Visualizing Transcendence as a Cross-Cultural Model

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In recent decades, approaches to the uses of visuality and spatiality that emphasize the power of ocular consciousness and its role in meaning-making have shaped cultural studies inquiries. They have been extended to examine the implications visual signs and representations may have in larger cultural and historical contexts (e.g., see Brasseur; Goggin; Haas; Propen; Gradea) since rhetorical valences of visual representations can help construct meaning and connect otherwise diverse cultures (or their representatives). By emphasizing the visualization techniques of works in apparently different cultures, this essay finds parallelisms between two Romantic poets of seemingly dissimilar cultures (John Keats and Mihai Eminescu) through an analysis of the arc of transcendence and the characters engaging it.

Building on the idea that transnational analyses and cross-cultural models benefit scholars and pedagogues in various disciplines by forging new connections and a better understanding of cultures, this article proposes a comparative analysis between Romantic poets John Keats of England and Mihai Eminescu of Romania based on a visual diagram designed by Keats expert John Stillinger in his book *The Hoodwinking of Madeline* (101). Stillinger, who created this diagram to illustrate the arc of transcendence in Romanticism and in Keats's poems, affirms that "What goes up must, in reality, come down" (*The Hoodwinking* 101). This visualization of the flight of transcendence between two realms equally applies to *The Evening Star*[1] (*Luceafărul*), Eminescu's (and Romania's) most representative poem, also known as one of

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[1] Although it is customary to italicize book titles, and most of the poems mentioned here have not been published alone but in collections, poem titles have been italicized for consistency and to easily differentiate between poem titles and title characters.

the longest love poems at 98 stanzas. Indeed, this analysis focuses on three poems that have in common the same set of three archetypal characters interacting in various ways in their search for the sublime: these poets' art is connected, not only unsurprisingly through Romantic tropes and imagery that imbue their art, but through the flight of transcendence that Stillinger's diagram helps visualize (see below). While a common underlying affiliation to Romantic imagery may be expected, a visualization of the poetic arc of transcendence (which can vary between poems) contrives a more solid cross-cultural connection between these two poets and solidifies the centrality of the sublime to their art.[2]

The Kinship between Keats and Eminescu

Although Romantic poets John Keats and Mihai Eminescu lived at seemingly opposite spaces in Europe (England and Romania) and at two ends of a century (the nineteenth), they are by no means at two extremes of a spectrum. The Arc of Transcendence - or the sublime - brings these Romantic poets and their respective cultures together, in addition to Romantic tropes common to their art that link them at deep levels. Stillinger's diagram, the foundation of this analysis, represents the flight between two realms, taken by the Romantic hero towards an ideal (B). Starting at point A, the hero arrives at point A` transformed by the experience of the flight:
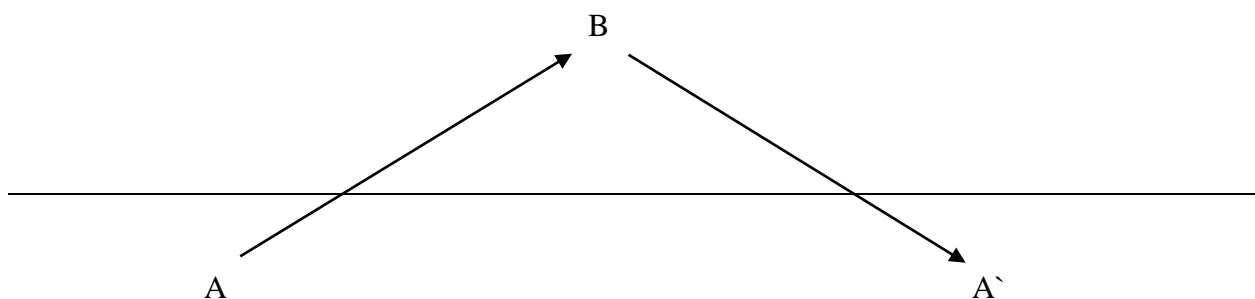
[2] This model could be successfully undertaken in classes that teach Romanticism-related topics, or the two poets, whether separately or together in a comparative manner, as well as in classes that emphasize visual rhetorical practices with application to literature or literary studies.

While commonalities between Keats and Eminescu include themes of the Absolute, the Ideal, or sensual versus ideal love, looking at ways of making the sublime visible opens up new venues for understanding their art in comparative analyses.

Within their respective cultures, Keats and Eminescu had meteoric, short presences; they both died relatively young - Keats at 25 and Eminescu at 39. Keats was contemporary with the great British Romantics, such as Percy Bysshe Shelley and Lord Byron, and both Keats and Eminescu aspired to gain a dignified place among the literary names of their cultures. Today, they are unanimously considered representative poets, as well as innovators of expression in their respective languages by means of their poetic craft. Jack Stillinger points out the "line-by-line richness" of Keats's poetry, comparing it with that of Spenser and Shakespeare: "At the time Keats wrote, no one had created such palpable, finely detailed pictures in poetry since Spenser and Shakespeare, and it can be argued that no one has done it so well again since Keats" ("Keats and Me" 1).[3] Roy MacGregor-Hastie, a journalist and political commentator who has lived in Eastern Europe (a translator from Romanian, and editor and translator of the first *Anthology of Contemporary Romanian Poetry* for UNESCO in 1969), calls Eminescu a "maker of language" (xxvii) that should fascinate the foreign student of Romanian, as he emphasizes Romanian's palimpsest quality in relation to foreign influences.[4]

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[3] Indeed, Keats's polished word has inspired other authors (e.g., the phrase "tender is the night" was taken up in the title of Scott F. Fitzgerald's renown novel). Romanian poet Mihai Eminescu similarly was an innovator of language and poetics. Petre Grimm, the founder and head of the English Department at the Babeș-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, and one of the finest translators of Eminescu into English, showed that "Eminescu's poems are in Romanian perfect symphonies owing to the poet's masterly handling of all the musical possibilities of his language" (qtd. in Treptow 13). Romanian twentieth-century poet Tudor Arghezi called Eminescu the "purest saint of Romanian words and verse," and stated that "while remaining very much Romanian, Eminescu is universal" (qtd. in Bantaș and Neț 40).

