The Unanxious Influence of Spenser for Keats

Yukie Ando

Synopsis
The title of my essay, “The Unanxious Influence of Spenser for Keats” is an allusion to Harold Bloom’s The Anxiety of Influence, which argues that major poets inevitably swerve away from their main predecessors. I attempt to show here that the opposite is clearly true in the case of Spenser for Keats. Spenser’s influence continued from the beginning of his poetic carrier till the end of his life. In section 1, “Keats’s Spenser,” I present biographical details about the role of Spenser in Keats’s poetic development, focusing on the stylistic elements, the sonorities, that reared his ears. In section 2, “Spenser’s Roman à clef,” I discuss The Shepheardes Calender, a landmark in English pastoral poetry. Spenser models it primarily on Virgil’s Eclogues, but he swerves from the melancholy and nostalgia that are the mainstays of traditional pastorals and deals with topical political and religious issues of the Elizabethan Age. I discuss the work in the context of the pastoral tradition and besides point out its importance for Keats and others. In section 3, “Keats’s Endymion,” I discuss this ambitious work, a pastoral poem in heroic couplets. While he was writing it, Keats took Spenser as his guiding light. Though he swerves from Spenser in thematic focus, avoiding political and religious topicality, he yet clearly imbues his lines with Spenserian sonorities, as he pursues ideal beauty. The character Endymion is himself idealized, not an ordinary shepherd, but the prince of shepherds, riding “a fair-wrought car” in pursuit of the supernal, the goddess Diana or her cynosure Cynthia. And while he is portrayed as achieving this otherworldly goal, what stays with us, I maintain, is the earthly beauty of Keats’s language.

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1. Keats’s Spenser

Keats’s first surviving poem is “Imitation of Spenser,” written early in 1814. Keats was introduced to Spenser by Charles Cowden Clarke, who was the son of the headmaster at Enfield School and taught Keats his letters. After leaving school in 1811, Keats often visited him and enjoyed literary conversation with him during his apprenticeship as a surgeon at Edmonton. In the spring of 1813, Clarke read aloud to Keats Spenser’s “Epithalamion,” an ode written to his bride, Elizabeth Boyle, on their wedding day in 1594. Clarke remembered this incident quite well and later he wrote, “At that time he may have been sixteen years old; and at that period of life he certainly appreciated the general beauty of the composition, and felt the more passionate passages; for his features and exclamations were ecstatic” (Clarke, 125). Later, Clarke often heard Keats quote the following lines of the poem:

Behold, whiles she before the altar stands,
Hearing the holy priest that to her speakes,
And blesseth her with his two happy hands,
How the red roses flush up in her cheekes,
And the pure snow, with goodly vermill stayne
Like crimsin dyde in grayne:
That even th’ Angels, which continually
About the sacred Altare doe remaine,
Forget their service and about her fl y,
Ofte peeping in her face, that seems more fayre,
The more they on it stare.
But her sad eyes, still fastened on the ground,
Are governèd with goodly modesty,
That suffers not one looke to glaunce awry,
Which may let in a little thought unsownd.

(223–37)

Clarke also recalls how Keats “took away with him the first volume of The Færie Queene, and he went through it, as I formerly told his noble biographer, ‘as a young horse would through a spring meadow—ramp-ing!’” (Clarke, 126). “His noble biographer” is Monckton Milnes (Lord Houghton), whom Clarke helped with his biography of Keats. It was Clarke who introduced Keats to Leigh Hunt, an admirer of Spenser.
Keats wrote “Imitation of Spenser” in the stanza form of *The Faerie Queene*, consisting of eight iambic pentameters and an Alexandrine, with the rhyming scheme *ababcdece*. Of this Charles Brown noted, “It was the ‘Faery Queen’[sic] that awakened his [Keats’s] genius. In Spenser’s fairy land he was enchanted . . . till, enamoured of the stanza, he attempted to imitate it, and succeeded” (Barnard, 557).

