The Apollonian and Dionysian Dialectics in John Keats’s Romance

Endymion

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Abstract

John Keats’s romance Endymion (1817) draws its materials from the mythological heritage which is variously deployed in Keats’s poetry at large. Actually, the whole body of the romance’s four books tells the widely known story of Endymion, the mythical shepherd who is said to see the moon-goddess, Cynthia, in his sleep, and, on waking, commits himself to the pursuance of his dream, which requires him to follow a labyrinthine journey across the earth, sea and air. In reality, the presence of myth in Endymion is felt not only thematically, but also through the different sets of imagery that map it out. This paper aims at elucidating how the imagery used in this romance reveals allusions and/or allegories, whether explicit or implicit, to the mythical Olympian gods, Apollo and Dionysus, who represent antagonistic drives that appear to be irreconcilable.

My principal objective is to show how Keats evinces a subtle attempt to blur such an opposition between Apollo and Dionysus, as part of his inclusive approach to the conceptualization of the ‘ideal’ and the ‘real’ that requires him to opt for a dialectical strategy which would allow him not to exclude any element of the seemingly contradictory aspects that both gods embody. The manifestation of this dialectics could be noticed in the poet’s amalgamation of the constituents of the ‘ideal’ with those of the ‘real’ that gives birth to a whole which seems to take on an organic character similar to Endymion’s symbiotic attachment to his idealized dream. Such an ‘organic whole’ is suggested in Endymion to be more idealized and, therefore, more exhaustive than the monolithic conception of the ‘ideal’ that totally excludes the ‘real’ from its canon. This means that the constitution of this ‘ideal organic whole’ is not made up of the refined characteristics and poised qualities that Apollo incarnates, but includes within it the very fragments of disorder, primitive instincts and excess which Dionysus stands for.

Before showing the pivotal role of the imagery used in Endymion in instrumentalizing such a dialectics, it is important to have a brief account about the functions of Apollo and Dionysus in Greek mythology. Most of the Apollonian attributes seem to belong to what is commonly considered to be beautiful aspects that are most of the time aspired for and
idealized by artists—the romantic poets in particular. In his book Aesthetic and Myth in the Poetry of Keats, Walter Evert offers a succinct illumination concerning the significance of the diverse positions that Apollo occupies in classical mythology:

As a god of astronomy, Apollo presides over the universal system of physical harmony; as a god of medicine, he maintains harmony among the physical elements of the human organism; as a god of the sun, he marks the passage of time and presides over the ripening of the fruits of the earth; as a god of song and poetry, he presides over the ripening of human intellect and brings it to comparable fruition in a harvest of harmonious expression. (31)

Whether he is a god of astronomy, medicine, sun, or poetry, Apollo is chiefly marked by a benevolent divine power that is translated in the ‘harmony’ he builds within the world he ‘presides over.’ In other words, Apollo’s character may indicate a predisposition, not abstinence, to share man’s world. Consequently, his fitness to assume a symbolic incarnation of the dialectics between the ideal and the real which Keats thematicizes in Endymion would seem quite appropriate. In a way, Apollo is apt to allegorize to the dream that bestows on Endymion the possibility to enjoy a ‘harmonious’ union with the goddess. Such an allegorical postulation may be consolidated with reference to Nietzsche’s consideration that "the Apollonian drive is manifested in an unconscious form in dreams." (Houlgate 186)

As for Dionysus, who is supposed to be the antithesis of Apollo, he is "the god of metamorphosis, the indefinable." (Brunel 298) Such a feature must be attributed to his mysterious character that is derived from his "crossing the frontier between life and death with such apparent ease"(300) along with his "effeminate appearance." (301) Dionysus’ contradiction that seems to delineate the Dionysian essence is reflected in the emblems attached to him. In contrast to "the fair world of Apollo, Dionysus is linked with Titanic and barbaric menace." (Lentricchia 43) As a matter of fact, this god is often associated with the dark side of human life that is deprecated given its obvious dissociation from the ‘fairness’ of the Apollonian dreamy world. Indeed, "the myths of Dionysus’s childhood and wanderings present him as a persecuted god: he is cut to pieces, cooked and eaten by the Titans, but he is always reborn." (Brunel 309) However, Dionysus’s subjection to the harsh aspects of the real world—that may correspond to Endymion’s often repulsed waking from his sleep—does not seem to impede him to devise other compensatory strategies that are conducive to imaginary realms which are not less soothing than the Apollonian dreamy world. Essentially,
immoderate indulgence into the satisfaction of the whimsical dictation of sensual appetites typifies Dionysus who becomes, accordingly, "the lord of love and wine, spilling over with life and energy." (Frye 56) Epitomizing man’s primitive instinctual drives, Dionysus seems to assume a metaphorical value that consists in exteriorizing the Apollonian dreamy world, though it is etherealized as an emblem of "order, form, everything that is fixed in a place"(56), such an Apollonian world is suggested to find its roots in the disruptive Dionysian energy with regards to the nature of Endymion’s own dream itself that is resonant with unlimited ecstatic rapture which Dionysus is said to experience in his life. As such, we can touch in Endymion a subtle unifying thread that subsumes the idealized Apollonian world within the generally-considered "feminine, subversive and nocturnal form of power of Dionysus.” (Brunel 313) At the same time, the anchorage of the Dionysian pursuance of intoxicating physical pleasure in its Apollonian counterpart could be accounted for Dionysus’s search for an alternative alleviation whose effect amounts to Apollo’s etherealized dreamy world.

