CHAPTER II

The Quest for the 'Known Unknown'

*Endymion* Bks. I & II
I

A thing of beauty is a joy
for ever:
Its loveliness increases;
it will never
Pass into nothingness;....1

(I, 11. 1-3)

Keats's long poem *Endymion* represents a quest. *Endymion*, the mythic hero, seeks the ultimate 'thing of beauty' symbolized in this context by the moon. *Keats*, the poet, seeks 'poetical fame'. In a letter to Bailey, dated 8 October 1817, he wrote --

As to what you say about my being a Poet, I can return no answer but by saying that the high Idea I have of Poetical fame makes me think I see it towering to (sic) high above me. At any rate I have no right to talk until Endymion is finished -- it will be a test, a trial of my Powers of Imagination and chiefly of my invention.... 2

Keats's initial conception of *Endymion* was as a test of his powers of invention. It was visualized as a complex and skill-oriented task that would ultimately prove his validity as a true poet. Keats selected the Greek myth of Endymion and Cynthia as a subject for this self-imposed challenge.
Keats did not have any knowledge of Greek. Works of Classical reference read in school had familiarized him with Greek mythology early in life. His constant favourites were Lempriere’s Classical Dictionary, Andrew Tooke’s Pantheon and Spence’s Polyretis. Later, classical allusions encountered in his reading of Shakespeare, Spenser, Marlowe and Fletcher and other Elizabethans added to his knowledge. The public exhibition of the Elgin Marbles also contributed to his growing enthusiasm.

*Endymion* marks the beginning of the poet’s quest for a place in the ‘Temple of Fame’. In the Preface to the poem Keats wrote --

I hope I have not too late in the day touched the beautiful mythology of Greece and dulled its brightness; for I wish to try once more before I bid it farewell. 3

The observation ‘too late in the day’ conveys the typically Romantic sense of loss at the decay of the ideal world. In a nostalgic vein, the poet desires a beginning which would not involve a break from the past but a return to it. He longs to restore the sanctity and the charm of the ancient fictions so that they can once again serve as the inexhaustible sources of the most refined pleasures. *Endymion*, thus, is a strategic move where the poet plans to
create '4000 lines' from 'one bare circumstance' and 'fill them with Poetry'. And poetry should come as 'naturally as the Leaves to a tree'. This axiom can be identified as the Romantic principle of natural inspiration and originality. There is also an awareness that the poet must fabricate a new mythology from the existing 'one bare circumstance'.

In a letter to his sister Fanny, Keats outlined this 'one bare circumstance' --

Many years ago there was a young handsome Shepherd who fed his flocks on a Mountain's side called Latmus -- he was a very contemplative sort of a Person and lived solitry (sic) among the trees and Plains little thinking -- that such a beautiful Creature as the Moon was growing mad in love with him -- However, so it was, and when he was asleep on the Grass, She used to come down from heaven and admire him excessively from (sic) a long time; and at last could not refrain from carying (sic) him away in her arms to the top of that high Mountain Latmus while he was dreaming. 6

Keats's intention from the outset seems to have been to reshape and develop the myth to suit his own mythic vision. He outlines this intention in an earlier poem 'I Stood Tip-Toe' which is treated by some critics as a discarded fragment of Endymion. In this poem, Keats traces the origin of poetry and mythology --
For what has made the sage
or poet write ?
But the fair paradise of
Nature's light.

( 11. 125-26 )

The poet goes on to describe 'The fair paradise' as 'a forest wide' full of 'flowers wild and sweet' exposing visions of mythical lovers like Cupid and Psyche, Pan and Syrinx, Echo and Narcissus, and also Endymion and Cynthia. Keats appears to be theorizing that myths and legends originated in imaginative response of the 'savage and poet' to the beauties of nature. All these myths are basically love themes and they record the ordeals and sacrifices necessary for achieving fulfilment of true love.

The moon is hailed as the 'Maker of sweet poets' and 'Closer of lovely eyes to lovely dreams'. The moon, hence, becomes the metaphor for poetic inspiration, imagination, creativity and beauty. Her generative influence is communicated to Endymion who symbolizes the ideal poet--

He was a poet, sure a lover too,
Who stood on Latmos' top, what
time there blew
Soft breezes from the myrtle vale below,
And brought in faintress solemn,
sweet and slow
A hymn from Dian's temple, while upswelling,
The incense went to her own
starry dwelling.
But though her face was clear
as infant's eyes,
Though she stood smiling
o'er the sacrifice,
The poet wept at her so
piteous fate,
Wept that such beauty should
be desolate.
So in fine wrath some golden
sounds he won,
And gave meek Cynthia her
Endymion.

(11. 193-204)

This passage, significantly contains the embryo of Endymion. It is suggestive of the layers of meaning the poet was going to invest in the myth and also of the sub-stratum of the autobiographical element where the poet himself would merge with Endymion. Keats sees this union as an expression of happiness, health and love. He rated these blessings highly since his own life had denied them to him.

