

Fantastic and Romantic: Generic Multiplicity of John Keats' "Lamia"

Şafak ALTUNSOY*

Abstract

This study focuses on the intergeneric structure of a Romantic poem, "Lamia" (1820). Since the scholars have mostly studied the long narrative poem from the respect of its origins and the influences of the previous literary sources, the study concentrates on the poem's generic nature by specifying its concern to the fantastic with the romantic qualities in the poem by referring to peculiar examples. The interconnection between romantic and fantastic elements and the transitions from one quality to another are other concerns of the study. The study starts with an attempt to define the term genre and the genre of the fantastic through "Lamia" as a multiple text and with references to the works of Fishelov, Todorov and Calvino. The study continues with the discussion of the multiplicity of "Lamia" through its different meanings changing in accordance with certain dichotomies such as the symbolic and the imaginary, the corporeal and the abstract, the mythic past and the linearity. The constant intrusions of the outer world through some characters or events and the glimpses of hope coming from the inner world suggest the various tension levels throughout the poem as well. The study concludes that reunification of the poetic personas with the subjective world can only be possible with the unleashing power of fantasy in the poem. Thus, in the presence of Enlightenment ideology, Lamia as a mythological figure and an authentic woman embodies the possibility of an alternate existence through the fantastic.

Keywords: Keats, "Lamia," fantastic, Romanticism, genre.

* Dr., Selcuk University, Faculty of Letters, Department of English Language and Literature, Konya, Turkey.
Elmek: shafakaltunsoy@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5573-1121>.

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Düşsel ve Romantik: Keats'ın "Lamia"sında Türsel Çeşitlilik

Öz

Bu çalışma Romantik bir şiir örneği olan "Lamia" içindeki edebi türler arası yapıya odaklanmaktadır. Şiiri inceleyenler daha çok şiirin kökenleri ve kendinden önce gelen eserlerden ne derece etkilendiği yönünde çalıştıklarından bu çalışma, metinden seçilen örneklerle ve şiir içindeki fantastik (düşsel) ve romantik öğeler arasındaki ilişki vasıtasıyla şiirin türsel yapısına yoğunlaşır. Romantik ve fantastik öğeler arasındaki bağlantı ve bir özellikten diğerine şeklinde görülen geçişler de çalışmanın diğer odağıdır. Çalışma tür tanımını çoklu bir metin olarak "Lamia" ekseninde Todorov, Fishelov ve Calvino'nun görüşlerine atıfta bulunarak yapmaya çalışır, "Lamia"nın anlamsal zenginliğini şiir içindeki imgesel-simgesel, somut-soyut, mitik zaman-doğrusal zaman gibi karşıtlıklarla gösterir. Dış dünyanın sürekli müdahalesi ve iç dünyadan gelen umut kırıntıları da şiirdeki çeşitli seviyelerdeki gerilimi yansıtır. Çalışma, şiirde şiir kişilerinin öznel olan dünyayla iletişimin ancak düşsel olan vasıtasıyla kurulabileceğinin sonucuna varır. Hem mitolojik bir figür hem de gerçek bir kadın olarak Lamia, şiirin son bölümde gösterildiği gibi düşsel olan aracılığıyla Aydınlanma fikrinin mevcudiyetinde başka bir varoluşun da mümkün olduğunu somutlaştırır.

Keywords: Keats, "Lamia," düşsel, Romantik akım, tür.

Extended Summary

“Lamia,” a long narrative poem by Keats, does not only present the main concerns of second-generation British Romanticism but also stands as a rich source for tracing the multiplicity of the fantastic elements. For that reason, rather than concentrating on the work’s literary origins, the study focuses on the poem’s generic structure by analysing the connection between the romantic and fantastic elements in the text.

The study starts with a brief description of the fantastic, mainly from Todorov and Calvino’s perspectives. Besides the study’s slight touch on the Platonic perception of the actual/ the real or truth in its general sense, Lacanian imaginary and symbolic realms also shed light on the essential opposition between the world of dreams/ the mythic space with a sense of nowhere and the world of the social/ language and the corporeality.

The apparent tragic story of an unconsummated love between Lamia and Lycius converts into a departure point from the illusionary actual world’s borders. Thus, the study regards the poem’s narrative structure as a space for facing the floating signifiers. The flexibility between the corporeal and the imaginary problematises the sense of fixedness in space and meaning as well. The poem conveys its multifaceted nature with its multiple meanings changing in accordance with the ideologies represented by means of certain opposing personas such as Lamia and Apollonius. The basic conflict of the supernatural and the rational also appears as the criticism of the Enlightenment philosophy in “Lamia.”