In Endymion, this mutual interdependence that binds Apollo and Dionysus to each other is reflected in the imagery that Keats uses. Literally speaking, imagery consists in "vivid description of a visible object or scene. It also means figurative language [that] includes all varieties of simile, metaphor, hyperbole, and personification." (Roberts 281) Martin Gray adds also to imagery "all the words which refer to objects and qualities which appeal to the senses and feelings." (102) A study of the different figures of speech and stylistic ornaments that constitute the imagery used in Endymion may reveal the considerable difficulty in disentangling the image of Apollo and Dionysus from each other as if the poet were monumentalizing in the romance an undividable whole that is exclusive of neither of them. We can say that the poet’s peculiar dealing with the paradigm of light and darkness represents the most graspable incarnation of the Apollonian and Dionysian dialectics in Endymion. Departing from John Peck’s assertion that "in all poetry, light is positive and darkness is negative" (53), we might expect to find the idealized world of Apollo to be associated with light, whereas, the negatively-viewed realms of Dionysus to be connected to darkness. Our expectation may have already got its substance in the text of classical mythology itself that presents Apollo as the god of the sun, and Dionysus as the embodiment of ‘nocturnal form of power.’ In the case of Endymion, however, the matter differs substantially as light and its variables seem to possess, paradoxically, an inexplicable darkness that keeps intensifying steadily throughout the romance. Simultaneously, the shades of darkness are liable to acquire in Endymion an illuminating effect that may even exceed what full light offers. This destabilization of the strict chasm between light and darkness (or
let’s say between Apollo and Dionysus) appears to constitute a motif throughout the romance that seems to confer a symbolic structure on Endymion’s whole plot. Indeed, Martin Aske may have sensed the centrality of this symbolic structure when he argues that the chief means of unity in the romance lies in its imagery, not in the tale itself:

*Endymion* is, in Barthes’s words, ‘structured but decentred.’ If we are to locate a structure beyond – or rather constituted by – the text’s embellishments, I think it is this, the arabesque, which might help define the mode of Keats’s poem. (165)

Imagery associated with light and darkness seems to function as the best embodiment of such a stylistic ‘embellishment’ that imparts to *Endymion* an ‘arabesque’ design which sustains the Apollonian and Dionysian dialectics. From the very onset of the romance till its end, the fusion of light with darkness remains present and takes on particular significances that might give us insights into the hero’s (Endymion’s) gaining of a gradual apprehension of perfect truth that is inclusive of both Apollonian and Dionysian characteristics. In this regard, the first book of *Endymion* may offer a miniature of the whole romance with reference to the paradigm of light and darkness that start to function antagonistically and end as dialectically complementing each other. Actually, Endymion’s whole course follows a similar process. Upon waking from his sleep in which he dreams of the moon-goddess, Cynthia, he grows at first estranged from his immediate environment among his fellow shepherds as he senses a complete divorce between his idealized dream and reality. However, Endymion’s exclusion of his dream from reality does not linger, and turns, eventually, into a desire to pursue his dream in reality, which marks the development of Endymion’s inclusive approach in viewing opposites. This process of development is indicated metaphorically through the poet’s subtle amalgamation of light with Dionysian aspects and darkness with Apollonian features, which may justify the marked presence of figures of speech such as paradox, oxymoron and hyperbole not only in this miniaturized book but throughout *Endymion*. These figures of speech clearly play a fundamental role in drawing attention to the apparently incongruous union between light and Dionysus (who embodies darkness and its associations) on the one hand, and darkness and Apollo (who epitomizes light) on the other.

It may even be deduced that it is this tenacious amalgamation of light with darkness that leads Endymion to cease viewing the real world and his idealized dream antagonistically and to adopt, instead, a dialectical approach that is inclusive of both worlds. At first, there seems to exist a strong animosity between light and darkness that takes the shape of a warring
conflict between them. Then, this conflict develops gradually into a harmonious tie by the end of the first book which might help anticipate Endymion’s ultimate reaching of ecstatic apotheosis by the end of the romance when he finally unites with Cynthia, his ideal object. Before assuming such a harmony, neither light nor darkness appears to incarnate the perfect ideal that Endymion may long for, given their pernicious interpenetrating fusion that seems to deter any possible apprehension of a light that is spared from the traces of darkness, or of a complete darkness in which light cannot send a glimmer. As a matter of fact, the suggested strife between light and darkness does not bring about Endymion’s affiliation to either of the two sides because Endymion seems to be eager that light might be wrested from darkness and, consecutively, darkness should be removed from light before he could be affiliated with light which, as Walter Evert maintains, represents "the single image most readily identifiable with both Apollo and Cynthia." (99) This entails that Endymion demands that light and darkness be excluded from each other before they be in rivalry. However, his aim seems to remain frustrated in as much as the individuality of the personified light and darkness is lost due to their obdurate preservation of interwoven characteristics till the end.