Cynthia, in Greek mythology, is identified with Artemis, Apollo's sister. Apollo is the god of the sun, poetry, eloquence and prophecy. Artemis has a triple role, that of the moon goddess, of a huntress equipped with the power of sending the plague to the mortals, and the benefactor who can provide the cure for the plague. Keats's Cynthia adopts her brother's attributes and appears as
the female benefactor of poets. Keats probably utilized this technique to keep alive the technique of his earlier poetry where Apollo was the inspiring deity. The shift is suitable because by now Keats had clearly begun to treat poetry as a woman and the poet as her lover.

The myth of Endymion and Cynthia, because of its associations with Apollo and its theme of eternal youth, beauty and love, held immense appeal for the young poet. Endymion's arduous journey and ultimate immortalization reflect Keats's deeper yearnings to be immortalized as a poet. Endymion, the seeker, is also the sought for. Cynthia, the female counterpart of Apollo, desires the union as desperately as Endymion himself. In fact, through mysterious and mystic means, she guides him all the way to their pre-destined wedding. This could be symbolic of Keats's desire to be guided by Apollo to the heights of poetical fame. This craving to be accepted as a true poet adds the element of Narcissism to the original myth.

In _Endymion_ Keats wanted to give his readers

'...a little Region to wander in where they may pick and choose, and in which the images are so numerous that many are forgotten and found a new in a second Reading'. 6

All great poets, according to him, wrote long poems.
Spencer's long works had impressed Keats greatly. The poetic mazes of *Epithalamion* and *The Fairy Queen* offered him fresh insights in every subsequent reading and that is how he wanted to model his own poetry.

Keats dedicated the poem to the memory of Thomas Chatterton and in justification of it he stated —

> Should anyone call my dedication to Chatterton affected I answer as followeth:
> Were I dead, Sir, I should like a book dedicated to me --

Keats's sharpened senses could preclude the shortened span of his life. The premonition of death is strong in these extracts and also in the empathy with Chatterton. This is, also, perhaps the reason for his 'feverish haste' to establish his reputation as a true poet.

*Endymion* was published in April 1818. Unfortunately, contemporary reaction was rather hostile as they failed to perceive the profound mythic insight of the young poet. *Blackwood's Magazine* and *Quarterly Review*, two of the leading periodicals of the day reviewed it adversely. *Blackwood's* criticism was painfully insulting —

> It is a better and a wiser thing to be a starved apothecary than a starved poet, so back to the shop, Mr. John, back to the "plasters, pills and ointment boxes". 8
'Quarterly Review' dismissed Keats as 'a copyist of Mr. Hunt'. It seems that the hostile attitude of the critics did not make Keats lose his equanimity. This can be inferred from the following extract from one of his letters of the same period --

Praise or blame has but a momentary effect on the man whose love of beauty in the abstract makes him a severe critic of his own Works.... The Genius of Poetry must work out its own salvation in a man: It cannot be matured by law & precept, but by sensation & watchfulness in itself -- That which is creative must create itself --

This passage also provides, in a nutshell, Keats's concept of a genuine artist.

In a letter to his publisher, John Taylor, Keats says --

The whole thing must I think have appeared to you, who are a consequitive Man as a thing almost of mere words -- but I assure you that when I wrote it, it was a regular stepping of the Imagination towards a Truth.

The mazes and intricacies of the long poem have been condemned for having nothing tangible, in them. However, to the poet himself, it seems to symbolize, at a level, a mythic, upward ascent towards a 'truth'. It is an exploration of his profound sensitiveness to the Greek spirit as
opposed to rigid forms of antiquity. The importance of *Endymion* lies in the part it plays in the general development of the poet's mythic vision rather than in its intrinsic merits.

II

The opening lines of the poem describe a green bower characterized by vegetational abundance. In the ancient agricultural rituals which enact the myth of the dying and resurrected vegetation god, the bower symbolizes the seed-stage. This bower offers the poet sleep, dreams and health away from 'despondence' and 'gloomy days'. This ethereal and secure abode is also symbolic of the womb. Here, the poet will continue to sleep, until 'Some shape of beauty moves away the pall'.

This 'shape of beauty' is suggestive of a woman. Graves traces the foundations of Greek mythology to the many-titled Mother Goddess. Ancient Europe, according to him, had no gods. The concept of fatherhood did not exist in the ancient religious system until the coming of the Aryans. The Great Goddess was immortal, changeless and omnipotent and motherhood was her prime attribute. The hearth was her social symbol and the sun and the moon were
her celestial symbols. She was also linked to the seasons. In spring she was a maiden and gave birth to new buds and leaves, in summer she was a nymph and bore fruit and in the winter she was a crone who had ceased to bear.12

To make a beginning, the poet must return to the ritualistic state of vegetative innocence viz the seed-state and then after resurrection, he must follow the calendrical cycle of change viz. birth, ripening and death of vegetation in order to begin, develop and complete 'the story of Endymion' --

So I will begin... 
Now while the early budders are just new, ... and as the year Grows lush in juicy stalks, I'll smoothly steer My little boat.... ... but let Autumn bold... Be all about me when I make an end. 

