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Osaka University
Stumbling at Self in Keats's *Endymion*

Yoshiki Nakamura

**Introduction**

One of the crucial subjects which are supposed to be paradigmatic of Romanticism is how poets set up the selves in the mode of poetry. If poetry is for them "a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" (Wordsworth)\(^1\) or some entity which "must create itself" (Keats)\(^2\), the poet's self expressed there would be something organic and autonomous, or something translucently represented through artistic forms.

Of course this so-called "organicistic" view, shaping a basic if too general set of criteria of Romantic poetry, is not necessarily defensible. When a poet tries to express his poethood in a work, the least we can say is that he only intends or pretends to do so, and not that he achieves it; this difference would bring to light a problem of self-recognition resulting from the character of the mode of poetic representation. In order to claim his own aesthetic experience to be immediate and authentic, a Romantic would delete from his poetry cognitive or reflective aspects which might blunt the purity of the experience. It is in this respect that this essay is concerned about how Keats attempts to, or rather fails to, embody the idea of poethood in *Endymion* (1818). The poem is about a story of internal redemption from the fatal loss of the original bliss of his own mind\(^3\), but such an allegory about self includes many scenes where the poet, excessively conscious of its fictional qualities, stumbles at narrating in a self-reflexive manner.
1 The Outline of Keats's Enterprise in Endymion

First of all I will give a rough outline of how Keats intends to put his self-consciousness into Endymion. The measures are taken in a duplicate way: first, by setting up a total order of the mythological world of Endymion and Cynthia, the Moon Goddess, through which Keats visualizes his aesthetic ideas. Endymion's attempt to recover the lost vision of Cynthia, by whom he once was blessed in a dream, and unify with it so as to attain the essence of supreme beauty, clearly corresponds to the poet's unique idea about imaginative faculties. Keats insists that imagination is the ability to acquire great happiness by bringing to consciousness what has been once perceived in a moment of vision. It thus "may be compared to Adam's dream — he awoke and found it [what he witnessed in a dream, Eve] truth". This reproductive working, to use N. Frye's ideas, organizes "[some forms which are] interpreted imaginatively as the structure of what might and could be true" against the "alienation myth" (126-7), or the myth of self-consciousness which has separated the subject from the transcendent world. In Endymion, the protagonist's struggle to recover the vanished sight of Cynthia is maintained by an anxiety for the evasiveness of his dream; "[...] like a spark / That needs must die, although its little beam / Reflects upon a diamond, my sweet dream / Fell into nothing" (I, 675-678). His journey is in this way spurred by the obsessive idea that the visionary bliss must be redeemed, and it is in this way that the whole series of this activity can become documents to dramatize Keats's own challenge to realize imaginative truths.

What makes possible Keats's projection of his imaginative activity upon Endymion is his peculiar attitude toward Poetry; basically for Keats Poetry is not a voiced expression of his thoughts, but the presentation of some ideal vision into which he could plunge:
The Genius of Poetry must work out its own salvation in a man: it cannot be matured by law & precept, but by sensation and watchfulness in itself — That which is creative must create itself — In Endymion, I leaped headlong into the Sea, [...].

A poet here stands in a reticent position to soak himself in the organic system of Poetry so that *Endymion* is supposed to appear in a dramatic mode with no obtrusive frame ("law and precept") upon it. Such emphasis on spontaneity gives us the assumption, along with the idea of "Negative Capability", that the poem is merely a phenomenal world directly presented to us, rather than the tale the poet narrates. Thus the first measure to represent the poet's identity in the work is taken by restraining himself from manifesting it in a subjective stance and instead setting up an imaginarily empirical field where Endymion, another persona of the poet, acts with his own mind and body.