The poem’s literary origins and the traditional perception of Lamia as a monster or victimised woman in Greek mythology reflect the element of hesitation or the state of uncertainty maintained throughout the poem. Keats presents Lamia as a suffering woman in order to establish a connection with the corporeal world. As an outsider coming from an unknown world, Lamia is the other to the self and always stands as a threat to the rational structure presented

through Apollonius. Hence, Keats evaluates Lamia figure not as a monster eating her own babies, but as a sensitive woman wronged because of her insistence on 'love.' The idealisation of Lamia's previously serpent form also consolidates how Keats takes sides with the supernatural world as nourishing power for alternate ways of life. However, even the origins of Lamia in both affirmative and negative accounts prove the slippery ground of meaning with the presence of the fantastic and the absence of the rational.

The tension between the world of the rational and the one offering a new subjectivity for the poetic personas reflects the prevalent concern of going beyond the human sphere in "Lamia." Since the poem suggests a distinct version of the romantic subjectivity, the fantastic elements signified through certain characters and events also contribute to the argument of imagination as the essential part forming that new subjectivity. From this regard, the study takes the poem's seemingly tragic end as a fresh departure from the known into the unknown as an escape from the illusionary convention of physical appearances. Thus, Lamia's disappearance and Lycius' death go beyond their surface meanings by offering the possibility of an alternative existence. Then, Lycius' losing Lamia and dying immediately after that powerful feeling of loss trigger a different sense of freedom by changing the conventional perception of loss into an act of positivity for remembering the forgotten inner world.

The study concludes that the fantastic elements support the romantic concern of surpassing rational borders by means of imagination. The personas gain a glimpse of truth in Keats' platonic poetic universe through the paradoxical functionality of loss and despair. Thus, the apparent negation of the last lines signifying 'death' affirms the presence of nourishing alterity by offering a borderless and timeless existence in "Lamia."

Introduction

“Lamia” reflects the concerns of the nineteenth century English Romanticism and exemplifies the pluralistic nature of the literary genres of the English Romantic period besides its focus on the feeling of disappointment experienced with the dominance of the outer forces and the paradox of the anti-rational appearing as both an affirmative and negating power for the female character, Lamia. Although Keats’ reaction towards the rational and reality are not the primary concern of the study, it should be clarified that the rational does not refer to the real in Keats’ poetry. In other words, the rational can signify the actual, but not the real. On the contrary, since dreams can surpass the rational boundaries, Keats glorifies them as real and divine resources for an alternative perception.

Before discussing the poem’s generic qualities, it is better to explain how the study takes ‘genre’ as a literary concept to demonstrate the diversity of “Lamia” as a literary text. In *Metaphors of Genre*, Fishelov describes “genre as a combination of prototypical, representative members, and a flexible set of constitutive rules that apply to some levels of literary texts, to some individual writers, usually to more than one literary period, and to more than one language and culture” (8). When such a definition is reconsidered within the context of the poem “Lamia,” the text’s multilayered structure becomes more evident. While the text is a combination of fantastic, gothic, tragic and satirical elements on the structural level, it also voices the “representative members” (Fishelov 8) of some ideological spheres with Lamia in the extra-linguistic realm, Apollonius in the linguistic realm and Lycius in a vacillating space between linguistic and extra-linguistic realms.

Moreover, the poem’s inter-generic position visualises the literary genres’ flexibility and plurality from the respect of culture and language. For that reason, it is possible to detect two languages employed symbolically by Lamia and Apollonius besides the two different cultures; one is distant and mysterious, the other is contemporary. As Harrold mentions, that is why the scholars have focused on the “Lamia motif, which appears in the folklore and literature of countries from England to China and India” (579). The poem’s various local origins from Eastern and Western cultures also contribute to its generic and temporal multi-

plicity. When the story of Lamia's medieval versions is reconsidered, the poem's temporal richness becomes clearer with its concerns and implications free from centuries' boundaries.

In this vein, the study analyses Keats' "Lamia" to demonstrate its multi-layered structure with the prevalence of fantastic elements. In addition to that, the fairy tale material, gothic, and tragic items apparent in the poem also culminate in the Romantic concern for voicing the individual's complicated inner world. However, the mind as the source of fantasy or imagination in the poem is paradoxical since "Keats is being very realistic in his exploration of illusion and reality in *Lamia*" (Gross 165). Besides creating a corporeal-illusory structure with the appearance and disappearance of Lamia throughout the text, "the dichotomising of truth and illusion belies the autonomy of illusion: reality and private dream include one another, involve one another at every point" (Hoagwood 680) too. Such flexibility between the corporeality and the world of dreams offers a hopeful way of life both for the poet and the personas in "Lamia." From this respect, the poem can function as a remedy to Reiman's "humanistic paradox" (669) to cope with the bitter realities Keats observes in both Nature and contemporary society. Thus, the poem can function as "a parable exhibiting the situation of modern man confronted by the blankness of unbelief" (Reiman 669).