( I. 11. 39-55 )

The poem begins with a spring-rite for the nature-good Pan, then follows a pattern of productiveness expressed in Endymion's various encounters with Cynthia and in its conclusion contains an autumnal picture of Endymion's ritualistic death in a dying forest before launching a new
seasonal cycle initiated by the wedding of Endymion and Cynthia.

Keats draws a catalogue of natural bounties, trees, sheep, daffodils, rills, musk-rose etc. to maintain the atmosphere of fertility, creativity and inspiration generated by the green bower. He then proceeds to describe the 'sides of Latmos'. The sprawling forest full of lush foliage, fed by the 'moist earth' creates an image of plenitude. This is the home of Pan, the god of universal nature and erotic charms of the Arcadian fertility rites. He is the son of Hermes, the god of sleep and dreams, and is associated with woodland jollity, herds and flocks.

The dream-like description of the marble altar and procession create an image of incalculable age and the reader is skilfully transported into the timeless pagan world. This 'dream' or trance-like quality is characteristic of Keats's creative process, more significantly and consciously defined in his later poetry.

The poet recollects the 'Vales of Thessaly'. Apollo, at one stage, had incurred the wrath of Zeus and had been sentenced to one year's hard labour in the sheep folds of king Aineitus. Now the poet compares the
procession to the shepherd bands who 'Sat listening round Apollo's pipe'. He recreates a vision of the primeval world where the first duty of the individual was simply to play his given role i.e. to be born, to work for his livelihood, and to die. Into this simple and unassuming society, the poet introduces his hero. From the 'multitude' the focus is now shifted to Endymion. 'The chieftain King' follows the throng. Lempriere claims --

Some suppose that there were two of that name, the son of the king of Elis and the Shepherd or astronomer of Caria. 13

Keats combines the two. The description of Endymion's chariot drawn by dapple-brown steeds is based on the description of the coming of Apollo to the Earth. Apollo is usually presented as driving the brilliant and blazing chariot of the sun. His arrival was heralded by the songs of the spring sung by the birds. Endymion's arrival is proclaimed by 'ditties' of the 'Multitude' that raised their voice to the clouds. In appearance, Endymion is like Ganymede, the son of King Tros who, being the most beautiful of the mortals, was selected by the gods to be Zeus's cup-bearer. Zeus fell in love with him, and disguising himself in eagle's feathers, raped him. Later on, in compensation, Ganymede was given the gift of immortality.
Ganymede's story offers an archetypal precedence to the experiences of Endymion. Endymion, too, was listed as one of the most beautiful mortals and was finally to achieve immortality.

Continuing the description the poet says that Endymion from a distance looked like 'One who dreamed/Of idleness in groves Elysian'. Elysium, being the place where those favoured by the gods enjoy a full and blessed life after death, represents total happiness. However, Endymion when seen at close quarters exhibits 'A lurking trouble in his nether lip'. His expression evokes depressing images 'Of yellow leaves, of owlet's cry,/of logs piled solemnly'. These are the emblems of winter and invoke an atmosphere of stagnation and decay. The 'logs piled solemnly' suggest the funeral rites of Oriental mythologies. The poet takes pains to communicate the significance of Endymion's recent experiences to the reader. Endymion has seen visions of perfect happiness and has suffered deeply with the realization that they were simply dreams.

In order to give the 'one bare circumstance' the status of a mythos or plot, Keats constantly weaves smaller myths into the fabric of the major one.
Archetypes of the quest of human desire and endeavour and the destinies of similar adventurers are used to inspire the hero in the course of his journey. This repetition of experiences and acts creates a talismanic energy that enhances the spirit of adventure and also helps to strengthen the resolution of the poet-hero to continue on his way.

The poet digresses for a while to describe the sacrifice to Pan. A venerable priest leads the procession to a marble altar. He, then, performs the rituals of pouring a libation on the Earth and making an offering of the first fruits. This is followed by the chanting of a hymn to Pan. The hymn evokes the charm and the mystery of the vegetational cycle --

\[
\begin{align*}
O \text{ thou, whose mighty palace} \\
\text{roof doth hang} \\
\text{From jagged trunks, and} \\
\text{over shadoweth} \\
\text{Eternal whispers, glooms,} \\
\text{the birth, life, death} \\
\text{Of unseen flowers in heavy} \\
\text{peacefulness;...}
\end{align*}
\]

(I, 11. 232-35)

The congregation praises him for giving them a bountiful harvest --

\[
\begin{align*}
..O \text{ thou, to whom} \\
\text{Broad leaved fig trees even} \\
\text{now foredom}
\end{align*}
\]
Their ripened fruitage....
...Our village leas
Their fairest blossomed beans
and poppied corn;...
...Yea, the fresh budding year
All its completions --

( I, ll. 251-60 )

Apart from being the benefactor, he is also the protector--

...breather round our farms
To keep off mildews, and all
weather harms;
Strange ministrant of undescribed
sounds
That come a swooning over hollow
grounds;...

