MODES AND GENRES IN THE POETRY AND LETTERS OF JOHN KEATS: AN ANALYSIS FROM THE STANDPOINT OF DECONSTRUCTIVE PHENOMENOLOGY AND FEMINIST DISCOURSE

ABSTRACT

THESIS

SUBMITTED FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF

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IN

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BY

NAHID AKHTAR

UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF

Dr. SEEMIN HASAN

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ABSTRACT

In Keats's poetry there is an abundance of women. They are an integral part of his poetry and letters. They enter into all aspects of his writing and cannot be contained in a single definition. This thesis examines the changing determinations of women in Keats's creative processes. Keats presents them in individual as well as universal identities. Keats conceives the poetic muse as feminine. In the poems of 1817, the feminine entity is an inseparable part of nature. Nature and natural objects are visualized as feminine.

The present work also conducts an intensive study of the feminine power and energy acknowledged by Keats throughout the odes. In each ode, the woman presents the central metaphor. In the 'Ode to Psyche', Psyche is represented as the goddess by the poet whose status has been marginal for a long time. The poet restores the lost status of Psyche. She is the ideal beauty that inspires the poet to create. The nightingale, in the 'Ode to a Nightingale', is a bird that fascinates the poet through its voice. In 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', the urn assimilates the qualities of serenity and maternity. She is a friend and companion to mankind. Melancholy in 'Ode on Melancholy' is 'veiled melancholy' ruling majestically in the
‘temple of Delight’. To the poet, indolence is desirable because it is full of creativity. Autumn in ‘To Autumn’ is personified as a female figure who continues to hold her power throughout the poem. Keats’s focus on women is a product of his subconscious. The obscuring patriarchal values dismissed references to women as sub literary. In Keats’s poetry women are symbols of beauty and creativity. However, they also represent the anxiety that the poet experiences in association with them. The patriarchy condemned women as threats to creativity and imagination.

This thesis explores Keats’s poetry and letters from the standpoint of deconstructive phenomenology. Deconstruction in literacy criticism denotes a practice of reading which dismantles the establishment of any boundary, unity and fixity of meaning.

The present thesis deals with deconstructive phenomenology combining both deconstruction and phenomenology. Deconstruction is a kind of strategy which departs from traditional scholarship. It challenges and attacks the old and established views. Phenomenology considers a text as an embodiment of the author’s consciousness. All of its stylistic and semantic aspects are grasped as organic parts of a complex totality of which the unifying essence is the author’s mind. When we apply deconstructive phenomenology the unity or totality of the text are dismantled.
In the 1817 volume, *Poems*, we find women everywhere. Keats cannot write without them. Women represent sources of beauty, energy and inspiration. Sometimes he seems contemptuous toward them and sometimes he is overwhelmed by their physical beauty, charm and humility.

The presence of women is evident throughout the early poems. They possess a significant place and role in his work. He cannot write without them. Women have been shown object of beauty as well as of reverence. 'Fill for me a brimming bowl' discusses women in a strong role. Keats's feminist attitude is evident in most of his poems, but in some of his poems his chauvinism is visible e.g. in ‘Ah, who can e’er forget so fair a being’. This 'undecidability' according to Derrida is an 'oscillation between possibilities'.

*Endymion*, composed between April – November 1817, is saturated in a feminine mood. Keats’s hero is pitted against nature, beauty and sexuality. According to conventional western thought, passivity is associated with the feminine. Endymion is acted upon by the Moon-Goddess. He is thus feminized in order to be made receptive and creative. Led by Cynthia, Endymion is caught in a whirl of ardent pursuits, entanglements and self-destroying enthrallments. Traditional male power structures are discarded in favor of the pale, melancholy, tearful hero.
*Hyperion* opens with a tabloid of defeated patriarchy. Saturn sits in absolute quietness like a statue. An overwhelmed Naiad presses 'her cold finger closer to her lips' and participates in his sorrow. His large footprints trace his enormous stature. He has lost his ruling position and reduced to this pitiable condition, he turns to his mother for comfort and kneels before her. She is Mother Earth symbolic of nurturing maternity.

*The Fall of Hyperion* is a reworking of *Hyperion*. It has been recast in the form of a vision in which the defeat of the Titans is narrated by a priestess Moneta through the dream mechanism. Keats thus endows Moneta with oracular and prophetic properties.

In the odes Keats's projection of femininity is at its height. To a certain extent, Keats's ambiguity toward the feminine persona, which dominates his earlier poetry, is resolved in this part. Their power and energy is acknowledged by Keats throughout the odes.

Each one of Keats's ballads projects a central female character. Each ballad narrates a love theme. The woman's role in love relationship has been analyzed from different perspectives by the poet.