This was followed by “Ode to Apollo,” written in February 1815, the first stanza of which runs as follows:

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In thy western halls of gold
   When thou sittest in thy state,
Bards, that erst sublimely told
   Heroic deeds, and sung of fate,
With fervor seize their adamantine lyres,
   Whose chords are solid rays, and twinkle radiant fires.
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Among his bards, besides Homer, Maro [Virgil], Milton, and Shakespeare, “A silver trumpet Spenser blows” (30), an allusion to *The Faerie Queene*, Book II, Canto xii, Stanza 71: “The silver sounding instruments did meet / With the base murmur of the waters fall. . . .” And “A hymn in praise of spotless Chastity” (33) is a reference to the title of *The Faerie Queene*, Book III, Canto i, “Contayning the legend of Britomartis. Or, Of Chastitie.”

The following year, Leigh Hunt published *The Story of Rimini*. Soon after reading it, Keats wrote two poems. The first, “Specimen of an Induction to a Poem,” has been characterized as an attempt “to embody the spirit of Spenser in the metre of *Rimini*” (Barnard, 565). Keats apostrophizes his precursor like this: “Spenser! thy brows are archèd, open, kind, / And come like a clear sun-rise to my mind;” (49–50). He also refers to “Archimago” (6), the wizard in *The Faerie Queene*, Book II, Canto ii. The other poem is “Calidore,” over twice as long, which continues to show Keats’s preoccupation with Spenser; Sir Calidore is of course the Knight of Courtesy who appears in *The Faerie Queene*, Book VI. “Calidore” begins as follows: “Young Calidore is paddling o’er the lake,” which is modelled on the opening line of *The Faerie Queene*, Book I, Canto i, “A Gentle Knight was pricking on the plaine.” “And show their blossoms trim” (12) is one of those lines of three stresses which are inserted into the ordinary lines of four stresses as a metrical variation.
Miriam Allott points out that it “probably derives from K.’s enjoyment of Spenser’s *Epithalamion*” (37), where we find the complementary line “Another gay girland” (42).

We see this preoccupation again in September 1816 Keats’s verse epistle, “To Charles Cowden Clarke,” which refers to the sonorities of “Spenserian vowels that elope with ease, / And float along like birds o’er summer seas” (56–57). The description of Archimago’s hermitage may be considered as an example of Keats’s use of such features. It runs as follows:

A little lowly Hermitage it was  
Downe in a dale, hard by a forests side,  
Far from resort of people, that did pas  
In trauell to and froe: a little wyde  
There was an holy Chappel edifyde,  
Wherein the Hermite dewly wont to say  
His holy things each morne and eventide:  
Thereby a Christall streame did gently play  
Which from a sacred fountaine welled forth alway.  

( *The Færie Queene*, I, i, 34)

In *Imagination and Fancy* Leigh Hunt comments on these sonorities: “Mark the variety of the pauses, of the accentuation of the syllables, and of the intonation of the vowels; all closing in that exquisite last line, as soft and continuous as the water it describes” (71).

In the same poem Keats refers to “Mulla’s stream,” which is near Spenser’s home at Kilcolman in Ireland, as well as to “Belpheobe, Una, and Archimago,” who are characters in *The Færie Queene*, Book I, Canto ii.

This was followed by “Sleep and Poetry,” started sometime after 9 October and completed in December 1816. In this long poem Keats is preoccupied with the pastoral world, “the realm . . . / Of Flora, and old Pan” (101–2). Here Spenser appears only allusively, as a figure England has since fallen from:

Is there so small a range  
In the present strength of manhood, that the high  
Imagination cannot freely fly  
As she was wont of old?  