( I. ll. 283-86 )

His beneficence is counterpoised by a terrifying aspect.
He is also the 'Dread opener of the mysterious doors/
Leading to universal knowledge'. The frightened congre-
gation fervently prays to him to remain "unknown" --

A firmament reflected in a sea;
An element filling the space
between;
An unknown -- but no more !

( I. ll. 300-302 )

Endymion, the prince, the most beautiful and brave,
has been receiving mysterious summons persuading him to
cross the 'mysterious doors'. The image of the doors
finds a parallel in a letter that Keats wrote to Reynolds
on May 3, 1818 --

This Chamber of Maiden Thought becomes gradually darken'd and the same time on all sides of it many doors are set open. 14

The hymn acquires autobiographical significance as the poet loses himself among the shepherds of Latmos. This extinction of the self, through the poet's merging with the Shepherds, is obviously of a mystical kind. Keats's mythopoetic attitudes find expression in these generative rites.

After the chanting of the chorus is over, the young Shepherds and maids dance to the music of the pipe. To the poet the whole scene appears as one from the mythic Golden Age 'High genitors, unconscious did they cull/Time's sweet first-fruits'. Keats's nostalgia for the simple generation, untainted ecstasy of the Eden of innocence results in this magical portrayal.

When tired of dancing, some of the shepherds sit down on the turf to listen to stories while others watch the 'quoit-pitchers' and thus evoke memories of long ago--

Of Hyacinthus, when the cruel breath
Of Zephyr slew him -
  Zephyr penitent,
Who now are, ere Phoebus mounts the firmament,
Fondles the flower amid the sobbing rain.

(I. 11. 327-31)

Hyacinthus was accidentally killed while playing a game of quoits with Apollo. Lempriere described Zephyr as the killer. Zephyr's lament, however, is Keats's own contribution. The poet proceeds to talk about others who watched the archers, and thought of Niobe, the unhappy mother, and of the journey of the Argonauts in search of the Golden Fleece. Thus Keats depicts the mind of the ancient people filled with thoughts of love, sacrifice and bravery. Those who sat in the 'Sober ring' with Endymion and the venerable priest 'discussed upon the fragile bar/That keeps us from our homes ethereal'. The use of the pronouns 'us' and 'our' reinforces the poet's identification with the men of Latmos and also suggests that he shares with them their visions of the 'rule of Fate' and of Elysium and its 'anticipated bliss'. The intuitive wisdom of these shepherds to sift the illusory from reality and their acknowledgement of the undoubted powers of the creator, shed light on Keats's mystical inclinations.

As the discussion proceeds, Endymion, unable to overcome 'the cankering venom of his secret grief', swoons. In all the passages dealing with love-episodes, Endymion
either falls asleep, swoons or 'dies'. This is the typically Romantic concept of 'love-death'. It held a special appeal for Keats who was the most sensuous poet among the Romantics. The fierce passion of the hero's love paralyses him and he is conscious only of a luxurious sensuality that flows through his limbs. This 'death' is actually a living state where the fertile ground has been prepared for the creative process, either mental or physical. This experience finds very close correspondence in the myth of the dying god. Thus, it is only natural for Keats to use the vegetational cycle as the ground myth for the long poem.

When Endymion swoons, his sister Peona comes to his assistance. Keats probably derives her name from Peon, the name of the physician to the gods. Peona combines the soothing and comforting qualities of the mother-figure with the healing powers of the physician. She leads Endymion to another regenerative green recess and lays him down to sleep. The poet now invokes 'magic sleep' as the 'Great Key-/To golden palaces'.

When Endymion wakes, Peona persuades him to confide in her as she is afraid that he has 'Sinned in aught/offensive' to the heavenly powers. She recollects the occasion when Actaeon was turned into a stag and torn to piece by his
own hounds because he had accidentally seen Diana bathing. Diana represents the chaste aspect of the Moon-goddess. Intuitively, Peona senses Endymion's entanglement with the Moon.

The Moon is a very old and venerable goddess. At a stage, Great Goddess split into three -- the maiden, the nymph and the crone -- symbolizing the three aspects of moon, the new, the full and the waning. She represents 'the spirit of essential Beauty', the 'Oldest trees' are holy to her; she can make dead things live 'kissing dead things to life', she manipulates the tides of the Ocean, and the beasts and birds and the creatures of the sea are under her control. She is a goddess of many names such as Diana, Proserpine, Hecate, Isis, Cybele, Ceres, Rhea, Ops, and Cynthia.

In Keats's poem she appears in three forms viz. her celestial form (in which Endymion recognizes her) and as two maidens, one golden haired and the other black-haired in which he does not recognize her. The triple appearance causes the main complications of the plot. Endymion's progress in love can be paralleled to the essentially cyclic career of the fertility god who dies and is reborn over and over again. The Matriarch mates with her son-
consort and then disappears for a time to attend to the agricultural processes. The Matriarch and the Moon and Peona are the three aspects of the one Great Goddess. The ignorance of the mortal hero and the mortal reader lend mystery and irrationality to the atmosphere of the poem.