The Definitions of the Fantastic

The genre of the fantastic, according to Italo Calvino, is one of the most important genres of literature since it is the most successful one in demonstrating the individual's inner life through symbols perceived collectively. Accordingly, the "supernatural" (Calvino 7) material dominant in the works of the fantastic enables us to reconnect with "the unconscious, the repressed, the forgotten" (Calvino 7) in opposition to the blocking effect of "our rational attention" (7). Furthermore, Todorov commences his definition of the fantastic with *Le Diable Romance*, a romance by Jacques Cazotte. The romance tells the love story of a man called Alvaro and a sylphide, Biondetta (the member of the supernatural race, Sylph, inhabiting the air in folklore). Similar to the story of "Lamia," Alvaro, the protagonist, experiences a love affair that demonises Biondetta in the

end. Todorov suggests that although she is depicted as a form deliberately belonging to another world, Biondetta shows that she is merely a woman in love with the real sorrows and experiences. As the words of Alvaro, the protagonist of the story, “It all seems a dream, I kept telling myself; but what else is human life? I am dreaming more extravagantly than other men, that is all, . . . what is possible? What is impossible?” (qtd. in Todorov 24) reflect, the fantastic creates hesitation both in the character and the reader. In other words, both of them display an ambivalence about believing the events that take place or are supposed to be taking place. In this respect, the notion underlying fantasy is primarily “defined in relation to those of the real and the imaginary” (Todorov 26) and the notion underlying fantasy is primarily “defined in relation to those of the real and the imaginary” (Todorov 26) and the wonder created between the two realms leads to the “fantastic effect” (Todorov 26). However, although the contrast between “the real and the imaginary” (26) remains almost the same, Todorov’s dichotomy can lead to a terminological contradiction in the case of Keats since the real is not the actual for him and the imaginary realm in opposition the corporeal world triggers the glimpse to truth through imagination as a medium.

Le Diable Romance, written in 1772, is regarded as the first example of modern fantastic story writing. “Lamia,” published in 1820, shares a similar plot with Cazotte’s story. The protagonists, Alvaro in *The Devil in Love* and Lycius in “Lamia” fall in love with extraterrestrial beings, Biondetta and Lamia, who have to exist in the corporeal world as different forms from those of their original bodies. The two female figures feel a great love for the men in the stories, but the love affair remains unconsummated at the end of the stories. In both plotlines, the female figures have to suffer by being alienated from their deep love with the reason’s intrusion. Even in the stories’ structure, the two works implicitly glorify the subjective world of dreams and fantasy in opposition to the corporeal world, which also indicates Keats’ criticism of nineteenth-century rationalism. On the other hand, as Sitterson discusses, the poem problematises Platonic realism, or the difference between the Platonic world of Ideas/ the world of Forms and the copies as “*Lamia* mocks such a distinction by suggesting that such a realm of permanence is a product of human ‘phantasy’ or desire” (201).

Another epitome of the fantastic tale genre is Theophile Gautier's "The Beautiful Vampire," telling the story of a priest, Romuald and his love affair with a vampire woman, Clarimonde. However, the love affair is impeded by Abbe Seraphion, who represents the rational world against the world of dreams. The story starts with the old Romuald's telling a "strange and terrible" (Gautier 229) experience in his youth as a priest. On his ordination day, he sees a beautiful woman in the church. The woman tells him that if he leaves the church now, she will make him happy throughout all his life. Accordingly, a similar encounter scene is recounted in "Lamia." Romuald is mesmerised by the beauty of Clarimonde and thinks that she belongs to a non-human world with such exquisite beauty. Lycius reacts in a similar way when he sees Lamia for the first time. He regards her as an object of his fantasy and shows extreme reverence to her by assuming her to be a goddess visiting the earth in the form of a woman. However, both protagonists, Romuald and Lycius, cannot achieve authentic happiness even though Clarimonde and Lamia warn about the disaster waiting for the male protagonists who listen to the advice of Abbe Seraphion and Apollonius through several repetitions. Gautier as a French Romantic poet, in this respect, shares a similar concern with Keats, that is, the world of the dreams enables the individual to reconnect with his forgotten inner self, but the outer world of illusion always stands as a threat to block such unification with the subjective world and Platonic perception of reality.

"Lamia:" Multiple Destinations of the Fantastic

The plotline of the two-partite "Lamia" can be summarised in five sections. In the first part, Lamia's being trapped in a serpent body is narrated. She is turned into a woman body by Hermes as a reward for her help to find the nymph Hermes searches. In the second part, Lamia encounters a young Corinth, Lycius. In this part, both Lamia's beauty and the man's ambitious love for her are emphasised. They live happily until Lycius decides to marry her. Although she opposes the idea, she consents to the proposal in the end on the condition that he does not invite Apollonius to their wedding ceremony. In the fourth part, Lycius leaves Lamia alone in order to invite his relatives to the marriage feast. During this time,

Lamia arranges the mansion with her magical powers and fairy servants. The guests are mesmerised by the manor's beauty, and they wonder whether it is real or not. Although Apollonius, Lycius' mentor, is not invited to the feast, he is also among the guests. In the last part, during the feast, Apollonius insistently looks at Lamia. Lycius asks her whether she knows his teacher before, but he cannot receive any answer from her. He gets angry with the persistent gaze of Apollonius and wants Apollonius to stop gazing at her. Apollonius says that he tries to save him from the prey of a serpent, and when he shouts at her as "serpent" again, she vanishes immediately, and Lycius dies.

