’s, ‘La belle dame sans mercy,” which inspires his original ballad, “La Belle Dame sans Merci” (291-292). In “La Belle Dame sans Merci,” Keats draws upon the literary traditions of romance and the ballad to construct a poem about a doomed relationship between a faery woman and her mortal lover. A knight is enthralled by a supernatural lady, who transports him into a realm of enchantment from which he cannot escape. The belle dame’s declarations of love for men are the method by which she ensnares her prey forever. Obsessive desire for “the beautiful lady” continues despite the warning of the knight’s dream and the fact that he has already awoken abandoned in a wasteland. Keats emphasizes the distance between the real world and the realm of enchantment at the beginning of the poem by portraying the knight as physically, psychologically and emotionally distant from normal human consciousness. The knight’s physical appearance reflects his internal state:

I see a lily on thy brow  
    With anguish moist and fever dew,  
And on thy cheeks a fading rose  
    Fast withereth too. (9-12)

The perspiration, or dew, that appears on his forehead suggests sickness. Visually, Keats illustrates the knight’s vitality through the feverish red of the rose, evoking the blood that rushes in his cheeks. The rose is a physical reminder of the time when the knight’s love

with the belle dame was in full bloom. However, the rose is fading and indicates the knight's diminishing life force. Sensual love is linked with physical punishment in the knight's declining health. His union with the belle dame is why he appears "alone and palely loitering" on the cold hillside (46). The lady represents the ideal, and the knight rejects the real world for the sake of an ideal of beauty and enchantment that she represents. In the same way, Madeline rejects reality for the ideal vision of her dream at the end of "The Eve of St. Agnes."

The knight recalls his first encounter with the ethereal maid: "Full beautiful, a fairy's child; / Her hair was long, her foot was light, / And her eyes were wild" (14-16). He describes the lady by listing only her external qualities, which are clearly not human. Because the knight cannot understand the non-mortal, the belle dame remains thoroughly foreign to all human observers. She seduces men with her external beauty and sensuality portrayed in her wild food of, "honey wild, and manna dew" (26). Her very existence is not of the human world—she inhabits an elvin grot outside of the realm of human reality.

The knight presents himself as the dominant figure in the beginning of their relationship. He is the active one who makes her a garland, bracelets, and "fragrant zone," and finally carries her off on his pacing steed (18). Rather than simply succumbing to the belle dame, the knight seems to invite her to enthrall him by placing her on his pacing steed. However, we soon learn that the lady lures her men in by allowing them to believe that they are dominant at first. The knight is transported into another realm when he hears the belle dame's song:

I set her on my pacing steed,  
And nothing else saw all day long,

For sidelong would she bend, and sing  
A fairy's song. (21-24)

The references to fairies and elves indicate the presence of enchantment. The belle dame sings her fairy song, or magical incantation, while transporting the knight into an enchanted realm of beauty and desire that exists outside of time. The knight interprets her “fairy’s song” as evidence as her reciprocation of his love although the language is unfamiliar to him: “And sure in language strange she said— / I love thee true” (27-28). Just as the knight translates her language, although perhaps inaccurately, the poet plays a parallel role as the ultimate translator of the vision in his imagination. The belle dame again exercises her mystical incantations to lull the knight to sleep and inspire his dream vision. “Lulled” evokes a lullaby, but her song acquires supernatural connotations over the course of the poem. She is an enchantress whose powers to enthrall her human lovers resemble the capacity of the poet to enthrall his audience. Her powerful song can signify the trancelike relations between the poet and reader captivated by the flow of sound. However, Keats’s powers of language impact his readers positively while the belle dame uses her powers for evil.

Keats presents an evocative meditation on the idea of enchantment through the knight’s dream vision in “La Belle Dame sans Merci.” Keats portrays the deflation of the visionary quest with its spectral figures, feverish consciousness, and landscape of barren love. The knight’s dream vision displays how dreams can transform reality for the worse:

I saw pale kings, and princes too,  
Pale warriors, death pale were they all;



They cried—"La belle dame sans merci  
Hath thee in thrall!" (33-40)

The ghosts evoke powerful men of ancient civilizations usually associated with conquest and dominion, but they are all subdued by the belle dame in the realm of enchantment. When her lovers are vulnerable and sleeping, the belle dame confuses them within the shifting reality of the dream world, where the veil between the realms of conscious reality and enchantment is very thin. The men are vulnerable because they are not aware or in control of their powers of reason or action while in the dream state. They haunt the earth while never being able to access either the enchanted realm or conscious waking reality. The men function as a warning that the belle dame is fatal to human life and society. The dream foretells the knight's future and results in the physical manifestation of his nightmare upon waking. Keats emphasizes that the knight is divorced from our reality by rendering him physically identical to the ghostly chorus of men. He leaves the reader with the understanding that the knight's dream has turned into an eternal and inescapable waking nightmare.

Keats can look upon the landscape with a double consciousness, seeing both versions of reality. The knight awakes abandoned reclining on the cold hillside—a thin barrier of earth that separates the realm of the living from the dead, which also suggests the closeness of the realm of enchantment to reality. One of the premises of faery magic is the existence of beings that belong to a mysterious world behind, within, and beneath physical nature. Underneath the cold hillside is a world of enchantment alive with supernatural figures including elves and fairies. The cold, dead earth symbolizes the knight's barren state of love after waking. The hillside recalls a barrow, or a mound of

earth that was used during ancient times to cover the remains of the dead, and in the poem, represents the dead world in which all of the belle dame's former lovers, now ghosts, reside. In giving himself entirely to the dream of the ideal, the knight destroys, and perhaps consciously renounces, his life in the real world.

Keats responds to the poetic traditions of the ballad and the allegorical romance by dramatizing what readers would ordinarily expect from these traditions. In the medieval romance, the belle dame appears as an enchantress who seeks the love of a mortal knight. In "La Belle Dame sans Mercy: Introduction," medieval historian Dana Symons explains a medieval trope portrayed in this poem: "As in many medieval love debates, reason and will stand in opposition" (Symons 1). The psychological structure of allegory in "La Belle Dame sans Merci" portrays minds divided between enchanting fantasies and desolate realities. Like the romance, a traditional theme in the folk ballad is the destructiveness of love. Keats creates a circular movement that reinforces the link between the opening and closing stanzas, following balladic repetition to stress the collective understanding of the supernatural figure. The poem concludes with the knight echoing the same language as the speaker in the first stanza. The fact that the poem has come full circle emphasizes that the knight is no longer capable of movement or change. He will remain stuck in between two worlds: conscious reality and his fantasy of an enchanted realm.

There are many possible explanations for what ails the knight, but Keats prefers to leave the motivations of the characters unresolved. Is it the knight's fault for falling in love with something not human? The vision of the pale men suggests that the belle dame is deliberately destructive and that her enchanted food induces starvation rather than

nourishment. She is never shown pitying the men trapped in the elfin land where they suffer. However, the lady's affections for the knight are unclear because the reader is denied access to her inner thoughts and feelings. The poem could display a self-destroying enthrallment. Ultimately, Keats leaves it up to his reader to form an opinion on the reality of dream visions and the physical consequences they have in the world of waking reality. The poems, "La Belle Dame sans Merci" and "The Eve of St. Agnes," allow us to experience both without necessarily forcing us to choose one over the other.

Keats directly portrays supernatural events and characters in "Lamia" using imagery from classical mythology. Lamia is immediately cast as a supernatural and otherworldly creature: "She seem'd at once, some penanced lady elf / Some demon's mistress, or the demon's self," and, "Her head was a serpent, but ah, bitter sweet! / She had a woman's mouth with all its pearls complete" (55-56, 59-60). Lamia's serpent form may refer to the ensnaring powers of women over men and bewitchment by temptation. In the beginning of the poem, Lamia desires "a sweet body fit for life," and to be reanimated as a human being, which Keats accomplishes through the action of the poem (39). Like the belle dame, Lamia entrances her lover Lycius through her words of love: "Then from amaze into delight he fell / To hear her whisper woman's lore so well; / And every word she spake entic'd him on / To unperplex'd delight and pleasure known" (324-327). Lycius's tutor, Apollonius, senses Lamia's inhuman nature and tries to warn Lycius on the day of his wedding to Lamia: "Thou art a scholar, Lycius, and must know / That finer spirits cannot breathe below / In human climes, and live" (279-281). Lycius appears so captivated by Lamia and entranced by her beauty that he ignores Apollonius. The guests at their wedding are similarly preoccupied by their own fantasies and neglect to

investigate the nature of the enchantment in the wedding hall: “The herd approach’d; each guest, with busy brain, / Arriving at the portal, gaz’d amain, / And entered marveling” (150-152). In “Seeing Romantically in ‘Lamia,’” critic Paul Endo asserts: “Rather than imposing their reality on Lamia, the guests commit to *her* world . . . The power of such communal beliefs is indeed magical: it effectively constitutes what can and cannot be seen” (Endo). Keats distinguishes between two classes of people: “That is a doubtful tale from faery land, / Hard for the non-elect to understand” (5-6). As a member of the non-elect group who does not understand or believe in magic, Apollonius is able to see through Lamia’s charm and expose her secret. Apollonius is an agent of disenchantment, but he works his own magic in the poem: he conjures Lamia out of existence with his “demon eyes” and accusation of “A Serpent!” (289, 305). His weapon is a rational version of the magic spell, and the “foul dream” Lamia is vanquished by the tutor’s piercing gaze (271).

“Natural supernaturalism,” as defined by literary critic M.H. Abrams, is the general tendency of Romantic poets, “to naturalize the supernatural and to humanize the divine” (Abrams 68). In Keats’s “Eve of St. Agnes,” “La Belle Dame sans Merci,” and “Lamia,” as we have seen, and in Coleridge’s “Kubla Khan,” “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” and “Christabel,” the chosen method of the poets is to humanize, or familiarize, the supernatural in order to renew a sense of awe in everyday life. In “Kubla Khan,” Coleridge humanizes the supernatural by presenting “a vision once I saw,” a world created in his imagination, as a true representation of reality (38). He begins the poem by describing an unfamiliar place:

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan  
A stately pleasure-dome decree:  
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran  
Through caverns measureless to man  
Down to a sunless sea. (1-5)

The poem's opening lines have an incantatory quality that makes them both memorable and repeatable, and the words create the impression of the poet reconstructing the pleasure-dome now using language. Literary critic Richard Fogle maintains in his article, "The Romantic Unity of 'Kubla Khan:'" "'Kubla Khan' along with the 'magic casements' passage in Keats's 'Nightingale' ode is the very essence of the distilled sorceries of Romanticism" (Fogle 13). In the pleasure dome, man transcends mere natural processes. The river Alph brings to mind the first letter in the Greek alphabet, *alpha*, which signifies the beginning of all creation and creative processes. Pleasure is evoked in the poem by a kind of magic: vivid, gorgeous images are conjured in the imagination:

The shadow of the dome of pleasure  
Floated midway on the waves;  
Where was heard the mingled measure  
From the fountain and the caves.  
It was a miracle of rare device,  
A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice! (31-36)

The stanza is filled with imagery of the dualities of light and shade that coexist simultaneously within the dome. The contrasting imagery of dark and light signify the difference between the realm of conscious reality and this enchanted place. They are all united in the pleasure dome, which represents the poetic capacity to encompass both the light and dark shade of things. Coleridge evokes: "A savage place! as holy and enchanted / As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted / By woman wailing for her demon-lover!"

(14-16). The woman and her demon-lover are representations of the supernatural, but Coleridge humanizes them by portraying the woman as a human being.

Music can bridge the gulf between form and formlessness through the use of the imagination. Coleridge conjures the power of the poet and his lyric: “That with music loud and long, / I would build that dome in air, / That sunny dome! those caves of ice!”

(45-47). In addition to using music to construct the vision in his imagination into something material, the poem demonstrates the poet’s ability to captivate an audience through his use of language:

That sunny dome! those caves of ice!  
And all who heard should see them there,  
And all should cry, Beware! Beware!  
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!  
Weave a circle round him thrice,  
And close your eyes with holy dread,  
For he on honey-dew hath fed,  
And drunk the milk of Paradise. (47-54)

Coleridge portrays his audience as being terrified at the poet’s appearance and perhaps the power he wields over them using his language. Both his appearance and the audience’s reaction to him imply that he is a supernatural figure. He describes the poet’s appearance using supernatural imagery, with “flashing eyes” and “floating hair.” The holiness of the inspired poet is appears unholy because it exerts a supernatural force over others. The people use a ritual to protect themselves from his power: “Weave a circle round him thrice” (51). He is portrayed on another level of consciousness from everybody around him because he has tasted and nourished his mind with the food of the divine, “the milk of Paradise” (54).