Endymion, soothed by the intoxicating music of Peona's lute, narrates his dream experiences to her. He starts with a description of his own feats of manliness such as his adventures with the lion and the vulture. After this, he refers to a beautiful 'nook, the very pride of June' where 'I have been used to pass my weary eyes'. On one occasion, he has a rather unnerving experience. There is a sudden blossoming of 'a magic bed' full of ditamy and poppies under his feet. 'Ditamy' and 'poppies' are the sacred flowers of Diana. This is the first of a series of love experiences. Endymion falls asleep and dreams of 'The loveliest moon'. The moon is the provider of light and emotional and imaginative nourishment which is so excessive that it dazzles Endymion. The moon disappears behind a cloud and a ravishingly beautiful goddess takes its place. Bewildered, Endymion asks the deities --

Who from Olympus watch our destiny!
Whence that completed form
of all completeness?
Whence came that high perfection
of all sweetness?

(I. 11. 605-7)

The description of Cynthia's golden hair, white neck and
the paradise of her lips and eyes and hovering feet leads
to a comparison with the 'sea-born Venus'. It is a
rich example of Keats's imaginative creativity. Cynthia's
incomparable beauty raised him to 'dizzy' heights of
rapture 'madly did I kiss -- The wooing arms which held
me'. The embracing bodies rested on a bed of flowers.
No one disturbed them save a 'peeping Oread'. Oreads are
mountain nymphs associated with Diana. Their embrace con-
tinued until Endymion's 'Sweet dream/Fell into nothing'.

This pattern of enchantment and awakening to dis-
appointment is recurrent in Keats' poetry. To dwell on the
contrast between dream and reality is a dominant Romantic
trait. The pattern occurs again in 'Isabella', The Eve
of St. Agnes, Lamia and also in the major odes.

Soon Endymion receives a second message from the
other world. This time he sees a face in a well. It is
'The same bright face I tasted in my sleep'. The well is
situated in a deep hollow near the 'matron temple'. He
defines certain childhood associations with the well.
Latona was the mother of Cynthia and Apollo. The reference combines maternal and sisterly associations with erotic associations of the beloved. And finally there are also the narcissistic associations of the face reflected in water. Endymion, the seeker, is also being sought.

Endymion receives a third communication from a grotto. While wandering around a hillside, Endymion arrives at a grotto which he believes to be the place from which Proserpine, the queen of the underworld, ascends and descends. The communication is as follows —

'Endymion! The cave is secreter
Than the isle of Delos,
Echo hence shall stir.
No sighs but sigh-warm
kisses, or light noise
Of thy combing hand, the
while it travelling cloys
And trembles through my
labyrinthine hair.'

(I. 11: 965-69)

Endymion, by now, is completely and feverishly in love with this elusive maiden. He is filled with the energy of love and is ready to set out in quest of her.

Endymion's sister, Peona, being a mortal is unable to grasp the significance of his experience. To her it just
shows a 'poor weakness'. Endymion earnestly defends the experience and says there is 'nothing base' in it because of its intensity and 'higher hope'. Endymion's insistence on the reality of this vision is actually a representation of Keats's well-known theory propounded in his letter to Bailey, written on Nov 22, 1817. There he vehemently asserts —

I am certain of nothing but the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of Imagination — What the Imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth — whether it existed before or not — for I have the same Idea of all our Passions of Love. They are all in their sublime creative of essentially Beauty — 17

David Pollard discovers a Greek attitude in this passage—

This is a movement of the Passions as the Greeks understood it. Pathos like its Latin equivalent, Passio, implies an imposition from without which happens to a man who remains passive. 18

Book I concludes in another rude awakening of the hero.

III

Endymion's quest begins in Bk. II. As hero of the mythical quest, he has to explore the Earth, the water, and
the air before he can attain unity with the sought. The descent into the bowels of the Earth represents an archetypal quest-image. The Earth, in the mythologies of agricultural societies, is necessarily envisaged as a woman, as she is the original producer of food. The seed must be buried in the Earth if it is to germinate. According to the myth of fertility, the consort of the Great Goddess couples with her, dies, and is born once again as her son. Instinctively sensitive to mythological relationships, Keats guides Endymion into the "Sparry hollow of the World", thus signifying the rooting process of the seed.

The narrative, in this section, begins with an apostrophe to love. Keats establishes love as a sovereign power which has everlasting value. He says that history is a 'gilded cheat' because it records just the events and ignores the greater dimension of human emotions viz love. Thus the story of the Trojan War is meaningless except for the love story of Troilus and Cressida --

Yet, in our very souls, we
feel amain
The close of Troilus and
Cressid sweet.

( II. 11. 12-13 )

The only path worthy of the 'muse' is that of 'love and
poesy'. The poet turns to mythology as the perfect vehicle for the articulation of his philosophy. He set about --

In chafing restlessness...
... to uprear
Love's standards on the battlement of song.