If we take into account the presence of light in *Endymion*, we can notice that its anchorage in darkness is metaphorically conveyed through allegories to certain aspects that Dionysus symbolizes in mythology. In this context, Martin Gray holds that "all interpretation of literature, any way of understanding a work as containing meanings other than its literal surface can be called allegorical" (11) In *Endymion*, allegorical instances to Dionysus could be found in the description of the altar around which Endymion and the shepherds gather:

> For 'twas the morn: Apollo’s upward fire  
> Made every eastern cloud a silvery pyre  
> Of brightness so unsullied, that therein  
> A melancholy spirit well might win  
> Oblivion. (I.95-9)

In these lines, words like ‘fire,’ ‘silvery’ and ‘brightness’ coupled with the allusion to Apollo in the first line function as a register of light that seems at first to exclude any Dionysian trace of darkness from the scene. However, the poet’s allegory to Dionysus could be detected from the use of hyperbole that serves to exaggerate the strength of light which reaches an intoxicating proportion. The ‘so unsullied’ intensity of light is suggested to be tantamount to wine in effect as it leads to ‘oblivion.’ Through personifying ‘melancholy’ and ‘oblivion,’ the poet introduces the latter as a boon that might be no less important than what Cynthia
represents for Endymion. Actually, the verb ‘to win’ might evidence that oblivion is a bet for which the personified melancholy, backed by intense light, fights against any rival. Implicitly, this defeated rival is indicated to be no more than Apollo himself who embodies knowledge rather than oblivion. Indeed, in Keats’s epic *Hyperion* (1819), which celebrates the ascendency of Apollo to godhead, Apollo makes his renowned assertion "knowledge enormous makes a God of me." (III.113)

The implied defeat of the Apollonian knowledge by the personified oblivion may entail the surpassing power of Dionysus whose symbolic association with wine makes him linked also with insurmountable intensity that exceeds any power. In this context, Pierre Brunel elaborates on the belligerent zeal of Dionysus against Apollo:

Dionysus can be understood only in relation to his solar antagonist, Apollo, the god of measure, appearance and dreams. The latter symbolizes the strictly Hellenic spirit confronted by the fearsome Dionysian power, which is sensed as foreign but, in fact, is deeply buried in the furthest depths of the Greek soul. (872)

Endymion has not yet learnt that the dark sides that of Dionysus are, in their essence, ‘deeply buried in the furthest depths’ of the very Apollonian world which Endymion hankers for. Endymion only conceives an inexplicable riddle that keeps swelling before him concerning the gradual assumption of light of Dionysian dark sides such as intensity. Rather than signifying Apollo’s triumph over Dionysus, the intense light that is expressed metonymically through Apollo’s fire which makes ‘every eastern cloud a silvery pyre’ indicates, paradoxically, the Dionysian dominion over every Apollonian aspect. Consequently, light is suggested to be stripped from Apollo and to become the property of Dionysus who is implied, then, to take over light in addition to his possession of darkness. Dionysus’s ownership of light and darkness can be derived from Endymion’s dramatization of the intensity of light that surrounds the altar:

And now, as deep into wood as we
Might mark a lynx’s eye, there glimmered light
Fair faces and a rush of garments white,
Plainer and plainer showing, till at last
Into the widest alley they all passed,
Making directly for the woodland altar. (I.122-7)
Proportional to the increasing darkness that is deictically expressed through the phrase ‘deep into wood’ is an ample extension of light which reaches the potency of ‘a lynx’s eye.’ In fact, the *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* informs us that "this wild animal of the cat family is noted for its excellent sight." In mythology, the lynx functions as a symbol of Dionysus whose inclusiveness of light and darkness accounts for his ambivalent character that is reflected in the animals that form part of the god’s retinue. On the one hand, there are the goat, the donkey and the bull, representing fertility; on the other, the lion, the lynx and the panther, representing murderous ferocity. (Brunel 312, italics mine)

In combining the lynx’s ‘murderous ferocity’ with the light that is inferred from the power of the lynx’s sight, the poet is perhaps seeking to highlight Endymion’s growing fear of light that seems to cease to emblematize for him the ideal world of Apollo and Cynthia who are the initial owners of light. Upon its fall into the trap of Dionysus, light seems to put on a new colour that is ‘foreign’ to it. Light now, though still illuminating, becomes mysteriously unintelligible as its mere ‘glimmer’ shows Endymion the semblance of ‘fair faces’ that seem only to tantalize his memory of the fairness of the moon-goddess he sees in his dream. Endymion appears to be unaware that these faces prophesy the oncoming revelation of his dream in his real world when he is going to achieve union with Cynthia while fully awake. The ‘fair faces’ that Endymion sees approaching the altar are wearing ‘garments white,’ a colour that might suggest their heavenly nature as angels who are giving Endymion a prophecy. In this respect, the element of prophecy that these ‘fair faces’ are implied to come with is a chief Apollonian characteristic in Greek mythology: "Apollo is supposed to have instructed mankind in the arts of foretelling future events." (Ricks 723) In addition, these faces maintain an Apollonian demeanour through their ‘plain’ appearance and their ‘passing in the widest alley’ as a sign of order and clarity that Apollo incarnates. However, Endymion seems to see only the Dionysian aspects in these ‘fair faces’ and excludes any Apollonian impression from them. Therefore, for Endymion light remains deeply anchored in the dark sides that Dionysus embodies. Light’s immersion in Dionysian darkness is clear from the description of the vase that the priest holds: "From his right hand there swung a vase, milk-white, / Of mingled wine, out-sparkling generous light." (I.153-4) In presenting wine, which functions as a main epitome of Dionysus, as ‘out-sparkling generous light,’ the poet may draw attention to the effect of the inclusion of light within the Dionysian orbit. Given the association of Dionysus with "intensity and mystical intoxication"(Brunel 105), the direct
corollary of the immersion of light in the Dionysian world means the excessive vigour and mysticism that light assumes thereafter, an excess which is suggested to far exceed the normal Apollonian ‘generous light.’