The Fanny poems represent Keats's own experiences regarding his love. The most important aspect to his attitude toward women is to be found in his attitude to Fanny Brawne. Her role is very important in his
life. His poems are the expression of his overwhelming love. In these poems, Keats talks about her beauty which fascinates and overwhelms him. He is unable to resist her beauty and charm. Her thoughts imprison him and he feels helpless before her like his male characters of poems.

In his poems and letters to Fanny Brawne, the fear of desertion keeps recurring in Keats’s mind. Uncertainty looms around him. He desires Fanny to be stable, single minded and constant. He is possessive about her and requests her to be true and loyal to him. Thus Keats’s feelings are profound regarding Fanny Brawne. She is not a hindrance in Keats’s artistic creation as she was once believed to be. When seen from the feminist perspective she seems to provide strength to Keats.

Keats’s letters show his ambivalent attitude about women. He sometimes seems to be under social pressure to adopt the norms of masculinity. But at other times, he accepts that his attitude toward women has changed with maturity.

Keats’s letters are considered as a pretext to his poetry. They are an inseparable part of his work because they reveal his philosophy, his views on life as well as his attitude toward women. But Keats’s views regarding women keep fluctuating. Sometimes he calls them ‘a set of Devils’ but at other times, he rejects the egotistical sublime of Wordsworth over the ‘negative capability’ of Shakespeare. This shows his inclination from his
masculine to the feminine self. Keats’s thoughts are not fixed on any particular woman in the 1817 letters. He gives his general opinion about women.
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This is to certify that Ms. Nahid Akhtar has completed her thesis entitled *Modes and Genres in the Poetry and Letters of John Keats: An Analysis from the Standpoint of Deconstructive Phenomenology and Feminist Discourse* under my supervision. To the best of my knowledge this is her original work.

(Seemin Hasan)
Supervisor
Dedicated
To my
Parents
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(Nahid Akhtar)
CHAPTER – I

An Exploration of Memory, Perception and Identity
In Keats’s poetry there is an abundance of women. They are an integral part of his poetry and letters. They enter into all aspects of his writing and cannot be contained in a single definition. This thesis examines the changing determinations of women in Keats’s creative processes. Keats presents them in individual as well as universal identities. Keats conceives the poetic muse as feminine:

The muse that Keats invokes in his early poetry is indeed a friend – docile, maidenly, and undemanding. She inspires poetry that remains primarily serene and, more important, largely imitative and illustrative of the past and current male poets, a reliable gauge of poetic achievement to a new poet with no identity of his own.

In the poems of 1817, the feminine entity is an inseparable part of nature. Nature and natural objects are visualized as feminine. ‘Characterized by the feminine traits of prettiness and passivity, she is frequently seen only as a smile, a blush, or a glance of a hesitant eye, and she is easily dismissible because of her mortal state.’

In *Endymion*, Cynthia exercises a mysterious power over Endymion through her charm. He appears as the feminized figure before Cynthia. Peona, Endymion’s sister, is different from the maidens of the early poems. She is a guide and friend and also a precursor to the powerful and autonomous Moneta. She is wise and through her wisdom provides knowledge and assistance to *Endymion*. Moneta, in *The Fall of*
Hyperion, is the most powerful woman of Keats’s poetry. She towers above not only women but also men. Rather than being an active seeker the dreamer, in the poem, is afraid of her due to her ambiguous identity. However, she serves as a source of mysterious instincts and profound ancient knowledge.

Isabella and Madeline are full of beauty and charm. They are the idealized projections by the male poet. On the other hand Belle Dame and Lamia are victims of patriarchal atrocities.

The present work also conducts an intensive study of the feminine power and energy acknowledged by Keats throughout the odes. In each ode, the woman presents the central metaphor. In the ‘Ode to Psyche’, Psyche is represented as the goddess by the poet whose status has been marginal for a long time. The poet restores the lost status of Psyche. She is the ideal beauty that inspires the poet to create. The nightingale, in the ‘Ode to a Nightingale’, is a bird that fascinates the poet through its voice. In ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’, the urn assimilates the qualities of serenity and maternity. She is a friend and companion to mankind. Melancholy in ‘Ode on Melancholy’ is ‘veiled melancholy’ ruling majestically in the temple of Delight’. To the poet, indolence is desirable because it is full of creativity. Autumn in ‘To Autumn’ is personified as a female figure who continues to hold her power throughout the poem. Keats’s focus on
women is a product of his subconscious. The obscuring patriarchal values dismissed references to women as sub literary. In Keats's poetry women are symbols of beauty and creativity. However, they also represent the anxiety that the poet experiences in association with them. The patriarchy condemned women as threats to creativity and imagination.

Keats's letters are a storehouse of emotions and attitudes that define his views about women. His poetry is spontaneous and effortless while the letters reveal a slight self-consciousness. According to Tilottama Rajan:

> Letters emerge on the boundary between the public and private: what they say is always provisional and situational. Being written to others, letters raise the problem of self-representation as a masking process: the writer identifies with positions that are created partly in reaction to, or in emulation of, the other person and that do not quite express the "self".  