[4] Roy MacGregor-Hastie states that Romanian language should be studied together with Latin, from where it stems: "Bulgars, Avars, Magyars, Germans, Greeks, Turks, and Russians have all had an impact on the language left behind in Dacia when the province was abandoned by Rome, but the language

Keats and Eminescu left behind a considerable body of work, despite their short life spans and difficult lives. They both experienced the loss of family members to ailments, which profoundly marked their lives and artistic creations. Mihai Eminescu was born in Moldavia in January 1850, about a decade before the principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia united to become the Romanian state in 1859. The seventh of eleven children, Eminescu tragically lost most of his siblings to tuberculosis, typhoid fever, and other ailments that were incurable at the time. Keats also acutely felt this pain: his life and art were marked by the tragedy of losing his younger brother Tom after having also lost both his parents as a child. His brother George and sister-in-law Georgiana emigrated to America, which accounted for a different yet similarly heavy sentiment of loss. Stemming from similar family tragedies, these deep emotions triggered in the two poets comparable sensitivities in perceiving life's pains and, in poetry, they found solace in Romantic tropes and poetic sublimation.

Eminescu attended German schools and became a "late Romantic" after studying in Vienna and Berlin between 1869 and 1874. Indeed, Roy MacGregor-Hastie states that Eminescu was, perhaps, the last of the Romantics, as evident in the title of his book, *The Last Romantic: Mihail Eminescu*.[5] Artistically, both Keats and Eminescu had veneration for Shakespeare, although it is still unclear whether Eminescu could read Keats or other English writers in their original language or through other languages he knew (Avădanei 15). Some critics claim that

survived—and Eminescu restored it for literature as one might restore a painting hidden away for centuries in a damp, dark cellar" (xxvii).

[5] In Berlin, Eminescu studied at the prestigious Humboldt University, where his interests were history, Sanskrit, and mythology (Walker and Popescu xxiv-xxviii) and where he translated Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* into Romanian (MacGregor-Hastie xxiv). Mario Ruffini states that Eminescu knew Latin and Greek well, French and Italian fairly well (enough to translate two chapters from Machiavelli's *Prince*), while his knowledge of German was profound. Eminescu was fond of the great German poets, especially Schiller, Goethe, Heine, and Lenau, and was fairly knowledgeable of Russian, Hungarian, and Norwegian literatures as well. Also, under Schopenhauer's influence, he had studied Buddhist philosophy and Indian epics in German translations (qtd. in Bantaș and Neț 66). Romanian critics claim that Eminescu's contact with Kant's and Schopenhauer's philosophies informed his melancholy and rendered him an overall pessimist.

Eminescu did engage in loose translations of Shakespeare, of whom he said he "ought not to be merely read, but with a vengeance studied" (qtd. in Bantaș and Neț 71). Romanian critics hold that, although the most coherent comparison with the British Romantics "should have to include Byron" (Avădanei 172), analogies between Eminescu and Keats are indeed "seductive" (143) and therefore worth examining. Moreover, Alexandru Duțu speculates that Eminescu probably had Keats's *Hyperion* in front of him for inspiration when he wrote his masterpiece, *The Evening Star* (cited in Avădanei 104).

The allegorical poems of Keats and Eminescu are situated at the intersection of Romantic vision, Greco-Latin classicism and mythology, and folkloric tradition, thus coalescing comparable philosophical thought and poetic imagery. Apart from the common themes of ideal love and the artistic ideal, the poets also approach other common Romantic themes, such as longing, melancholy, understanding the human being's place in the universe, Greco-Roman mythology, medieval times, local folklore, and mutability versus permanence in nature and humankind. In fact, on close examination, many of their poems have surprisingly similar titles, as the following examples illustrate:

Ode on Melancholy (Keats)—*Melancholy* (Eminescu);

Bright Star (Keats)—*To the Star* (Eminescu);

To Autumn (Keats)—*It's Autumn Now* (Eminescu).

The feminine ideal and the ideal in art are developed in a number of poems, for instance in Keats's *Endymion*, *Bright Star*, *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, *Ode to the Nightingale*, *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, and Eminescu's *The Evening Star*, *Diana*, *What is Love*, *To the Star*. Many of these poems treat the common theme of the impossible love, which oftentimes involves beings of opposing worlds.

Keats's poetry exudes a specific *joie de vivre*. While there is sadness in these poets' art, Eminescu is in fact an enjoyer of life, an optimist, which goes against the common tenet in Romanian consciousness that he is a pessimist under Schopenhauer's influence. Similarly, MacGregor-Hastie sees Eminescu's melancholy originating from the "awareness of many affronts to human dignity," and instead calls him an optimist, explaining that he was

> paradoxically . . . also an optimist, like Shelley, and consoled himself with evidence that in the past Man had survived men's attempts to degrade, even destroy him. He believed in love, not in genetic engineering. He believed that men should make music with words, even poetry with their lives. (MacGreor-Hastie xxvii)

Eminescu's optimism is further apparent in the manifestation of the Freudian Eros (or love/life drive), which traverses as a silver lining through his poems on love and nature, and seen this way, optimism is yet another point of confluence between Eminescu and Keats.

Essentially, Eminescu's and Keats's poems address what has often been called in relation to Eminescu's theme of the "impossible love" - the love between entities belonging to two opposing worlds. Not only do they not belong to the same material world, but the two worlds - the material, sensual, lower level, on the one hand, and the absolute, ideal, or higher level, on the other hand - are seemingly irreconcilable. The search for love in the space between these two opposing spaces, therefore, clearly establishes and defines the poems of Keats and Eminescu. Attempts have been made for these poems to be read as something other than love poems, but also to assume that this quest for a higher, impossible love is the only central theme of *Endymion* and *The Evening Star* would do no justice to these masterpieces.

The search for the ideal in art or beauty (*Endymion*) and the role of the artist/genius in society (*The Evening Star*) underline the tension between art's ephemeral and permanent

qualities. Christian La Cassagnère, in a reading of *Endymion* as a myth of melancholy (43), argues that it is not a "neoplatonic romance, but a myth of creation" (47). Thus, when applying symptoms of melancholy to Endymion, he appears as "psychologically absent" in the opening scene, with a sorrow "without a cause," and a quest for a solitary place "where the self can commune with his affect" (43). La Cassagnère supports his theory with such textual examples as when the hero is described as "quite dead to every worldly thing" (*Endymion* IV 292) and goes so far as saying that a death drive motivates the hero (La Cassagnère 43). Eminescu's Evening Star is also motivated by the wish to die when he requests from the superior being to become mortal, which further brings the title characters of the two poems together. In this respect, therefore, their quest seems to be the result of the Freudian death drive (Thanatos) which they develop after searching for Eros, thus further illustrating how the two conflicting forces of love and death can coexist in these complex allegories. Sigmund Freud explains that Eros represents the forces of life at conflict with the forces of death, Thanatos, and that they exist latently in our *id* or unconscious as well as in our conscious (see Gregory Zilboorg's "Introduction" to Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* xxxiv, xl).