In “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” Coleridge continues the theme of the powers of poetry. He employs the ballad form, which emphasizes the archaic language specifically selected for the poem, perhaps in order to exaggerate the story’s immortal qualities. His inclusion of explanatory marginalia adds to the impression that this truly is a ballad of ancient times—one that is now being explained to the reader through the necessary marginal gloss. Upon his first impression of the Mariner, the wedding guest doesn’t want anything to do with the strange, inexplicable power of the Mariner’s tale. Coleridge explains in the marginalia: “The wedding-guest is spell-bound by the eye of the old sea-faring man, and constrained to hear his tale” (Coleridge 168). The reaction of the wedding guest to the Mariner’s tale mirrors the reaction of the poet’s audience to the poet at the end of “Kubla Khan.”

The supernaturalism in the Mariner’s narrative occurs when nature is no longer familiar and appears to be governed by strange and unknown forces and spirits. The Mariner’s ship is drawn towards the South Pole, where ice, “cracked and growled, and roared and howled, / Like noises in a swoond!” and, the water glows, “like a witch’s oils, / Burnt green, and blue and white” (61-62, 129-130). There are no other living things to be seen until an albatross flies alongside the ship. Coleridge explains the symbolism of the albatross in the marginalia: “A spirit had followed them; one of the invisible inhabitants of this planet . . . They are very numerous, and there is no climate or element without one or more” (Coleridge 171). The bird is interpreted as a good omen by the crew, but the Mariner kills it anyway, provoking the forces of nature to avenge the albatross: “The very deep did rot: O Christ! / That ever this should be! / Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs / Upon the slimy sea” (123-126). By the end of “The Rime of the

Ancient Mariner,” the wedding guest will no longer view the world in the same way he once did:

He went like one that hath been stunn'd,  
And is of sense forlorn:  
A sadder and a wiser man  
He rose the morrow morn. (624-626)

He was impacted by the living force of the Mariner’s tale and transformed by it.

Coleridge credits his poem “Christabel:” “I mean witchery by daylight” (*Biographia* 507). In the poem, the character Geraldine appears as the witch casting a spell over Christabel. The imagery in the poem unmistakably resembles that of “The Eve of St. Agnes:” “Tis the middle of the night by the castle clock, / And the owls have awakened the crowing cock / . . . The night is chill, the cloud is gray” (1-2, 20). The mastiff bitch wailing outside the castle casts an ominous and foreboding tone in the poem. Christabel first appears performing a ritual alone in the woods: “And she in the midnight wood will pray / For the weal of her lover that’s far away” (29-30). The practice recalls a pagan ritual, and it seems odd that she doesn’t pray in a church. Geraldine appears as a shining, ethereal figure walking barefoot in the woods: “There she sees a damsel bright, / Drest in a silken robe of white” (60-61). She resembles Keats’s belle dame in her description as a fairy-like figure: “Her blue-veined feet unsandl’d were, / And wildly glittered here and there / The gems entangled in her hair” (63-65). Geraldine downplays her otherworldly appearance by concocting a story about being violated by a group of warriors. The first sign of her supernatural nature occurs when she cannot enter the castle until Christabel invites her in, which suggests she embodies an evil spirit or is a



witch. In the bedroom, Geraldine casts her spell over Christabel: “In the touch of this bosom there worketh a spell / Which is lord of thy utterance, Christabel” (267-268). Christabel and her father appear under the power of Geraldine and do not question the authority she exercises over them. However, Christabel soon has a prophetic dream revealing Geraldine’s evil nature and attempts to warn her father:

Then falling at the Baron’s feet,  
“By my mother’s soul do I entreat  
That thou this woman send away!”  
She said: and more she could not say:  
For what she knew she could not tell,  
O’er-mastered by the mighty spell. (615-620)

After being detected as supernatural, Geraldine is vanquished from the house like Lamia.

In Romantic poetry, figurative language encourages the reader to transcend the literal to a more intuitive level of consciousness in order to connect the disparate objects offered within the poem. For Coleridge—and I suggest Keats also—poetry explores the alchemical principle in a Romantic quest for unity. Mystical intimations come to the poet through inspiration, or a flash of higher consciousness, in which the consciousness is liberated and awareness is expanded. In such a state, the poet perceives an expanded meaning, a fundamental nature, and an importance in the images all at once. In “The Eolian Harp,” Coleridge describes the “one life” that all humans partake in: “O the one life within us and abroad, / Which meets all motion and becomes its soul, / A light in sound, a sound-like power in light” (26-28). M.H. Abrams expands on the symbolic significance of the “one life:” “The inherent tendency to return to the one origin is expedited by the Philosopher’s Stone, the principle of transformation and unification

which it is the task of the alchemist to disengage and purify” (Abrams 159). In the ultimate transformation of the self and the achievement of the Philosopher’s Stone, man’s spiritual enlightenment will expand to accept the absolute unity of all things. In “The Eolian Harp,” music and poetry have the potential to represent the “one life” that unites us all:

And what if all of animated nature  
Be but organic harps diversely framed,  
That tremble into thought, as o’er them sweeps  
Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze,  
At once the Soul of each, and God of All? (44-48)

The Aeolian harp was a small wooden box that could produce sound by the wind blowing across its strings. To the Romantics, it appeared as if Nature were playing the harp and revealing its intrinsic melody. In this sense, the poet could be conceived of as the Aeolian harp and an instrument of nature. Nature caused Romantic poets to vibrate in the same way that an electric guitar produces sound waves that cause musicians to vibrate. In *The Secret Power of Music*, music critic David Tame explains: “The ancients were convinced that music could become internalized by the individual; the music influencing, as it were, the rhythm of man’s thoughts, the melody of man’s emotions, and the harmony of his bodily health and manner of movement” (Tame 15). In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Friedrich Nietzsche compares Dionysian musicians to the lyric poet, who, “needs all the stirrings of passion, from the whisper of inclination to the fury of madness . . . He understands the whole of nature, including himself, to be nothing but that which eternally wills, desires, longs” (Nietzsche 6). In “A Defence of Poetry,” Shelley explains the relationship of the poet to the Aeolian harp in the same way: “It is as if the lyre could accommodate its chords to the motions of that which strikes them, in a determined

proportion of sound; even as the musician can accommodate his voice to the sound of the lyre” (*Norton Anthology* 838). For the Romantics, Nature is not merely alive, but also possesses a spiritual dimension that is inextricable from its material reality. In “Ode to Apollo,” Keats adds a mystical dimension to the music of the harp: “Wild warbling from the Aeolian lyre / Enchantment softly breathe, and trembling expire,” when the music fades away (34-35). As we will see in the last chapter, “Ode to a Nightingale” can be viewed as a representation of the enchantment of the reader through music.

As we shall see in my next chapter, Romantic ideas of poetry and song as powerful catalysts for transformation of consciousness continued to influence creative artists long after Shelley, Keats, and Coleridge died. Like the Romantics, Led Zeppelin viewed their music as being capable of enchanting their audiences and sought to demonstrate its magical powers in their recorded albums and live performances. The “alchemy” of Led Zeppelin’s art bears a powerful resemblance to many of the works already discussed here, taking even more seriously the proposition that music has the power to enchant, or bewitch, its listeners and to conjure sublime effects through sound.

## Section II- Music and Magic

### Chapter 4

#### Gods on Earth

I was living it. That's all that there is to it. It was my life—that fusion of magic and music. – Jimmy Page<sup>4</sup>

In their art, Led Zeppelin, Coleridge, and Keats reference and present themselves as the creators of otherworldly realms governed by mythic and magical forces. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche claims: “Music can give birth to the myth” (Nietzsche 79). They self-consciously created an aura of mysticism surrounding their poetry and music that shapes the way audiences today approach their art. Stephen Davis’s unauthorized biography of the band, *Hammer of the Gods*, plays an important role in creating a mythology surrounding Led Zeppelin and quickly became the most popular biography of Led Zeppelin. The biography amplifies the association between the band’s music and image with mythological figures. Davis spins an alluring tale filled with black magic, deals with the Devil, Dionysian escapades on tour, and the inexplicable power the band holds over its fans. Robert Plant admitted: “I want to believe Hammer of the Gods because it’s done us huge favors in terms of aura” (*Hammer of the Gods* title page). The public image of Led Zeppelin with all the myths of trashing hotel rooms, bedding underage groupies, and performing black magic only contributes to people’s obsession with the band and the mystery surrounding its music.

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<sup>4</sup> *Guitar World*, January 2008

In a 1991 interview for *Masters of Rock*, Robert Plant engages with man as a mythical figure: “Mankind had powers far greater than we have today, but somewhere within us lie those powers. We all have been aware of our powers for moments at a time” (Stein). Plant highlights his conception of the magic of music: “But where is the magic? Where is the transmission of something apart from what everybody expects?” (*Creem*, June 1973). In his lyrics, Robert Plant portrays the past as a magical time filled with unlimited possibilities. In “Ramble On” he sings: “How years ago / In days of old / When magic filled the air.” He wishes to recall or summon up this past in order to create magic in the present through music.

One of the most important sources for studying Led Zeppelin’s live performances is their 1976 theatrical release, *The Song Remains the Same*. The film combined concert footage from three different nights at Madison Square Garden in New York City during Led Zeppelin’s 1973 tour of the United States. It shows the band in their peak 1970s form and combines onstage artistry, behind the scenes footage, and fantasy sequences that provide the viewer with inside access to the band. Plant describes the fantasy sequences in *The Song Remains the Same* as representations of how the individual band members would like to be seen offstage. The way that Plant and Page in particular choose to portray themselves is very important.

Within the band, Robert Plant’s role could be compared to that of an actor performing the music, and Jimmy Page could be compared to a director as the creator of their sound. Plant performs mythic ideas by narrating them in his songs and positioning himself as the protagonist of his segment in *The Song Remains the Same*. Both men’s

segments stand out because they depict themselves in mystical settings that are divorced from everyday reality.

Robert Plant's fantasy sequence in *The Song Remains the Same* is distinguished by its Celtic motif and the mythological terms in which it presents the singer. Plant appears as a Celtic warrior conquering new land, and the ambiguous time frame suggests he is a mythological figure. Plant disembarks from a wooden ship on a deserted shore and is met by a mysterious horse that leads him through misty woods to a castle. Plant has to kill all of the guards to overtake the castle. After he wins the final battle, he climbs up a winding staircase to find a candle-lit chamber with a blond maiden standing in the center. Plant gives her such a coy, yet predatory look that it's hard not to laugh at how serious he appears.

Jimmy Page's sequence develops his role as the director of the band. Page's segment begins with him sitting alone on the grass of his country estate playing the hurdy gurdy, a stringed instrument that appears medieval, but creates an Eastern drone-like sound. When he turns around to face the camera, his eyes glow an inhuman orange color. During the freeform section of "Dazed and Confused," the live footage transitions into a shot of a misty forest and a full moon shining upon the figure of Page, who appears climbing a steep mountain. A hermit-like figure stands at the top of the mountain holding up a lantern. The cloaked figure raises his eyes and stares into the camera, metamorphosing into Page himself aging and growing young before our eyes. Page explains his intentions in the scene:

My segment was supposed to be the aspirant going to the beacon of truth, which is represented by the hermit and his journey toward it. What I was trying to say through the

transformation was that enlightenment can be achieved at any point in time; it just depends on when you want to access it. In other words you can always see the truth, but do you recognize when you see it or do you have to reflect back on it later? (*Guitar World*, January 2008)

In his segment, Page plays both roles of the aspirant seeking spiritual guidance and the Hermit holding the lantern of spiritual wisdom. As the aspirant, Page climbs to reach spiritual enlightenment, and in the concert, he climbs new heights in his musical improvisation. He suggests that the moment of spiritual enlightenment occurs whenever the person is willing to follow the path of the aspirant seeking truth, or his “True Will.” When we are ready to see, our path to spiritual enlightenment will be revealed to us. In her book, *In The Houses of the Holy*, music critic Susan Fast explains: “The conflation of Page’s identity with that of the hermit in this vignette not only represents a quest for self-knowledge that takes Page into both his past and his future but also suggests him as a supernatural, an appropriate extension of the powerful figure he cuts as a guitar hero” (Fast 31). Page’s fantasy sequence in the film concludes with the hermit waving a multicolored wand in a semicircle over his head, and Page mimics this movement with his violin bow when the scene shifts back to the live performance. The wand transforms into eleven different colors, which is a “general number of magick,” according to Aleister Crowley.