Keats's letters reveal the development of his poetic thought and shed valuable light on his poetry. Through the poignant letters written to Fanny Brawne Keats emerges as a lover pining for his beloved, admiring her beauty; sometimes complaining, sometimes relishing her love. He writes, in the letter of May (?)1820, to Fanny Brawne, 'I am greedy of you – Do not think of anything but me. Do not live as if I was not existing – Do not forget me.'
In the nineteenth century, women were supposed to occupy their place in the private sphere. 'Men possessed the capacity for reason, action, aggression, independence, and self-interest. Women inhabited a separate, private sphere, one suitable for the so-called inherent qualities of femininity.'\textsuperscript{5} They were considered 'a biological entity' and their female body 'a sexed body'. Such concepts kept women in the private sphere and prevented their participation in the public realm. According to Rousseau, the education of women ought to be geared to ultimately enrich men's lives. He argued that women's place is within the family:

> Woman's empire is an empire of sweetness, dexterity and good-nature... She must reign in her house as a minister in his State, and ensure she is given orders to do what she desires. In this respect the best households are those where women have the most authority; but when she fails to recognize the voice of authority, and when she seeks to usurp her rights and command herself, disorder ensues that can only introduce misery, scandal and dishonour.\textsuperscript{6}

Rousseau's views regarding women received support throughout Europe in the nineteenth century. However, they have also elicited feminist opposition. He considered women fit only for biological functions. In his opinion, 'Being unable to sublimate their natural passions and desires, women have no sense of justice; they will therefore always prefer to support and protect their own kith and kin rather than accept the principle of equality before the law.'\textsuperscript{7}
The power of women was acknowledged by some of the important women writers of the nineteenth century. They wanted to participate in every sphere. The participation of women in a number of political campaigns increased when they became aware of their own strength. They directed their attack against prostitution and slavery. Abolitionism was an anti-slavery movement in the early 1830’s which demanded the abolition of slavery. It emphasized the view that every man was a self owner and had a right over one’s own body.

The legal systems of Europe and America regarding marriage gave husbands complete possession over their wives. A married woman had no legal rights to her property, earnings, freedom of movement, conscience, body or children. Women’s position in society was considered equal to slavery by the early supporters of women’s rights like Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott and Susan B. Anthony. According to them, women needed to be financially independent and strong. However, women’s position did not change overnight:

Throughout the nineteenth century, women and their male allies challenged these hold-overs of the aristocratic patriarchal society. They sought property rights, education and employment opportunities, and the right to divorce. These legal disabilities, they insisted, did not protect women in the domestic sphere of home and family but rather exposed them to the brutalities of the world at large.
Among the nineteenth century early feminists, Mary Wollstonecraft occupies an important place. Her feminist work *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) presents a retort to Rousseau's views regarding women and argues for the need to provide decent education and even co-education for women.

Mary Wollstonecraft was born in London in 1759. She was the eldest daughter of the five children. She saw the tyrannical attitude of her father toward her meek and submissive mother. The unpleasant family circumstances forced Mary to leave home at the age of nineteen. She served as a companion to a widow in Bath. After her mother's death, she lived with a close friend Fanny Blood and took to needlework to earn a living. She rescued her sister Eliza from a cruel husband. She established a school at Newington Green with Fanny Blood and her sisters. But due to financial reasons it had to be closed. Her personal life was also not pleasant. Her first marriage with American Gilbert Imlay was unsuccessful. Later she married William Godwin but, unfortunately, died during childbirth.

*A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) is considered an important text in the history of feminism. It is a political as well as an educational treatise of women's social, legal, political and economic equality. It celebrates the rationality of women. Wollstonecraft rejects the
belief that women do not possess rational faculty and that they are slaves to their passions. She believes that girls are trained by the family to be docile. If they are given the right opportunities from an early age, they will prove themselves in the same areas as men. According to psychologists Nancy Chodorow Carol Gilligan 'gender identification is a product of the social environment, specifically of a mother’s nurturing style, rather than an inborn response.'

Margaret Fuller is an author, editor and teacher of nineteenth century America. She made her contribution to the American Renaissance in the field of literature and reform movements. According to Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, Margaret Fuller ‘possessed more influence on the thought of American women than any woman previous to her time.’ She started language classes for women and held conversations for women to enable them to discuss their views freely and explore knowledge in different areas.

The most important work of Margaret Fuller is the essay, ‘The Great Lawsuit: Man vs. Men and Woman vs. Women’ written in 1843. She enlarged this essay and published a recast in 1845 entitled Woman in the Nineteenth Century. It can be called a manifesto of the Women’s Rights Movement. She projects the oppression of the female sex and demands equal status, ‘[...] hers is the ablest, bravest, broadest, assertion
yet made of what are termed Woman's Rights.\textsuperscript{11} The works of these writers served to enlighten the nineteenth century minds. Women were given more space.