In turn, in the Romanian collective consciousness, Eminescu's *The Evening Star* has also traditionally been read as the myth of the misunderstood, solitary genius, i.e., the poet, the artist, or the visionary who cannot find love/understanding among the ordinariness of everyday people (particularly women). As the title character ponders over the human condition, the words uttered by the Demiurge/Lord stand testimony and exemplify this interpretation that renders the Evening Star superior to the flawed human: "For all die only to be born, / And all are born to die. // But you, Hyperion, shall live / Wherever you may set…" (lines 319-322).

As a love poem, the pessimism of the poem's ending is blamed on Eminescu's love relationship with the woman he loved, Veronica Micle, with whom he was at odds at the time he wrote the poem (MacGregor-Hastie xxv). In this reading (indeed, most common among the Romanian critics), the poem contrasts the absolute, ideal love to the real, material, but oftentimes unreliable woman, who lives in an allegedly petty world and cannot possibly understand the artist genius. It is this reading, as misogynistic as it may be, that also promotes Eminescu himself as the pessimist, the misunderstood genius in Romania's culture and consciousness.

Transcendence as a Cultural Connector between Keats and Eminescu

Conceivably, widely studied Romantic tropes immediately bring Keats and Eminescu together in expected ways. Similarly, their poetic sublime is a journey that takes place between the opposing concepts of the Apollonian and the Dionysian, in the sense explicated by Friedrich Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* (see also Coolidge 454) and other senses too, as we shall see in what follows.

In this analysis, I focus on a comparison between three poems - Keats's *Endymion* and *Bright Star*, and Eminescu's *The Evening Star* - and I apply the excursion diagram Jack Stillinger devised in *The Hoodwinking of Madeline* (101), which visually depicts the types of travels possible for Romantic poetic characters into the ideal. In other words, Stillinger's visual depiction of the arc of transcendence is employed as a method to ascertain through visuality a cross-cultural commonality and intersectionality between Keats and Eminescu. This visualization materializes the transcendence at the same time as it bridges the two cultures.

This analysis relies on two premises: the first one considers the poems' structural frame, such as number of actors, types of characters, and the arc of transcendence into the ideal; while the second one visualizes the way the sublime actually takes place and the precise path of that

journey. These premises demonstrate the poets' similar approaches to the sublime and tell complex yet similar stories. The poems feature the same types of characters, in a triad namely, the Celestial Body, the Mortal, and the Mortal Challenger, who tell similar stories, albeit from various viewpoints. Secondly, the arc of transcendence - also called the flight of transcendence or the journey into the sublime - involves these three archetypal characters. Then, when the arc is visualized in diagrams inspired by Stillinger's, it establishes a material cross-cultural parallel between poets in different parts of Europe.

Transcendence or in Search of the Sublime

In what seems to be Keats's personal definition of the sublime, in a letter to John Taylor on February 17, 1818, Keats fittingly explains that "poetry should surprise by a fine excess" (*Selected Letters* 66). Widely represented in Romanticism, the sublime is defined as the attempt to go "beyond the limits of ordinary experience" (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*). The sublime as an adjective is, among other things, "tending to inspire awe usually because of elevated quality (as of beauty, nobility, or grandeur) or transcendent excellence;" "very beautiful or good: causing strong feelings or admiration or wonder;" and "complete or extreme." As a verb, "to sublime" is "to cause to pass directly from the solid to the vapor state and condense back to solid form;" "to elevate or exalt especially in dignity and honor;" "to render finer (as in purity or excellence);" "to convert (something inferior) into something of higher worth;" or "to pass directly from the solid to the vapor state" (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*).

Beauty and sublimity as philosophic concepts have long been subsumed to the aesthetics, having been defined at times as belonging to the empirical and the physiologic, while other times as intellectual and pertaining to grand ideas. While the "entire Western tradition about the beautiful and the sublime going back to Plato, Aristotle, and the first-century CE Greek critic

known as Longinus" has valued our aesthetic experiences, Burke on the other hand maintains

that, "our aesthetic experiences are simply touching or moving without any grand ideas,

experiences of emotional arousal enjoyed in their own right and not because of any intellectual

payoff, experiences grounded in our physiology rather than in our intellect" (Paul Guyer in the

"Introduction" to Burke ix).

However, Immanuel Kant considers the experience of the sublime as an "aesthetic

revelation of our own powers of theoretical and practical reason," while Arthur Schopenhauer

maintains that "all aesthetic pleasure takes the form of a release from the pain of life . . . through

a state of 'intuitive contemplation' or 'eternal, tranquil . . . cognition' triggered by the perception

of an object" (Burke xxxiii). The latter explication links with the Romantic flight of

transcendence if we understand it as an escape from the level of existence as if to avoid its pain

or *ennui*.

The flight into transcendence is, however, a departure in search of the absolute as well as

an inner need for it. In this sense, philosopher of aesthetics Georg Hegel sees the sublime mostly

in relation to beauty, defining it as "the attempt to express the infinite, without being able to find

in the realm of phenomenal existence such as is clearly fitted for its representation" (qtd. in

Saxena 165). The poetic sublime is also defined as "the intensity of emotion necessary to beauty"

that "may apply either to intense emotion or to the version of reality this emotion helps create"

(Albrecht 196). In Freudian terms, as previously suggested, Eros (the love/life drive) is the

engine that motivates the characters to take off in their transcendental flight. Freud clarifies that

"the libido of our sexual instincts [coincides] with the Eros of the poets and philosophers which

holds all living things together" (43).