At the same time, as the second measure, Keats attempted to confirm his poetical identity, distinguished from Endymion's, by engaging in myth creation. Discussing the plan of writing this poem, he expressed a strong belief that "a trial of my Powers of Imagination and [...] invention" should be made through an "endeavour after a long Poem", wondering "[d]id our great Poets ever write short Pieces?". Influenced by such classical sources as Drayton's *Endimion and Phoebe* (1595), and Sandy's translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (1640), he felt called upon to "make 4000 Lines of one bare circumstance and fill them with Poetry". His concern for "invention", a practical act of producing poetry, fully shows his awareness that a creative vocation and self-definition cannot be separated, and in fact his attempt to reconstruct the old myth was encouraged by a kind of metaphysical desire about his selfhood; "[Endymion] will take me a dozen
paces towards the Temple of Fame— it makes me say— God forbid that I should be without such a task!", or "I find that I cannot exist without poetry— without eternal poetry". The poem would give him a great opportunity to establish the solid ground of his identity under the inventive enterprise of poem-making.

Thus we come to a sketch of the dual procedure Keats takes for self-fashioning: the self is, first, to be "metaphorically" constructed through the representation of the protagonist's journey, and also, it is to be "performatively" validated through the act of producing the myth. Each purpose is, he expects, to be achieved in the moment of Endymion's apotheosis by which the myth is completed, so that the dramatic climax (content) and the authorial one (form) coincide with each other; this achievement might be supposed, say, to make Endymion spiritualized, Endymion mythologized, and Keats consecrated.

This duplicate commitment to the myth is expected to be taken under the mode of single subjectivity, as is implied at the very outset of the poem. The opening lines function as a prologue in a choral statement to involve Keats himself (and the supposed audience) in the fictional world set on the stage. The lines say, "the moon, / the passion poesy, glories infinite, / Haunt us till they become a cheering light / Unto our souls, [. . .]." (I, 28-31. Italics mine). In a succeeding part, the world presented is further qualified as vicarious by the narrator's committed illustration of the protagonist's world:

[. . .] '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 valley. (I, 34-39)
By committing himself to the "drama" of the mythic story, he intends to set himself in its space, and perform as if upon his actual experience. According to this standpoint, he wishes to be not a kind of intrusive commentator from the outside of the stage, but the source of an inner, authentic voice uttered through the dramatic situation. M. H. Abrams argues that poets who engage in mythology since ancient Greece bear a duplicate task both of narration by a prophet who has the ability to deliver supernatural truths, and of creation of "a second nature..." in an act analogous to God's creation of the world. (272) In order to confirm this task, Keats appears in some parts of the story and invokes the ancient Gods and the muses for inspirational motivation. He often swears allegiance to what may be called the myth of Poetry, whose power is believed to give an ontological ground to his poetical activity. At the beginning of Book III, he addresses Apollo:

[... ] And, by the feud
'Txist Nothing and Creation, I here swear,
Eterne Apollo, that thy Sister fair [Diana / Cynthia]
Is of all these the gentlier-mightiest. (III, 40-43)

Not only by celebrating Cynthia's supreme grace for Endymion, but also by swearing it by the authority of Apollo ("high Poet", III, 48), does he contend for the privilege of his own "Creation" over "Nothing". It is on how successfully he could deliver the mythic vision with his internal imagination that, in addition to the prayer for the protagonist's wish-fulfillment, the qualification of himself as an idealized poet depends. We find a clear similarity between the two personas when, in succeeding lines, Keats invokes Cynthia to display her ubiquitous influence: "O, Moon! Old boughs lisp forth a holier din / The while they feel thine airy fellowship. / Thou dost bless everywhere, with silver lip / Kissing
dead things to life." (III, 54-7. Italics mine) Echoing Endymion's desire to have "a fellowship with [Cynthia's] essence" (I, 779), Keats now shares the belief in the principle of happiness with him, and thus harmonizes the choral act of narration and the empathic commitment to the mythic world through the power of "creative imagination" (Abrams, 275).

The problem is, however, that these two modes of participation contain a decisive difference in terms of the character of self; one projected and the other projecting. The indeterminate aspect lies where Keats's Negative-Capable plunge into the myth is inevitably mediated by the clear consciousness of the act of narrating or writing. The ambiguities it would cause are, for example, whether the work is just a dramatic stage set for Keats's self-performance or is a kind of objet d'art for his aesthetics, and whether the protagonist's identity is the poet's own or its objectified reflection. These disparities become evident when Endymion or Keats falls into a self-reflexive contemplation, especially faced with his final purpose — Cynthia (for Endymion) and Poetry (for Keats), both of which I am going to consider next, respectively in the 2nd and the 3rd sections.