*Page as the Hermit in The Song Remains the Same*

Page's association with the Hermit will be echoed in the band's album art for their fourth record.

Jimmy Page ultimately dismisses the mythology surrounding the band and their music:

In this day and age there is a sensation that people feed off—towards that aspect of things—with a voracious appetite. It'll be interesting to see what's more important at the end of the day—the salacious gossip or the music. I know what I went into it for in the first place. What's important about Led Zeppelin is the music. (*The Sunday Times*, January 8, 2010)

However, Page's dismissal of the myth of the band doesn't alter the public perception of Led Zeppelin. During the 1970s, Page reinforced this mystical self-presentation by refusing to clarify the association of magic and mystery with their music. The occult resonates in the band's music, performances, and album artwork even if (or perhaps



because) the subject has been avoided by the band. Led Zeppelin's music and image can be seen as one expression of living mythology in contemporary culture.

## Chapter 5

### The Unleashed Impact of the Hammer of the Gods

The dominant self-mythologizing motif used by Led Zeppelin was enigmatic: the hammer of the gods. Cameron Crowe describes a conversation between Jimmy Page and the photographer Neal Preston, who asked him what he was looking for in his music. Page responded: “Power, Mystery, and the Hammer of the Gods” (Preston 1). In “Immigrant Song,” Plant describes the Viking hammer of the gods: “The hammer of the gods will drive our ship to new lands.” In what follows, I will investigate this trope as key to Led Zeppelin’s theatrical presentation of its music to audiences and fans.

Thor was one of the most powerful gods in Norse mythology, whose prime function was the exercise of physical force. Thor’s hammer is personified with distinct characteristics as *Mjollnir*, which means “Destroyer,” or “Crusher.” The hammer represents physical force, creation, and power. When Thor raised his hammer, thunder rumbled. The god could throw his deadly hammer and it would strike its target and fly back into the god’s hand. The description of the hammer of the Thunder God as a throwing weapon can be compared to Led Zeppelin’s music as their sonic waves fly through the air to hit listeners.


Led Zeppelin had a musical force created by the titanic thunder of John Bonham that was truly as powerful and driving as the hammer of the gods. John Bonham can be understood as Led Zeppelin’s hammer of the gods and the powerful force driving their music. The symbol of the hammer of the gods demonstrates how the explosive force of

John Bonham's drumming contributes to the power of Led Zeppelin's music.

Mythologist H.R. Davidson describes the characteristics of Thor in Viking mythology:

When he appears in the stories, he is described as a huge man with a red beard, with a great voice and terrible, fierce, burning eyes. Outspoken, indomitable, he strode through the Northern heavens, filled with vigour and gusto. He set his reliance in his strong right arm and in his simple weapon, the hammer *Mjollnir*. (Davidson 3)

If we consider *Mjollnir* as Thor's instrument of destruction, each of the band members can become powerful as the god with his instrument in his hand. Robert Plant represents

the god's great and terrifying voice. Jimmy Page's identifying  symbol on the fourth album relates to the Viking god through its visual iconography. The bottom of the "Z" appears like a lightning bolt. Lightning corresponds to thunder, generates electricity, and is also the power behind Page's amplified guitar. The hammer most resembles the drum and when struck against a resounding object it is used to imitate the noise of thunder. Davidson describes the symbolism of the hammer of the gods:

It may be that the Lapps, who continued the worship of the thunder-god . . . when they used a hammer to strike their magic drums. The god with a hammer was often depicted on the drums (which bore pictures of the realms of the gods, of the country of the dead, and many religious symbols), and the beating of the drums was a religious ceremony to assist the Lappish shaman to fall into an ecstatic trance. (Davidson 9)

Page could be suggesting that he wants his band's music to hit people as hard as the hammer of the gods would. In making their great and crashing noises, Led Zeppelin is attempting to imitate the noises of the gods.

## Chapter 6

### Music as Power:

#### The “Will” of Led Zeppelin

Many of Led Zeppelin’s songs are about sex, promiscuous women, and having a good time. The *OED* states that the origin of rock ‘n’ roll “may originally also have been some allusion to uses of each verb as euphemisms for sexual intercourse.” In the majority of their songs, musically and lyrically, Led Zeppelin’s “will” equals desire for women. In *The Secret Power of Music*, critic David Tame explains the physical effect of music on the listener: “The sonic waves unite the listener and artist. Syncopated rhythms actually possess the capacity to force the subtle energies of the body downward into this region of the anatomy, therefore increasing the outpouring into the bloodstream of sexual hormones” (Tame 199). Nietzsche also asserts: “Truly Dionysiac music is just such a general mirror of the universal will,” implying that we all have a desire for sex (Nietzsche 83). Led Zeppelin’s music could be described as intensely sensual, physicalized music. In a 1993 interview for *Creem* magazine, Robert Plant explains:

The wonder of music is that I want to be transported by it. I want something else to think about. I want to be wooed by the music...I just want to be taken someplace and dealt with beautifully; and I want to do that too. I want to make music that is sensual and sensuous. (Petracca 39)

Led Zeppelin’s lyrics in “When the Levee Breaks” and “Whole Lotta Love” portray unbridled desire. “When the Levee Breaks” describes the danger of a levee

collapsing under the river's floodwater, which can be construed sexually as a metaphor for sexual desires giving way to physical onslaught. Plant sings seductively: "All last night sat on my levee and moaned, / Thinkin' about my baby and my happy home." The song expresses nature's power—by being overcome by it, we succumb to lust. Plant warns women about the power of his sexuality: "Cryin' won't help you, prayin' won't do you no good, / When the levee breaks, mama, you got to move." Plant moans as if he really feels the pain and desire he is singing about. In the article, "Gender and Sexuality," music critic Susan Fast describes: "[Plant's] vocal timbre in the piece . . . creates a sense of urgency (or near-overflowing) that is palpable. Read against the text, we might interpret this as conveying the intensity of his sexual longing (or, indeed, the intensity of his sexual encounter)" ("Gender" 285). The sexual meaning of "Whole Lotta Love" is undeniable. The song is a cover of the Muddy Waters version, but the sexual interpretation of love in both songs and their expressions of sexual desire are consistent in the two versions. In addition to the songs about male sexual desire, "Whole Lotta Love" also portrays a woman's carnal sexual desire: "You got burning / I've got yearning." Plant insists: "Way down inside, honey you need it / I'm gonna give you my love / I'm gonna give you every inch of my love, oh." In *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance*, professor and geomancer Ioan Culianu asserts that the goal of erotic magic is to enable a manipulator to control both individuals and crowds. He argues: "Magic is merely eroticism applied, directed, and aroused by its performer" (Culianu xviii). Led Zeppelin represents the performers of magic arousing their audiences into a state of ecstasy and in live performances, they demonstrate their ability to captivate an audience using sex appeal. Culianu continues: "Magic is a means of control over the individual and the

masses based on deep knowledge of personal and collective erotic impulses” (Culianu xviii). The person in Dionysian ecstasy expresses the irrational and transcendent part of the psyche and also seeks out orgiastic experience as an expression of desire.

The Greek god Dionysus represented the intoxicating powers of wine, its beneficial influences in society, and the vital energies expressed in revelry. Dionysian rituals aimed to be transcendent, amoral, and irrational. In *The God of Ecstasy*, H.R. Davidson describes: “The coming of Dionysus represents . . . the resurgence of a world-view, a way of regarding nature, sexuality, and religion that directly threatened the established concepts of the time” (Davidson 43). Led Zeppelin represents the resurgence of Dionysian practices during the 1970s. Dionysus can be considered as an expression of the unrestrained sensual joys of life. In *The Book of the Law*, Crowley stresses the importance of unrestrained behavior in the quest for the “True Will.” “The word of Sin is restriction. O man! refuse not thy wife, if she will! O lover, if thou wilt, depart! There is no bond that can unite the divided but love: all else is a curse” (Crowley 4). Jimmy Page was fascinated by Crowley’s theory that magic was hidden in a man’s will and his conception of the liberation of the will. Page explains:

What I can relate to is Crowley’s system of self-liberation in which repression is the greatest work of sin. It’s like being in a job when you want to be doing something else. That’s the area where the true will should come forward. And when you’ve discovered your true will you should forge ahead like a steam train. If you put all your energies into it there’s no doubt you’ll succeed because that’s your true will. It may take a little while to work out whatever that is, but when you discover it, it’s all there. (Mylett 70-71)

Something about liberation allows one to transcend the normal limitations of the rational mind to receive transcendent knowledge. Led Zeppelin and the rock-god lifestyle they

embodied represented an ideal of freedom and unrestrained Dionysian excess. Led Zeppelin's tour manager, Richard Cole, describes: "There were girls, of course, whom we began to party with, sometimes to excess. And there were endless bottles of alcohol, too. . . . But soon we began to overdo it. The alcohol and later the drugs, too, eventually caught up with the band and began taking their toll" (Cole 69).

Dionysus was usually accompanied by a troop of Pans, Satyrs and Mainades, his female devotees. The Mainades, or "mad women," were in Bacchic ecstasy raging with madness and enthusiasm for the god. They also represented the female orgiastic counterparts to Dionysus. Led Zeppelin's groupies mimicked the behavior of the Maenads in their ecstatic worship of the "rock gods." Should we consider Led Zeppelin's groupies as continuing the tradition of the Mainades? The band's ecstatic devotees were interchangeable, as Cole describes, "So we swapped women. Too often, we treated girls like just another commodity, like exchanging one bottle of champagne for another. Plant tried to convince me, 'The girls don't seem to mind'" (Cole 245). Because the groupies frequently debased themselves to the whims of musicians, their role in rock music cannot be viewed in such a positive light.

The ancient Dionysian rituals of ecstasy were performed in the context of religious rites. In the context of the rock concert, people also expect some transcendence of selves and a release through the experience of the music. Nietzsche describes a Dionysian element comparable to attending a rock concert: "Dionysiac excitement is capable of communicating to a whole crowd of people the artistic gift of seeing itself surrounded by a host of spirits with which it knows itself to be profoundly united" (Nietzsche 43). If we see Dionysian behavior inside the concert hall, Nietzsche's "host of

spirits” is conjured within the “house of the holy,” a term used by the band to describe concert halls. As concertgoers, we become participants in the communal and magical rite that reaches for transformation of consciousness. The Dionysian rituals were meant to appeal to the senses and emotions, employing intoxicants, music, and dancing as methods to induce a trance-like state and to liberate a person from the constraints of the ego and society. The individual could then return to a more natural state, which echoes the Romantic trope of returning to Nature. A state of ecstasy transports an individual into a state of common being, free from individual boundaries and liberated from identification with the rational mind.

Music is an act of transformation resulting from the movement of air, travelling sound waves, and its vibrations on the body. It is important to look at the kinds of sounds that Page chose and the ways in which he made them when thinking about particular meanings attached to Led Zeppelin’s music. Recording allows individual listeners to repeat the experience of listening to music, creating a different relationship to sound and lyrics. With Led Zeppelin, it is also important to look at their live performances in addition to their recorded music. The powers of sound can be harnessed to affect the surrounding environment, and their music gains additional force because it is performed. I will explore both forms of listening in this chapter in my discussion of the idea of magic or alchemy as central to Led Zeppelin’s work.

David Tame describes the ancient conception of music’s impact on the listener: “Sound was a *power*; music an *energy*” (Tame 47). There is a palpable interchange of energy between Led Zeppelin and their audience that can be noticed even by looking at old footage from their live shows. Led Zeppelin was able to give a truly astounding



performance because they sonically take the crowd into another realm that stands distinct from the audience member's everyday life. The audience's response to the band resembles the behavior that would take place in a Dionysian ritual. Nietzsche portrays the behavior present in a ritual: "An ecstatic reality, which . . . seeks to destroy individuality and redeem it with a mystical sense of unity" (Nietzsche 18). One of the most spiritual elements in attending a rock concert is the communal power created by thousands of voices in the crowd rising in unison, blended into perfect harmony. At a Led Zeppelin concert, the crowd goes wild, everyone jumping up and down, unable to control their excitement.