In this analysis, I consider the sublime as the attempt to transcend into the absolute, the transformative movement between different points situated at various levels. Transcendence can be the movement both from the material level to a higher one that attempts to the absolute, as well as the opposite, a movement from a higher to a lower level. Transcendence is also called the flight of the imagination attempted between the Apollonian and the Dionysian (as theorized by Nietzsche[6]) defined as the material and the spiritual levels of life - or the realms between which the flight of the imagination takes place in Romantic poetry. Initially associated with the two Greek gods, Apollo and Dionysus, these concepts also refer to classical and romantic art (Coolidge 454). Stillinger uses the two levels to show that the sublime in Romanticism follows a trajectory from the Dionysian to the Apollonian and back to the Dionysian, where the protagonist arrives transformed (see the diagram in *The Hoodwinking* 101). Circumscribed within these Romantic travels of the poetic soul, the contrast between ideal love and sensual love pervades in the three poems that treat the theme of this duality from the Romantic perspective, and they portray the love theme as played between the various characters.
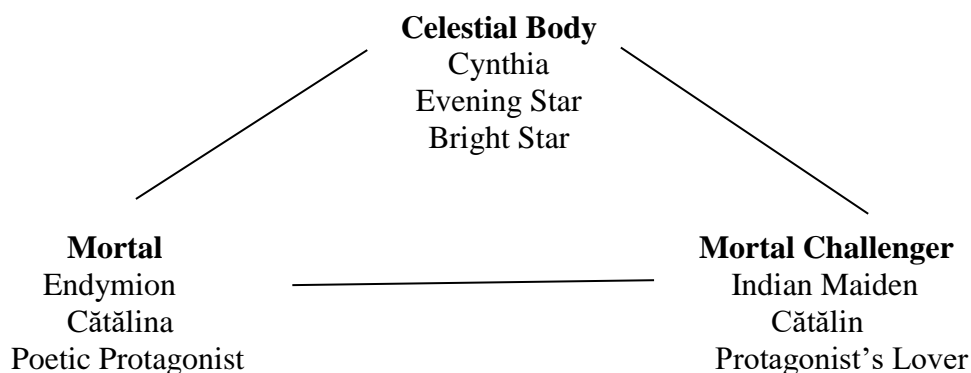
The Models for Analysis

The poems chosen for this structuralism-informed analysis are Keats's *Endymion* and *Bright Star*, and Eminescu's *The Evening Star*. Although they differ in length, narrative voice, and poetic style, they have in common comparable relationships between three main types of

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[6] As Raymond Geuss clarifies in the Introduction of Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*, "'Apollo' embodies the drive toward distinction, discreteness and individuality, toward the drawing and respecting of boundaries and limits; he teaches an ethic of moderation and self-control. The Apolline artist glorifies individuality by presenting attractive images of individual persons, things, and events. In literature the purest and most intense expression of the Apolline is Greek epic poetry (especially Homer). . . . The Dionysiac is the drive towards the transgression of limits, the dissolution of boundaries, the destruction of individuality, and excess. The Dionysiac is the drive towards the transgression of limits, the dissolution of boundaries, the destruction of individuality, and excess. The purest expression of the Dionysiac was quasiorgiastic forms of music, especially of choral singing and dancing" (xi).

characters, in love triangles, or triads. In some interpretations, the poems are not about love at all, but rather about art, melancholy, the search for the absolute, or other abstractions. However, the poems' stories unfold to reveal the importance of structural parts and the relationships that form between them. Fundamentally, each poem takes a different point of view through the eyes of one character over another, thus emphasizing one side of the structural triangle at the time.

Characters

In all poems, there are the following characters: one Mortal, one Celestial Body, and one Mortal Challenger. Each poem emphasizes one side of the structural triangle formed by these characters. These characters are listed in the graph below, according to each category and the discussed poems: *Endymion*, *The Evening Star*, and *Bright Star*:

Celestial Body
Cynthia
Evening Star
Bright Star

Mortal
Endymion
Cătălina
Poetic Protagonist

Mortal Challenger
Indian Maiden
Cătălin
Protagonist's Lover

The Visual Arc of Transcendence

The relationships between the characters play out in the arc of transcendence, or the flight between different levels of experience. John Stillinger created a diagram as a visual tool to illustrate his movement between lows and highs in Romantic emotions, a visualization of the route undertaken by the poetic characters in search of the absolute.

How does a visual representation of the sublime and the search for Romantic perfection work between cultures of apparent dissimilar veins? Stillinger calls the sublime a "literal or

metaphorical excursion" (*The Hoodwinking* 101), and the term "excursion" presupposes a

movement or a becoming - a transcendence, whether spatial or temporal or both. For

exemplification, Stillinger's diagram is as follows (*The Hoodwinking* 101):

B

A   A`
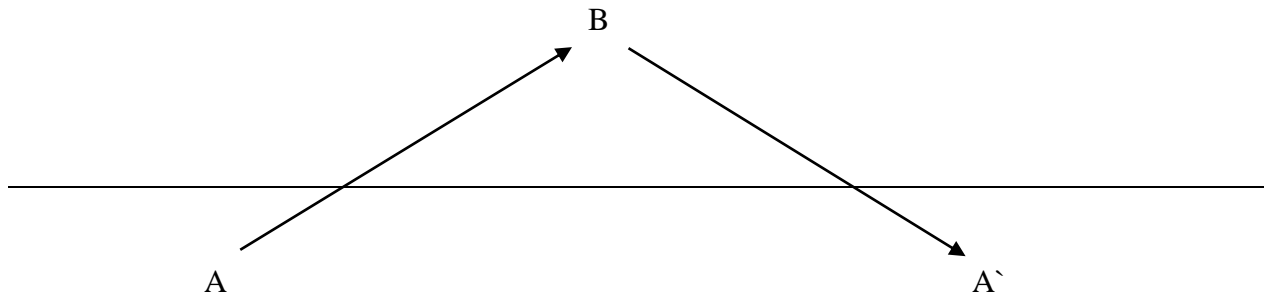
In the diagram, Stillinger explains, the horizontal line is the "boundary" between "the actual

world (below) and the ideal (above)," although the two realms can evidently represent many

other binaries, such as the ones he also identifies in "earth and heaven, mortality and

immortality, time and eternity, materiality and spirituality, the known and the unknown, the

finite and the infinite, realism and romance, and so on" (*The Hoodwinking* 101). Many Romantic

poems present us with the journey between these two worlds, in which the hero starts at point

(A), ascends toward point (B), and ends at point (A`) transformed to a certain degree (see Keats's

La Belle Dame sans Merci, *Ode to a Nightingale*, and others). This transformation through the

arc of transcendence is prevalent in these Romantic poems and is a first point of confluence

between these poets. The higher point (zenith) and the lower point (nadir) hold various

significances, however, depending on the starting point of the character the narration favors.

