

6th February 2021

Pause

“In Endymion, I leaped headlong into the sea, and thereby became better acquainted with the surroundings, the quicksands, and the rocks, than if I had stayed upon the green shore ... and took tea and comfortable advice.”

John Keats, Letter to James Hessey

In Greek mythology, Endymion was a handsome Aeolian shepherd who lived at Olympia. One of the myths tells of Selene, the Titan goddess of the moon, falling in love with the mortal Endymion, considering him so strikingly beautiful she couldn't live without him. So she asked Endymion's father, Zeus, to grant him eternal youth so that he would never leave her.

The 19th century English poet, John Keats, based his epic poem *Endymion* on this handsome shepherd beloved of the moon goddess, and he renames her Cynthia for poetic effect. “A thing of beauty is a joy forever”, Keats writes as a beginning to this remarkable work.

To be honest, I thought Endymion was a *place*, and that Keats was foolhardy not to pause before he “leapt headlong into the sea”. But he's telling James Hessey that this was about tackling a massive enterprise with his own resources. It was *huge* task that he'd set himself, the final poem running to four sections – or “books” – each of a thousand lines. No one, he believed, could give him advice about that. He had to jump right in and get on with it. Only then was he going to know the dangers *and* delights awaiting him in this great undertaking.

“Look before you leap”, we're told, so that we can prepare ourselves for hidden dangers before we embark on an enterprise. Whether we do our own looking or take sage guidance from people who've been there before us, there are times when advice matters. But there are also times when we just have to go for it, take the plunge and cope with the consequences, be they disasters or delights. Either way, the same issue applies. Take care! Pause for a bit and think! Weigh up the possibilities. Make sure you anticipate what might be waiting for you. Be careful!

Taking “tea and comfortable advice” can be a good thing. Leaping “headlong into the sea” to face the unknown can be necessary sometimes too. But make sure you take care, so you can live to tell the tale.

A prayer for today

Advice, Lord? Now, let me pause, and think ... Amen.

An original reflection by © Tom Gordon

Also available at <https://swallowsnestnet.wordpress.com>