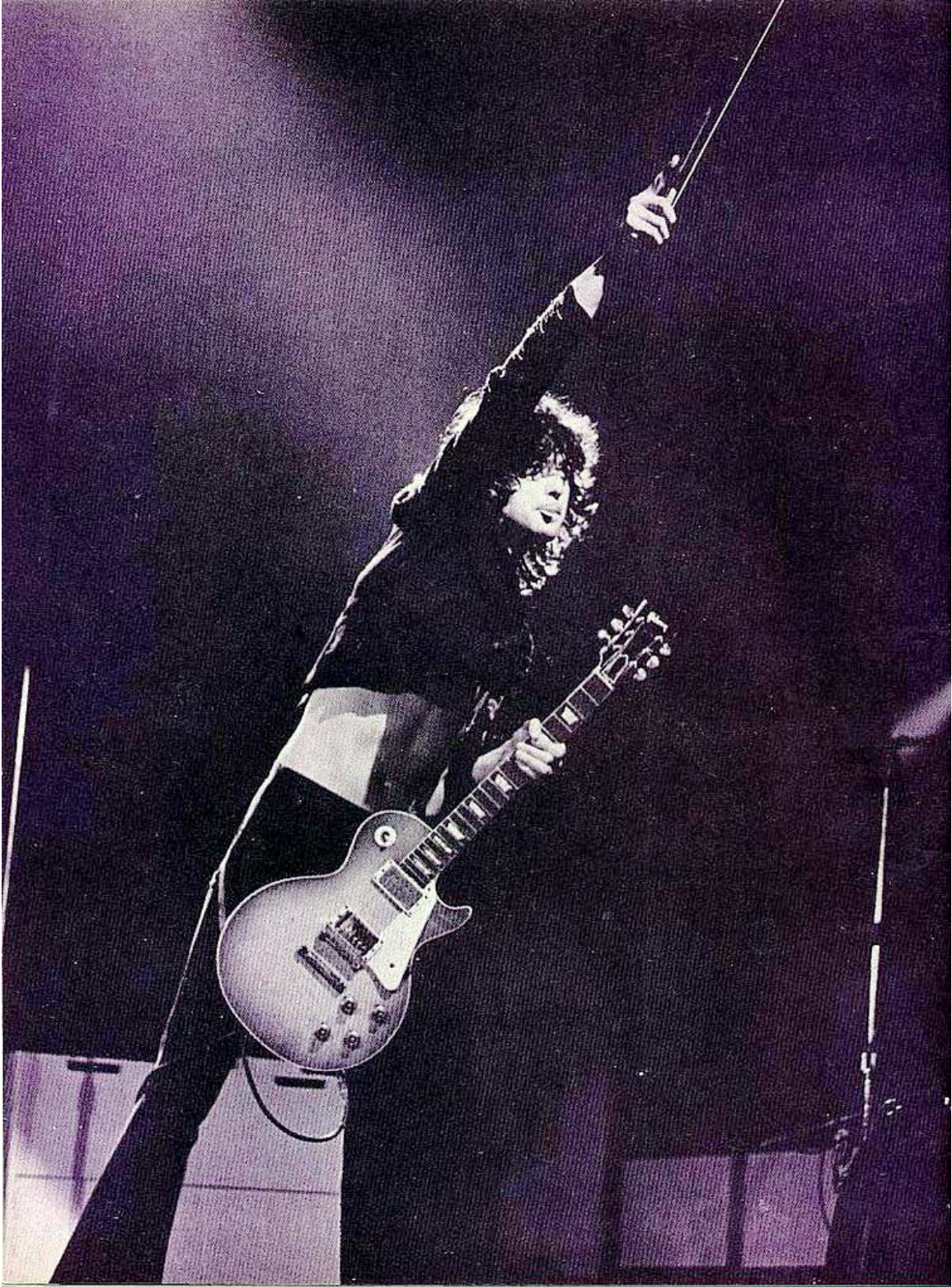
Both Romantic poets and Led Zeppelin evoke qualities of the sublime. The sublime offers spectacle—an experience that can excite both terror and delight. Both the Romantics and Led Zeppelin deliberately evoke qualities of the sublime, seeking to overwhelm the senses. Led Zeppelin's music evokes heaviness, power, and emotion. On the most visceral level, the force of music impacts the body physically through loudness. The sheer volume of Led Zeppelin is so powerful, and it overtakes the concert hall, pushing down upon the audience and making the rock hall a highly charged space. By using volume to create a tremendous sense of dynamics in their live performances, Jimmy Page evokes emotional states in audience members ranging from euphoria to agitation and pain—all qualities of the sublime. Looking at one song from their concert in *The Song Remains the Same* allows us to understand the sublime effects Led Zeppelin created through live performance: "Dazed and Confused" displays lead guitarist Jimmy Page at his highest point of power. When performed live, "Dazed and Confused" portrays the search for new possibilities of releasing creativity and accessing the innermost levels

of consciousness. The song showcases free onstage improvisation that enabled Page to take the music in whatever direction he wanted to. The middle section could stretch for forty-five minutes, seeming to escape normal time. There is no longer a clear narrative conveyed by the lyrics, only a sonic landscape charged by emotion. The song is distinguished by a strange, descending guitar riff that creates a disorienting effect for the listener. The minor chord progression conveys the motion of descending with the music into the depths of hell that Plant describes in the lyrics. With each successive verse, Page adds something new to contribute to the menacing and threatening tone. Page takes us into unfamiliar realms with abstract, eerie sounds from his theremin, a small black box that emits high-pitched frequencies according to the distance of the musician's hand from the antenna. The musician never touches the antenna, creating the impression that he is conjuring these sounds out of thin air.



**Page playing the theremin**

Page's use of the violin bow during the middle section of "Dazed and Confused" also emphasizes the otherworldliness of the song and contributes to its sublimity. Page's bow experiments are awe-inspiring for their ritualistic connotations. At times, he taps his guitar with the violin bow and points it in various directions around the room, as if he were charging the bow with power and directly transmitting the energy of the music to the audience. He portrays his instrument as a magical instrument with mysterious powers. The bow is not only a visual symbol for magic; it is also sonically magical since it transforms the sound of the guitar and takes us into a new soundscape.



**“Dazed and Confused” San Antonio 1973**

In their recorded albums and live shows, the members of Led Zeppelin display a mutual interest in improvisation and showcasing each instrument in their collective sound. Page describes the band's creative process: "When things develop as a group they start off instrumental, Robert's there, singing anything that's coming to mind, the same way you're playing anything that comes to mind. I guess at that point he's another instrument, and then he molds the feeling that he finds is relating and crystallizes it" (Ingham 2). During onstage improvisation, all of the band members appear to be on the same wavelength, and each contributes to the mood being set by Page. It is uncanny how the band members are able to anticipate the others' playing on an intuitive level. Page also expresses amazement at the ability of the band to do this: "The actual chemistry — or is it alchemy — of the group is that everything just always fits together. I can go roaring off on a solo, and then suddenly break off into staccato. I look up at Robert [Plant] and somehow we're all there. It's like ESP" (Jerome). Robert Plant's unique vocal power allows him to mold his voice to suit the character of a particular song, traveling to lower blues range and maintaining incredible power in the upper range. Bonham's drums and Jones's bass provide a strong back beat that enables the multi-speed interplay between Page and Plant.

As a guitar player, Jimmy Page is known for his monumental riffs. The guitar riff acts as a cycle to keep us locked within its continually repeating musical elements. Mantra-like riffs set up certain vibrations in the body and can produce powerful hypnotic states in the audience. Page and Burroughs discussed synthesizing rock music with older forms of trance music that had developed over the centuries, "to produce powerful, sometimes hypnotic effects on the audience" (Burroughs). Jimmy Page explains: "Music

which involves riffs, anyway, will have a trance-like effect, and it's really like a mantra...and we've been attacked for that" (Burroughs). Indeed, Led Zeppelin's work resembles trance music in terms of volume, repetition, and drums. In a conversation with Mick Wall, Page explains his goal in "When the Levee Breaks:" "The whole point of that [guitar riff] was to make it like a mantra, or, as he put it to me, 'Hypnotic, hypnotic, hypnotic'" (Gates). A spell is an act of verbal magic involving the raising of psychic power and directing it to a specific purpose. Repetition and specific vowel and consonant sounds (as in spell-casting) are capable of generating large amounts of energy through a reader's articulation in the brain and the voice. The artist could cause a deliberate induction of the trance state in the audience members, which would give the band an immense amount of physical and psychic power over their listeners.

Led Zeppelin's music combines an explosive electric sound and softer acoustic melodies, and Page frequently juxtaposed the two sounds within the same song. In *It Might Get Loud*, Page defines the characteristic Led Zeppelin sound: "Dynamics—light and shade, whisper to the thunder... [They] sort of invite you in, sort of intoxicate you." The contrast in the music that Page refers to—the light against the shade, the heavy against softer sounds—creates a dramatic tension within a song. This duality is brought together and unified in the figure of Keats's poetical character and Led Zeppelin's music—the light and dark form counterparts in the same equation. Page describes his goal in the recording process: "I've always tried to capture an emotional quality in my songs. Transmitting that is what music seems to be about, really, as far as the instrumental side of it goes, anyway" (Schulps 10). For the Romantics, poetry functioned as a transcript of overwhelmingly intense emotion. So too, for Led Zeppelin the recording

of music was aimed at capturing the “alchemy” of live performance with its improvisatory brilliance for repeated immersion long after the concert itself was over.

In their recorded albums, Page treats rock music as a sculptured sound and consciously incorporated every bit of distortion, feedback, reverberation, and sonic effect in their music. *Led Zeppelin I* is the band’s first studio album released on January 12th, 1969. The raw energetic music on the first album can be attributed to the style and intensity the band had developed during their first European tour. Page succeeds in capturing the sound of the music live. The force of the album is undeniable; it’s driving and pounding drumbeat carries the entire album forward. From the first two drumbeats that start the album, *Led Zeppelin I* succeeds in capturing a kind of energy that is transmitted to the listener. Their first album was pivotal in its inclusion of distorted amplification techniques. Page creates atmosphere via heavily echoed guitar harmonics. He refers back to the opposing light and shade elements in the songs: “I had a strong idea of exactly what I wanted to do on the album, which involved a lot of contrast that I didn’t think anybody else was doing” (Welch 21). Page invented the “backward echo” effect: he would record a part normally, then flip the tape over and add echo to it, so that when the tape is played the right way again, the echo precedes the sound it was applied to. During the sonic wave middle section in “Whole Lotta Love,” the backward echo effect creates a full, swirling, psychedelic sound and a consistent echoing beat that sounds foreboding. After minutes of relentless thundering from Bonham’s drums, the sound dissolves into tinkling of bells, creating a new and eerie soundscape. John Bonham’s drum playing is distinct because his thunderous sound approximates a violent force of nature powering Led Zeppelin’s songs. Page knew exactly how to capture Bonham’s

drum playing at its maximum sound, and he mixed the drums louder than any other producer at the time. Page explains his technique in recording drums: “Drums are an acoustic instrument, and acoustics need to breathe. So when I recorded Zeppelin, particularly John Bonham, I simply moved the mics away to get some ambient sound. I wasn’t the first person to come across that concept, but I certainly made a big point of making it work for us” (*Guitar World*, April 2009).

The monolithic track on *Led Zeppelin IV*, “When the Levee Breaks,” displays the band’s mastery of a powerhouse blues sound. Inspired by music of the delta blues, Led Zeppelin recreates the blues to fit a heroic mold—the sound of the blues has been amplified to the almighty vast, and the song sounds like it has descended from Valhalla itself. The riff constructs a tunnel of sound around the listener that leads up to the resolving climax during the bridge. Page states: “At the end of it where we’ve got the whole works going on this fade [out], it doesn’t actually fade, as we finished it the whole effects start to spiral [and] all the instruments are now spiraling” (“BBC Classic Albums”). The song comes across the record like a giant whirlpool about to swallow you whole.