2 The Predicament of Endymion's Self

The poem does complete Keats's primary purpose and closes itself just where Endymion is sublimated into the heaven, but the closure is only a teleological, preestablished one for the theme. Apart from any concern with such an "idealistic" form of the poem, let us have a look at the way Keats faces with his transcendent Object in the course of the story. His clumsy approach to it shows a cognitive crisis in the trial to form his ideal self-consciousness. The focus in this section is on how Endymion, not Keats himself but his projected persona, meets some predicaments of self-definition during the quest for Cynthia.
Endymion, traditionally represented as a sleeping youth who has a rapturous experience in his slumber, was taken notice of by Keats as the proper leitmotif for embodying the Romantic "trial" on which one is urged to bring some visionary, metaphysical experiences down to his clear knowledge; Endymion is expected to actualize, or rather, "poeticize" them with vivid reality. The serious irony in Endymion is, however, that his ambition to encounter Cynthia is realized only outside of his distinct consciousness. A direct contact with her is successful only three times, except the final communion, on every occasion of which he falls into a sleep, in "a magic bed / Of sacred ditamy and poppies red" (I, 554-5; the first encounter, which takes place before the story begins), in the secret "jasmine bower" of the underworld (II, 670), and during a ride on a black steed to soar up into the heaven (IV, 398-) Every result from them is that he only awakes to find her figure fading like a shadow or a pale moonlight; she is nothing more than a vision intuitable in the domain of unconsciousness.

But when he endeavors to confirm her identity by distinct vision, a peculiar mixture of metaphysics and eroticism takes place. Just before starting his journey, he ardently argues the significance of heavenly happiness which he thinks would be achieved by "a fellowship with [her] essence" (I, 779) in a "self-destroying" manner (I, 799). The following passage offers one example of Keatsian aesthetics of Negative Capability by which the ethereal region of Cynthia, although containing much implication of a neo-Platonic concept of Idea, is given a mass of exuberantly sensuous images. Endymion mentions the happiness as this:

[... ] Behold
The clear religion of heaven! Fold
A rose leaf round thy finger's taperness
And soothe thy lips; hist, when the airy stress
Of music's kiss impregnates the free winds,
And with a sympathetic touch unbinds
Aeolian magic from their lucid wombs — (I, 780-786)

Keats describes this scene, it seems, delightedly with a mixture of imagination and bodily sensuality, fancying a rose leaf clasping around his delicate fingers and tender lips, stroking them. He involves himself vicariously in particular items by watching and relishing them, as the way an ideal poet, a "camelion Poet", as Keats insists, "lives in gusto, [...] filling some other Body". The world of Cynthia is not acknowledged by rational mind but by sensory perceptions, and therefore the difficulty of recognizing the ideal state of self here lies in the position of his consciousness in a self-destroying indulgence in those objects. The detailed reference to particular parts of the body ("finger", "lips") suggests a distinct view of the watching subject and the corporeality of what he watches, so that the aesthetic relation between the two may be turned into quite a realistic, physical one. His commitment to ethereal beauty might be degraded into an act of fetishistic toying with beauties, thus containing some ambivalence of his perceptive faculty which would otherwise sublimate his identity into a spiritual one, though retaining the danger of subverting it. D. Gigante argues, in terms of Keatsian self-recognition, "that navigating subjectivity [...] runs the risk of making one's identity either too ethereal, and hence immaterial [...], or else too material to qualify as aesthetic — to 'live in gusto' and feast upon airy nothings." (485) Clearly, in the following invocation to Cynthia, she is put on the verge of the antinomy made by these two extremes of quality, existing "too ethereal[ly]" to become visible to him but being actually described "too material[ly]";
Enchantress! Tell me [where thou art] by this soft embrace,
By the most soft completion of thy face,
Those lips, O slippery blisses, twinkling eyes,
And by these tenderest, milky sovereignties—
These tenderest, and by the nectar-wine[.]  (II, 756-60)