Besides, the intensity of light may bring forth ecstatic rapture to Endymion. Such an ecstasy might allegorize to "the cult of Dionysus in ancient Greece which had a cathartic function. It temporarily delivered people from their civic tradition, and at the same time gave them free rein to their cruel instincts." (Brunel 313) The cathartic dimension that Endymion’s ecstasy engenders is related primordially to the revelation of Cynthia as a result of the intensifying light which seems to lead him to experience the elixir of his most primitive sexual desires that are suggested to be accompanied with the deliverance of his ‘cruel instincts.’ Upon Cynthia’s revelation, Endymion’s rising sexual fancy is evocative of the Dionysian madness which is "a sign of mystical intoxication." (108) Endymion’s ‘mystical’ satiation of his sexual desire seems to implant within him enough courage to acknowledge to his sister that the revelation of Cynthia resuscitates his deeply-seated erotic impulses which he qualifies to be "the darkest" (I.631) he has ever experienced. At the same time, light seems to include the same degree of mysticism as darkness inasmuch as growing light grants Endymion, the mortal, full perception of the moon-goddess, Cynthia: "I saw emerge / The loveliest moon that ever silvered." (I.591-2) Hence, both light and darkness appear to assume the same mystical function for Endymion whose madness leads him, accordingly, to embrace the Dionysian oblivion that culminates in making his speech sound like a delirium. Actually, delirium is mythologically associated with Dionysus whose "delirium is seen as an archaic force, rather than a calculated one." (Brunel 314) It seems that such ‘an archaic force’ is responsible for entrenching Endymion’s conviction that the more intense light is, the more implicated darkness would be in it:

............... ........... she did soar  
So passionately bright, my dazzled soul  
Commingling with her argent spheres did roll  
Through clear and cloudy, even when she went  
At last into a dark and vapoury tent. (I.593-9)

During Cynthia’s revelation to Endymion, light and darkness become so intertwined that they develop into a disjoined whole which seems to cause differences between them to be hardly recognizable. This indistinctness could be revealed through the use of oxymoron, "a figure of speech that consists in the yoking together of two expressions which are
semantically incompatible, so that in combination they can have no conceivable literal reference to reality.” (Leech 132) However, upon scrutiny, the poet seems to resort to oxymoron to highlight the complementariness that exists between light and darkness, and, by implication, between the symbolic associations attached to Apollo and those linked with Dionysus. Therefore, Cynthia’s revelation of her divine ‘argent spheres,’ that seems at first sight over-shining with light, comes down to Endymion in a simultaneously ‘clear and cloudy’ shape. Her amalgamation of clarity with cloudiness might imply a duplicate character whose disposition is receptive, rather than discreet, of opposites. Because this receptivity emanates from a divine power who is Cynthia, Endymion’s growing confusion of identifying light from darkness seems to assume gradually a prophetic function whose purpose is to indoctrinate Endymion that his association of light with darkness, far from being a mere delirium, is rather, in essence, a prophetic glimpse that gives him insights into the divine world of Cynthia which is inclusive of light and darkness. As a matter of fact, the revelation of Cynthia may mark the turning point for Endymion whose process of indoctrination begins with his increasing awareness of the implication of light and darkness in each other. The bridging of the gap between light and darkness, which implies blurring the boundaries that separate Apollo from Dionysus, is dramatized through Endymion’s gradual recognition of his inability to distinguish between them. Hence, the goddess’s preservation of light even when she moves to the ‘dark and vapoury tent’ may symbolically anticipate Endymion’s gradual apprehension of the real nature of light and darkness that constitute a unified whole that is inclusive of Apollonian and Dionysian characteristics.

The darkness to which the goddess enters is emphasized through the cumulative effect produced by the double use of the adjectives ‘dark’ and ‘vapoury.’ The degree of darkness is intensified in coupling ‘vapour’ with it, which further seems to dim Endymion’s sight of her. Notwithstanding this fact, Endymion is surprised by the goddess’s sudden emergence within an excessive light that seems to reach the apex of its intensity. Endymion’s suggested stupefaction with this occurrence might imply that he sees in it a veritable miracle. It is only through his sister, Peona, that Endymion starts to, what we might call, ‘naturalize’ such a miraculous immersion of light in the depth of darkness. Indeed, Peona expounds on the poeticization of the organic link that binds light to darkness. The imagery she opts for to highlight this bond may illustrate her intention to rectify Endymion’s perception of light and darkness so that he might apprehend in their fusion both Apollonian and Dionysian dimensions:

[...] Before the crystal heavens darken,
I watch and dote upon the silver lakes
Pictured in western cloudiness, that takes
The semblance of gold rocks and bright gold sands. (I.739-42)

Here, the picture Peona draws is much poeticized as it includes a subjective view of a universe in which there is a mating of light with darkness in a way that might be unknown to Endymion’s hitherto understanding. We can envisage in these lines a whole process precipitating in nature that leads, ultimately, to miraculous effects which are no less mysterious than the persistent growing light that still emerges from Cynthia when she enters darkness. Essentially, mystery is related to the apparent incongruity between the process of change that is taking place in nature and its resultant effect. The process indicates a gradual increase of light that radiates the ‘western cloudiness’ which is introduced in sculpturesque terms as a tableau (or an urn, if we want to use the jargon of Keats’s Ode on a Grecian Urn) on which ‘silver lakes’ are ‘pictured’ and both ‘rocks’ and ‘sands’ assume the brightness of the ‘gold’ colour.