(II. 11. 39-41)

The 'Brain-sick shepherd prince' is found 'wandering in uncertain ways' until he is attracted by a bud on a 'wild rose-tree'. He plucks the rose, dips it in the water of a shady spring, the bud magically flowers and releases a golden butterfly with strange characters painted on its wings. The butterfly guides him into a glen, to a splashing fountain near the mouth of a cave. Midst music that flows in from a distant 'holy bark' carrying pilgrims to Delphi, the butterfly is metamorphosed into a nymph who delivers a message of hope --

... thou must wander far
In other regions, past the scanty bar
To mortal steps, before thou cans't be ta'en
From every wasting sigh, from every pain,
Into the gentle bosom of thy love.

(II. 11. 123-27)
The butterfly in Greek is called 'psyche' which is also the Greek name of the soul. The rose, traditionally, is the symbol of love. The face in the well and the nymph in the fountain suggest a female or generative aspect of the water-spirit. The complication, obviously, is that Endymion's quest-descent into the underworld is not the traditional descent into the land of the dead, but as part of the regenerative rites of the fertility myth which is being sustained as the ground myth by the poet.

The sudden disappearance of the nymph causes some despair to Endymion. However the regenerative energy of his love helps him to recover. He swears by 'the Orphean lute' that he will not give up but continue steadfastly to search for his 'thrice-seen love'. The reference to the 'Orphean lute' is significant. In Greek mythology, Orpheus was the most famous poet and musician who ever lived. In fact he is treated as the founder of the mystic cult known as Orphism. Apollo gifted Orpheus with a lyre and the muses taught him how to use it. He enchanted the wild beasts and made the rocks move to the sound of his music. When his wife Eurydice died of a snake-bite, he boldly crossed into Tartarus with the intention of bringing her back. With his beautiful music he charmed the ferryman and the Judges
and also suspended the tortures of the damned souls. Persephone allowed him to take Eurydice on the condition that he should not look back. He broke his promise and thus lost her forever. Later, the Maenads tore him to pieces and his head floated down the river still singing. Ultimately it came to rest in a cave where it prophesied day and night until Apollo bade it be silent. The lyre was then taken up to heaven to become one of the constellations.

Orpheus, thus, becomes the metaphor for love, poetry and myth. The Orphic voice is the prophecy of the poet and the Orpheus myth, in its narrative, exposes a method of bridging the worlds of the mortals and the immortals. His journey to Hades brings in the spirit of inquiry and adventure. So far, the myth offers a parallel to the story of Endymion. However, Orpheus lost all as the result of an extremely mortal weakness. Endymion, if he is not to suffer the same fate must transcend mortality. So, he prays to Cynthia (still not aware of her real identity) for help. Almost immediately he feels that 'The bars/That kept my spirit in are burst'.

The experience is so 'dizzy' and 'dazzling' that he once again calls to the goddess for help. His 'maddened stare' 'lifted hands' 'trembling lips' and finally being
'frozen to sensless stone' imply that the process of immortalization or deification has begun. This stationing or freezing as a statue is the base of Keats's imagery of the deification of his heroes. The image of 'marble-men' occurs in the sonnet on the Elgin Marbles, in Hyperion and also in the Ode on a Grecian Urn. The sculptured figures have achieved a kind of immortality through being frozen into stone. To treat statues as 'breathing stones' was a common aesthetic response of the Romantics.

This experience of Endymion finds an archetypal precedence in the story of Niobe. Niobe was so proud of her seven sons and seven daughters that she taunted Leto for having only two children. Leto, in anger, killed all of Niobe's fourteen children leaving her alone to bewail her loss. On the tenth day, Zeus turned her into stone. The torment of being separated from those she loved, resulted in Niobe being frozen into stone. Endymion, too, has experienced the torment of being separated from the one he loved. Using this myth as the image-base, Keats suggests that Endymion, too, was 'frozen to sensless stone'.

To enhance the poignancy of Endymion's feelings, the poet refers to Deucalion and Orion. Deucalion's flood was the result of Zeus's anger. Zeus intended to wipe off the
entire human race. Deucalion and his wife survived in an ark and thus the human species was preserved. For nine days, however, they prayed to Zeus to withdraw the waters. Orion was a giant who was loved by Eos, the dawn. Artemis, out of jealousy, took away his eyesight and blind Orion remained 'hungry for the morn'.

Endymion is told by a voice from the cavern to 'Descend' --

A little lower than the chilly sheen
Of icy pinnacles, and dipp'dst thine arms
Into the deadening ether that still charms
Their marble being; -- now as deep profound
As those are high, descend!
He ne'er is crowned With immortality, who fears to follow
Where airy voices lead; so through the hollow,
The silent mysteries of earth, descend!

(II. 11. 207-214)

The 'airy voice' advises Endymion to treat this descent as an 'ascent' of a pinnacle. Images of ascent and descent are interchangeable in the ancient Greek concept of time which is represented by the an over-revolving wheel. Endymion's descent is not an escape but a rather
mystical aerial ascent, the journey of achievement, of a newly liberated human spirit, suggested in the earlier line 'the bars/ That kept my spirit in are burst'.

