

# John Keats and his Endymion

Literature, Russian Literature



Endymion is one of Keats's early adventures in poetry. The poem reflects Keats's attitude to beauty. Endymion is a youth renowned for his beauty and his perpetual sleep. As he slept in Mount Latmus in Caria, his beauty warmed the cold hearts of Seleue (the Moon) who came down to him, kissed him and lay by his side. His eternal sleep on Latmus is assigned to different causes but it is generally believed that Seleue had sent him to sleep that she might be able to kiss him. Keats has certainly made use of the myth of Endymion to explore his own way to realize the truth that is beauty (Hewlett, 1949). But the myth remains only the framework. Keats invents quite a lot. Aileen Ward (1963) in this connection says:

“ the legend of Endymion's winning immortal youth through the love of the Moon – Goddess was only the beginning or rather the ending; he had to fill up his four books with living characters, set them moving in a world of their own and breathe new meaning into the old legend.”

And this meaning he does, indicate at the beginning of the poem:

“ A thing of beauty is a joy for ever;

Its loveliness increases: it will never

Pass into nothing; but still will keep

A bower quite for us, and a sleep

Full of sweet dreams, and health and quite breathing.”

The theme of the poem is love, beauty and youth. He starts this marvelous adventure laden with exotic scenery, in mid April and locates it aptly in the Isle of Wight:

“ ... So I'll begin

Now while I cannot hear the cities' dire;

Now while the early hudders are just new,

And run in mazes of the youngest hew

About old forests; while the willow trails

Its delicate ambler; and the dairy pails

Bring home increase of milk...”

There are certainly inspired pieces in the first book as Hymn of Pan. It begins after a description of the Festival of the God, which held on a lawn in a forest on a slope of Mount Latmus. The whole assembly is addressed by the old priest who tells the worshippers of the bounties which Pan has heaped upon them. The imagery is well chosen to explain the manifestation of God's energy. All the objects are described in happy phrases. The God is associated with the objects of nature, every aspect which imagination, hunting for the objectively mysterious, can comprehend. The Hymn ends in the lines in which Pan is:

“... The unimaginable lodge

For solitary thinkings; such as dodge

Conception to the very Bourne of Heaven

Then leave the naked brain....”

The style of Endymion is largely that of “ I Stood Tip-Toe” and “ Sleep and Poetry.” This is luscious, half-feminine and often beautiful (Roe, 1997).

There is a distinct growth, of course, in craftsmanship but the most important point about Keats at this state is his depth and breadth of philosophic apprehension of myth. If we try to search for the meaning of the poem in the organism of the structure, the divided self of Keats might be clearer, though it will affirm his inclination on the realistic side even at this stage. The control in certain portions of the poem is uncertain partly because Keats was a young and undisciplined artist (Steinhoff, 1987). Up to the last moment, the hero as well as the poet till the last moment of his life is subject to conflicting desires.

As a matter of fact, there is ambiguity in the poem. The poem's ending is presented in highly ambiguous way and it could be interpreted on two different levels. On the mythological level, the maid – Indian Maiden – is only the Goddess in a disguise to test Endymion's fidelity. This is a fairy tale device. So when Endymion seems to give up human love and asserts his devotion to “ things of light” the maiden turns back into the Goddess and rewards him with the “ immortality of passion” promised in the myth (Hewlett, 1949).

To conclude, the real significance of the poem lies in search of truth, through the “ bare-circumstance” of this legend. Keats was the first poet in English who found a human meaning in the myth. He did not fit myths into an allegorical pattern as Elizabethans did or did not only use them to decorative effect as the 18th Century people did. Keats' contribution lies in finding that the Greek myths were relevant to our inner experiences.

## References

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