Thus, in a slightly different manner, critic Northrop Frye asserts what seems to be the

opposite, that is, that the flight does not necessarily happen exclusively outwards and upwards,

but also in reverse: "the metaphorical structure of Romantic poetry tends to move inside and

downward instead of outside and upward, hence the creative world is deep within, and so is

heaven or the place of the presence of God" (qtd. in *The Hoodwinking* 101). As Stillinger points out, this interpretation of the flight in reverse direction is not "fundamentally incompatible" with his description, but instead focuses more on the descent from B to A` in Stillinger's diagram (*The Hoodwinking* 101). Stillinger's and Frye's descriptions, including both upward and downward movements, benefit the present analysis because some characters take the flight from a position of immortality and superiority to the human race *toward* mortality, that is, from high above to down below. In so doing, they land transformed in a point that is also higher than the place toward which the flight occurred.

Consequently, the poems have as a starting point Stillinger's diagram from which visual diagrams are derived and made specific to each. It is important to understand that, whichever the trajectory, whether upward or downward, the transcendental excursion both poets emphasize consists less of the destination and more of the journey itself. In fact, the destination itself - or the completion of the journey - does not always bring about a clear-cut resolution or a happy conclusion. Rather, in most cases, after undertaking fascinating, cathartic travels, the characters are rendered ambivalent if not dazed in the end.

Endymion

In *Endymion*, the Mortal is the character Endymion himself, who attempts a flight into transcendence by means of aspiring to the moon-goddess, Cynthia, the Celestial Body (or astral entity) of the poem, while the Indian Maiden character in the poem has the role of the Mortal Challenger. The Celestial Body and the Mortal connect through dreams, and the oneiric encounters prompt the Mortal to start his journey of sublimation in search of the ideal lover of the higher world. The poem's perspective is, therefore, that of the Mortal shepherd, Endymion, attempting to accede to the higher level of his ideal love, which leads him to epic adventures in

his quest for the archetypal woman. Once arrived at the moon-goddess, he is seduced by her

vestal, the Indian Maiden, which could be construed as the sensual side of the archetypal woman.

Being challenged by the Indian Maiden, Endymion subsequently leaves with her. Surprisingly,

however, at the end of *Endymion*, the Indian Maiden (who acted as the Mortal Challenger in the

character triad) transforms into Cynthia (Celestial Body), and this final resolution provides for

Endymion a happy ending that contains the best of both worlds. In this conflation of worlds, one

can see Keats's optimism at work.

The diagrammatic representation of *Endymion*, then, should be the following one:

B

A   A`
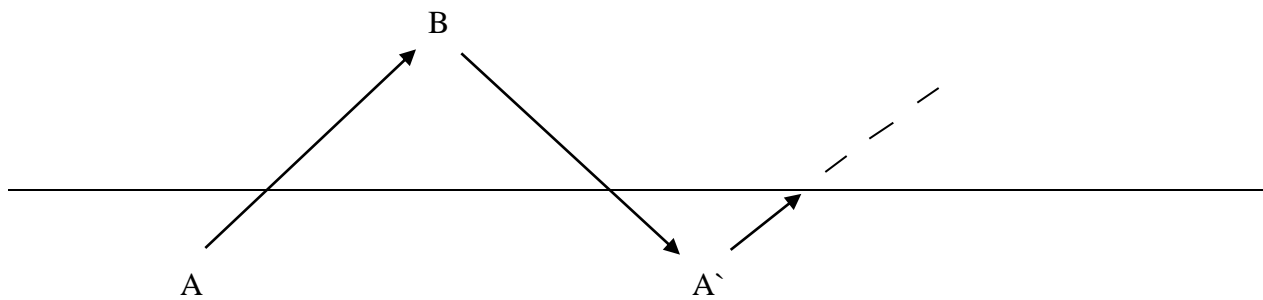
In Stillinger's observation, usually the character undertaking the trip ends at the same level as the

starting point. However, in *Endymion*, through the final transformation of the female character,

the point of arrival is higher. The trip is one of initiation, one that has been interpreted for the last

century to be "a parable of the poet's longing for and eventual union with the spirit of ideal

beauty" (see Sperry 38). However, Stuart M. Sperry Jr. states that, more recently, critics have

challenged the validity of the traditional allegorical interpretation, claiming that it is a

"straightforward love poem" (39). Placing the poem in the context of Keats's poetry of the year

1817, when Keats was concerned with the "nature of poetry and imaginative experience" (40),

Sperry emphasizes that *Endymion*, consequently, is better understood as an allegory - a poem of

the journey towards an ideal embodied by beauty, the absolute, the inexpressible, or the poetic

perfection. Such an interpretation justifies the use of the ancient Greek myth of the attempted connection between a mortal and the goddess embodied in the Moon itself, which explores the need for sublimation from the human stage to the ideal stage.

Noting the regression from Christianity to pre-Christian lore, Jacqueline Zeff opines that Keats "manipulate[s] this universalization of his tale by defeating any expectations of a familiar fairy tale structure in the lines which follow. Keats clearly dates his scene in the times of myth" (Zeff 632). Indeed, these are the times

> before the faery broods
> Drove Nymph and Satyr from the prosperous woods,
> Before king Oberon's bright diadem,
> Sceptre, and mantle, clasp'd with dewy gem,
> Frighted away the Dryads and the Fauns
> From rushes green, and brakes, and cowslip'd lawns
>
> (I 1-6)

The poet reminds his reader of a time when Olympus "gave way to pastoral divinity, or in Northrop Frye's terms, when myth lost its hold on man's mind to be replaced by romance: 'In the period of romance, the poet, like the corresponding hero, has become a human being, and the god has retreated to the sky. His function now is primarily to remember'" (qtd. in Zeff 632-33).