The women in Keats's own life wielded a positive influence on his poetry. His female relatives included his grandmother, mother, sister, his beloved and some friends. His relationships provided him with memories and fantasies of identification with the conventional feminine domains. When transferred to his poetry, they transcended actual experience.

One of the most profound influences upon Keats's life was his mother. She has been accused of being impulsive and erratic due to her remarriage two months after the death of her husband. Keats was greatly attached to his mother. 'The effect of this remarriage on the children must have been profound, especially on John. He was his mother's favorite, and his passionate possessive nature towards her had already shown itself.'\textsuperscript{12}

The nineteenth century was woman-centered. The role of the mother was very important:

\begin{quote}
The mother-child relationship was at the heart of the new model of familial domesticity. Children came to fulfill an emotional and sentimental role within the family, as opposed to a financial role, and this required intensive parental and especially maternal involvement with children.\textsuperscript{13}
\end{quote}
Keats had a deep involvement with his mother but the emotional and sentimental role was not fulfilled in Keats’s case because she did not live with the children. This created in Keats a deep insecurity that stayed with him throughout his life. According to Joseph Severn, ‘Keats used to say that his great misfortune had been that from his infancy he had no mother.’ When she returned, she was a sick woman. Keats nursed her all through her sickness. She also showered her affection on him. Her sudden death shattered him totally.

Maternal care was provided to the Keats children by their grandmother. She tried her best to give them the love and understanding. Keats acknowledged his attachment. Her death affected them equally but it brought great changes in the life of Fanny Keats. She had to live with her guardian Abbey at Walthamstow. It was a trend that ‘unmarried and widowed women could find a place for themselves, either incorporated into the household of kin or, if finances were tight, of an unrelated family.’ Keats was extremely concerned about her well being. She was not allowed to meet her brothers. This troubled Keats a great deal. He tried to behave like a responsible brother. ‘To care for his small sister was for Keats an exercise of normality to balance the inexplicable contradiction of nature that seemed to surround their mother.’
This thesis explores Keats's poetry and letters from the standpoint of deconstructive phenomenology. Deconstruction in literacy criticism denotes a practice of reading which dismantles the establishment of any boundary, unity and fixity of meaning. 'More specifically, deconstruction aims its critique against a conception of knowledge and meaning as graspable essences that independently precede or follow expression.'¹⁷ The term deconstruction has been originated by the French thinker Jacques Derrida. His major books *Of Grammatology*, *Writing and Difference* and *Speech and Phenomena* are published in 1967.

With the help of deconstruction, a text can be used to support two opposite or contradictory points. Deconstruction offers an alternative to traditional scholarship, to identify strands of narrative, threads of meaning. It also shows that texts contradict their own logic. Deconstructionists practice reading with the aim of unmasking internal contradictions in the text. The aim of it is to show the disunity which apparently seems to possess unity. A literary text lacks a totalized boundary that makes it an entity. That unity is broken by the play of internal contradiction and self-conflicting forces. The deconstructionists look for gaps, breaks, fissures and discontinuities of all kinds. Thus it can be said that:
The word “deconstruction” suggests that such criticism is an activity turning something unified back to detached fragments or parts. It suggests the image of a child taking apart his father’s watch, reducing it back to useless parts, beyond any reconstitution. A deconstructionist is not a parasite but a parricide. He is a bad son demolishing beyond hope of repair the machine of Western metaphysics.

In its approach to literature as primarily subjective, phenomenology studies the structures of consciousness which is experienced from the first person point of view. That experience is intentional and directed toward something or objects.

Phenomenology is the study of ‘phenomenon’, appearances of things as they appear in our experience. According to Husserl:

Objects can be regarded not as thing in themselves but as things posited or ‘intended’ by consciousness. All consciousness is consciousness of something: in thinking, I am aware that my thought is ‘pointing towards’ some object. The act of thinking and the object of thought are internally related, mutually dependent. My consciousness is not just a passive registration of the world, but actively constitutes or ‘intends’ it.

Phenomenological movement as a philosophical method was started in the first half of the 20th century by Edmund Husserl. The term phenomenology is not only restricted to sensory qualities of seeing; hearing etc. rather the range of phenomenology is much wider than that. It includes the meaning things have in our experience, the significance of objects, events, tools, the flow of time, the self and others.
In phenomenological criticism, all the stylistic and semantic aspects of a text are considered as having organic unity. Phenomenology blurs the distinction between subjectivity and objectivity. It is an attempt to understand and describe phenomena exactly as they appear in an individual’s consciousness.

