

“Endymion”, by John Keats (1818)

First Stanza

A thing of beauty is a joy for ever:
Its loveliness increases; it will never
Pass into nothingness; but still will keep
A bower quiet for us, and a sleep
Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet
breathing.

Therefore, on every morrow, are we wreathing
A flowery band to bind us to the earth,
Spite of despondence, of the inhuman dearth
Of noble natures, of the gloomy days,
Of all the unhealthy and o'er-darkened ways
Made for our searching: yes, in spite of all,
Some shape of beauty moves away the pall
From our dark spirits. Such the sun, the moon,
Trees old and young, sprouting a shady boon
For simple sheep; and such are daffodils
With the green world they live in; and clear
rills

That for themselves a cooling covert make
Against the hot season; the mid forest brake,
Rich with a sprinkling of fair musk-rose
blooms:

And such too is the grandeur of the dooms
We have imagined for the mighty dead;
All lovely tales that we have heard or read:
An endless fountain of immortal drink,
Pouring unto us from the heaven's brink.

Nor do we merely feel these essences
For one short hour; no, even as the trees
That whisper round a temple become soon
Dear as the temple's self, so does the moon,
The passion poesy, glories infinite,
Haunt us till they become a cheering light
Unto our souls, and bound to us so fast,
That, whether there be shine, or gloom
o'ercast;
They always must be with us, or we die.



Therefore, 'tis with full happiness that I
Will trace the story of Endymion.
The very music of the name has gone
Into my being, and each pleasant scene
Is growing fresh before me as the green
Of our own valleys: so I will begin
Now while I cannot hear the city's din;
Now while the early budders are just new,
And run in mazes of the youngest hue
About old forests; while the willow trails
Its delicate amber; and the dairy pails
Bring home increase of milk. And, as the year
Grows lush in juicy stalks, I'll smoothly steer
My little boat, for many quiet hours,
With streams that deepen freshly into bowers.
Many and many a verse I hope to write,
Before the daisies, vermeil rimm'd and white,
Hide in deep herbage; and ere yet the bees
Hum about globes of clover and sweet peas,
I must be near the middle of my story.
O may no wintry season, bare and hoary,
See it half finish'd: but let Autumn bold,
With universal tinge of sober gold,
Be all about me when I make an end.
And now, at once adventuresome, I send
My herald thought into a wilderness:
There let its trumpet blow, and quickly dress
My uncertain path with green, that I may
speed
Easily onward, thorough flowers and weed.

Commentary: *Endymion* is in many ways a response to Shelley's *Alastor* (1816), where a young poet dreams of an ideal mate, in fruitless pursuit of whom he quests across the world, only to die alone and unloved. Keats's poem begins with a mortal, Endymion, discovered restless and unhappy with the pastoral delights of his kingdom, for he has become enraptured with a dream vision, the moon goddess Cynthia. After a series of adventures, he abandons his restless quest, which by book 4 has come to seem illusory, in favor of an earthly Indian maid, who is eventually revealed to have been Cynthia all along. Although the actual narrative will hardly bear much scrutiny, the themes evoked here would haunt Keats all his life. Only through a love for the earthly is the ideal reached, the real and the ideal becoming one through an intense, sensuous love that leads to a "fellowship with essence." The theme of a mortal's love for an ideal figure that proves either illusory or redemptive would be a continuing source of philosophical exploration and ironic play for Keats, as would the paradox of redemption or transcendence evolving from a fuller engagement with human suffering and finitude. (See Poetry Foundation – [online](#).)