From the many readings of *Endymion* that have emerged, Stillinger singles out five of the most common ones that appear in the body of critical work before he published his book in 1971, and among them, two best fit the three poems analyzed here. The first one is that of "'Gradations of Happiness' - the idea of a valuation scale of 'essences'" (*The Hoodwinking* 17) because a quest for happiness is easily discernable as a main driving force in all the three poems. The second one is "the opposing claims of human and immortal realms of existence" (*The Hoodwinking* 19). Indeed, the Romantic tension between mutability and permanence is also at

the core of these poems. Abundant textual supporting evidence exists to prove both these

interpretations. These various readings do not necessarily render the poems *Endymion* and *The*

Evening Star much different, since both male protagonists find a kind of "Cave of Quietude" in

the end.

The temporal dimension is similar. As Jacqueline Zeff points out, when she analyzes the

time strategies in Keats's poems, in *Endymion* Peona tells her brother to "feel as if it were a

common day; / Free-voic's as one who never was away" (IV. 820-21), and then Peona also

reduces the time sequence to "hours" (631-32):

> Not even I, for one whole month, will pry
> Into the hours that have pass'd us by.
> Since in my arbour I did sing to thee. (IV. 824-826)

In light of Zeff's interpretation, the sublime of Endymion's travels can be seen as both one that

traverses many seasons but, at the same time, as one that is rather short in objective terms. As

such, the interior and subjective aspects of the adventures are at play, and therefore, in all the

three poems, the temporal sequence gains importance merely in the economy of the poem and

less so in an objective sense. Emphasizing the length of the flight episode is thus a poetic choice.

In both *Endymion* and *The Evening Star*, the travels taken by the title characters are described in

temporal and spatial terms; however, they can easily be seen as metaphoric inner travels.

The Evening Star

Both Keats's *Endymion* and Eminescu's *The Evening Star* are resplendent in mythology

and local folklore[7]. While Keats uses the Greek myth of Endymion and the moon-goddess

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[7] In the 1982 book *Eminescu and the Greco-Latin Classicism* (in Romanian), Cezar Papacostea argues
that Plato was the inspiration for Eminescu's *The Evening Star* as well as a folk tale collected by a certain
Kunisch, a German traveler through Transylvania. (Papacostea does not clarify or provide reference about

Cynthia for his poem, Eminescu's apparent inspiration came from Romanian mythology and folklore legends. The rich Eastern European folklore tradition is at least as old as the classical Greco-Latin antiquity, and apart from the stories, the imagery is equally replete with natural elements. As in Keats's poem *Endymion*, where the opening is a celebration dedicated to Pan, the god of Nature, in Romanian folklore, nature is seen as a relative of humans ("The forest is the Romanian's brother," the proverb states).

Similarly to Keats's poem *Endymion*, which opens with the expression "upon a time" (I 1), Eminescu's *The Evening Star* begins with the setting of a fairy tale:

> Now once upon enchanted time,
> > As time has never been,
> There lived a princess most divine,
> > Of royal blood and kin.
>
> Such beauty only heaven paints!
> > She walked in maiden bloom
> As Virgin Mary 'mong the saints,
> > Among the stars, the moon. (1-8)[8]

Kunisch, which makes it difficult to identify him or his work.) The story seemingly collected by Kunisch is very similar to Eminescu's poem, with the exception that the Evening Star is a dragon, a supernatural being that can occasionally be human. At the end of the folk tale, the dragon throws a boulder on the princess and kills her while she attempts to elope with a prince. The prince, who is also a mortal, is not killed but remains for three days and three nights lying down in shock (reminiscent of the knight in Keats's *La Belle Dame sans Mercy*). Then, he starts walking home and arrives at the Valley of Memory, where he sits under a tree, exhausted. The birds in the tree sing songs about the beauty of the princess, so the prince sits and listens to the song birds until his death (106-09). The tale is quite different than the poem but is definitely the inspiration for it. Eminescu also used as a source the Romanian mythological figure of the Flyer, usually a supernatural male figure who bothers young maidens or recently married women by visiting them at night, in their sleep. Eminescu, again, took the mythological character and changed him into a more positive one.

[8] Many translations exist of Eminescu's *Luceafărul*. "Luceafărul" is Venus, the brightest planet in the evening sky. Some translators opt for the name "Lucifer," but the "Evening Star" seems more appropriate since Lucifer may have an alternate significance. Of all the translations researched, that of Adrian George Sahlean maintains the meter, rhythm, rhyme, and overall tone of the original, and all quotes from *The Evening Star* used here are taken from that translation (see Sahlean).

Eminescu introduces Christian allusions to Virgin Mary and then brings to the foreground classical mythology with references to the moon and the stars, in the next line.[9] However, the setting also references the medieval times, especially since it is about a princess, who calls the protagonist her "prince," as we shall see.

If Nature and its celebration is the opening scene of *Endymion*, in *The Evening Star*, Nature is also present, and the most occurring natural element is the sea, which acts as a point of reference, indeed a connection between the characters. Most importantly, the waves allude to the mutable human condition, a recurring theme in Romanticism, which is at the core of the dialogue between the Evening Star and the Lord when the former asks the latter to grant him mortality, so he can be with his mortal lover (lines 281-296).

Eminescu's *The Evening Star* follows the perspective of the title character, who is the Celestial Body in the triad scheme of characters. He comes down to a princess, the Mortal, and joins her in dreams, precisely like in *Endymion*, albeit here with the genders reversed. The Mortal princess, Cătălina, is not a simple mortal, but abounds in celestial characteristics: "Of royal blood and kin . . . She walked in maiden bloom / As Virgin Mary 'mong the saints, / Among the stars, the moon." In *The Evening Star*, the princess calls upon the title character in two separate instances, asking him to descend to her through the following invocation:

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[9] In *The Evening Star*, the moon and the stars also allude to the Romanian oral ballad *Miorița* (*The Ewe Lamb*), where the impending death of a shepherd is described as an allegorical wedding in which the moon and the stars hold and place the crown on the bride's and groom's heads, as is the case in the Orthodox wedding ceremony. *Miorița* also inspired Eminescu in the use of prosody. In the traditional ballad, the meter varies but occurs in sets of two, as in A/A/B/B. Eminescu's *The Evening Star* takes the simplicity of the short line and uses the A/B/A/B rhyme. The meter is iambic tetrameter in lines one and three, and iambic dimeter with an amphibrach in lines two and four. Although not identical, this type of prosody is reminiscent of the ballad: the poet thus speaks to his people, for whom this rhythm is familiar, at the same time as he advances his poem into the national consciousness to the realm of the mythological/folkloric. Although comprising 98 stanzas, its short lines and the A/B/A/B rhyming make it easy to memorize.