Songs like “Immigrant Song,” “Battle of Evermore,” “The Song Remains the Same,” “Kashmir,” and “Stairway to Heaven” cultivate mythic and epic traits. “Stairway to Heaven” represents the archetype for these songs, which are all composed of lengthy, multi-sectioned pieces and lyrics that allude to mythological and spiritual topics. The storylines of the songs are coupled with poetic language that evokes the archaic and creates a material link with mythic and epic stories of the past. Led Zeppelin presents a revival of a mythical and mystical past in songs, which, along with other Romantic



poems, form part of the epic tradition. Susan Fast explains the power of the epic tradition: “They resonate with the listener because Plant performs mythic ideas that have been circulated for centuries, at once narrating the myth and positioning himself, and, by association, the other band members, as the hero protagonists” (Fast 60). The lyrics in “Immigrant Song” reflect Plant’s interest in Celtic and Viking mythology. Plant’s war cry is a vital part of the sound and functions as an instrument in itself to evoke the mythical past in the present. Jimmy Page characterized Plant’s voice: “a primeval wail,” linking it to the remote past. Plant depicts the conquest of new lands:

We come from the land of the ice and snow  
From the midnight sun where the hot springs blow.  
The hammer of the gods will drive our ship to new land  
To fight the horde, sing and cry, “Valhalla, I am coming!”

Plant evokes the world from the perspective of a Viking warrior, and the band is figured as Viking invaders pillaging the land and whispering tales of their legendary conquests. In Norse mythology, Valhalla is the place where men who were slain in combat go to reunite with all of the other heroes. The band is portrayed with mythological status by joining glorious heroes in the afterlife.

*Led Zeppelin IV* draws on the blues-based format of the first two albums, the acoustic and folk songs from their third album, and stylings of Eastern music. Page utilized complex overdubs in his producing to create the rich textures in the songs. The acoustic “Battle of Evermore” is a marriage of rock and ghostly folk music that displays Plant’s interest in Celtic and Scottish folklore. The song evokes great sublimity through its lyrics and musical structure. The mandolin gives the song an archaic feel. Sandy

Denny from the folk group Fairport Convention duets with Robert Plant, lending her ethereal voice as the Queen of Light, “who took her bow and then she turned to go.” In the absence of light, the song dwells in perpetual darkness: “The prince of peace embraced the gloom / And walked the night alone.” The ominous tone anticipates the fearful anxiety of people preparing for battle, which is forecasted two lines later: “The Dark Lord rides in force tonight.” The obscurity of the song’s lyrics and its dark imagery is enhanced when Plant’s vocals fade out and echo as he sings: “The magic runes are writ in gold to bring the balance back, bring it back.” Led Zeppelin plays the role to bring the balance back into the lives of their listeners, perhaps the balance between magic and reality. The mandolin and guitar parts gradually fade out, creating the illusion that the music and the mythic world of darkness it creates will continue on forever.

Plant wrote “The Song Remains the Same” for the band’s next album to convey music’s transcendence of time and place and allude to the universality of their music. He invites listeners around the world to become a part of the shared experience of attending a rock concert: “Hear my song—people won’t you listen now? / Sing along.” The immaterial sound is portrayed with the capability of affecting the material world. In the song, “The Houses of the Holy,” Plant attempts to describe Led Zeppelin’s musical power: “Let the music be your master / Will you heed the master’s call?” Their mastery of music is figured as something that translates into physical force to impact the listener.

The significance of “Kashmir” on the *Physical Graffiti* album lies in its fusion of the powers of rock music with the mystical intimations of Arabic music. The use of Eastern sounds in “Kashmir” seem foreign and mysterious in comparison to other songs in their canon and distinguish the song as otherworldly. Page uses a special tuning on his

guitar that he called the “CIA” tuning, referring to its Celtic, Indian, and Arabic sound (Welch 27). He creates an epic quality in the music by creating a “guitar army” through overdubs. The tuning creates a sustained mood of ominous mystery throughout the song. The music focuses your attention to manifest and create a new reality being described in the lyrics using imaginative powers. The lyrics depict travelling across an empty desert landscape. In the song, Plant has the power to cross the boundaries of both time and space:

Oh, let the sun beat down upon my face  
Stars to fill my dreams  
I am a traveler of both time and space  
To be where I have been  
To sit with elders of a gentle race  
This world has seldom seen.  
They talk of days for which they sit and wait  
When all will be revealed.

The lyrics portray a generalized non-Western culture through the unearthly “elders,” who evoke religious authority and wisdom. Their presence in the song imbues it with a sense of generic spirituality:

Talk and song from tongues of lilting grace  
Whose sounds caress my ear.  
But not a word I heard could I relate  
The story was quite clear.

The foreign and unknown “tongues of lilting grace” spoken by the otherworldly elders caress his ears, even though he cannot understand what they mean. As he describes in “The Song Remains the Same,” Plant alludes to a bond between him and these people that transcends spoken language and allows him to communicate on a different level of

consciousness, like the speaker and the belle dame in Keats's "La Belle Dame sans Merci." Plant describes his desire to access this mystical world again: "Heed the path that led me to that place." The path is ambiguous and mystical and hints at an alternate state of consciousness that is needed on the journey to Kashmir. This kind of mystical path will be evoked again in "Stairway to Heaven" as the path that leads to spiritual knowledge. In *Led Zeppelin and Philosophy*, Scott Calef associates "Kashmir" to Page's and Plant's fantasy sequences in *The Song Remains the Same*: "[Page and Plant] were, in their own ways, travelers of both time and space, spiritual aspirants seeking the truth (a point emphasized by Page's ascent and transformation in *The Song Remains the Same*)" (Calef xvi). "Kashmir" ends with Plant inviting the listener: "Let me take you there," creating the illusion that the music has the power to take us "there," some untouched region of the mind and concealed knowledge. Plant promises a profoundly mystical goal: "All will be revealed," by listening to their music.

In addition to the symbolism in Led Zeppelin's lyrics and music, their album artwork is also important for shaping the public's perception of them and creating a mythological aura surrounding the band. The albums *Led Zeppelin IV*, *Houses of the Holy*, and *Presence* particularly employ ambiguous and mystical imagery that give the impression of Led Zeppelin as powerful and mythical figures.

The first pressings of the 1970 single for "Immigrant Song" have, "Do what thou wilt," etched on the innermost stop grooves on side one. Side two has the words, "So mote it be," inscribed in the same uneven and shaky handwriting. The carving on the vinyl is extremely small and inscrutable and appears only if you adjust the record to the right angle in the light. Once detected, it appears like an ancient motto carved into stone

many ages ago. The quote is taken from the core tenet of Aleister Crowley's philosophy in *The Book of the Law*: "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law" (*Liber al vel Legis*. 1:40). *The Book of the Law* is known as *Thelema*, the Greek word for "will." By etching Crowley's credo on vinyl pressings, Page could send the same message to everyone who bought the single whether they were aware of it or not. Its presence on the record suggests that it will work whatever magic Jimmy Page intended it to do through our subliminal consciousness. The inscription introduced Led Zeppelin's audience to the one law the band would abide by: absolute liberation to achieve whatever you want. This was the public's first induction into the mysterious ways of Led Zeppelin. Page admits: "The inscription was a little milestone on the way, you could say—a point of reference. I sort of wondered how long it was going to take before anybody noticed. It took a long while. No wonder they started playing our records backward after that!" (*Guitar World*, November 2008). The etching on the single ultimately displays the occult studies that were contributing to Page's musical vision at the time.

*Led Zeppelin IV* bears no mention of Zeppelin's name, title, record label, or even a catalog number. Page was trying to prove that the music could sell itself without the band's name: "After all this crap that we'd had with the critics, I put it to everybody else that it'd be a good idea to put out something totally anonymous" (Schulps 12). The front cover depicts an old man bent under a load of brush, and the back of the cover reveals that the old man is part of a painting hanging on a deteriorated wall amid a desolate cityscape. Page describes the album art as representative of the change in balance that was going on: "The old man on the cover carrying the wood is in harmony with nature. He takes from nature and gives back to the land. It's a natural circle. It's right. His old

cottage gets pulled down and they put him in slums, terrible places” (Welch 65). The cover thematizes the Romantic preoccupation with harmony with nature. The album art on *IV* seeks to bring the balance back described by Plant in “Battle to Evermore” through pictorial symbolism.

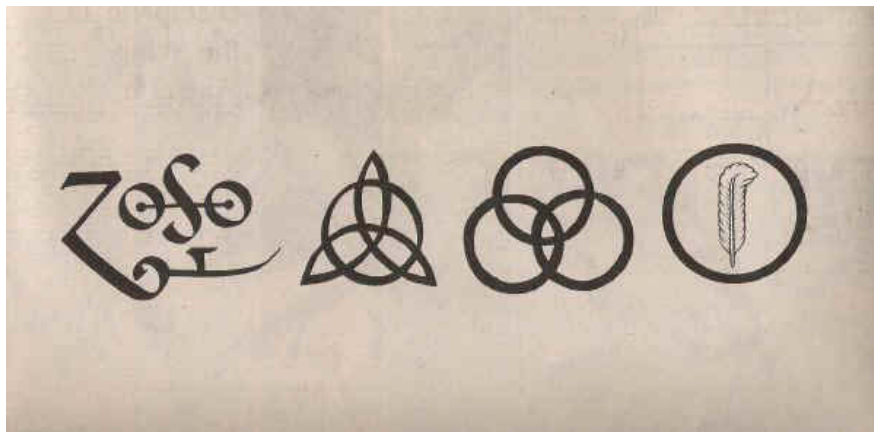


*Led Zeppelin IV* inner gatefold

The inner gatefold depicts an illustration of the Hermit of the Tarot cards standing atop a craggy tor and holding the lantern to light the path to self-knowledge. The Hermit is an occult symbol of self-reliance and mystical wisdom in the Tarot cards—a figure that combines hard work and aspiration, two traits that Led Zeppelin seems to possess in achieving worldwide recognition. Crowley explains the significance of the Hermit in his own Thoth tarot deck: “The Hermit The Magus of the Voice of Power” (*Liber LXXVIII*). The combined image of the Magus and the Voice of Power relates to the band with Page as the Magus creating Led Zeppelin’s sound and Plant as the Voice of Power manifesting Page’s “magic” in the physical plane. At the bottom of the mountain, a young aspirant climbs toward the hermit and his light, symbolizing the spiritual quest and a profound religious musical statement about the power of music to take the listener on a journey toward spiritual truth. Page mysteriously alludes to the meaning of the album art: “Well, I was hermetic. I was involved in the hermetic arts, but I wasn’t a recluse. The image of the hermit that was used for the artwork on *Led Zeppelin IV* and in the movie actually has its origins in . . . the Waite tarot deck” (*Guitar World*, January 2008). The *OED* defines hermetic as, “relating to or dealing with occult science, especially alchemy,” or, “one skilled in hermetic art or science; an alchemist.” Recall, Page frequently describes Led Zeppelin’s music as the product of alchemy. His description of himself as hermetic at the time reinforces the band’s music to his practice of “alchemy.” This is a powerful trope for the process of creating and experiencing music communally, either among the members of the band or with the vast audience inspired by Led Zeppelin’s artistic vision.

*Guitar World*: Your use of symbols was very advanced. The sigil on Led Zeppelin IV and the embroidery on your stage clothes are good examples of how you left your mark on popular cultures. It's something that major corporations are aggressively pursuing these days: using symbols as a form of branding.

Page: You mean talismanic magic? Yes, I knew what I was doing. . . . But the fact is—as far as I was concerned—it was working, so I used it. . . . I'll leave this subject by saying the four elements of Led Zeppelin making a fifth is magic into itself. That's the alchemical process. (*Guitar World*, January 2008)



**The symbols on *Led Zeppelin IV***

On the inner sleeve, Page had each member of the band choose a metaphysical symbol that would represent his personality from Howard Koch's *Book of Signs*. The symbols are reminiscent of runes, the alphabetic Norse symbols of magic and wisdom, reinforcing the association of Led Zeppelin to mythological figures and drawing them into a timeless and mysterious realm. They appear ritualistic, a practice gathered from another time and place. Each band member's symbol is branded onto his amp, reinforcing the connection between the person, his symbol, and the amplification of his sonic force. Robert Plant chose a feather in a circle. The feather represents the Egyptian goddess of truth, Ma'at, and signifies the emblem of a writer. John Bonham chose three interlocking



rings, symbolizing the triad of the mother, father, and child (Koch 32). Coincidentally, Bonham's symbol is also the logo for Ballantine Beer and resembles his drum kit. John Paul Jones chose three ovals bisecting a circle, which signifies a person with confidence and competence (Koch 33). Sandy Denny also got her own symbol on the album sleeve, a stack of three pyramids symbolizing the Godhead (Koch 5).