The intimations of a growing light that this process implies give birth, paradoxically, to a darkness that affects the ‘crystal heavens.’ This contradiction between the process (increase of light) and effect (darkness) might be allegorical to Dionysus’s ambivalent character: "he is a god who spent his time in disguise or changing his shape […] He moves from one shape to another, becomes a ghost, a reflection or even two people." (Brunel 301) Within the Dionysian frame of mind, it comes as no surprise that differences between light and darkness cease to function antagonistically and to interact, instead, dialectically with each other. However, the poet seems not to exclude allegories to Apollo in highlighting this dialectics he builds between light and darkness. The qualification of ‘heavens’ in terms of ‘crystal’ may connote an emitting of superb brightness that cannot be tarnished whatsoever in the same way Cynthia’s going into darkness does not impede the miraculous springing of light from there. The ever-presence of light in the midst of darkness might metaphorically parallel the cyclical alternation of day and night, a cycle of which Apollo is a symbol: "He is the charioteer of the sun; he drives his chariot every day through the circuit of heavens, and at night sinks below the waves to rest." (Ricks 722-3) Therefore, the apparent disjunction that we have deduced in the process of increasing light that yields to the ‘darkening’ of ‘crystal heavens’ may turn into a harmonious consonance when viewed from an Apollonian prism too. Even the inferred paradox that exists in the amalgamation of ‘crystal heavens’ (that is suggestive of a never-ending light) with the process of ‘darkening’ would stop functioning if
we were to take into account the Apollonian cyclical nature of day and night. This might explain the assumption of darkness of Apollonian characteristics that are reflected in the imagery used in *Endymion*.

A meticulous reading of the romance may reveal that darkness is not always evocative of Dionysus but it also allegorizes to Apollonian symbolic associations in the same way light is. For example, we see *Endymion* poeticize the gentle coming of night through the image of a singing nightingale:

As does the nightingale, up-perched high,  
And cloistered among cool and bunched leaves –  
She [the nightingale] sings but to her love, nor e’er conceives  
How tip-toe Night holds back her dark-grey hood. (I.828-31)

The poet has probably capitalized the initial letter of ‘Night’ to underline its specificity. The unnoticeability that is derived from the ‘tip-toe’ silencing of the nightingale’s song might constitute the main distinguishing virtue that typifies this ‘Night.’ The effect of this tacit unnoticeability is to highlight the implication of Night in the song of the nightingale. Although the bird stops singing, the ‘tip-toe’ arrival of Night implies a similar tip-toe cessation of the song that is hardly recognizable as if this cessation were, in its essence, a continuation of the nightingale’s song. Hence, like Apollo who ”let[s] his divinity o’erflowing die / In music, through the vales of Thessaly” (I.143-4), the personified Night is suggested to make the nightingale’s song dissipated ‘among cool and bunched leaves’ without the bird’s awareness. Moreover, the protective aspect of night is expressed symbolically through its ‘holding back (controlling) of her [the bird’s] dark-grey hood’ which might contain an implicit amorous relationship that binds Night to the sleeping bird. While sleeping, the bird is controlled by the benign personified Night who keeps vigil to grant enough warmth to the nightingale. Darkness assumes the metaphor of such warmth through presenting the cover (expressed synecdochically through ‘the hood’) that enwraps the bird in ‘dark-grey’ terms. Inferably, the thick layers of darkness are presented to be at the origin of the relishing warmth that the sleeping nightingale is suggested to find.

Hence, far from being a source of fear, darkness seems to assume the same reassuring quality that light is generally considered to afford. Sometimes, the poet even presents darkness in more idealized terms than light. Indeed, *Endymion* dramatizes the security he imbibes from darkness when he tells his sister about his adventurous accession to the divine realms of Cynthia:
I felt up-mounted in that region
Where falling stars dart their artillery forth,
......................................................
Felt too, I was not fearful, nor alone,
But lapped and lulled. (I.641-2 / 44-5)

The safety that accompanies Endymion’s reaching of Cynthia’s ‘region’ may allegorize to Apollo, "the god of divination, or penetration into divine secrets." (Brunel 105) The concomitant darkness that goes with such a penetration seems to have the same protective function for Endymion as it does for the sleeping nightingale. Actually, the adjectives ‘lapped’ and ‘lulled’ may be evocative of a peaceful baby-like sleep within the mother’s bosom whose superb warmth is suggested to entrench in Endymion the serenest feelings he has ever known. In addition, Endymion’s elaboration on his feeling while being ‘up-mounted’ to Cynthia’s divine world might be also allegorical to Apollo with whom "two principal activities are associated: prophecy and lyricism." (105) Endymion’s gaining of growing prophetic insights could be evidenced in his claim to Peona by the end of the first book of the romance: "thou shalt see, / Dearest of sisters, what my life shall be; / What a calm round of hours shall make my days." (I.981-3)

What Endymion prophesies reveals his extension of the peaceful divine realm of Cynthia (a realm that he previously enjoys at night when even stars seem to ‘fall’ so that darkness would be complete) to ‘[his] days.’ In other words, Endymion prophesies that he is going to be lavished with the splendid ‘calmness’ and the tranquillity of the divine care of Cynthia day and night alike. In fact, this prophecy comes true by the end of the romance in the fourth book when he fulfils his idealized dream while fully awake. Upon fulfilling his dream of uniting with the goddess, the poet now bathes the scene with light:

And as she [Cynthia] spake, into her face there came
Light, as reflected from a silver flame:
Her long black hair swelled ampler, in display
Full golden; in her eyes a brighter day
Dawned blue and full of light. (IV.982-6)

Seeing the goddess in his dreams while being voluptuously enwrapped in the darkest shades of darkness precedes, then, Endymion’s perception of her while being ‘displayed’ in the ‘full light’ of ‘a bright day.’ Besides, the element of prophecy in Endymion is coupled with the
marked use of lyricism in which "there is an expression of a state of mind or a process of thought and feeling." (Gray 89) Lyrical language seems to permeate both light and darkness as far as Endymion’s process of apprehending Cynthia’s presence is concerned. Roughly, the same ‘thoughts and feelings’ that come across Endymion’s mind in the depths of darkness when he is granted revelations of the goddess characterize his reaction to seeing Cynthia in full light by the end of the romance. In both cases, his total sensual response to the sight of Cynthia seems to reach its zenith as to lead, paradoxically, to a complete dissolution that may contain allegory to Dionysian universe which "must be viewed as a sea of forces in perpetual motion, a world that ceaselessly destroys and recreates itself, like Dionysus himself who is always born and dying." (Brunel 873)

At the moments of Cynthia’s revelation to him in dark settings, Endymion is suggested to experience a similar process that Dionysus is said to undergo. Endymion metaphorically presents love as an integral part of "entanglements [and] enthralments / [that are] self-destroying, leading, by degrees, / To the chief intensity." (I.798-800) This combination between self-destruction and intensity seems to be oxymoronic given the general association of self-destruction with death and intensity with absorption in life. However, the yoking of these apparent opposites together might indicate that Endymion does not conceive it a mortification of his primitive senses when he feels himself dissolved during the revelation of the goddess to him enticingly. Rather, for him the apparent death that follows his intense succumb to his instinctual drives is but a holistic point that marks the acme of sensual pleasure:

I was distracted; madly did I kiss
The wooing arms which held me, and give
My eyes at once to death – but ‘tis to live,
To take in draughts of life from the gold fount
Of kind and passionate looks. (I.653-7)

Endymion’s intense involvement in sensually apprehending Cynthia’s apparition is metaphorically likened to the effect of intoxicating wine that engenders his excessive indulgence in life. As a matter of fact, his ‘giving his eyes at once to death’ which, paradoxically, results to life could be read in metaphorical terms as connoting Endymion’s masturbatory ecstasy produced out of the seductive form of Cynthia that is revealed in his dream. By extension, Endymion’s poeticization of the thick layers of darkness that provide him with a magnificent cover which includes allegories to Apollo seems to be ascribed to
Endymion’s finding in darkness an outlet that offers him the possibility to fully live out his primitive senses in a Dionysian manner. Thus, even in the last scene of the romance when he is allowed to see Cynthia in the full light of the day, Endymion "vanishe[s] far away" (IV.1002) with her after undergoing "a blissful swoon" (IV.999) which might bespeak Endymion’s immersion in his intoxicating pleasure that is still capable of making him ‘give his eye at once to death.’

Whether in light or in darkness, Endymion experiences the same dissolution that instead of leading him to death bestows him more intense life. Throughout this process of Endymion’s ecstatic experience, Apollonian and Dionysian allegories never cease overlapping so that the traces of both mythological gods are most of the time immersed within each other in the whole body of imagery that is used to describe Endymion’s course of gradual apprehending the truth of his dream. In this respect, we might construe the frequent use of the image of blue light in the romance as a symbolic incarnation of the effect produced by such an overlap. Essentially, blue light seems to cover the whole gamut of light and darkness, which may foreground inclusiveness as the main metaphorical function of this blue light. Indeed, the use of blue light may connote the harmonious intersection of Apollo and Dionysus in several respects. If we take Endymion’s qualification of the bed on which he sees himself in dream succumbing to the total satisfaction of his erotic impulses, we notice that he describes it as "the lushest blue-bell bed." (I.631, italics mine) The fact that what Endymion sees is a dream may contain in itself allegory to Apollo who among other things is "the god of dreams." (Ricks 576) Therefore, the colour blue here seems to play a pivotal role in highlighting the nature of the scene presented to us in the same manner changes of lightning on theatrical stages are auxiliary in grasping scenes. The blue colour of the scene may help sustain its belonging to Endymion’s dream world. In addition to the Apollonian traces in that scene, the use of superlative form ‘lushest’ to describe such a ‘blue-bell bed’ includes allegory to Dionysus too. The adjective ‘lush’ which is usually associated with the thick growth of plants is evocative of Dionysus who is said to "give plants vigour and growth." (Brunel 310) Actually, the term ‘blue-bell’ in itself is a name of "a plant with blue or white flowers shaped like a bell." (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary)

The recurrence of the colour blue in Endymion continues to entertain Apollonian and Dionysian features. Endymion’s invocation of the goddess to cover him with her divine light day and night includes his explicit recognition of the powerful aspect of blue light and its limitless superiority to the ordinary light of day:

........................................... O meekest dove,
Of heaven! O Cynthia, ten times bright and fair!
From thy blue throne, now filling all the air,
Glance but one little beam of tempered light
Into my bosom, that the dreadful might
And tyranny of love be somewhat scared! (II.170-5, italics mine)