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
Here her altar shone,
E’en in this isle; and who could paragon
The fervid choir that lifted up a noise
Of harmony, to where it aye will poise
Its mighty self of convoluting sound,
Huge as a planet, and like that roll round,
Eternally around a dizzy void?
Ay, in those days the Muses were nigh cloyed
With honours. (162–79)

Keats’s first volume, *Poems*, was published on 3 March 1817 by Charles and James Ollier, with an epigraph from Spenser’s “Muiopotmos, or the Fate of the Butterflie” (1590):

> What more felicity can fall to creature,
> Than to enjoy delight with liberty.
> (209–10)

“I stood tip-toe,” the opening poem, follows the expansive descriptive procedures of *The Faerie Queene*, as does “Sleep and Poetry,” which concludes the volume as Keats’s “credo” (Bate, 141).

On 18 April 1817 Keats wrote in a letter to his friend John Hamilton Reynolds as follows:

> I find that I cannot exist without poetry — without eternal poetry — Half the day will not do — the whole of it — I began with a little, but habit has made me a Leviathan — I had become all in a Tremble from not having written any thing of late . . . Just now I opened Spencer[sic], and the first Lines I saw were these.—

> “The noble Heart that harbors virtuous thought,
> And is with Child of glorious great intent,
> Can never rest, until it forth have brought
> Th’ eternal Brood of Glory excellent—”

(Rollins, I, 133–34)

And he added, “I shall forthwith begin my Endymion” (Rollins, I, 134). He finished this ambitious undertaking on 28 November 1817. We will discuss this narrative poem later in section 3 in detail.

On 5 February 1818 Keats wrote a sonnet, “Spenser! a jealous hon-ourer of thine,” referring to his friend, J. H. Reynolds, which begins as follows:
Spenser! a jealous honourer of thine,
   A forester deep in thy midmost trees,
Did last eve ask my promise to refine
   Some English that might strive thine ear to please.

As Andrew Motion points out, this sonnet “shows they [Keats and Reynolds] spent part of the evening discussing Spenser” (231). Here Reynolds is referred to as a “forester” because of his “Robin Hood” sonnets, which would appear in the Yellow Dwarf on 21 February 1818. Keats entreats Spenser in the closing couplet:

   Be with me in the summer days and I
   Will for thine honour and his pleasure try.

It was this very trial that led him to Endymion. After that, in January 1819 Keats went to Chichester and Bedhampton with Brown and wrote “The Eve of St. Agnes” in Spenserian stanzas, a form he had not attempted since his “Imitation of Spenser.” Nicholas Roe persuasively commented on its aptness in this new work as follows:

   . . . it was exactly suited to his present needs. The rhyme scheme ababccbccc mounts towards a central couplet, then turns in a second sequence towards a closing couplet that takes its leave with a long, supple Alexandrine measure in its final line. Each stanza contained a pattern of gathering intensity, fulfilment and leave-taking that would be reflected in his poem’s larger narrative structure. (297)

One more poem Keats wrote in Spenserian verse is “The Cap and Bells: or, The Jealousies,” during November and December 1819, but this was not finished, due to the onset of his tuberculosis. It was, however, a gesture rather than a poem that marks Keats’s parting tribute to Spenser. In his list of the things Keats gave Fanny Brawne before his departure for Rome, Motion mentions copies of some of his poems, his ring, a lock of hair, a miniature Severn painted, a copy of Literary Pocket Book for 1819, his Dante, and his folio Shakespeare, and adds:

   There was the edition of Spenser with certain passages underlined. Fanny realized these underlinings were meant to instruct her in Spenser’s ‘beauties’; as she turned over the pages they seemed to spell out a different purpose: almost every passage that Keats had marked emphasized the folly of ambition and the frailty of fame. (535)
Motion’s discernment here is in emphasizing the preeminence of Spenser in so much of what is noteworthy in Keats’s brief life.

2. Spenser’s Roman à clef

Spenser’s *The Shepheardes Calender* was published anonymously in 1579 and became a landmark in English pastoral poetry. Spenser modeled it primarily on Virgil’s *Eclogues*, but while the Roman poet’s work consists of ten poems, Spenser’s consists of twelve, denoting the months of the year.