This thesis deals with deconstructive phenomenology combining both deconstruction and phenomenology. Deconstruction is a kind of strategy which departs from traditional scholarship. It challenges and attacks the old and established views. Phenomenology considers a text as an embodiment of the author's consciousness. All of its stylistic and semantic aspects are grasped as organic parts of a complex totality of which the unifying essence is the author's mind. When we apply deconstructive phenomenology the unity or totality of the text are dismantled.

Feminism is not single movement. It involves social theories, political movements, and moral philosophies, largely concerned with the experiences of women in relation to their social, political and economic situation. ‘The term came into English from French in 1890s, replacing the word womanism. It refers to “the doctrine of equal rights for women based on the theory of the equality of the sexes.”'²⁰ At the social level, it focuses on eradicating gender inequality and encouraging women’s
rights. Feminist literary criticism emerges from the Women's movement of the 1960's. Its goal is to reveal the 'misogyny of literary practice.'\(^{21}\) Elain Showalter says 'There is no Mother of Feminist Criticism.'\(^{22}\) She does not want women to only be readers. She emphasizes her point, 'The program of gynocritics is to construct a female framework for the analysis of women's literature, to develop new models based on the study of female experience, rather than to adapt male models and theories.'\(^{23}\)

Critics like Simone de Beauvoir, Mary Ellman and Kate Millett recognize that throughout literary history women have been considered as the 'other'. Simone de Beauvoir is of the opinion that women have been made inferiors and the oppression has been compounded by men's belief that women are inferiors by nature. But she believes that 'One is not born a woman; rather, one becomes, a woman.'\(^{24}\)

Kate Millett in *Sexual Politics* (1790) used the term patriarchy to define the cause of women's oppression. According to her, patriarchy subordinates the female to the male. She makes a distinction between sex and gender. Sex is decided by biology while gender is a psychological concept which refers to culturally acquired sexual identity. In Keats's poems and letters sometimes this ambivalent attitude is visible but it cannot be adhered to very long by the poet. He recognizes the female power.
In Keats’s major poems women possess power and authority. Their presence is life giving and regenerative to men. They are autonomous and free to evolve in their own way. They cannot be tamed or controlled. Precluding the views of third-wave feminism which stresses equality, Keats’s women aspire for it. Equality does not limit gender or sexual expression. Being a woman is just as worthwhile as being a man, and equality includes respecting women’s choices.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


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CHAPTER II

Memory, Magic and Melancholy
The juxtaposition of John Keats’s poems and letters of 1817 within the intersections of feminism and deconstruction identify narratives that pose relevant questions rather than define a convergence or reconciliation of the two literary theories. The ‘rethinking’ thus stimulated highlights the different roles of women, mediates their actions, and investigates the ideal balance and harmony between women, men and nature.

Keats occupies an important place among the Romantic poets. His position now is higher than it was in the nineteenth century. His desire to rank himself among the English poets after his death has been fulfilled. Keats’s poetic development has not been a gradual one. He has grown rapidly both in talent and maturity. Robin Mayhead aptly asserts:

[...] Keats’s development from his feeble poetic beginning to the magnificent odes is one of the great stories of any kind of history [...] No other poet in English has risen from mediocrity with such dramatic speed, and in few writers are hints of future strength so oddly entangled with much that is weakest in their earlier and inferior productions.¹

He also accepts that his work is a combination of quality and kind. Shelley’s *Alaster* worked as a stimulus for Keats to organize his own poems for publication:

‘The first volume of Keats’s muse’, says Cowden Clarke ‘was launched amid the cheers and fond anticipation of all his circle. Everyone of us expected (and not unreasonably) that it would create a sensation in the literary world; for such a first production (and a considerable portion of it from a minor) has rarely occurred.’²
The year 1817 was very important for Keats. He continued to write poetry during his stay with his brothers George and Tom Keats at Cheapside. The first volume of his poetry *Poems* was published by C. and J. Ollier, who were new publishers. The book was not received well, except by his immediate friends. Keats wrote that it was read, 'by some dozen of my friends who lik’d it; and some dozen whom I was unacquainted with, who did not.'

Keats’s relationship with his guardian, Abbey, was not very cordial. Abbey wanted Keats to practice medicine, but Keats’s inclination was in a different direction. He wanted to write poetry. Keats decided to abandon his practice of medicine at a stage when his grandmother’s money had run out. Keats was also worried about his sister who was in the guardianship of Abbey. Abbey’s insecure financial condition made Keats uneasy and this uncertainty is frequently reflected in his poetry.

Keats lacked the guidance of a stable, older person to advise him. His new friends encouraged him and furthered his literary career. However, at the young age of twenty-one he felt utterly lonely, without family connections. No one of the older generation remained to guide him. The only older person connected with him was Richard Abbey but he could not fulfil Keats’s needs. This vacuum is reflected frequently in
his poetry and in his letters. He often turns to a poetic feminine presence for consolation.