"Lamia" as a narrative poem, is based on Greek mythology and folk tale tradition (Harrold 1966; Reiman 1971; Sitterson 1984; Gross 1990). As a mythological figure, she is an "obscure figure from lower stratum of the Greek mythology" (Leinweber 77). She is the mistress of Zeus and is transformed into a monster after Hera kills her children as a result of her jealousy. Although "several mythological variations of this theme exist," (77) what is common in Lamia's depiction is that she is described in negative terms as the devourer of others' children (77). Moreover, according to Leinweber, "she became a kind of fairy tale figure, used by mothers and nannies to induce good behavior among children" (77). However, in Keats' case, the poem depicts Lamia not as a monster, on the contrary, as a suffering woman or an extraterrestrial entity. From another perspective, "Keats presents Lamia not as an evildoer and enchantress, as Apollonius proclaims, but as one who is victimised by the public gaze embodied by Apollonius' gaze" (Karadaş 352). The poem uses two elements from her traditional description, the serpent-like form and her prophesizing ability, since as compensation to Hera's punishment, Zeus grants her the ability to foresee the future (Bell 271). When the way Keats employs the conventional material in the poem is considered, even her serpent image is presented with an aesthetic concern, which means that Keats idealises Lamia by omitting the negative description in mythology. However, temporality in the poem remains mythic as the opening lines of "Lamia" both prepare the ground for the transformation of Lamia from the serpent form into a woman and position the poem into a fairytale-like atmosphere with an emphasis on the distant mythological past.

Moreover, as the first lines "Upon a time, before the faery broods/ Drove Nymph and Satyr from the prosperous woods" (Keats 171) can signify, time sense is problematised in terms of the linearity of the corporeal world with reference to the indefinite past. As Jack Zipes points out, the fairytale

"begins with 'once upon a time' or 'once there was' and never really ends when it ends. The ending is actually the true beginning. The once upon a time is not a past designation but futuristic: The timelessness of the tale and lack of geographical specificity endow it with utopian connotations- utopia in its original meaning designated 'no-place' . . ." (4).

Accordingly, the fairy tale element in "Lamia" conveys the metaphorical meaning of the poem with its concentration on the timelessness in the beginning lines. So, the time sense reflected in a conventional fairy tale is presented in "Lamia" as an indeterminate entity. Lamia's coming from nowhere or a world unknown to the rational practice of Apollonius also refers to the hope of reinteraction with the world of the repressed emotions as an expression of the yearning for fulfilment. In this regard, Lamia's vanishing like a soap bubble and Lycius' death lead the reader to an 'end,' which "is actually the true beginning" (Zipes 4) since an avid reader reconsiders the whole narrative from a new perspective. That is to say, Lycius' death in the corporeality becomes a symbolic death by presenting the gist of Keats' romantic attitude cherishing the inner world in contrast to the outer world. Thus, the only way to get out of the material world occurs in Lycius' death, which functions as a gate for the supernatural realm.

However, such an ending distinguishes the poem from the fairy tale structure since in a classical fairy tale, the protagonists "triumph over death" (Zipes 4), but in "Lamia," death as a seemingly tragic end turns into a medium for regaining 'truth' concealed in the distractions of the physical world. Then, death does not signify the loss but "triumph" (Zipes 4) in the poem. From this standpoint, as Hoagwood suggests, "the poem presents, and then undermines, a sentimental and conventional fantasy about love-the fantasy that love overcomes the sordid and painful pressures of actuality" (691). But the poem's ending is nevertheless suitable to the fantastic as a genre. In this respect, Todorov's words, "For Poe, the tale is characterised by the existence of a single effect, located at the end, and by the

obligation all the elements within the tale are under to contribute to this effect” (87) can also explain the plot structure and the ending in the fantastic narrative of “Lamia” since “the final effect” or “single effect” (Todorov 87) signifies that “the rational explanations are not satisfactory” (87). Thus, the ending lines convey the glimpses of fulfilment and lack on the same ground.

Moreover, the corporeality of Lamia is questioned by Apollonius with the repetition of the word ‘serpent,’ and her woman form disappears by leading to both dramatic and situational irony. To clarify, the reader learns about her extra-terrestrial past from the beginning lines recounting her help to Hermes. However, Lycius assumes her to be a ‘normal’ human being, which creates dramatic irony in the poem. He cannot know her supernatural quality up to the end. The situational irony lies in the change of the wedding ceremony into a funeral. Thus, through two kinds of irony, Lycius’ persistence in the marriage, Apollonius’ gaze, and Lamia’s being silent to the insistent questions of Lycius pave the way to the tragic end with a shift from fantasy to tragedy.