In the Middle Ages the wool trade was very important in Britain, and shepherds depended on their almanacs. One such work was *The Kalender of Shepherds*, which was first translated into English from the French in 1503 and reproduced in numerous English versions. Spenser borrowed his title from this, but in his poem he assumes the mantle of a shepherd named Colin Clout and deals with his own concerns and the Elizabethan Age.

In “Ianuarye” Colin is depicted as lovelorn:

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All as the Sheepe, such was the shepeheards looke,
For pale and wanne he was, (alas the while,)
May seeme he lovd, or els some care he tooke:
Well couth he tune his pipe, and frame his stile.
Tho to a hill his faynting flocke he ledde,
And thus him playnd, the while his shepe there fedde.
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(7–12)

In his plight, he invokes Pan, the “shepheards God,” who experienced the pain of love with Syrinx. Colin complains of his unrequited love for Rosalind, who scorns his “rurall musick.” This is, of course, a pastoral convention. However pastorals have as much to do with power as with love. In the pastoral tradition the sovereign of the day is praised over all others. In Virgil Octavian is called “a human god”:

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I saw that noble youth
For whom our altars smoke twelve times a year.
He gave his suppliant this oracle:
“Graze cattle as before, lads, breed your bulls.”
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(*Eclogues* I, 42–45)
In a similar way, Theocritus calls Ptolemy II Zeus in *Idyll VII*, reflecting the way bucolic verse, from the outset, was also a form of court poetry. In “Aprill” Queen Elizabeth I is called “fayre Elisa” and Spenser addresses the Muses to praise and pray for her:

    Of fayre *Elisa* be your siluer song,
    that blessed wight:
The flowre of Virgins, may shee florish long,
    In princely plight.
    For she is *Syrinx* daughter without spotte,
    Which *Pan* the shepheards God of her begot:
    So sprong her grace
    Of heauenly race,
    No mortal blemishe may her blotte.

(46–54)

This is a supreme metaphor for Elizabeth, giving her supernatural beauty and dignity. Her attire is gorgeous, but she wears a coronet of flowers, not of jewels:

    See, where she sits vpon the grassie greene,
    (O seemly sight)
    Yclad in Scarlot like a mayden Queene,
    And Ermines white.
    Vpon her head a Cremosin coronet,
    With Damaske roses and Dafadillies set:
    Bayleaues betweene,
    And Primroses greene
    Embellish the sweete Violet.

(55–63)

In “October” the focus continues to be on the nobility:

    There may thy Muse display her fluttryng wing,
    And stretch her selfe at large from East to West:
    Whither thou list in fayre *Elisa* rest,
    Or if thee please in bigger notes to sing,
    Advaunce the worthy whome she loueth best,
    That first the white bear to the stake did bring.

(43–48)

The “worthy” here is Robert Dudley, First Earl of Leicester, whose badge
was a bear with a ragged staff, and who led the palfrey of honour in Elizabeth’s coronation procession.

Religion is involved here as well, as it was in Virgil. *Eclogue IV* mentions the coming of a new golden age prophesied by the Cumaean Sibyl: “The last great age the Sibyl’s song foretold / Rolls round: the centuries are born anew!” (4–5). The age begins with a birth: “Now as the babe is born, with whom iron men / Shall cease, and golden men spread through the world” (8–9). This baby is considered to be Octavian’s, because his wife, Scribonia, was pregnant when the poem was written. There is even a Christian interpretation of the poem, which was introduced by Constantine at Nicaea in 325. Thus many Christian writers have regarded the eclogue as a prophecy of the coming of the Messiah, and in *The Divine Comedy* Dante makes Virgil his guide through Hell and Purgatory, calling the Roman poet “il cantor de’ bucolici carmi” (“the singer of the pastoral song,” Purgatory, XXII, 57).