In spite of the imaginative address, Endymion's eyes are cast closely, again, over discrete items of her body ("face", "lips", "eyes") which are specified with demonstrative pronouns ("this", "those", "these"), and, further, such physicality is still intensified by epithets to indicate such sensuous pleasure as "soft", "slippery", and "milky". Hence Endymion's gazing view makes her "too ethereal" figure rather lascivious and vulgar. Many critics have ever harshly attacked these lines as a blemish on the metaphysical theme of the poem; it "offends taste without raising the imagination, and it reveals a plainly impossible foundation for dignified passion" (R. Bridges), or it is "something like a caricature of the sprightly, chatty style of Hunt" (W. J. Bate, 186). But the excess of sensory pleasure, disfiguring the ethereality of beauty as they say, still illustrates a significant aspect of Keatsian aesthetics: there is an unsteady dialectical relationship between the essence of Cynthia, who has the supremacy to sublimate Endymion's self, and his earthly consciousness, which tends to see her figure as an erotic object. The nature of the Goddess is, as C. J. Rzepka states, "an ontological oxymoron", an amalgamated entity of spirituality and materiality, or immortality and earthliness.

Such ambivalence of Endymion's perception sometimes leads him to the vexation concerning his precarious self, especially when he feels excluded from heavenly experiences and fails to define them. In Book II, before he reaches the bower of Adonis, he wanders off around the "dusky empire" (II, 224) in the dim
underworld, where he witnesses various uncanny objects, such as silver grots, sapphire columns, and a hundred waterfalls. He gasps with reverence at their pomp and mystery, but also feels their stiff, cold texture which is "past the wit / Of any spirit to tell" (II, 249-50). This consciousness of alienation presses upon him more heavily when he gets to the "fair shrine" (II, 260) of Diana (Cynthia); at the very moment he touches his forehead "against the marble cold" in order to make sure its Elysian magnificence, he realizes "silence dead, / Roused by his whispering footsteps" (II, 267-8).

There, when new wonders ceased to float before  
And thoughts of self came on, how crude and sore  
The journey homeward to habitual self! (II, 274-6)

Failing to experience an ecstatic sense of affinity with the marble, his delicate feeling sorely receives its deathly coldness which forces him back to the "habitual self". Ironically it is when he realizes the frustration of his involvement in ethereal objects that the self comes to his mind. This paradox takes places again at the end of Book II; after witnessing the completion of love between Adonis and Venus, he hopes for Cynthia's coming-up though knowing that he is still excluded from her blessing, and tries to have an imaginative meeting with her in a bower.

O known Unknown from whom my being sips  
Such darling essence, wherefore may I not  
Be ever in these arms? (II, 739-41)

In this passage we see an unstable state of his identity in its relation to the Goddess; in spite of the desire to submit himself to her maternal grace, indulged in oral pleasure ("sip" brings to mind a baby sucking its mother's breast), he fails to do so because he is crucially aware of his sipping "being", or the self
which imagines sipping, making the Goddess an object for his sensory experience. Thus faced with the ontologically oxymoronic Being, his self is also suspended between habitual and ethereal, or conscious and self-destroying.

Endymion's hardship not only brings to light the possible impotence of Negative Capability but, more crucially for him, leads to the problem of reflective understanding of it. The dire invocation "O known Unknown" expresses his (and of course Keats's) cognitive dilemma; he knows that she is, but not what she is. This dilemma is the kind in which the way of "interpreting" Cynthia is the most serious issue. In spite of the strife to grasp her supernatural, elusive visions, he cannot escape the self which "habitually" perceives them, or imprisons them in the realms of concept and visible imagery.

There are some scenes in which, with the impossibility of self-destroying unity with the Goddess, Endymion tries to get involved in her world by objectifying it from a "linguistic" perspective. His first encounter with her has occurred in his sleep, before the story itself begins, and after awakening he attempts in vain to explain to Peona, his sister, how blissful it has been. He is grieved that it is "such a dream that never tongue, [...] /[...] /Could figure out and to conception bring / All I beheld and felt" (I, 574-8), and, reflecting upon Cynthia's infinite benediction, he feels he "would rather be struck dumb / Than speak against this ardent listlessness" because "it might bless / The world with benefits unknowingly" (I, 824-7. Italics mine.) And not only Endymion but even Cynthia, in the response to his address, laments that she cannot fully convey the vision of the ethereal world with "human words"; replying to him, she prays that their union be realized and promises to him that "I will tell thee stories of the sky, / And breathe thee whispers of its minstrelsy" (II, 812-3), but the reality is:
[... ] Oh, dearth
Of human words! Roughness of mortal speech!
Lisping empyrean will I sometimes teach
Thine honeyed tongue [...]