Page designed his own mysterious glyph that appears to be a sigil, a symbol created for a specific magical purpose. A sigil is an image containing energy, a lot like a song or poem. Crowley explains the efficacy of a sigil: "The charge to the spirit is usually embodied . . . in some kind of talisman. . . . Yet, every object soever is a talisman, for the definition of a talisman is: something upon which an act of will (that is, of Magick) has been performed in order to fit it for a purpose." (*Magick* 98). Many of the spells described by Crowley use a talisman or symbol known as a sigil to bring about the desired effect. Every time Jimmy Page sees his sigil, it could remind him of his "True Will" to achieve musical fame. Talismanic magic seeks to predict and control the world with the underlying assumption that the universe contains hidden forces and energies that can be manipulated using the appropriate rituals and implements.

There has been much speculation on the meaning of Page's symbol, but his refusal to give an explanation leaves it open for speculation today. The Z in "Zoso" could represent the symbol for Saturn, the planetary ruler of Capricorn, Jimmy Page's astrological sun sign. It has been pointed out that the first part of the sigil resembles an alchemical symbol for "reverberation," perhaps a reference to the sonic waves emitted from his guitar (*In The Light*). The "oso" in Zoso is a symbol that appears in Aleister Crowley's publication, *Equinox*, and numerically represents the Great Beast 666. The two

0's with dots represent the number six, and the middle S also stands for six (*In the Light*). In *Magick in Theory and Practice*, Aleister Crowley declares: "SATAN is not the enemy of Man, but He who made Gods of our race, knowing Good and Evil; He bade 'Know Thyself!' and taught Initiation . . . He is therefore Life, and Love . . . His Zodiacal image is Capricornus, that leaping goat whose attribute is Liberty" (*Magick XXI, II*). Page's identification with the Great Beast 666 would be understandable given his connection to Crowley and the fact that he is a Capricorn. Crowley portrays Capricorn as the astrological sign of "Liberty," another ideal that Page highly values.



Page's stage suit in 1973

Page's stage clothes also contribute to creating a mythology and mystique surrounding the band. During the 1973 United States tour, Page made use of his astrological signs by having them emblazoned on his clothing worn on stage. The top symbol is another sign for Capricorn, the middle sign represents Scorpio, Page's rising sign, and the bottom symbol stands for Cancer, his moon sign.

Led Zeppelin's next album, *Houses of the Holy*, similarly bears no identifying marks of the band or a title on the outside. The title suggests a church or spiritual temple, but apparently refers to the spiritual aura that the band romanticized as being present in the concert halls they played in. Plant describes the impact of their live shows as, "the feeling that's left everybody, the cosmic energy" (*The Song Remains the Same*). The concentration of mass energy that you get at a rock concert could be channeled in magical ways. The concert hall can potentially become a

space for holy transformation for Led Zeppelin fans. The photographs on the inner and outer covers depict an ancient house of the holy where sacrifice and ritual took place.



*Houses of the Holy*

The album art was done by Aubrey Powell from the graphic design team, Hipgnosis. He created a collage of multi-exposure photographs of two naked children with blonde hair and silvery skin climbing up a boulder-filled mountainside toward an apocalyptic sky. The photographs were taken at Giant's Causeway, a rock formation in Northern Ireland. Giant's Causeway consists of approximately forty thousand hexagonal basalt stone columns of various heights that were left after a volcanic eruption sixty million years ago. Powell's photographs attempt to capture the light at dawn, and the monolithic stones appear even more otherworldly because of the sky's vibrant orange color.



*Houses of the Holy inner gatefold*

The inner gatefold displays the late-medieval Dunluce Castle near the Causeway at dusk. Dunluce Castle is dramatically positioned on a mountain surrounded by sharp drops into the sea. The photograph depicts a figure resembling a man raising one of the girls up to a ruined castle under a ray of light, suggesting some sort of sacrifice. Among the many sacrifices offered to appease Dionysus, human sacrifices were also mentioned, and Led Zeppelin pictorially evokes this ancient custom. The ray of light functions like a spotlight, and Led Zeppelin could symbolize the figures sacrificing their fans to the gods.

The object on the album sleeve design for *Presence* was referred to as “The Obelisk,” or “The Object.” The front cover depicts a 1950's family sitting around a dinner table all entranced by a mysterious black object at the center of the table.



### *Presence*

The black object reappears in various photographs on the album and hints at a special aura of Led Zeppelin through its ambiguity. Page is evasive about defining the true nature of the object, preferring to leave it open to interpretation. He explains: "There was no working title for the album. The record-jacket designer said, 'When I think of the group, I always think of power and force. There's a definite presence there.' That was it. He wanted to call it 'Obelisk.' To me, it was more important what was behind the obelisk"

(Page quoted in the liner notes from Led Zeppelin's first boxed set). The album designer, Storm Thorgerson, expands upon the significance of the object:

Perhaps it was a cosmic battery, or a spiritual relic or alien artifact, exposure to which seemed essential - it filled your life, it sustained you, it bathed you in mysterious emanations. It was vital for growing infants, for education, useful to science and financial institutions, handy for both leisure and sport, indispensable even to romance. It was central to everyday existence - utilitarian, religious and addictive. So powerful that back in those days everyone had one, so powerful that nowadays one didn't need one any longer, so pervasive that the memory alone would suffice, so powerful that it didn't actually need to be there, no depth cues nor shadows cast by the object, more a hole than a thing, an absence rather than a presence. So powerful that the mere suggestion was enough, like a secretly whispered word, like a radical idea or a desert wind, substantial but not needing substance, just like the band, their music and their reputation.<sup>5</sup>

The comparison of Led Zeppelin's music to a cosmic battery suggests that it contains a vital life force that can sustain human beings physically and spiritually. Music is portrayed as an essential factor in all areas of life, "central to everyday existence." The mysterious force of music renders it undecipherable to the non-elect, but fans of Led Zeppelin have the potential to grasp its meaning. Thorgerson also categorizes Led Zeppelin's music as addictive, meaning that once people experience the mysterious force of their music, they cannot live without it. The object evokes this presence through its hypnotizing power to the people around it. Thorgerson contrasts the object's presence in ancient days against today's reality when such an ineffable power would be hidden and disguised under many different names in society. Led Zeppelin's presence is generated through the power of their music and the mystical aura surrounding the band. The album art includes an implicit invitation for the listener to participate in deciphering its meaning,

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.stormthorgerson.com>

just like Keats's poems. Both Led Zeppelin and the Romantic poets seek to reinstill the power of the arts in contemporary times.

## Section III- Alchemy and Creativity in Keats and Led Zeppelin

### Chapter 7

#### Finding the Magic:

#### “Ode to a Nightingale” and “Stairway to Heaven”

The goal of the alchemical process can be understood as self-knowledge. There is an interest in expanding consciousness, and both rock music and Romantic poetry appeal directly to this interest. In Keats’s “Ode to a Nightingale” and Led Zeppelin’s “Stairway to Heaven,” the artist’s experience parallels or informs the reader’s or listener’s experience. The two works of art induce Dionysian altered states of consciousness.

#### “Ode to a Nightingale”

“Ode to a Nightingale” illustrates a personal escape that leads to a disorienting and transcendental experience at the end of the poem. The speaker experiences moments of ecstasy that are instigated by listening to music. The poem represents both the medium of music through Keats’s lyric and a meditation on music. At the conclusion, once the nightingale’s music and Keats’s verse are gone, the reader is left wondering if he traveled to a different state of consciousness during the act of reading the poem.

“Ode to a Nightingale” explores the unstable relationship between the imagination and reality. The shape of the ode is one of entrancement that ends with a reentry into



reality once the speaker reawakens and the trance is broken. The poem celebrates the value of poetry and its glimpses of immortality while acknowledging the necessity for the poet's imagination to come to terms with the contradictions of this world. The poet yearns for an escape from the self and the human condition. Here, Poetry, or imaginative vision, is offered as something that might not only transcend history, but also the human condition. The nightingale's song provides respite from suffering and signifies the ability of the imagination to create pleasure when it is absent from human experience. The power of the imagination can create worlds in the minds of all readers, which displays the enduring quality of poetry.

The lyric in the beginning of the ode creates the musical equivalent of the speaker's drugged state:

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains  
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,  
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains  
One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:  
'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,  
But being too happy in thine happiness,—  
That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees,  
In some melodious plot  
Of beechen green and shadows numberless,  
Singest of summer in full-throated ease. (1-10)

Through his language, Keats conveys the paralysis and forgetfulness of a drug or pain-induced stupor. The first stanza creates a heavy atmosphere of lethargic oblivion, which also parallels the hypnotic effects of sound in the verse. The poet feels numb to the everyday reality of sensual experience as if he ingested hemlock, "Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains" (3). Keats substitutes veins for the word "drains" in order to allude to the fact that the speaker's veins no longer sustain life—he has been drained of vitality.

Keats revives ancient Greek mythology through the “Lethe-wards” and its ability to instill forgetfulness in the people who drink its waters (4). The nightingale portrays the opposite state of the speaker, overflowing with vitality and creative inspiration. Keats contrasts “a plot of beechen green” against the surrounding “shadows numberless,” and creates a light and shade dynamic within the verse (9). “Numberless” evokes the feeling of numbness through the similarity of the sounds of the words. Numbers also represent metrics, or verse, and suggest that the nightingale is creating its own poetry. Looking at the bird as a natural poet, it represents a model for Keats himself. The second stanza portrays the speaker’s desire to transcend conscious reality through Dionysian practices:

O, for a draught of vintage! that hath been  
□ Cool’d a long age in the deep-delved earth, □  
Tasting of Flora and the country green,  
□ Dance, and Provencal song, and sunburnt mirth!  
O for a beaker full of the warm South,  
□ Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,  
□ With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,  
□ And purple-stained mouth;  
□ That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,  
□ And with thee fade away into the forest dim: (11-20)

The speaker seeks to reach oblivion through Dionysian revelry and excess. Wine is compared to “the true, the blushful Hippocrene,” which was the fountain of the Muses on Mountain Helicon and the poet’s waters of inspiration (15). The alliteration in, “beaded bubbles winking at the brim” duplicates the sound of bubbles breaking and enhances the auditory experience of the poem (17). “And purple-stained mouth,” functions as a synecdoche for Dionysus (18). The stanza ends with a direct invocation of the creative principle by abandoning conscious reality and following the nightingale.

The third stanza is one of reiterated suffering:

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget  
What thou among the leaves hast never known,  
The weariness, the fever, and the fret  
Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;  
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,  
Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;  
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow  
And leaden-eyed despairs,  
Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,  
Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow. (21-30)

Reason is inevitably tied to human mortality, and the reader hears the nightingale's song in the context of human suffering. Thinking about the human condition intensifies the speaker's desire to escape the pain of reality. He will make his passage to another realm of consciousness through the powers of his imagination and verse:

Away! away! for I will fly to thee,  
Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,  
But on the viewless wings of Poesy,  
Though the dull brain perplexes and retards:  
Already with thee! tender is the night,  
And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,  
Cluster'd around by all her starry Fays;  
But here there is no light,  
Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown  
Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways. (31-40)

The speaker rejects wine as false ecstasy, implying that his desires have nothing to do with the carnal associations of Bacchus. Instead, the speaker will make the passage on "the viewless wings of Poesy," or the imagination (33). He exchanges the material world, symbolized by the image of "Bacchus and his pards," for viewless verse, which has immeasurable power because it is immaterial (32). Through his invocation of "Poesy," the speaker experiences the exhilaration of the creative act immediately, exclaiming,

“Already with thee!” and he achieves the goal of unbounded imagination presented in “Ode to Psyche” (35). Like the nightingale, Keats’s lyric expression can swiftly take us to a place of enchantment far away from reality. However, the speaker must fight against the physical aspects of the external environment: “But here there is no light, / Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown / Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways” (37-40). The body is forced to remain in darkness, and it is portrayed as having legitimate claims over the spirit—the speaker will inevitably be dragged down to the dark depths of humanity.