Spenser’s frame of reference is, of course, resolutely Christian. In “Maye” two shepherds, Palinode and Piers, provide an allegory about Roman Catholicism, the Church of England, and the Reformation. Palinode wants to live “at ease and leasure”, but Piers blames him, saying, “Ah Palinode, thou art a worldes childe” when “shepheards (as Algrind vsed to say,) / Mought not liue ylike, as men of the laye.” “Algrind” here alludes to Edmund Grindal, an English Protestant leader who successively held the posts of Bishop of London, Archbishop of York and Archbishop of Canterbury, a position he finally resigned because of his Puritanism. In this vein Piers condemns the Pope and priests of high rank for their avarice or covetousness, sounding like Mantuan, the satirist of the Roman clergy:

Some gan to gape for greedie gouernaunce,
And match them selfe with mighty potentates,
Louers of Lordship and troublers of states.

(121–23)

In “Maye” Spenser’s satirical bent takes an Aesopean turn. Here he tells the tale of a kid who is left at home while his mother goes out. The mother goat has warned the kid not to open the door. Then a fox comes along, disguised as a sheep and a peddler, offering wares. The kid is “so enamoured with the newell” (276), a mirror, that he opens the door to
the fox. The kid is then attracted to another novelty in the fox’s basket, but immediately the fox closes the lid, and the kid is trapped. The mother goat comes home to find her kid gone:

Tho on the flore she sawe the merchandise,
Of which her sonne had sette to dere a prise.
What helpe? her Kidde shee knewe well was gone:
Shee weeped, and wayled, and made great mone.
Such end had the Kidde, for he nould warned be
Of craft coloured with simplicitie:
And such end, perdie, does all hem remayne,
That of such falsers frendship bene fayne.

(298–305)

“Such end” apparently alludes to the St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre, that event in France on 24 August 1572 in which Huguenots (French Protestants) were slaughtered by Roman Catholics. *The Shepheardes Calender* was dedicated to Philip Sidney, who witnessed the Massacre on 24 August in Paris, reinforcing his Protestantism.

Spenser also undertakes traditional pastoral moralizing. “Iulye” includes a conversation between Thomalin, a jolly shepherd in “the lowly playne” and Morrell, “a goteherd prowde / that sittes on yonder bancke.” This proud goatherd alludes to John Aylmer, Bishop of London, but Spenser’s main focus here is the fall of Grindal, that is, the loss of his position as Archbishop of Canterbury, for he makes Thomalin say, “I am tought by Algrin’s ill, / To loue the lowe degree.” Similarly, in “Febrvarie” when a young cowherd, “Cvddie,” insults an old shepherd, “Thenot.” Thenot relates a fable of an aged oak and a boastful brier, the moral being, of course, that arrogance brings an unhappy end.

Spenser’s original anonymity in publishing all these views gave him a freer hand to make of pastoral not a longing for a sentimentalized past but a firm engagement with the issues of the day, a form of Roman à clef. The mid-18th century Spenser revival saw other pick up these strains. Thomas Warton, for example, took up Spenser as a proponent of a national tradition in *The History of English Poetry*, while James Thomson, in *The Castle of Indolence* and James Beattie in *The Minstrel* swerved from Spenser in imitations that were often burlesques. It is not clear
that Keats was familiar with these works, but in his way he follows in their wake.