"Climb down to me from lonely skies
> My night prince from afar!

Oh, gentle star, glide on a beam
> To be with me tonight—
Come to my room, make true my dream,
> My life fill with your light!" (47-52)

Subsequently, the Evening Star comes down to her level twice and asks her to leave her world behind. The first time, she calls him "so handsome angel" (line 89), and the second time, "so handsome daemon" (line 141). This embodiment of two extremes shows the lengths the Evening Star will go to reach her, at the same time as it illustrates the Apollonian and the Dionysian opposites. However, at the same time it emphasizes the difference between the two of them: that she is a mortal and he is not because, each time, they remain in different, incompatible categories. When she asks him to become a mortal like her, so they could live together, he starts on a journey to meet the Lord and ask for freedom from eternal life. In other words, he is ready to accept death in exchange for a life of love.

The Lord addresses him as "Hyperion" and sends him back to take another look at the mortals, after philosophically pondering the destiny of humans and their ephemeral existence:

Hyperion, you out of chasm
> Arise with worlds of grace—
Ask not for wonder or phantasm
> That has no name or face;

To be a human is your call?
> A man is what you mind?
Oh, let the humans perish all,
> Others will breed in kind.

Men only build to nothingness
  Vain dreams in noble guise:
When waves to silent tomb quiesce
  New waves again will rise;

Men merely live by stars of luck
  And star-crossed fatefulness;
We have no death to prove our pluck,
  Nor place or time possess.

And seem to rise to endless morn
  While death in wait would lie:
For all die only to be born,
 And all are born to die. (297-320)

In the meantime, Princess Cătălina has given in to advances made by the Mortal Challenger,

page Cătălin. However, when she sees the Evening Star appearing anew, she invokes and calls

upon him again, as if she will not give up on her dream. This time, the Evening Star does not fall

from his heights, as before, but instead admonishes her. At her invocation, he highlights once

more the differences between them, telling her he will remain in his world:

As time before, on dales and woods,
  He quivers 'mong the trees,
His light still guiding solitudes
  Of ever-moving seas;

But would not fall again from sky
  To sea, as yester day:
"What do you care whether'tis I
  Or other, face of clay?

In human sphere of narrow lore

      May that your luck will hold,

As I remain for ever more

      In my eternal cold." (381-92)

The story follows mostly the Evening Star's viewpoint. He takes downward and upward excursions, attempts sublimation, and ends up at the same level where he started, albeit transformed (A`). The poem's diagrammatic representation could be the following one:
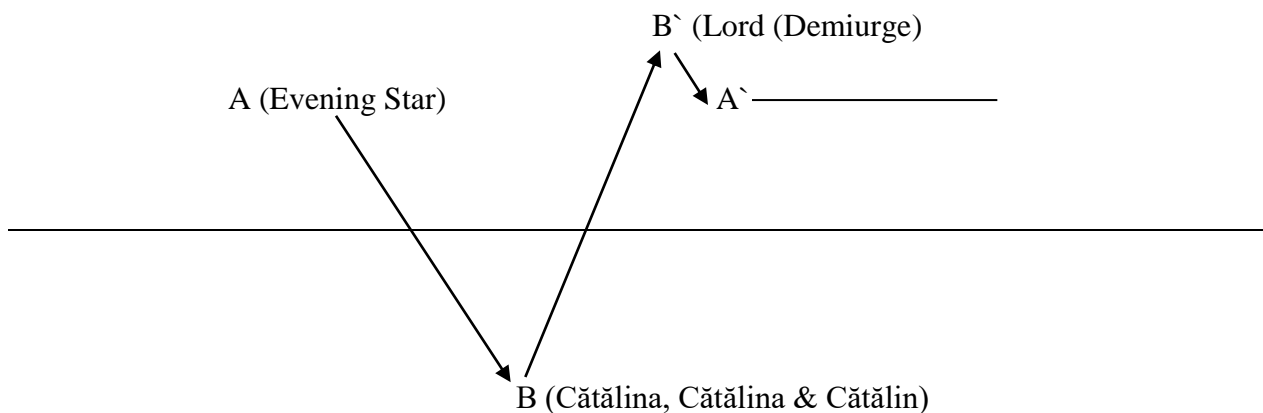
The Evening Star's transformation consists in the fact that, through this excursion and pursuit of love, having experienced love he is rendered changed, despite his utterance of words of resignation: he has loved and lost and, as Eminescu states in another poem (*To the Star*), "The icon of the love that died / Still haunts us" (my translation). As Stillinger explains, the one who has taken the flight does not "simply [arrive] back where he began (hence "A`" rather than "A"), for he has acquired something - a better understanding of a situation, a change in attitude toward it - from the experience of the flight, and he is never again quite the same person who spoke at the beginning of the poem" (*The Hoodwinking* 102).
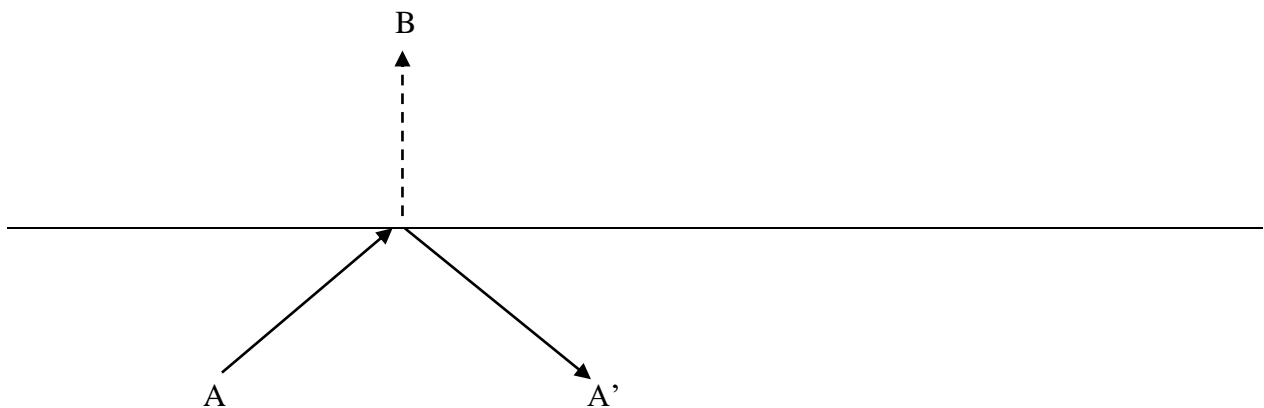
Bright Star