In the fourth stanza, the poet momentarily inhabits the imagined world of the nightingale and the actual world of the garden. While portraying images of synesthesia, Keats makes allusions to an aching heart and an existence of pain:

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,  
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,  
But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet  
Wherewith the seasonable month endows  
The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;  
White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;  
Fast fading violets cover’d up in leaves;  
And mid-May’s eldest child,  
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,  
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves. (41-50)

Keats employs moving and seductive descriptions to convey the lush darkness of the evening. The senses can enthrall the mind with their ability to alter the balance between the imagination and the external world. Because vision's defining presence is removed, the reader's experience can mirror the speaker's through using sound to approach the external world. Synesthesia, or the blending of different senses in a description, is one important quality for the experience of sound to be perceived as mystical phenomena. All

of the senses are stimulated during a ritual, creating a synesthetic experience. “Embalmed darkness” has a dual significance that evokes the darkness embalmed in rich fragrances as well as the embalmed darkness of a coffin. In the sixth stanza, the speaker begins to distance himself from the nightingale:

Darkling I listen; and, for many a time  
I have been half in love with easeful Death,  
Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme,  
To take into the air my quiet breath;  
Now more than ever seems it rich to die,  
To cease upon the midnight with no pain,  
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad  
In such an ecstasy!  
Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—  
To thy high requiem become a sod. (51-60)

The name “Darkling” continues to develop the environment Keats has created out of the darkness and highlights the nightingale’s song reaching the speaker out of the darkness. The speaker yearns to die because he considers death a means of transporting him to complete union with the bird’s song. He calls Death names, invoking his presence, and perhaps hopes to seduce him through his “mused rhyme.” (53). The nightingale’s song now appears as a, “high requiem,” or a liturgical song for the dead (60). Like wine and poetry, death is a release from pain and removes a man from his conscious self. Death also signifies the speaker’s complete separation from the nightingale’s song. The poem is concerned with the attempt to escape from the conditions of human life and to reach a state of consciousness unrestrained by human mortality:

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!  
No hungry generations tread thee down;  
The voice I hear this passing night was heard  
In ancient days by emperor and clown:

Perhaps the self-same song that found a path  
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,  
She stood in tears amid the alien corn;  
The same that oft-times hath  
Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam  
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn. (61-70)

Through an expansion of lyrical movement, Keats experiences the historical progress of the world since antiquity. The bird, or at least her species, is immune from the death and pain of human existence. The essence of poetry is characterized as a transcendent, immortal figure because the nightingale's song has been heard and experienced since ancient days and in realms unknown to the world of contemporary England. Since magic arises from the hidden or unknown, nature appears alive with concealed magic and untapped forces of power and creativity. The nightingale's song is a source for natural creativity and is able to transport the speaker through time and space into a foreign, enchanted realm. The omnipresence of the song also represents a quest for a setting conducive to supernatural happenings on, "Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam / Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn" (69-70). The magic casements signify a point of access to another realm of the mind and imagination. The speaker appears unsure whether the nightingale's music belongs in a mythical world that transcends time or a temporal one with him. The final word in the stanza, "forlorn," breaks the spell cast by the nightingale. The conclusion of the poem portrays consciousness sharpening to differentiate itself from its surroundings, and the speaker's attentiveness towards the world increases:

Forlorn! the very word is like a bell

To toll me back from thee to my sole self!  
Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well  
As she is fam'd to do, deceiving elf.  
Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades  
Past the near meadows, over the still stream,  
Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep  
In the next valley-glades:  
Was it a vision, or a waking dream?  
Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep? (71-80)

“Forlorn” replaces the nightingale’s song as the sole sound that connects the speaker to the external environment, and it functions like the sound of a bell to ring him back to conscious reality once he calls upon the power of the word. The parallel span of the poem and song in time up to this point suggests that the poem functions like the nightingale’s song for any listener or reader. The nightingale’s song is not simply the starting point of the poem—it is heard throughout, and in a real sense the poem becomes the song. For Keats, the imagination exists as a creative power that offers escape from conscious reality, but creative imagination flees from the poet with the end of the song. At first, the poet and the nightingale are capable of accessing mental states that reveal untapped sources of power and wisdom, but the melody and its transformative power fade into the distance like an illusion. In addition to conveying the physical distance of the bird’s song, Keats portrays mental and psychological distance through the imagery of death and being buried underground.

As in “Ode to Psyche,” the poet doesn’t know if he has been dreaming, or if he received an inspired vision. He departs from the world of human consciousness to an imaginative one through an expansion of consciousness instigated by music. Once the bird’s song fades into the distance, Keats meditates on the powerful effect of music on the mind: “Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep?” (80). The intensity of the

experience has left the speaker and the readers disoriented and confused about the ambiguous nature of the nightingale's song. Music appears as an ungovernable force for the speaker that embodies a potential power to alter his consciousness. Keats alludes to the capability of music to project or create the quality of a moment. David Tame relates the mysticism of sound:

*It seems highly likely that different types of music, in giving to us various kinds of emotional experiences—romantic love, lust, religious feelings, patriotic fervor, rebellion, etc.—also encode such feelings and their various hues. . . . And in combining words with music, many concepts can be encoded as never before. (Tame 149)*

In the poem, it feels as though music possesses a definite and very real energy. For the reader, Keats's verse has functioned like the nightingale's song to transport us to a different state of consciousness. The poet and the reader become one in Keats's portrayal of the experience. At the end of the poem and the song, we are also left wondering where we have traveled.

"Ode to a Nightingale" exists to stimulate the imaginations of readers to reflect on the legitimate power of the imagination and music to transport us to a different realm. Keats concludes the ode ambiguously to include the implicit invitation for the reader to think about the power of poetry. In the magical world invented from language, Keats embeds the immortality of song and poetic expression in surrounding nature, ready to be heard by any willing listener. The pure essence of music is available in a moment of sensual enchantment, one that can occur during any type of song if the listener is receptive to its transcendent possibilities. Keats creates an experience out of the poem



that has the power to occur in his readers' consciousness, not with the permanence of a material object, but with the recurrence of the song.

In "Ode to a Nightingale," music initially functions as a sedative that ultimately offers powerful inspiration for the poet. The music in Led Zeppelin's "Stairway to Heaven" appears to function as a stimulant for the listener to contemplate the spiritual dimension of music. "Stairway to Heaven" alters the consciousnesses of its listeners using the same techniques of ambiguous meanings and spiritual suggestiveness, and the experience offered in the song also remains available to the listener with the recurrence of the song.

## “Stairway to Heaven”

“Stairway to Heaven” expresses a yearning for spiritual transformation that will result in a union of musicians and listeners. The song relates the story of a lady’s allegorical quest for spiritual truth, which can be understood as the discovery of her “True Will.” The lyrics of “Stairway to Heaven” are printed in an archaic looking font on the inner sleeve of *Led Zeppelin IV*, marking the first time Zeppelin ever printed any of their lyrics, which suggests that they recognized the significance of the song and wanted to convey its powerful message explicitly to everyone. Plant’s lyrics combine mysticism with ambiguous references to spiritual enlightenment through music, as in Keats’s “Ode to a Nightingale.” Plant explains the importance of mystery within a song for its listeners: “The only thing that gives [the song] any staying power is its ambiguity. It allows one to develop one’s own interpretation.”<sup>6</sup> The lyrics of “Stairway to Heaven” allude to the inherent unity of all things, human and divine, even as the lengthy submission of a listener within the lengthy development of the song enacts the subject at the level of form. The song portrays an ascent to spiritual enlightenment and the “True Will,” which the listener can similarly experience by listening to the record.

The eight-minute epic is organized into several highly structured sections, which build to the end of the song with its suggestion of an expanded consciousness. The opening of “Stairway to Heaven” suggests a kind of ancient or mythological sound disassociated from a specific time or place. The song features Page playing a six-string acoustic, electric, and twelve-string electric guitars. John Paul Jones’s keyboard work

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<sup>6</sup> Taken from an interview on “Stairway to Heaven,” available at [http://discography.ledzeppelin.com/disc\\_lz4.html](http://discography.ledzeppelin.com/disc_lz4.html).

weaves in and out of Page's smooth guitar melody. In his essay "The Ocean's Roar," music critic John Stone-Mediatore describes their playing technique: "The harmonically rich and complex chords that Page and Jones play are clearly inspired, evoking images of flight and vastness" (Stone-Mediatore 13). Plant introduces a lady, "who's sure all that glitters is gold / And she's buying a stairway to heaven."<sup>7</sup> She appears materialistic at first, concerned only with precious objects that she can acquire. However, the fact that she's buying a stairway to heaven marks the beginning of her effort towards spiritual realization. In his essay, "With Flames from the Dragon of Darkness," Theodore Schick explains that the lady "comes to realize that there may be more to life than the fulfillment of her earthly desires" (Schick 107). In other words, she is going to get exactly what she wants: "When she gets there she knows, . . . With a word she can get what she came for." At first, the lady appears unsure of the purpose of climbing the stairway, which is portrayed as a metaphor for the journey to find the "True Will:"

There's a sign on the wall  
But she wants to be sure  
Cause you know sometimes words have  
Two meanings.  
In a tree by the brook there's a songbird  
Who sings sometimes  
All of our thoughts are misgiven.

In western occultism, once a spiritual aspirant has begun upon the path to enlightenment, the next phase is known as "the pull of the way," which represents following your intuition. Ezra Pound describes this in "The Wisdom of Poetry:" "For the initiated the signs are a door into eternity and into the boundless ether" (Pound 362). The signs, or intuition, lead the aspirant into another realm and to transcendent wisdom. The

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<sup>7</sup> All lyrics are from the liner notes to *Led Zeppelin IV*.

sign on the wall suggests that there are guiding symbols leading the way to spiritual enlightenment. The ambiguous lyrics appear to have multiple meanings just like the words that have two meanings. The description of multiple meanings contained in words also implies that the listener should pay attention to the lyrics of the song because they might hold a deeper meaning below their surface value. The songbird recalls Keats's nightingale, which leads to creative breakthroughs.

Plants interjects multiple times in between verses: "And it makes me wonder," using an elevated tone that suggests the flight of the imagination to grasp an expanded meaning. The line also evokes a sense of awe inspired by the impact rock music can have in the imagination, prompting the listener to wonder about this too. The third verse awakens the spiritual side of the song:

There's a feeling I get when I look  
To the West.  
And my spirit is crying for leaving.  
In my thoughts I have seen rings of smoke  
Through the trees  
And the voices of those who stand looking.

Plant conjures the undefined vastness of the West, which surpasses the mind's capacity for visualization and brings a sense of awe and wonder at the unlimited possibilities. The undefined expansiveness of the West causes the speaker to long to leave his body in the same way that the nightingale's song heightens the speaker's desire in "Ode to a Nightingale" to escape his mortal frame and be liberated like the nightingale. The liberation of consciousness appears so attractive that both speakers cry to leave the mortal frames in which they are imprisoned and liberate the consciousness. "The voices of those

who stand looking,” evoke the watchful presence of the elders in “Kashmir” and the figure of the Hermit, who helps spiritual aspirants along the path. The nightingale and the elders evoke a sense of immortality in both works and a transcendent, mythical past that is beyond the capability of rational minds to conceive of. Plant’s vocals attempt to portray the unknowable identities and wisdom of these enlightened beings. At the same time, he suggests that he knows something about them since he is invoking their presence in his song. Plant gains the authority to play the role of the piper and lead the listener further down the road:

And it’s whispered that soon if we all  
Call the tune,  
Then the piper will lead us to reason.  
And a new day will dawn for those  
Who stand long,  
And the forests will echo with laughter.