3. Keats’s *Endymion*

If there is a swerve away from Spenser in Keats, it is certainly not stylistic, but in a turn to unreality. *Endymion* is a pastoral poem written in heroic couplets. It consists of four Books and about four thousand lines. Keats wrote to his friend Benjamin Bailey on 8 October 1817 about his ambitions in this undertaking:

> . . . it will be a test, a trial of my Powers of Imagination and chiefly of my invention . . . by which I must make 4000 Lines of one bare circumstance and fill them with “Poetry” . . . Besides a long Poem is a test of Invention which I take to be the Polar Star of Poetry, as Fancy is the Sails, and Imagination the Rudder. Did our great Poets ever write short Pieces? (Rollins, I, 169–70)

It took about seven months for him to finish the poem, a fact he incorporates proleptically as follows:

> 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-rimmed 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.
> (I, 45–53)

Here “vermeil” is an allusive red flag, signaling the “vermeil Rose” in *The Færie Queene*, Book III, Canto i, Stanza 46, which refers to the essence of Britomart’s femininity. “Vermeil” in fact became one of Keats’s favorite words; he uses it in two other places of this poem, as follows: “the vermeil rose had blown” (I, 696) and “from vermeil lips” (IV, 148).

In Greek mythology Endymion is a beautiful shepherd beloved by Diana. Accordingly, Keats’s *Endymion* is not an ordinary shepherd, but
the prince of shepherds, who rides “a fair-wrought car” (I, 165) with three steeds and whose attire is that of “a chieftain king’s” (I, 172). Keats identifies with Endymion, following the pastoral tradition, and quests himself for the goddess Diana or for her cynosure Cynthia, namely, his ideal beauty.

The opening line of the poem is very famous: “A thing of beauty is a joy for ever:” (I, i). What has seldom been noted, however, is that this thing of beauty is precisely a pastoral scene:

Upon the sides of Latmos was outspread
A mighty forest; for the moist earth fed
So plenteously all weed-hidden roots
Into o’er-hanging boughs, and precious fruits.

(I, 63–66)

Here “Latmos” is the mountain in Caria, Asia Minor, traditionally associated with Endymion. And here Keats depicts a festival of Pan that recalls the exile of Apollo in *The Færie Queene*, Book III, Canto xi, Stanza 39, describing with the falling swoon of his music how there is trouble in paradise, a lack of joy for Endymion. Following a ceremony celebrating Pan, Endymion stands with “a lurking trouble in his nether lip” (I, 179). His sister, Peona, takes him to “her favourite bower’s quiet shade,” (I, 437) where she asks him as follows:

Brother, ’tis vain to hide
That thou dost know of things mysterious,
Immortal, starry; such alone could thus
Weigh down thy nature. Hast thou sinned in aught
Offensive to the heavenly powers? Caught
A Paphian dove upon a message sent?
Thy deathful bow against some deer-head bent
Sacred to Dian? Haply thou hast seen
Her naked limbs among the alders green —
And that, alas! Is death. No, I can trace
Something more high-perplexing in thy face!

(I, 505–15)

This recalls Spenser’s account of Faunus watching Diana bathing in *The Færie Queene*, Book VII, Canto vi, Stanza 42–47.
Endymion tells Peona his “secret grief” (I, 539) following a dream vision of a surpassing loveliness, a “completed form of all completeness” (I, 606), fairer than Venus, Goddess of Beauty. This is an incarnation of the moon, but Keats regards her as “ideal beauty.” He faints at her “charmed touch” (I, 637), but comes to and kisses her:

Ah, desperate mortal! I e’en dared to press
Her very cheek against my crowned lip

(I, 661–62)

His disappointment is that this is all but a dream. However, during his conversation with Peona, he calms down and reflects:

Wherein lies happiness? In that which beck
Our ready minds to fellowship divine,
A fellowship with essence; till we shine,
Full alchemized, and free of space.

(I, 777–80)

He then discusses love and friendship. From friendship “there ever issues forth / A steady splendor” (I, 804-5). The influence of love, “Thrown in our eyes, genders a novel sense” (I, 808) at first, “till in the end, / Melting into its radiance, we blend, / Mingle, and so become a part of it” (I, 809–11). He concludes that earthly love has the power to make a mortal man immortal and sets out to pursue this impossible dream.