Keats presented a copy of Poems to Abbey who scolded him when they next met, 'Well, John', he said, 'I have read your Book & it reminds me of the Quaker's Horse which was hard to catch, & good for nothing when he was caught - So.' Abbey realized that Keats was deeply hurt and said to Taylor, 'I don't think he ever forgave me for uttering this opinion.'

This book could not be sold. Keats had to turn to other publishers viz. Taylor and Hessey. The editorial section was handled by Taylor while the rest of the part was managed by Hessey. He read Keats's poem with interest but he was critical of some parts of it. During the same period Keats published 'On Seeing the Elgin Marbles' in 'The Examiner' on March 9th and in the Sunday paper 'The Champion', edited by John Scott. Reynolds wrote a praiseworthy review of the Keats's first volume Poems. Haydon wrote to Keats, 'but the feelings (you have) put forth lately – have delighted my soul–always consider principle of more value than genius'.

Keats's friends' circle consisted mostly of men when he was at Enfield School with Cowden Clarke. His duties in the surgery made him acquainted with the masculine world and the glimpses that he got of the
feminine world were unpleasant and sad. He saw women on the operation table, crying and unhappy. Dorothy Hewlett records his experiences of women during his medical practice:

In another way Keats's experience of women was not normal. He had spent five impressionable years in medicine; he had seen women sick, in childbirth and enduring the agonies of the operation table. In his greatness of heart he suffered with them.7

These situations created certain awareness within him. Otherwise, life provided him little opportunity to have much contact with women.

His mother abandoned him early in life. He was deeply attached to her. The grandmother also died within a few years of his mother's death. The only female family member Fanny Keats, his sister, could not stay with him. She later claimed, 'My enthusiasm and admiration of my dear brother are so strong in me at this moment, as when the blood of youth flowed in my veins.'8

The absence of natural and direct communication with female relatives created within Keats an anguished yearning for feminine companionship and love. In a letter to George and Tom Eliot 15 April, 1817 he wrote 'I felt rather lonely this morning at breakfast so I went and unbox'd a Shakespeare — “There 's my Comfort.”'

Later, in the same letter, he expressed gratitude for ‘Aunt Dinah’s Counterpane’. In another letter to Leigh Hunt 10 May, 1817 he asked:
How are the Nymphs? [...] Does Mrs. S – cut Bread and Butter neatly as ever? Tell her to procure some fatal scissors and cut the thread of Life of all to be disappointed Poets. Does Mrs. Hunt tear linen in half as straight as ever? Tell her to tear from the book of Life all blank Leaves.

Women lived in Keats’s mind, imagination and emotions. They surface in his letters and poetry. They have presence; they trigger action, raise questions and provide solutions. This movement coordinates with Derrida’s view that, ‘[...] woman is recognized and affirmed as affirmative power,[...] She is not affirmed by man, rather she affirms herself, in herself and in man.’

Keats came in contact with some more women in this period. He became friendly with the Mathew sisters and also their cousins, Caroline and Anne. He also met the enchanting Mary Frogley. He proceeded to address a number of poems to her. She was a beautiful young girl with dark curly hair, dimples and a lively countenance. Keats admired women with lively and attractive personalities. Mary admired his work and this admiration and interest remained even after his death. From Mary Frogley, she became Mrs. Neville. Her husband was a cousin of Richard Woodhouse, the young lawyer, who later on recorded the biography of Keats. This effort proved useful to the coming generations.

Another girl who became acquainted with Keats was Georgiana Augusta Wylie who was destined to marry George Keats. Keats claimed
in a letter of 10 June 1818, 'My Love for my Brothers from the early loss of our parents and even for earlier Misfortunes has grown into an affection 'passing the Love of Women – I have been ill temper’d with them.'

Keats’s literary circle was mainly male. It consisted of patriarchs like Wordsworth, Hunt and Coleridge among poets, and Severn and Haydon among painters. Poetry after the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* was a tough masculine task according to Wordsworth, the father of Romanticism. Haydon praised Keats’s ‘Sleep and Poetry’, ‘I have read your “Sleep and Poetry” – it is a flash of lightening that will round men from their occupations and keep them trembling for the crash of thunder that will follow.’ Haydon keeps just the male readers in view. The female readers are totally excluded. This implies that he considers literature a male domain. Keats too, sometimes has a negative view of the women writers of his time whom he calls a ‘set of Devils’ in a letter, ‘The world, and especially our England, has within the last thirty year’s been vexed and teased by a set of Devils, [...] These Devils are a set of Women [...]’ (Letter, 21 September 1817).

During the same year in March Keats, with his brothers moved to Hampstead which was considered one of the healthier areas of North London. Before their move from Cheapside to Hampstead, Keats’
brothers gave up jobs provided by Abbey. They became acquainted with Clarke, Wentworth, Dilke and his wife, Maria. George Keats left Abbey’s business hoping for a better prospect of earning money. The very next year George moved to America after his marriage with Georgiana Augusta Wylie. Keats felt this separation intensely.