Cuddon suggests that “fairy tale is a narrative in prose about the fortunes and misfortunes of a hero or heroine who, having experienced various adventures of a more or less supernatural kind, lives happily ever after. Magic, charms, disguise and spells are some of the major ingredients of such stories” (302). When the plotline of “Lamia” is evaluated from Cuddon’s framework, it can be said that “Lamia” both suits to and does not suit the conventional fairy tale structure due to its oscillation between fortunes and misfortunes of the protagonists besides its verse structure. To illustrate, Lamia’s confinement in serpent shape, the regained beautiful woman form, her encounter with Lycius and their happy days are counterbalanced with Lycius’ proposal, their unconsummated love affair and the interruption of Apollonius. The poem also includes charms and spells that are significant elements in the plotline. For instance, her unveiling the spell from Hermes’s eyes and his seeing the nymph he desires for grants her the chance to become human again as her words to Hermes denote “I was a woman, let me have once more/ A woman’s shape and charming as before” (Keats 174). Similarly, her using magic in the preparation of the wedding ceremony creates enchantment in the guests. The mansion’s cosy atmosphere and the images of the happy guests

savouring the glories of the feast contribute to the climax and the disappearance at the end of the poem. Again, fantastic elements coexist with the romantic ones, which signifies the multiplicity in the fantastic as a genre since the genre has a "stock of myths, fairy tales, legends, ballads, and romances" (Jobling 6) and employs these "roots" (6) as a starting point for its development. Keats' employing myth, legend, and fairy tale in romance form blurs the poem's generic structure and enriches the text by illuminating the plurality of elements in the poem. Hence, the abundance of fantastic features contributes to the Romantic concern of escaping from the illusiory/ physical world's borders through mysticism.

In Keats' poem, "Lamia," the visual experience is dominant from the beginning to the end. According to Calvino, the genre of the fantastic is based on visual experience as if it is the most dependent genre "to make its entrance through our eyes, to become concrete in a succession of images" (12). He also points out that "the true theme of the nineteenth-century fantastic tale is the reality of what we see: to believe or not to believe in the phantasmagoric apparitions, to glimpse another world, enchanted or infernal behind everyday appearances" (11). This claim enforces the idea that the supernatural and not the actual/physical is the real/reality. Similarly, in the opening lines, Lamia's serpent body with human limbs conveys the grotesque coexistence of the "another world" (Calvino 11) with the physical one. Lycius' seeing Lamia for the first time, considering her to be a goddess or dreamy figure and then a mortal woman in the first part, and Apollonius's gaze in the second part demonstrate the fantastic concern or "the problem with reality of what we see" (Calvino 7). For instance, the depiction of Lamia in the first part creates hesitation in the sense Todorov explains with the words, "fantastic is a particular case of the more general category of the 'ambiguous vision'" (33), as it can be seen in the following stanzas,

She was a gordian shape of dazzling hue,
 Vermilion-spotted, golden, green, and blue;
 Striped like a zebra, freckled like a pard,
 Eyed like a peacock, and all crimson barr'd;
 (. . .)

She seem'd, at once, some penanced lady elf,
Some demon's mistress, or the demon's self.
Upon her crest she wore a wannish fire
Sprinkled with stars, like Ariadne's tiar:
Her head was serpent, but ah, bitter-sweet!
She had a woman's mouth with all its pearls complete:
And for her eyes: what could such eyes do there
But weep, and weep, that they were born so fair? (Keats 172)

The use of exotic places, names, and materials in nineteenth-century fantastic writing also appears in Keats' poem. Through the simile signifying the colourful body of Lamia as a serpent through the images of zebra, leopard, and peacock with one specific mark from each animal, Keats glorifies Lamia by emphasising her aesthetic or corporeal beauty appealing to the sense of vision. However, as a work of fantasy, "Lamia" counterbalances the detailed description of the serpent with the "ambiguous vision" (Todorov 33) expressed in the line "she seem'd, at once, some penanced lady elf/ Some demon's mistress or the demon's self" (Keats 172). From this respect, Todorov's emblematic example from Potocki demonstrates a similar attitude in the style of "she seem'd" (Keats 172). Potocki's words, "I almost came to believe that some demons had animated bodies of hanged men in order to trick me" (qtd. in Todorov 168), exemplify the "complex" "speech act found at the base of the fantastic" (Todorov 168). Since the fantastic event is given in the subordinate clause, and the main one demarcates the corporeal world, Todorov suggests that the persona "does not want to abandon the framework itself and thus informs us of his uncertainty" (168). Keats' starting with Lamia's physical description and then continuing with her ambivalent stance between being a serpent, a human being, "elf," or "demon's self" (Keats 172) demonstrate the fantastic genre's success in the conveyance of the corporeal together with the imaginary, or the concrete being with the abstract one.