In the third poem, Keats's *Bright Star*, the perspective is that of the Mortal (poetic protagonist and narrator). He is the counterpart of the characters of Endymion in Keats's *Endymion* and Cătălina in Eminescu's *The Evening Star*. In this poem, the poetic first person narrator admires the Star's steadfastness, yet chooses the material, sensual love of the mortal next to him. Here is the entire poem:

> Bright star, would I were stedfast as thou art -
>
> > Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night
>
> And watching, with eternal lids apart,
>
> > Like nature's patient, sleepless Eremite,
>
> The moving waters at their priestlike task
>
> > Of pure ablution round earth's human shores,
>
> Or gazing on the new soft-fallen mask
>
> > Of snow upon the mountains and the moors -
>
> No - yet still stedfast, still unchangeable,
>
> > Pillow'd upon my fair love's ripening breast,
>
> To feel for ever its soft fall and swell,
>
> > Awake for ever in a sweet unrest,
>
> Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,
>
> And so live ever - or else swoon to death.

Here, the trip into the imagination (A to B) is as short as the first line, evidencing that the Mortal character does not necessarily want to take the flight, but instead wishes to emulate

characteristics of the Bright Star (the Celestial Body). Starting with the first word in line 2, "Not," the poem shows the "unearthliness" of the Star: "lone splendor," "hung aloft," etc. Therefore, Stillinger underlines the ascetic nature of the Star as well as its distance from the beautiful, tangible nature. According to the same critic, the character-narrator of the poem wants only the Star's steadfastness, but he wants it here, on earth. The most important observation is that "the lesson the speaker learns from his imaginative flight . . . does not greatly enlarge his understanding" (*The Hoodwinking* 103-04). Similarly to the other poems discussed here, the Star has features that are significantly different from the earth qualities, and the Mortal character understands this, without necessarily envying or desiring a transformative journey towards the Star. Instead, the Mortal treasures the realm he resides in, the company he has, and the earthly love he would not change/give up/renounce. This is a different perspective than the experiences of the Mortals in the other poems.

In the poem, the flight is only hypothesized and never undertaken in actuality. The poem's diagram is the following one:

However short the flight of the imagination to the Bright Star seems to be in this poem, the time dimension of the trip becomes irrelevant, as we have seen with the other poems. The Mortal character considers the qualities of the Bright Star but opts for being "pillowed" on the

real woman's chest, in other words, he opts for the tangible, material love, no matter how ephemeral and mutable. It is a definite choice for the real, concrete world that offers its pleasures, and a repudiation of the abstract and the intangible. This choice redefines the "ideal love" of the other poems by assigning its qualities to the "immediate love" that is at the end of fingertips.

Conclusion

Comparing all these poems, we observe that in two of them - *The Evening Star* and *Bright Star* - after the imaginary flight takes place, the transformation undergone by the character does not appear to be absolute. Instead, the transcendental flight ends in the confirmation that the world of origin, the point of departure, is a better place. *Endymion* is the only poem where the title character changes the most, after realizing the same thing and accepting his earthly life: his Indian Maiden transforms into his ideal. *Endymion* depicts an extra step, ending with a happier resolution that comprises the best of both worlds. Nevertheless, even there, in the end, the couple will live in both worlds, in a conciliatory turn. In *Bright Star*, the contented Mortal also lives happily after choosing a warm, earthly love.

There is a certain ambiguity, however, in *The Evening Star*, in that it is debatable if the hero lands on the same plane or if he makes a clear-cut choice in favor of one world over the other. Both *The Evening Star* and *Bright Star* seem to conclude with the clear position of the hero over which world is better: the immortal, Celestial Body (the Evening Star) remains cold in his world, and respectively, the Mortal (the narrating character in *Bright Star*) prefers being "pillowed" on the real woman's chest.

Eminescu's poem, *The Evening Star*, concludes bitterly with his resentment of the mortal realm because of its mutability. He remains in his "cold" world, in a resolution that is only

apparently better for the Celestial being: "As I remain for ever [sic] more / In my eternal cold" (lines 391-92). Here, the "eternal cold" hints to an unpleasant realm, to a less undesirable situation, despite its permanence and absolute aspect. In fact, in a more literal translation, he says "And I in my world I feel / Immortal and cold" (my translation), which defines the same eternity of coldness that can be read as unhappiness.

Similarly ambiguous, in *Bright Star*, the last line does not put a clear happy ending to the poem: "And so live ever - or else swoon to death" (line 14). Here the choices are either to live forever or to die at the lover's bosom, but in the absence of the Bright Star's steadfastness, the probability is that neither will happen. Therefore, the narrator shows that the wish to be able to acquire the star's permanent quality is just that - a wish. As a result, this only means that he will not live forever and will not die "pillow'd upon [his] fair love's ripening breast" because that can only happen provided the premise of steadfastness becomes reality. The premise is in the conditional, and without its certitude, these things may not happen; therefore, love's enduring quality is also brought into question. In these readings, both Keats's and Eminescu's poems end not in content with the world where the characters remain but, on the contrary, with at least a sense of ambivalence, if not unhappiness. The characters' choices in the end are no reason for final content. The tension still lingers after the last lines of the poems. Consequently, since the characters took the flight of transcendence one time, it is possible and maybe even expected that they may attempt sublimation again, precisely because the result is not a definitive resolution.

In the cross-cultural model presented here, starting from a visual diagram and a structuralist model applied to a set of poems by two Romantic poets of different cultures, I prove that the arc of transcendence can reach across cultures. By visualizing the arc of transcendence in concretely designed fashions, we can picture the various yet comparable relationships between

typological characters in Eminescu's and Keats's poems, motivated as they are by Eros and

Thanatos. The profoundness of the sublime, with both nadirs and zeniths as maximum points,

also alludes to the Nietzschean archetypes of the Apollonian and the Dionysian. The

Romanticism-infused arc of transcendence reveals similitudes between these poets and their art

which otherwise remain intuited in their use of poetic tropes. The arc between the English and

Romanian cultures and the sublime achieved through the journey into the transcendence remind

us that, after all, Romantic poetry is all about the journey, not the destination.

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