ABSTRACT

This bachelor thesis sets to examine Romantic Hellenism in selected works of John Keats and Percy Bysshe Shelley. During the Romantic era, Ancient Greece occupied a unique position, on the one hand it was admired and promoted as an ideal, on the other hand it was reduced to a very limited selection of texts even at university level. While the Romantic movement originally strived to liberate itself from the classical authorities and sought their own, new ways of poetic expression, the second generation of English Romantic poets made interesting attempts to appropriate the legacy of Ancient Greece, only this time (allegedly) independent of the established canonical views.

In my thesis I examine the question of (both actual and perceived) authenticity, the influence of other interpretations, and the problem of authority in the selected works of John Keats and Percy Bysshe Shelley, two second-generation Romantic poets whose education pertaining to the classical world was substantially different. My goal is not to judge the appropriateness of the varying allusions to Ancient Greece in their work, but rather to examine the different relations of the authors to the different, insurmountably other and idolised world.

The first chapter is concerned with the authors’ different approaches to the original texts. I argue that Keats’s dependence on translations and other renditions was almost symptomatic, present even in cases where no rendition was required. My analysis is concerned mainly with Keats’s sonnet “On First Looking Into Chapman’s Homer.” Ancient Greek influence on English literature was so strong that the authenticity of contemporary renditions was judged depending on the degree to which the text agreed with the established interpretation. It was exactly on this level that Shelley attempted to change the perception of the Ancient Greek world through his own translations of the Greek originals (my focus is on Symposium and “Hymn to Mercury”) – however, not even he was able to escape the influence of his English predecessors.

In the second chapter my interest is focused on Keats’s and Shelley’s conceptualisation of a new mythology – their use of mythical figures and themes free from any overt literary influence. For the comparison I selected Keats’s “Ode to Psyche” and Shelley’s “Ode to the West Wind.” The chapter discusses the manner in which the poets position themselves to the symbols of the lost world, how they perceive their meaning and by
the use of what techniques they are trying to establish a connection with the mythological realm.

The last chapter is interested in the problem of the lost Golden Age, how its loss is interpreted in the selected poems of Keats and Shelley, both from the mythological and from the historical perspective. My focus is on Keats’s *Hyperion* and Shelley’s *Queen Mab*. Considering the fact that both poets believe in the historical tendency towards progress, Ancient Greece could be perceived as utterly disconnected from the flow of history. Together with its mythology, Ancient Greece is perceived as a wholly isolated world, since any temporal or thematic continuity between it and the contemporary world is absent.