Clearly, Endymion’s invocation includes his helpless stipulation of the goddess to grant him even ‘one little beam’ of her divine light that diffuses her ‘blue throne’ whose magnitude ‘fills all the air.’ This search for divine light is again allegorical to Apollo for whom divinity is achieved only after his relentless pursuance of the ‘blue throne’ of divinities. Apollo’s restlessness to achieve divine knowledge may be illustrated in Hyperion when he addresses the shape of the goddess, Mnemosyne: "Goddess benign, point forth some unknown thing: / Are there not other regions than this isle? / What are the stars?" (III.95-7) Likewise, Endymion seems to be caught in the same Apollonian process that is indicated inchoately through his desire to be bestowed just ‘one beam’ of Cynthia’s light whose radiance is suggested to be ‘ten times brighter and fairer’ than this beam which Endymion longs for. However, the chief virtue of such a divine light that springs from Cynthia’s ‘blue throne’ is its ‘tempered’ quality. Although the poet does not tell us with what this light is tempered, we might guess that it is with darkness that Cynthia’s light is fused. This might explain Endymion’s reason behind getting a glimpse of the goddess’s light, a reason that revolves around his wish to shun ‘the dreadful might and tyranny of love.’ Endymion seems to allude to his own victimization by the light of the day which pitilessly deracines him from the peaceful dreams that he sees in the depths of darkness at nights with the frequent revelations of Cynthia to him.

Endymion seems to be certain that Cynthia’s blue light is, unlike common light which is exclusive of the nightly pleasures he experiences, is inclusive in nature. Consequently, Endymion prophesies that it is only when he is cocooned in ‘one little beam’ of Cynthia’s blue light that such an exclusive light of the day would be ‘scared’ so that Endymion could no longer conceive in the sensual pleasures of love a real ‘tyranny.’ Cynthia’s blue light implies, then, the extension of these ecstasies of Endymion’s erotic raptures to the light of the day instead of being confined to mere revelations at night. This desire to extend the nightly pleasures to the light of the day seems to include within it Endymion’s desire to transplant them from mere masturbatory fantasies that accompany the enticing revelations of the goddess at night to an actual performance of such fantasies. In this context, Barbara Johnson
ascertains that "masturbation is both a symbolic form of ideal union, since in it the subject and the object are truly one, and a radical alienation of the self from any contact with others. The union that would perfectly fulfil desire would also exclude the space of its very possibility." (xii) Thus, Johnson perhaps implies that only through a tangible contact with the desired object could one obtain an inclusive fulfilment of one’s desires. As such, the blue light that Endymion yearns for would epitomize the very locus of desire satisfaction. Hence, the anchorage of Cynthia’s blue light in the Dionysian excessive indulgence into the gratification of the senses would be, then, strongly suggested. In fact, Dionysus is associated with "the delicious ecstasy that is provoked by the breakdown of the principle of individual existence and the feeling of melting into the primitive One." (Brunel 872) Endymion is suggested to win that beam of blue light as he embraces this Dionysian ‘primitive One’ through acquiring a divine-like perception that allows him to see a marriage between light and darkness:

> Sharpening, by degrees, his appetite
> To dive into the deepest. Dark, nor light,
> The region; nor bright, nor sombre wholly,
> But mingled up. (II.220-3)

Endymion’s nascent divinity is indicated by a parallel increase in apprehending the real character of blue light that is inclusive of light and darkness. This process of welcoming blue light might be already indicated metaphorically through Endymion’s sensing of himself being guided by light and darkness: "day and night aid me along, / Like legioned soldiers.” (II.42-3) The simile that introduces Endymion’s personified guides (day and night) similar to ‘legioned soldiers’ might serve to underline the closely-knit connection that now binds them to each other in such a harmonious way that starkly contrasts Endymion’s initial conception of a warring enmity that exists between light and darkness. As ‘legioned soldiers’ day and night now constitute a joint league whose union is suggested to amount to the strength of blue light that emanates from Cythia’s divine power which is inclusive of light and darkness. Endymion’s inferred getting of glimpses of such an inclusive and divine blue light seems to equate him with Apollo through his assumption of divinity. Like Apollo who "attains divine status when he is made aware of his divinity by the goddess Mnemosyne" (Brunel 109), Endymion is suggested to gain a divine proportion thanks to Cynthia who seems to be intent on acquainting him with her inclusive blue light. Cynthia’s intervention might be grasped in instances such as that when he recognizes:

> Upon my ear a noisy nothing rings –
O let me once more hear the linnet’s note!
Before mine eyes thick films and shadows float –
O let me ‘noint them with the heaven’s light! (II.321-4)

The oxymoronic harnessing of the adjective ‘noisy’ with the negative pronoun ‘nothing’ that indicates obscurity may metaphorically parallel the paradox associated with Endymion’s desire to ‘anoint’ the ‘thick films’ and floating ‘shadows’ (that are suggestive of darkness) with ‘the heaven’s light.’ Endymion’s urge is conveyed in a religious context derived from the verb ‘anoint’ that consists in putting oil on some parts of the body as part of the baptizing ceremony that accompanies a person’s entering to Christianity. However, Endymion is instigating not a Christian religion, but a poetic universe that is deeply anchored in the mythological blue light of Cynthia, a light that is inclusive in nature and, therefore, exhaustive of all religions. This might bring to mind Christophe Caudwell’s assertion that "religion is then a mythology and shows all the spontaneous inventiveness and recklessness of self-contradiction which is characteristic of mythology." (35)