Another element of hesitation is achieved through the red colour from the reader's perspective. As the lines "Her head was serpent, but ah, bitter-sweet!" and "And for her eyes: what could such eyes do there/ But weep, and weep, that they were born so fair?" (Keats 172) indicate, Keats sympathises with the versions of Lamia myth in fairy tales and Greek mythology as a woman victimised

by the jealousy and wrath of deities. Moreover, unlike the threatening serpent image, Lamia's colours are full of life and energy. In this regard, her bodily appearance also supports the dichotomy of the richness of the forgotten inner world and the rational one's dullness. Hence, the colour red does not refer to the wild nature of a vampire and a sinful demonic figure but to a passionate lover who wants Hermes to transform her into a woman form for "Love's sake" (Keats 172).

The God on half-shut feathers sank serene,
 She breath'd upon his eyes, and swift was seen
 Of both the guarded nymph near-smiling on the green.
 It was no dream; or say a dream it was,
 Real are the dreams of Gods, and smoothly pass
 Their pleasures in a long immortal dream.
 One warm, flush'd moment, hovering, it might seem
 Dash'd by the wood-nymph's beauty, so he burn'd; (Keats 174)

Lamia is a marginalised woman figure in the poem since she is the embodied form of an 'alternative' meaning. From Calvino's perspective, such a situation is "like the revolt of the unconscious, the repressed, the forgotten, all that is distanced from our rational attention" (Calvino 7). In the above lines, Keats poeticises how Lamia helps Hermes to find the nymph he desires. In other words, Lamia functions as a threshold between the repressing reason and the repressed desire as the veil image hindering Hermes and other hunters to see the nymph. Only through the supernatural material, magical powers, not through the act of hunting the nymph in this case, opens the way for the desired. Moreover, the nymph's appearance can also be read within the three orders theory of Lacan. To make it clear, in the above lines, Hermes can be considered as the one positioned in the symbolic. Even if he is a god, thus a divine entity, he cannot see the nymph's beauty. Like the lack in Lacanian terms, Hermes searches for his object of desire for full satisfaction, but in each case of his hunting, he cannot satisfy his desire and is led to another place. He would not satisfy his passion without the help of Lamia. From the Lacanian perspective, the imaginary appears fragmentarily in the symbolic (as the realm of language, signifiers, death and lack), which threatens the structure proposed by the symbolic order; thus, it should be repressed. However, Lamia's demonstration of the nymph momentarily by breathing into the

god's eyes signifies the symbolic blindness before the imaginary or the subjective world. The lines "It was no dream; or say a dream it was,/ Real are the dreams of Gods, and smoothly pass/ Their pleasures in a long immortal dream" (Keats 174) express the hesitation in the poem and reflect the problematised sense of reality between "the world we live in" and "the world that lives within us" (Calvino 7).

The element of hesitation in the poem is experienced not only by the reader but also by the character or the narrator (Todorov 33). The narrator firstly hesitates to describe the scene in which Lamia shows the nymph. In other words, he cannot explain the supernatural event with the specular experience. Then, he rationalises the event by concluding that dreams are not fictitious reflections of the mind but actual events within the supernatural realm to which the heavenly beings belong. The lines above suggest another generic multiplicity, the coexistence of the fantastic and the romantic. However, this multiplicity and the coexistence should be read carefully as "it is not an infusion to one another, but a bare recognition of existing boundaries that help us to define the Other much better in its own term" (Altındaş 22), peculiarly in the symbolic/ illusionary/rational realm. As the narrator's reaction to Lamia's unveiling the nymph signifies, things exist with their differences and clear-cut borders in the rational sphere. But with the presence of the supernatural, they lose their distinctness, which creates a peculiar tension through the element of hesitation again.

Furthermore, the romantic element is vocalised, especially in the tone of a yearning for the "pleasures in a long immortal dream" (Keats 174) of the fantastic. For instance, in the romantic and the fantastic coexistence, Lamia learns certain corporeal events in her dreamy voyages. As the lines "But first 'tis fit to tell how she could muse/ And dream, when in the serpent prison-house,/ Of all she list, strange or magnificent:/ How, ever, where she will'd, her spirit went;" (Keats 176) show, through dreaming she surpasses the spatial limits of the human world. Nonetheless, in the fantastic, as Todorov states, "the physical world and the spiritual world interpenetrate; their fundamental categories are modified as a result. The time and space of the supernatural world, as they are described in this group of fantastic texts, are not the time and space of everyday life. Here time seems suspended, and it extends beyond what one imagines to be possible" (118).