Keats took a four-month tour of Carisbroke, Canterbury, and Hastings etc in April 1817, shortly after giving his book to Abbey. During that period he also completed the first book of *Endymion* and other poems. For the first time in his life, he had the opportunity to focus and pay attention to poetry completely and understand the extent of his own ambition and ability. For a while, he remained in solitude but soon sought the comfort of Tom’s companionship. Haydon, advised him to remain in solitude as much as possible to facilitate writing. But what he personally needed was the support of his siblings. There was a strong bond between the Keats children and the reason was the early loss of his parents and grandparents. Haydon’s kind advice could not influence him and he stayed with them until George’s departure to America. Keats was committed to his brothers and he could not remain away, at times he sacrificing a great deal.

This trip had some beneficial effects on Keats’s life. He came in contact with some people who remained loyal till the end of his life. He
met Joseph Severn, the young painter, who attended to him during his terminal illness at Rome. Keats’s genius impressed Severn immensely. Keats had the ability to feel the poetic essence in all things. Haydon repeats the words of Severn, ‘The humming of the bee, the sight of a flower the glitter of the sun, seemed to make his nature tremble.’

Keats also met Benjamin Bailey and Charles Brown. He stayed with his new friend Bailey at Oxford in September and wrote Book III of *Endymion*. Book IV was completed late in November. Keats felt comfortable with Bailey as he was economically sound and also a good companion. He provided books which Keats enjoyed. Like Severn, he had great admiration for Keats. His warm and genuine admiration encouraged Keats to work. Keats shared many of his personal problems with Bailey. He learned that Abbey did not want Fanny to meet her brothers. Keats wrote comforting letters to her, addressing her as his only sister and “dearest friend”.

Keats’s stay at Oxford gave Bailey an opportunity to have an insight into his character. Without any exaggeration, he says:

> The errors of Keats’s character – and they were as transparent as a weed in a pure and lucent stream of water – resulted from his education; rather from his want of education. But like the Thames waters, when taken out to sea, he had the rare quality of purifying himself."
The brief stay at Oxford made a great impact on Keats as a man and poet. He developed a dedication to his literary career. He returned to London feeling dejected. The noise and lack of privacy of the city hindered the creation of poetry.

In the last months of 1817, Keats recovered from his own illness. However, Tom contracted the disease of which his mother died. Most of his time was spent in caring for his brother.

In December 1817, the poet got the opportunity to meet Wordsworth. Haydon arranged the meeting. At Haydon’s request, Keats recited his ‘Hymn to Pan’ from Endymion. Wordsworth dismissed it as ‘a very pretty piece of Paganism’- Wordsworth’s patriarchal notions could not accommodate the soft nuances of Keats’s poetry. The volume was criticized as having ‘lack of restraint and power’. It had echoes of Wordsworth and the Elizabethans, yet it had individuality. In the poems of 1817 Keats creates a unique individual style. They have spontaneity and fluidity of language. This quality equates him with other great artists. The poems have a wild, natural beauty. Keats uses his senses actively and exhibits the influence of Spenser, Shakespeare and Coleridge.

This volume also contains the natural beauty of fields and gardens. Scattered myths are included. It contains strong autobiographical elements. It appears as an allegory of his life showing his poetic growth,
starting with the ‘Imitation of Spenser’ passing through many stages of ‘Hope’ through the fragmentary ‘Calidore,’ verse epistles addressed to the Mathews, to the great sonnet ‘On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer’ and the finer lines of the last poems in the volume ‘Sleep and Poetry’ in which the seeds of his future poetry are contained.

Keats’s selection of sonnets for the volume is random and not based on any planned scheme. There were mixed responses when the first volume appeared. Charles Cowden Clarke expressed his sorrow over it and said, ‘Alas! The book might have emerged in Timbuctoo with far stronger chance of fame and approbation.’

According to Clarke, Keats’s friendship with Hunt was responsible for the failure of this volume. But there were many positive reviews where Keats emerged as a promising poet. Josiah Conder, the editor of the Eclectic Review appreciated the sonnets:

‘Sleep and Poetry’ he called a strange assay’, and if ‘it is to be taken as the result of the Author’s latest efforts, would seem to show that he was indeed far gone, beyond the reach of the efficacy either of praise or censure in affectation and absurdity.’

He was quite right in his opinion about Keats’s early work. It was the product of his youth and his imagination was fresh, untainted by artificiality. This made Keats different, in a unique sense, from his contemporaries.
Keats early poetry, sparked off by Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* expanded to include the pastoral idylls of Wordsworth and Hunt. Hunt commented that he had a, ‘tendency to notice everything too indiscriminately and without any eye to the natural proportion and effect for giving way to every idea that came across him.’