Given its inclusive thrust, Cynthia’s religion never excludes Dionysian traits that act, seemingly, in direct contravention of Apollonian drives. Rather, Cynthia’s religion seems to absorb even the mysticism attached to Dionysian frenzy that, owing to its extreme state of excitement and wildness, is liable also to transcend differences and to include opposites within its composition. In this context, Earl Wasserman must have detected Keats’s frequent allegories to such a Dionysian mysticism when he uses the term ‘mystic oxymoron’ "to describe a kind of paradoxical essence that is the central principle of Keats’s visions—the way in which the poet, through use of metaphor, invests the physical with the ethereal." (qtd.in Sperry 32) Interestingly, the metaphorical associations of blue light in Endymion bear much ‘mystic oxymoron’ that could be evidenced in the scene in which Endymion, in the process of his pursuance of such a divine blue light, penetrates to the world of the mythological gods, Adonis and Venus. There, ‘the physical’ is indeed ‘invested with the ethereal’ in the description of the sleeping Adonis:

No sight can bear the lightning of his bow;
His quiver is mysterious, none can know
What themselves think of it; from forth his eyes
There darts strange light of varied hues and dyes;
A scowl is sometimes on his brow, but who
Look full upon it feel anon the blue
Of his fair eyes run liquid through their souls. (II.538-44, italics mine)

The element of mystery seems to dominate the depiction of Adonis’s facial contour that is suggested to contain aspects of mystic oxymoron. Essentially, the description that lends itself both to Apollonian and Dionysian allegories might sustain this mystic oxymoron that leads, ultimately, to the derivation of Adonis’s ‘blueness of his fair eyes’ which, in ‘running liquid through’ a contemplator’s ‘soul,’ seems to establish an organic effect of the double appeal of the sleeping Adonis to the senses and to the soul. Hence, the light radiating from Adonis is suggested to equal Cynthia’s divine blue light in its inclusiveness of ‘varied hues and dyes’ that seems to transform the sleeping Adonis to a splendid painting in front of Endymion.

In reality, deciphering a painting is, like decoding a poem, based primordially on suggestiveness, "that quality which stimulates the imagination into a creative activity of its own." (Brooks 137) As such, the description of the painting of the sleeping Adonis is not only suggestive of Dionysian mysterious character that is "of all the gods of Olympus […] the hardest to define given its richness, complexity and fleetingness." (Brunel 298) Actually, the presence of these qualities in the painting of Adonis is suggested in its puzzling unreadability that is clear though presenting it as ‘none can know.’ The Apollonian presence in this painting is also suggested through Endymion’s allegory to the culminating stage of Apollo’s process of transformation into a god, a stage during which light makes ‘no sight can bear it.’ Therefore, we see Apollo in Hyperion have:

…………………………….. his bright tears
Went trickling down the golden bow he held.
Thus with half-shut suffused eyes he stood,
While from beneath some cumbrous boughs hard by
With solemn step an awful Goddess came,
And there was purport in her looks for him,
Which he with eager guess began to read. (III.42-8)

So Apollo’s ‘half-shutting’ eyes, a state that accompanies the emergence of the Goddess, Mnemosyne, may match Endymion’s suggested closing of his eyes on perceiving the unbearable ‘lightning’ of the sleeping god’s ‘bow.’ Besides, just as Apollo is presented as ‘begin[ning] to read’ the divine message of the ‘awful looks’ of Mnemosyne, so is Endymion suggested to be granted the privilege of getting divine insights that 'none can know.' As a matter of fact, Endymion’s growing divinity makes him an alter ego of Apollo.
Moreover, Endymion’s gradual apprehension of artistic beauty precipitates his divinity and seems to consolidate his metaphorical association with Apollo who is presented in *Hyperion* as "the Father of all verse." (III.13) Indeed, Endymion’s aestheticization of the blue colour represents also an important feature that makes him linked allegorically to Apollo. For example, Endymion uses blueness as a metaphor while describing his Apollonian penetration to the mythological realms of Mercury, "the messenger of the Gods who is furnished with a winged hat, called *petasus*, and with wings to be worn to his feet, called *talaria*." (Ricks 733) Having been granted such a divine privilege, Endymion sees himself, then, transported to the divine world of Cynthia who brings him two winged horses, one to him and another to her so that they can ascend together to her realm: "So from the turf outsprang two steeds (archaic term for horses) jet-black / Each with large dark blue wings upon his back." (IV.343-4, italics mine) The ‘jet-black’ colour of the ‘steeds,’ a colour which designates "a deep shiny blackness" (*Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*), combines with the ‘dark blueness’ of the steeds’ wings to suggest an intense darkness that becomes paradoxically ‘shiny.’ This intense shininess that emanates from the dark-coloured steeds might be intended to superimpose symbolically the Dionysian intensity in the Apollonian poetic world. Actually, the close of the whole romance of *Endymion* ends with infusing the highly poetic union of Endymion and Cynthia that marks the apotheosis of the story with a state of "wonderment" (IV.1003), which may metaphorically suggest Keats’s epiphanic discovery of the organic tie that binds dialectically the Apollonian world to that of Dionysus. This dialectics, which entails inclusion of opposites, is hardly conceivable by man on earth because it constitutes a divine essence that could be apprehended only aesthetically by artists like the poets. Hence, *Endymion* should be construed of ritually as a poetic cult of inclusion.
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