The labyrinth that Endymion enters is hard, gleaming and metallic with fearful, vast caverns and pits. It is symbolic of the human sub-conscious. He meanders through fantastic passageways lighted by sparkling gems. He is so absorbed in their beauties that he fails to notice the 'fiercer wonders' which can only be comprehended by 'The mighty ones who have made eternal day/For Greece and England'. 'Mighty ones' refers to the major poets who are envisioned as living in Elysium and continuing the task of writing imperishable poetry. A note-worthy implication of these lines is that immortalization of Endymion will also be the immortalization of Keats the poet.

Endymion now comes across a temple of Diana. The wonders and beauties of the fascinating subterranean journey had diverted him temporarily from his sorrow. Now, however, the 'habitual self' returns. He remembers his unhappiness and his quest. He addresses a prayer to Diana --

Young goddess, let me see
my native bowers!
Deliver me from this
rapacious deep!
( II. 11. 331-32 )
In answer to his prayers, music guides him to a secret underground bower, luxuriant in vegetation. This is the bower of Adonis. A green bower within the bowels of the Earth is a Keatsian invention. Greenery in all forms, is traditionally the cover for the exterior of the earth. However to sustain the presence of the regenerative Mother throughout the narrative, the poet creates the green bower.

He is admitted by a 'Serene cupid'. In Roman mythology, Cupid is the boy-god of love, son of Venus. But here, Keats's reference is not to the boy-god but an attendant of Venus. The 'feathered lyricist' whispers --

Though from upper day
Thou art a wanderer, and thy presence here
Might seem unholy, be of happy cheer!
For 'tis the nicest touch of human honour
When some ethereal and high-favouring donor
Present immortal bowers to mortal sense --
And now 'tis done to thee,
Endymion

(II. 11. 433-39)

The 'ethereal donor' is obviously his dream-love. By following the dictates of the 'airy voice', Endymion has
proved his fidelity in love. Acknowledging this, the goddess rewards him with a prophetic glimpse into actual mythology. This is also the moment of initiation where he will receive a new and positive orientation that will prepare him for the life of a deity.

Adonis is asleep on a silken couch. He, 'Safe in the privacy of this still region' is completing his winter sleep. The path to the bower had led through cold stone caverns. Thus Adonis, too, is 'frozen to senseless stone' and like the dreamy Endymion he, too, is a sleeper.

According to the myth, Venus arose from the foam of the sea, near the coast of the island of Cynthera. She was wafted by the Zephyrs and received on the sea-shore by the seasons, who were daughters of Jupiter and Themis. She was extremely proud of her beauty. But the wife of King Cinyras boasted that her daughter Smyrna was more beautiful than Venus. The goddess avenged this insult by causing Smyrna to fall in love with her own father. Smyrna used to satisfy her desires by using the darkness of the nights as a cover until one day Cinyras discovered her guilty secret. Wild with wrath he chased her with a sword. Smyrna was changed into a myrrh tree. Out of this tree was born Adonis. Venus now fell in love with him and when he was
killed by a boar while hunting, she caused the rose to spring from his blood. Both Venus and Proserpine now claimed him. Jupiter decreed that Adonis should spend part of the year with each. The myth of the sharing of Adonis by Venus and Proserpine indicates the archaic analogy of the two goddesses. This analogy is actually identity, in one ambivalent goddess figure. It is also prophetic of the next series of Endymion's adventures when he is to be shared by two maidens.

Cupid offers a feast to Endymion. The food is delicate and exquisite and evocative of rich mythological associations. The wine evokes memories of Bacchus's associations with Adriane; the cream is 'sweeter than that nurse Amalthea skimmed' for Jupiter, and the pears have been sent by Vertumnus, the Roman god of Spring. The underworld that Endymion visits has constant interaction with the regenerative forces of nature. The luxuriant vegetational abundance indicates the presence of the life-spirit in the underworld. The feast that Endymion is offered is 'ready to melt between an infant's gums'. In the ritual of initiation, in the primeval religions the fertility god received exotic food before copulating with the Great Goddess. This food and love sequence occurs again and
again in Keats's poetry. Food serves as sacrament or 'communion' in the ritual magic that makes the earth provident. Though Adonis is the fertility god, the exotic food is offered to Endymion. The food etherealizes Endymion's senses, and he begins to 'feel immortal'. Now, Venus descends into the bower and Endymion is witness to the 'rebirth' and her union with the 'new-born' lover that is the generative principle of life. With a view to encouraging Endymion, Venus says —

Endymion, one day thou wilt be blest.
So still obey the guiding hand that fends Thee safely through these sweet ends.

(II. 11. 573-75)

Feeling 'assured of happy times' he moves ahead. He discovers that the diamond path ends 'abrupt in middle air'. He prays to Jupiter for help. An eagle appears and carries him to 'A jasmine bower'. The bower is very erotic —

It was a jasmine bower, all bestrown with golden mass.
His every sense had grown Ethereal for pleasure:

(II. 11. 670-72)
Following the ritualistic mode of the food and love sequence, this bower is the place where he is destined to encounter his dream-goddess --

Stretching his indolent arms, he took - o bliss! -
A naked waist: 'Fair Cupid, whence is this?'
A well-known voice sighed 'Sweetest, here am I!'
At which soft ravishment, with doting cry
They trembled to each other.