(II, 817-820)

Her despair at the lack of words is definitely shared by Endymion, suggesting that the failure of attaining empyrean conditions comes from the limit of language in which mortals are confined. Here we could alter our view from the former dialectical polarity between materiality and spirituality to another one between "speakable" and "unspeakable"; Endymion can speak of what cannot spiritualize him, while he cannot speak of what elevates him beyond materiality. A good example of the former is his prying description of her body like "the most soft completion of thy face, / Those lips, O slippery blisses, twinkling eyes", in which her celestial beauty is weakened all the more because he expresses it with a stack of material words. The latter is once and for all indicated by the very last event, in which, the moment Endymion and Cynthia synthesized ascend into the sky, he is denied even an occasion to count her instant kisses ("Before three swiftest kisses he had told, / They vanished far away!", IV, 1001-2), and we are only left with an abrupt conclusion that they have gone beyond our intellectual boundary.

We need to situate the problem of this "rhetorical action" in the wider context of Romantic epistemology. The primary dream of meeting the Goddess, which is the motive for his journey, serves as the transcendent origin of his sterile approach to her in his quest, but his attempt to capture her essence is made only by producing ex post signs in order to give secondary, temporal value to the primal experience of rapture in that dream. With the fatal sense of belatedness, Endymion repeats making an "allegorical sign", to borrow Paul de Man's term, which "refer[s] to
another sign that precedes it", but which itself "consist[s] only in
the repetition [...] of a previous sign with which it can never
coincide" (207). What Endymion actually does is not to verify
the presence of Cynthia as a metaphysical Being, but to reveal
that she exists at the horizon where words and images can hardly
seize her. While, according to de Man, a "symbolical" view of-
fers modes of empathetic union with external objects, the mode
of allegory clarifies the fictiveness of that union and leads us to
admit that it is something postulated only in rhetorical terms.
Though Endymion's final synthesis with Cynthia draws the kernel
of the poem forcibly back to the general Romantic symbolism,
the process of his pursuing her illuminates its usually repressed
aspect, that is, the impossibility of that symbolism, and "renounc
[es] the nostalgia and the desire to coincide, [establishing] its
language in the void of this temporal difference." (de Man, 207)
The sharp consciousness of this "void", which is clearly Keats's
own but is thematized within the story, makes Endymion a self-
critical myth concerning its representative method.

3 The Predicament of Keats's Self
The problem of verbalizing also drags Keats the narrator into
the similar predicament, in terms of how to envision the myth it-
self. We find the role of a choral prophet places him in the un-
stable position, again, between empirical and cognitive, or in this
case, between direct presentation and commentarial narration. In
a general discussion on subjectivity in Romanticism, Abrams says
that "a poem is disguised self-revelation, in which its creator,
'visibly invisible,' at the same time expresses and conceals him-
self." (272) The assertion and negation of self coincide in this
remark, mystifying the difficulty the poet has in apprehending his
self in terms of subject/object scheme. What I am going to do
in this section is to explain, by picking up some critical
occasions in which this mystification is disillusioned by Keats's own reflection upon the act of narrating, how the structure of self is made in relation to the myth he makes.