In Book II, he searches underground, in the realm of Diana, and comes upon the bower of Adonis:

A Chamber, myrtle-walled, embowered high
Full of light, incense, tender minstrelsy,
And more of beautiful and strange beside.
For on a silken couch of rosy pride,
In midst of all, there lay a sleeping youth
Of fondest beauty, fonder, in far sooth,
Than sighs could fathom, or contentment reach.

(389–95)

Miriam Allott points out that Keats modelled this on the Garden of Adonis in *The Færie Queene*, Book III, Canto vi, Stanzas 42–45. In fact in
Stanza 43: “Right in the middest of that Paradise, / . . . / A gloomy grove of mirtle trees did rise” (1–3), and Stanza 44 runs as follows:

And in the thickest couert of that shade,
There was a pleasant arbour, not by art,
But of the trees owne inclination made,
Which knitting their rancke braunches part to part,
With wanton yuie twyne entrayld athwart.

(1–5)

To this bower an eagle comes and carries Endymion to another bower of jasmine, where he sleeps and dreams again of his ideal love, calling her a “known Unknown” (II, 739). At last she returns his ardor:

Now a soft kiss—
Aye, by that kiss, I vow an endless bliss,
An immortality of passion’s thine:
Ere long I will exalt thee to the shine
Of heaven ambrosial.

(II, 806–10)

She also says, “O let me melt into thee” (II, 815), but then he wakes and finds again that this is only a dream.

In Book III Endymion continues his vain pursuit in nether regions of the sea, and comes upon Glaucus, an old man transformed by Circe, who tells his own story in “a sound of moan, an agony of sound” (485). This “moan” is a Spenserian loan, an echo of Book III, Canto i, stanza 38:

Lo, where beyond he lyeth languishing,
Deadly engored of a great wild Bore,
And by his side the Goddess groueling
Makes for him endlesse mone.

(1–4)

In Book IV Endymion comes back to earth and meets an Indian maid who is in sorrow, pleading “Is no one near to help me?” (IV, 44). Endymion responds by saying “I love thee!” (IV, 138) and asks her to sing for him. She sings a long song of “Sorrow” (II, 146–290). Then they ride on two black horses into the sky, where Endymion dreams of his wedding with Cynthia in heaven. When he wakes, both Cynthia and the Indian maid are gone, yet when he comes back down to earth he again hears the voice of the Indian maid, and he vows to say good-bye to heavenly love and live
for human love. But when he finds the Indian maid in the bush, she says, “I may not be thy love: I am forbidden” (IV, 752). So he returns to Peona, vowing to be a hermit. Then he goes to the grove of Dian’s temple to say his last farewell to his love.

Nor had he done
His laugh at nature’s holy countenance
Until that grove appeared, as if perchance,
And then his tongue with sober seemlihed
Gave utterance as he entered.

(947–51)

Again Miriam Allott usefully points out that “the word ‘seemlihed’ (seemliness) is an archaism probably owed to Spenser” (282). In The Færie Queene, we see it in Book IV, Canto viii, Stanza 14: “And by his persons secret seemlyhed” (3).

After this Endymion’s dreams yet haunt him, and he again gives them sway, seeming to behold the Indian maid transmogrified:

Then he embraced her [Peona], and his lady’s hand
Pressed, saying: ‘Sister, I would have command,
If it were heaven’s will, on our sad fate.’
At which that dark-eyed stranger stood elate
And said, in a new voice, but sweet as love,
To Endymion’s amaze: ‘By Cupid’s love,
And so thou shalt! And by the lily truth
Of my own breast thou shalt, belovèd youth!’
And as she 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 love. Ay, he beheld
Phoebe, his passion!

(IV, 974–87)

The two lovers then vanish into the sky, their love seemingly requited.

Also requited, I trust, at this point is a sense of how Spenser informed Keats’s work. We are left to reflect again that those things of beauty which are to be a joy forever must be earthly, as grounded as Spenser’s sonorities in Keats’s ear.

(Emeritus Professor of Osaka Prefecture University)
Works Cited