(II. 11. 712-16)

Their love-making is an extension of the food-image of the bower of Adonis. Endymion 'dreams 'deliciously', tastes her, and 'sips' her 'essence'. Endymion's concern now is to retain these moments of happiness forever --

'O known Unknown from whom
my being sips
Such darling essence, wherefore may I not
Be ever in these arms?'

(II. 11. 739-41)

Cynthia tells him that there is an obstacle in the course of their love. She is the goddess of chastity and hence cannot commit adultery. The poet thus makes a rather Christian concession. Consummation of love requires sanctification. A marriage must take place and then they will
have 'an immortality of passion' --

...we will shade
Ourselves whole summers by
a river glade,
And I will tell thee
stories of the sky,
And breathe thee whispers
of its minstrelsy...
Lisping empyrean will I
sometimes teach
Thine honeyed tongue --
lute breathings, which I gasp
To have thee understand...

( II. 11. 810-813, 819-21 )

The implication is that through his marriage,
Endymion will not only be immortalized but will also become
an immortal poet. She will be his divine Muse. The reward
of fertility will extend to immortal poetry. The golden-
haired maiden in this myth of Endymion and Cynthia represents
the maiden form of the Great Goddess responsible for the
breeding functions. This is a result of Keats's school-boy
fixation with 'a fair woman as a pure goddess' that appears
in a rather confessional letter of July 1818 --

I am certain I have not a right feeling
towards women.... Is it because they fall so
far beneath my Boyish imagination? When I
was a Schoolboy I thought a fair Woman a
pure Goddess, my mind was a soft nest in which
some one of them slept, though she knew it
not -- 19
Most of his heroines (Cynthia, Madeline, Isabella) appear as pure and chaste maidens. This is Keats's concept of the perfect woman. Love-making, following the tradition of the fertility rites is a mystery and the initiation should be ceremonial and should take place in the hidden depths of either mythological underworld as in *Endymion* or in the depth of the dream world as in *The Eve of St. Agnes* and *Lamia*. The swoon of Endymion is a mystic death which can be paralleled to the temporary death of Adonis and this is a necessary step for the achievement of an 'immortality of passion'.

After the departure of the goddess, Endymion now 'began to ponder on all his life' and found that 'Essences—once spiritual are like muddy lees' in comparison to the 'magic' of 'excessive love'. Love has helped him to evolve, and to liberate himself from the barriers of mortality.

At this stage, the poet interrupts his narrative to comment on the importance of traditions and on the genesis of mythology. This 'ditty' --

> Long ago 'twas told  
> By a cavern wind unto a  
> forest old  
> And then the forest told  
> in it a dream
To a sleeping lake, whose
cool and level gleam
A poet caught...
He sang the story up into
the air
Giving it universal freedom.

(II. 11. 830-834, 838-39)

The poet is suggesting that myths embody elemental truths. They bring realization and enlightenment. He defines mythology as 'the tradition of the gusty deep' and finds within it potential for change and deliverance.

This diversion gives Endymion the time to recover from his swoon and to continue on his way once again. Now he enters 'A vaulted dome' that was 'huge and strange'. Midst fog and dusk appears Cybele 'the shadowy queen' seated in a lion drawn chariot. She silently, 'faints away/Into another gloomy arch'. Cybele is the sinister aspect of the Great Goddess. She is the death-in-life goddess. She destroys her consort as the queen-bee destroys the drone. One of her sanctuaries is a subterranean chamber. This is the malignant version of love-bower. That Cybele passes him by without any communication suggests that he has imbibed the wisdom that archetypal quest heroes imbibe in their underworld descents.

Endymion now encounters Alpheus, a river god and
Arethusa a water-nymph. Alpheus fell in love with Arethusa when she was bathing in his stream. She fled from him and was transformed by Diana into a fountain. But Alpheus flowing under the sea was united with the fountain. The Keatsian hero enters the myth at a point when 'Sudden fell/Those two sad streams a down a fearful dell'. Sympathizing with their agony Endymion prays to his beloved

Thee, gentle Goddess of my pilgrimage,
By our eternal hopes, to soothe, to assuage,
If thou art powerful, these lovers' pains,
And make them happy in some happy plains.

(II. 11. 1014-17)

Endymion's immortalization has begun. This is obvious by the fact that he can now participate in the enactment of a myth. By sharing the agony of the others and offering sympathy, he is, like Coleridge's Mariner, released from captivity of body and spirit. This is an expression of Keatsian humanism.

Book II concludes with this prayer for the victory of love and eternal happiness of all lovers.
Notes and References

1. The Poems of John Keats, ed. M. Allot (London, 1970) p. 120. All subsequent citations from Keats's poems are from this edition.


10. Ibid., p. 223.


16. This idea has been elaborated in Sleep and Poetry.

17. Ian Jack, Keats and the Mirror of Art (Oxford, 1967) p. 154. Ian Jack feels this description is reminiscent of Botticelli's 'Birth of Venus'. However the painting was not known in England during Keats's time. But the similarity in artistic response is noteworthy.