In a scene of Panic festivity in Book I, he becomes one of its participants and begins to describe its lively performance. But in the middle of the revelry of dancing and piping, he suddenly implores the muse to inspire him to relate it successfully: "O kindly muse, let not my weak tongue falter / In telling of this goodly company" (I, 128-129). There is a similar happening in Book III, just when the pompous banquet is to be held in celebration of the release of all lovers from Circe. Here also an unexpected passage is inserted to expose the poet's uneasiness about his lisping speech; "Oh, 'tis a very sin / For one so weak to venture his poor verse / In such a place as this" (III, 937-9). These temporary digressions are carried out in a form of "parabasis", an inserted narration which suspends the sequence of the drama and gives the audience distancing effects. The choral speech spoils its immediacy, being pulled down from the dramatized stage to a field of self-reference. These examples imply that such a "linguistic disillusionment" tends to occur in the very culminating moments of visionary experience, turning into an irony because the poet is stirred by anxiety about the ability to authenticate such moments with his own terms. What is important is that the recognition of the limit of poetical words is, as I have discussed, thematized in Endymion's frustration with Cynthia. Evidently Keats as well as Endymion flinches at the "dearth of human words" in describing her figure, and there we can find "meta-dramatic" aspects of Endymion which throw light on the limit of its design of presentation.

This disruptive consciousness also results in a crisis of poethood; of his status in impersonating one of the legendary poets who, resorting to Apollo as their origin, have ever related
mythic tales. A part of the reasons why Keats calls the poem a "trial" of his creativity is his latent sense of inferiority toward great poets in past ages. Once in a letter to his friend, speculating on what are "the seeds from which any one sentence [of Endymion] sprung", he mentions "the eternal Being, the Principle of beauty", and then adds with a dash, "— the Memory of great Men"\(^\text{12}\), by which he means prominent poets, from ancient Greek ones (Homer and Ovid) to English national ones (Spenser, Shakespeare and Milton). His reverence for such great poetic Minds also appears in many invocative remarks in the poem ("the grandeur of the dooms / We have imagined for the mighty dead" (I, 20-1), "[t]he mighty ones who have made eternal day / For Greece and England" (II, 253), and "Muse of my native land! Loftiest Muse!" (IV, 1)). By the direct address to them the poet expects to put himself in the transcendent area of the myth creation, holding against the anxiety of being excluded from it. He confesses in the preface to the poem, "I hope I have not in too late a day touched the beautiful mythology of Greece, and dulled its brightness: for I wish to try once more, before I bid it farewell." The great humility toward ancient myth suggests his vitality to revive and internalize it, and at the same time a hidden psychological distance from its influence as well.

This tension is found in the following quotation, in which, describing Endymion's erotic caressing of Cynthia during his second dream, Keats stops to speculate upon how he could celebrate it, and then, makes an invocation with a sense of diffidence about his poetic ability again:

O fountained hill! Old Homer's Helicon,
That thou wouldst spout a little streamlet o'er
These sorry pages! Then the verse would soar
And sing above this gentle pair, like lark
Anxious about "these sorry pages", Keats tries to persuade himself of being bestowed with the aid of "Helicon", an emblematic source of poetic powers. But soon he awakes to find his inadequacy and laments that "there is no old power left to steep / A quill immortal in their joyous tears." (II, 731-2) Here, as is the case with the other invocative remarks, Keats's consciousness happens to appear in two ways; it is directed not only toward the grand figure of imaginary Helicon but toward "these" pages just in front of him, the very material upon which words are being written at that moment. Here occurs an internal conflict between the mythic drama and the literary text in the same space; although his poetry, he says, would spontaneously "soar / and sing" with the inspiration of Helicon (as if exemplifying the creed, poetry "must create itself"), it is his own practical writing that enables him to continue to produce such a vision. The passage above illustrates that the poetic experience he refers to is disfigured by its own textuality, and hence, as Endymion is obsessed with the sense of "habitual self" in the intercourse with Cynthia, so the ideal prophet here is put on the verge of being reduced to a man of letters.

About a hundred lines later, we see a division caused by a halt of the story (interlude), between the myth he writes and the transcendent one as its origin. After presenting a pathetic but fruitless dialogue between Endymion and Cynthia (II, 739-824), he inserts a reflective passage (II, 827-853), asking readers to have sympathy with distressed Endymion. There he begins to justify the protagonist's tough quest and relieve fretted readers by explicating the story's nature as an unblemished legend:

\[
[t...]
'tis a ditty
Not of these days, but long ago 'twas told
The tale of Endymion is that which has been given birth to in the prehistoric age by "a cavern wind", "the forest", "a sleeping lake", and "a poet". In the temple of Phoebus (Apollo), that imaginary poet energizes and transforms the tale from a "ditty" into an eternal legend by singing "the story up into the air, / Giving it universal freedom." (II, 838-839) But the reference to this legend is soon finished and Keats goes back to his own narration by saying "Now turn we to our former chroniclers" (II, 854). The "chroniclers", including himself, are clearly distinguished from the poet who gives the story universal freedom, in that the formers are ranked as historical individuals who have ever attempted to reproduce, edit, and hand down the myth for centuries, while the prehistoric poet gives to it a self-sufficient, atemporal quality entirely cut out of the dramatic space and sequence.