Accordingly, "serpent prison house" (Keats 176) image can reflect the metaphysical concern of the Romantics, that is, the craving for going beyond the 'body' to reach the glimpses of the sublime. Keats also acknowledges that such a yearning cannot be wholly fulfilled in the corporeal sphere. The process apparently fails because of the presence of the rational, as demonstrated with Lycius' demise, the dominance of Apollonius, and the disappearance of Lamia in the poem. However, such an ending is "triumph over death" (Zipes 4), which suggests the possibility of new beginnings with the absence of Lamia and the death of Lycius since Apollonius as the extension of the rational or the symbolic cannot function anymore in that unknown realm.

Todorov argues that "the intervention of the supernatural element always constitutes a break in the system of pre-established rules" (166). Hence, the fantastic creates surprise and wonder in the reader through its non-rational material. This effect is achieved with the transformation scene of Lamia from a serpent into a beautiful woman as follows,

Left to herself, the serpent now began
 To change; her elfin blood in madness ran,
 Her mouth foam'd, and the grass, therewith besprent,
 Wither'd at dew so sweet and virulent;
 Her eyes in torture fix'd, and anguish drear,
 Hot, glaz'd, and wide, with lid-lashes all sear,
 (. . .)
 Nothing but pain and ugliness were left. (Keats 174-5)

According to Marina Warner, "Transformations bring about a surprise, and among the many responses story solicits from us, is surprise. The breaking of rules of natural law and verisimilitude creates the fictional world with its own laws" (18). Besides the surprise conveyed through the mutation scene as the body turns into an extremely different form by challenging the law of Nature, Keats also indicates that the previous colourful serpent body stands as an entity belonging to the world of dreams and anti-rational material (functioning like water snake image in Coleridge's "Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs/ Upon the slimy sea" (39) in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner"), and a better way of existence than the new form. The line, "Nothing but pain and ugliness were left," (Keats 175)

in this respect, prophesizes her new sorrowful life originating from the deep love for Lycius. Moreover, the pain depicted in the transformation scene contributes to Keats' perception of Lamia as an authentic woman.

Lamia's fantastic transformation can be evaluated as Keats' reaction to the Enlightenment philosophy that cherishes "clear reason" (Warner 26). In this regard, Warner discusses that "the era of secularisation, scientific inquiry, epistemological adventures in the pursuit of clear Reason saw a bubbling spate of fables, dramas, romances, fancies and harlequinades in which animals turn into human beings and vice versa, in which magic spells and talismans bring about a myriad transformations" (27). She also maintains that such "shape-shifting" (27) fragmentises "the rules of time, place, of human reproduction and personal uniqueness" (27). Accordingly, besides "Lamia," Keats' composing "Endymion," "Hyperion," "Isabelle or the Pot of Basil" during the same time period reflects his reaction towards the dominant discourse of the nineteenth century through the uncanny material prevalent in the abovementioned narrative poems. Thus, the fantastic nature of "Lamia" does not hinder its relation to the physical life, which appears as the criticism of science and the social teachings/ conventions reflected by means of Apollonius, with probable connotations to the Nietzschean Apollonian and Dionysian perceptions of art, in which the Apollonian represents the order and logic, and the Dionysian the chaos or lack of the rational as expressed in the lines through which the narrator depicts how Lycius is a fortunate man to have such a beauty with an emphasis on the dichotomy of order and chaos as follows,

A virgin purest lipp'd, yet in the lore
Of love deep learned to the red heart's core:
Not one hour old, yet of sciential brain
To unperplex bliss from its neighbour pain;
Define their pettish limits, and estrange
Their points of contact, and swift counterchange;
Intrigue with the specious chaos, and dispart
Its most ambiguous atoms with sure art; (Keats 176)

Fantasy "negotiates a boundary between the actual and the incredible, the real and the illusory. Fantasy, in fact, is inevitably a commentary on or counterpart to reality" (Jobling 5). However, in Keats' case, the real is an illusion, and

the thing that is called 'illusion' is truth. Likewise, in "Lamia," the fluctuation between the corporeal and the imaginary is always prevalent as it happens for instance, in the scene Lycius sees Lamia and the following one Lamia prepares the mansion for the wedding feast. The songs Lamia sings also underline the border between "the actual and the incredible" (Jobling 5). Lycius' first reaction contradicts his changing attitude towards Lamia's beauty. In other words, Lamia's beauty creates the conflict between the symbolic and the imaginary, which is the feature of the fantasy genre and nineteenth-century Romantic poetry. As Karadaş puts it, unlike the previously mentioned sense of multiplicity, "in Romantic poetry, poetic imagination imbues objects of nature in the process of perception with an ideational and mythical content and thus transforms objects of perception into unfamiliar and alien entities" (65). In this respect, Keats' attitude towards Lamia's physical appearance and Lycius' reaction demonstrates the degree of idealisation in the beginning lines and its recession within the corporeal world at the end of the poem. The lines below signify Lycius' inconsistent emotions towards Lamia, which leads him whether to believe or not to believe 'the thing' (undefinable by the reason) before his eyes,