As the singer, Plant himself plays the role of the piper leading us to reason, acting like the inner calling that pulls the listener through the course of the song. Plant once again links Led Zeppelin to the Dionysian path through the figure of the piper, who is derived from the mythological Pan, one of the companions of Dionysus. Listening to the song and following the piper is also drawing you along the path of the Lady, who reaches toward spiritual enlightenment through her stairway to heaven. Here, reason does not signify rational truth, but instead symbolizes spiritual truth, or emotional, sensual knowledge that is available to us through being affected by the power of rock music and this song. Both the listener and performer of the song are united in wondering whether “Stairway to Heaven” can transport us beyond normal reality to achieve transcendent knowledge of the self that Plant is singing about. Plant suggests that a new day will dawn

once we realize our “True Will.” The forests “echoing with laughter” suggest the presence of otherworldly forces at work within nature that are beyond human understanding and control. This uplifting laughter has been heard by the elect throughout history, just like the nightingale’s song. Plant invites his listeners to abandon rational thinking and follow the ways of pagan mythology:

If there’s a bustle in your hedgerow  
Don’t be alarmed now.  
It’s just a spring clean for the May-Queen.  
Yes there are two paths you can go by,  
But in the long run  
There’s still time to change the road you’re on.

The imagery in the verse evokes hope and new growth, perhaps in the attempt to show the worthiness of embarking on any path to achieve the “True Will.” Plant reassures the listeners that it is never too late to change the path we have chosen in life. The two paths could represent the different ways to reach spiritual truth.

The song comes to a dramatic pause and shifts into an acoustic bridge with three triumphant notes ringing from Page’s guitar that recall fanfare. Fanfare suggests the possibility of spectacle and has sublime implications. The bridge finishes with a new, twelve-string electric guitar part, creating the impression of expansive power and grandeur. Page utilizes the tape echo in his guitar solo, which audibly creates the effect of the forests echoing with laughter. Page explains the deliberateness of the song’s build up: “It speeds up...on purpose. It speeds up like an adrenaline flow as well. That’s the musical aspect of it.”<sup>8</sup> The listener experiences the rush of energy simultaneously with

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<sup>8</sup> taken from an audio clip of Jimmy Page on Led Zeppelin’s official website:  
[http://rhino.edgeboss.net/download/rhino/ledzeppelin/discography/lz4\\_stairway.mp3](http://rhino.edgeboss.net/download/rhino/ledzeppelin/discography/lz4_stairway.mp3)

the musician. For the final verse, Plant reenters with three times the force and power of before with amplified, electric instruments behind him, driving the song with a force to impact the listener:

And as we wind on down the road  
Our shadows taller than our soul  
There walks a Lady we all know  
Who shines white light and wants to show  
How everything still turns to gold  
And if you listen very hard  
The tune will come to you at last  
When all are one and one is all  
To be a rock and not to roll.

Plant transitions into using the collective “we” in the effort to transform the song into a description of the communal experience shared by all of the listeners and the band members themselves who are seeking spiritual truth and look to the possibility of spiritual liberation through listening to music. The imagery of “shadows taller than our souls,” strains the listener’s imagination, like the vastness in “the feeling I get / When I look to the West,” to conceive of something immeasurable—the soul—compared to a shadow. The shadow could refer to the psychological shadow, the negative aspects of our personalities. It could also be a reference to the band’s reputation for musical excellence and the high standards set for their music; their reputation always looms in the distance with high expectations that the band occasionally does not feel up to meet, just like everybody else. The challenge inspires the band to strive for even more success and discover more innovations in recorded music and live performances so that their fans will get the most out of the band and what they have to offer. “How everything still turns to gold” is a reminder of hope and inspiration for the spiritual aspirant or listener to find the eternal aspect of the spirit that will always lead him to his “True Will.” This quality of the

human spirit reminds us of the purity of the soul that increases along the path. “To be a rock and not to roll,” is a play on words and the roots of Led Zeppelin’s song tradition and their revival of Southern delta blues. To be a “rock” is to stand with a will that is unwavering, and the line emphasizes that each person should devote himself to finding his “True Will.” The rock is also imagery for the ultimate achievement of the spiritual goal—the Philosopher’s Stone—which evokes gold and the purity of the soul and its ability to create, or synthesize, all dualities in the universe. According to alchemy, Andrea Aromatico explains, “materially, gold is wealth, but allegorically, gold is purity—spiritually, it is wisdom” (Aromatico 66). Like alchemists, Led Zeppelin can turn anything to gold through their music (and in fact every one of the band’s records turns to gold).

Plant wants us to “listen very hard,” or to be in awe of the possibilities of the mystical significance of the song and their music. “If you listen very hard,” to the song, you will grasp the tune and the spiritual truths that he alludes to about how everything in the universe is connected, “When all are one and one is all.” There is a suggestion that if you listen to Led Zeppelin’s albums, you too will be able to absorb some of their power and spiritual knowledge. By really listening to their music, you will begin to understand the symbolism of Zeppelin’s magic and how to incorporate and harness it in your own life to achieve your own goals. “When all are one and one is all,” is the moment when the boundaries of the individual are transcended and everything in the universe is united.

The alchemical quest for the Philosopher’s Stone was considered a definite spiritual act, and “Stairway to Heaven” could represent the ascent to spiritual truth. The Lady reminds us that alchemy, or reaching spiritual perfection, is still a possibility in



today's world. The final verse describes those who have realized their "True Will," or spiritual perfection. Recall that Jimmy Page has described Led Zeppelin's music in terms of alchemy: "The four elements of Led Zeppelin making a fifth is magic into itself. That's the alchemical process" (*Guitar World*, January 2008). The fifth element that is produced in this song points to the goal of climbing the stairway: to achieve your "True Will"—the subjective experience of attaining spiritual perfection. Mysticism in music invokes material transcendence through sound. Page alludes to "Stairway to Heaven" as the song in which the band was able to finally capture the essence, or fifth element, produced by the band in their music. He asserts: "To me, I thought 'Stairway' crystallized the essence of the band" (Crowe, "The Durable Led Zeppelin"). To reach this goal requires producing something that is greater than the sum of its parts, and the fifth element generated by the four musicians is Led Zeppelin's music. The forces being put into the creation of their music by each band member produces intangible music that contains the power to impact the listener.

Listeners have to give themselves completely over to the song in order to fully reach the goal that the band attempts to lead you to. As in "Ode to a Nightingale," we can become one with the song and transcend all boundaries of time and space. Consequently, the listener will enter into a trancelike state, unaware of external reality and capable of accessing other regions of the mind as long as the music fills his ears and alters his consciousness. Once the music and the world created by the song vanishes, the listener is left unsure if his listening experience and expansion of the mind was an illusory dream or a vision that represents a truly enlightening experience. Page confirms the importance of the listener's participation in the song:

The point about the music and the album covers was to be something that would be thought-provoking, hopefully on an intellectual or an emotional level.... The cover was supposed to be something that was for other people to savor rather than for me to actually spell everything out, which would make the whole thing rather disappointing on that level of your own personal adventure into the music. (*The Sunday Times*, January 8, 2010)

“Stairway to Heaven” embodies the journey to reach spiritual perfection. The amplified power of its music, its visionary themes, and its mystique-laden charm would open expansive spiritual vistas for its audience, far beyond the routines of everyday life. The beauty of Led Zeppelin’s recorded music is that every song is able to act as a key for the listener to access this state again; the experience can be re-entered and repeated.

Both “Ode to a Nightingale” and “Stairway to Heaven” embody a spiritual quest to achieve union with the ideal, resulting in the union of the artists with their audiences. In this way, Led Zeppelin follows the Romantic tradition. Alchemy’s affinities with the Romantic imagination and Led Zeppelin are founded upon the imagination’s power to grasp the vision of the One. The Romantic quest for unity is the experience of oneness that transcends all opposites. The experience of oneness is always followed by a perpetual elusiveness of reaching the ideal, which is conveyed by the sense of deception and loss in “Ode to a Nightingale” and the elusive nature of the stairway to heaven. Understanding the profound and powerful elements of sublimity in Zeppelin’s music enables us to recognize that when it comes to rock and roll or Romantic poetry all are truly one and one is all.

## Chapter 8

### The Enchanted Reader and Listener

Magic shifts one's perception of reality and constitutes an expansion of consciousness. In *Romanticism and the Esoteric Tradition*, esoteric scholar and literary critic Paul Davies asserts that esotericism encompasses the "perspective to clarify consciousness, as well as outward to the physical environment" (Davies 12). The poet has the ability to translate these cosmic truths accessed in his imagination into poetry. Spiritual possibilities are made possible through listening to or making music too. Music and poetry with their manifestations of energy can powerfully move and change the consciousness of the listener and reader. Art functions not only to convey abstract, intellectual, and spiritual wisdom, but to release that wisdom as a real and sacred energy. For many, the arts can come to replace conventional religion as the source of deepest convictions. The music in "Ode to a Nightingale" can be understood as a sort of religion for the speaker that allows him to have transcendental realizations. Susan Fast describes: "Music of this sort was being perceived as being part of the experience of an alternate spirituality, one that valued questing for self-knowledge through an intense understanding of personal subjectivity" (Fast 18).

Poetry is self-perpetuated through the act of readerly engagement. I continue to read Keats because engaging with the text allows me to reinterpret the same poem in innumerable ways. Each engagement evokes different images and emotions, which makes the reading experience fresh. Keats demonstrates that poetry is akin to music in its aspects of rhythm and sound. I find pleasure in extracting the hidden melody from the

lines of a poem. The effect Led Zeppelin's music has on me—the feelings it evokes and the empowerment I get when listening to the power and strength of their music—is a testament to the “magical” impact their “will” enacted in their music. Their studio albums pack their own force that still affects listeners four decades later. Romantic poetry contains its own force that has the power to connect seemingly disparate aspects of reality into a unity perceived by the creative intellect. Through their identification with universal consciousness, poets express the underlying unity of creation. It was being conscious of this unity that allowed me to make the connection between Led Zeppelin and John Keats in the first place.

Romantic poetry holds the possibility and opportunity to discover some truth about myself that I haven't encountered yet in quite that way. For the poet, imagination is a means of traffic between worlds and a facilitator of transformative movement. The feeling of self-recognition in a text written centuries before transcends ordinary everyday experience. Accessing eternal truths and emotions is one of Keats's purposes in writing poetry. In a letter to John Taylor written on the February 27, 1818, Keats describes his axioms in creating poetry: “1<sup>st</sup> poetry...should strike the reader as a wording of his own highest thoughts, and appear almost a remembrance.” Coleridge describes a similar experience: “In looking at objects of nature...I seem rather to be seeking, as it were asking for, a symbolical language for something within me that already and forever exists, than observing anything new” (*Biographia* 117). Through the imagination, we are able to see the world as Romantics saw it—enchanted and animate. This new way of perceiving the natural environment adds a new dimension to everyday life.

Romantic poetry appeals to the mind's capacity for higher consciousness. The ability to induce altered states of mind may enable us to think more creatively and be receptive to extraordinary insights that stand apart from normal everyday consciousness. Keats's poetry deals with such heightened consciousness, and his poems represent the idea of the inside coming out—the internal made external. The hidden wisdom in poetry is interwoven in imaginative thinking, and it is revealed in sparks of creativity where all of a sudden everything is revealed. Similarly, Led Zeppelin fans highly value the spontaneous creativity of the band's improvisation during live performances. Page describes improvisation: "You can get quite spiritual about soloing. It's almost like channeling. One minute it wasn't there and the next minute it is. I'm sure anyone who is creative has that moment, that point where it just sparks" (*Guitar World*, November 2008). The improvised guitar solo suggests the potentiality of spiritual transcendence reached through the music. The potential for transformation comes from sublime improvisational moments.

A poem can be a revelation, revealing the glimmer of consciousness that moved the poet to write. Shelley makes bold claims about the power of poetry:

[It] awakens and enlarges the mind itself by rendering it the receptacle of a thousand apprehended combinations of thought. Poetry lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world, and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar; it reproduces all that it represents, and the impersonations clothed in its Elysian light stand thenceforward in the minds of those who have once contemplated them, as memorials of that gentle and exalted content which extends itself over all thoughts and actions with which it coexists. (*Norton Anthology* 844)

Poems can function as a series of revelations for the reader, as if we recognize something we already knew inside but never thought about it consciously, having remained buried in our consciousness until now.

Led Zeppelin are the inheritors of the Romantic tradition of following the path that leads to an expansion of consciousness through the power of their words. Zeppelin adds to the Romantic ideology by literally amplifying these traditions with the physical force of electric instruments in the Seventies. Approaching Led Zeppelin through the lens of Romanticism has deepened my understanding of the spiritual meaning behind their music as well as the spirituality sought after by Romantic poets.

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