Here a peculiar reversal takes place between figure and ground; in this interlude, the legend of Endymion, having deeply lain under Keats's consciousness of myth-making, is "foregrounded" against Endymion (the figure). But this legend as only a "ditty" here is one rigidly framed by the poem, not precedent to it in its structure, and the narrator finds that he actually can take no measure to get in contact with it except by resuming his own stressful account; "turn[ing] to our former chroniclers". Thus this momentary break in the drama clarifies the temporal, sequential character of narrative actions he is obliged to continue to confirm the original myth, which grounds other tales like Endymion.
made by chroniclers, but is never grounded or possessed of any inherent quality to fulfill the condition of its being, except by those historical poets' narration in a referential way.

Near the climax of the story, there comes out in the most protruding way Keats's authorial consciousness, which prevents the story from being carried out so smoothly as he has intended. When Endymion's journey is about to reach its final stage by accepting the Indian maiden, Cynthia's mortal double, she suddenly claims to be "forbidden" (IV, 752) his love for uncertain reasons. With "no word returned" (IV, 764) to it Endymion wanders with her into the valleys, "lovelorn, silent, wan" (IV, 764); he is now faced with the deadlock of his quest and sunk into a "wordless" plight. At this moment the narrator intervenes by uttering a lament that "Truth" has not been achieved yet, the truth without which Endymion would have already been "enskied":

Endymion! Unhappy! It nigh grieves
Me to behold thee thus in last extreme—
Enskied ere this but truly that I deem
Truth the best music in a first-born song. (IV, 770-3)

This pitiful address fills in the void of the dialogue between Endymion and the maiden, suggesting he now encounters the last conflict before the climax. But more significantly, this intrusion can be considered to make up for the shortage of the narrator's own words, or the difficulty of how to portray Endymion's further actions to overcome this predicament. Here, "[o]bviously it is Keats", S. M. Sperry argues, "who is most of all unhappy embarrassed by the tangled involvement of his narrative" (82), suffering from the dearth of human words. What prevents Endymion from being "enskied" is, besides the thematic impasse of the story, just Keats's own anxiety in stammering out his own "truth" which would be achieved if he, as a choral persona, succeeded
in delivering "the best music [of the myth] in a first born song". So the abrupt reference to the "truth" implies his immaturity for comprehending not only the Truth of Endymion myth but also his internal struggle for it.

Conclusion

Keats finally mystifies the problem of the disruptive self and acquires his "Truth", thematically by realizing the synthesis between Endymion and Cynthia, and formally by filling in 4000 lines as he has planned. Despite what I have been discussing as self-critical aspects of Endymion, he was actually much more naive and enthusiastic in writing this poem, which would, in this sense, preserve its position in the orthodox paradigm of Romantic poetry in terms of the innocent affinity between self and myth. But I emphasize that the poem contains a dialectical strain between fervent impulse for transcendence and austere self-reflection, Idea and material, and a Romantic Keats and a narrating (writing) Keats. The concept of self could be a stumblingstone, rather than a touchstone as he thought, against the Fryeian Edenic myth to be recovered, suspending his imaginative enterprise and hence urging us to reconsider the criteria of the representative nature of Romantic Poetry.

Notes

4. The same as the Note 2.
6. Letters, to Benjamin Bailey, 8 October 1817, 27. Every quotation except the last one in this paragraph is from the same letter.
11. The idea of parabasis is owed to de Man; "Parabasis is understood as . . . what is called in English criticism the 'self-conscious narrator', the author's intrusion that disrupts the fictional illusion." (de Man, pp. 218-9).

Works Cited