For so delicious were the words she sung,
It seem'd he had lov'd them a whole summer long:
And soon his eyes had drunk her beauty up,
Leaving no drop in the bewildering cup,
And still the cup was full, (. . .)
"Leave thee alone! Look back! Ah, Goddess, see
Whether my eyes can ever turn from thee!
For pity do not this sad heart belie -
Even as thou vanishest so I shall die.
Stay! though a Naiad of the rivers, stay! (Keats 177)

The function of song or melody in the poem paves the way for the "reality of the interior, subjective world of the mind, the imagination, giving to that world a dignity equal to or greater than that of the world of objectivity and of the senses" (Calvino 9). Hence, the words Lamia "sung" (Keats 177) to Lycius underline his entrance into the subjective world of dreams and love. Besides the emphasis on the visual experience of the character, the style of "it seem'd" (177) reflects the

hesitation in Lycius on the linguistic level (Keats 177). Thus, Lycius assumes Lamia to be a dreamy figure, and his experience is a momentary one. The line “Even as thou vanishest so I shall die,” (177) is not a mere hyperbolic expression for the passionate love of Lycius or a disastrous end; on the contrary, it foregrounds a triumphal beginning. Although he literally ceases to be when Lamia vanishes at the end of the poem, with loss and death, he also has the chance to recognise the truth of beauty and love by means of Lamia.

Furthermore, the interaction of the corporeal and the imaginary is maintained in the following lines depicting Lamia’s transition from the figure of a goddess to a real woman,

With brighter eyes and slow amenity,
Put her new lips to his, and gave afresh
The life she had so tangled in her mesh:
And as he from one trance was wakening
Into another, she began to sing,
Happy in beauty, life, and love, and everything,
A song of love, too sweet for earthly lyres,
(. . .)
For that she was a woman, and without
Any more subtle fluid in her veins
Than throbbing blood, and that the self-same pains
Inhabited her frail-strung heart as his. (Keats 178)

In this case, the song does not lead to the subjective world of the abstract entities but the corporeal world’s concrete desires. However, the song’s function remains the same because it arouses the emotions experienced in the material world, which is described in the lines, “And as he from one trance was awakening/ into another, she began to sing” (Keats 178). On each occasion, Lamia’s song enchants Lycius and offers him a new experience without the corporeality’s limit- edness. However, Lamia’s concern in the lines “That Lycius could not love in half a fright,/ So threw the goddess off, and won his heart/ More pleasantly by playing woman’s part,/ With no more awe than what her beauty gave,” (Keats 179) can be regarded as hamartia in the poem since Lamia contradicts her true nature with the strategies and causality of the rational mind. Thus, immediately after accept- ing her corporeality, Lycius tries to register her into the material world’s rational

system with the symbolic act of his insistence on marriage and her persistent rejection or negation.

As a final point, in "Lamia," the connection between the symbolic and the imaginary is reflected on the visual level, especially in the scenes Lamia prepares the mansion for the wedding ceremony with her spells and fairy servants. The grandioseness of the room that is "Fill'd with pervading brilliance and perfume" (Keats 186) and "Thus loaded with a feast the tables stood" (187) creates wonder in each guest and they begin to question "Whence all this mighty cost and blaze of wealth could spring" (187). However, they leave such a questioning tone with the influence of wine and soft music. Thus, "The roof of awful richness, nectarous cheer,/ Beautiful slaves, and Lamia's self, appear," "No more so strange" (Keats 187) since they break away from the borders of the symbolic. In this regard, the wine and soft music images convey the pass from the world we perceive with our senses into the unconscious one as it is the unlimited and eternal reality for the Romantics. Thus, the supernatural/ irrational/ mystical creates a glimpse of satisfaction as expressed in the lines "Of every guest; that each, as he did please,/ Might fancy-fit his brows, silk-pillow'd at his ease" (Keats 187) by indicating the porous structure between the symbolic and the imaginary realms, and an intersecting space between the fantastic and the romantic.

Conclusion

"Lamia" as a Romantic poem, reflects the generic flexibility of the fantastic and can be regarded as a quintessential poem for demonstrating the multiple uses of the fantastic and its contribution to Romantic poetry. The fantastic element in the poem also offers a new perspective to the conventional meanings of specific terms such as death, the real and presence/ absence. The poem underlines its organic relation with the fantastic through its emphasis on the visual experience, the uncertainty created by the conflict of believing or not believing both by the reader, the narrator, and the character. Consequently, through the oscillations between the perceptual/ sensible world and the imaginary one, the glorification of the inner world in opposition to the corporeal world, spells, magic, mythology, and the contrast between the rational and the irrational, "Lamia" conveys not only a love

story originated from mythology and medieval fairy tales but also the possibility of an alternative existence through imagination surpassing the limits of the illusionary/physical world.

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