Keats’s contemplation of sensuous and natural beauty was now combined with the agony and strife of the human heart. The profusion of images and an intense yearning for a proper poetic career gave a vital new dimension to his work. Some of his contemporaries appreciated it and some disliked it. George Felton Mathew observed that, ‘he seems to have a principle that plan and arrangement are prejudicial to poetry.’ John Hamilton Reynolds praised Keats’s spontaneity.

The Romantic literary circles were characterized by all-male meetings hosted by publishers. Poetry remained a male dominion. Keats was heavily influenced by the patriarchs. However, we find an abundance of female characters in his poetry. In the 1817 volume, *Poems*, we find women everywhere. Keats can not write without them. Women represent sources of beauty, energy and inspiration. Sometimes he seems contemptuous toward them and sometimes he is overwhelmed by their physical beauty, charm and humility. His narratives deal with the rhetoric of stormy romances, sometimes followed by conjugal bliss and at others
by disillusion. He views women as sexual objects in his youth but as he matures, he sees them as whole and complete individuals:

The docile maidens of these first poems are the product of a mind that has not yet undergone, in earnest, the tragic experience of a "ruin dark and gloomy". As the experience that Keats attempts to escape in these poems becomes instead the focus of later poems, making the disagreeables more rapidly apparent, the female will become, by necessity, more powerful.\textsuperscript{17}

Love of a woman is, for Keats, a constant source of attraction and repulsion. His analysis, at this stage, is still in the space of formation. His love poems are valuable because he identifies spheres where they are included and also those where they are excluded. The primary inclusion is in the mating ritual. One of his earliest poems, 'Fill for me a brimming bowl' reveals this keynote. Love becomes a source of inspiration to the young Keats even before he meets Fanny Brawne. It is creative of essential beauty. In Keats's poems and more often in his letters, his ambivalent feelings about women are evident. According to Stanley, C. Russel, 'They were desirable mainly in the safe region of fancy, the flesh and blood variety brought only the 'joy of grief,' the hand maiden of death longing.'\textsuperscript{18}

It is significant that in Keats's imagination, poetry itself is frequently presented as feminine. She appears in different forms.
Sometimes she is the comforter and healer. At other times, she is the destructor and betrayer. Susan J. Wolfson asserts:

Sometimes she appears as the hostile arbiter of the poet’s desire, as in Moneta’s challenges to the dreamer of The Fall of Hyperion; sometimes the politics of courtship are reversed so that the poet can vent his hostility, degrading the feminine figure that focuses his desire, or portraying her as a flirt whose attentions prove as inconstant as they are potent. These figurations are largely conventional, of course, but Keats shows himself attracted to them, and experiencing their implications, in a uniquely intense and eroticised way.

Spenser was a recurrent influence on Keats’s poetry. The poem ‘Imitation of Spenser’ is a deliberate attempt on the part of Keats to write like him. In the opening lines, the morning has been personified as a woman, who came from ‘her orient chamber’. She spreads her beneficence without any discrimination. Each hill, flowers, lake and the bowers around it and also the sky get their freshness from her. She has maternity that provides comfort to all. In the lake, the kingfisher sees his bright feathers reflected and the swan stretches his neck with majesty. Here we find Keats reveling in male majesty. We can identify some narcissist elements here. The next few lines show that Keats is enchanted by the beauty of an island in the lake. He says that no one has ever seen such a beautiful place. He refers to two very sad people, Dido and Lear. The island appears like an emerald in the bright waters. Different kinds of plants are dipping into the water with the familiarity of intimate friends.
Drops of water roll down from the rose tree and fall like tears. The poem is loaded with poignant natural scenes.

The next sonnet 'On Peace' was written to celebrate the end of the war with France. Keats addresses peace in high terms. In the same context, Keats refers to mountain nymphs. In Classical mythology, they are beautiful female spirits inhabiting the sea, rivers, woods and mountains. Further, he addresses Europe and calls upon her to get liberty and stay in chains no more. Here the Romantic attitude to freedom and liberty is evident.

According to Woodhouse the poem 'Fill for me a brimming bowl' was written after Keats briefly caught sight of an unknown woman at Vauxhall. The poet wants to have a bowl full of wine and drown his soul in it. But he also wishes to pour some intoxicating potion in it, to banish the thought of womankind from his mind:

Fill for me a brimming bowl,
And let me in it drown my soul;
But put therein some drug, designed
To banish Woman from my mind. 20
(LL.1-4)

He says that the effect of her charm and beauty is so intense that he wants a drug to alleviate it. But it is also suggestive of his fear of women. He does not want to think about them. According to him women arouse
sexual desire that captivates and ruins men. He wants to forget the 'fairest form' totally and to be free of 'lewd desiring'.

But, the poet discovers he feels helpless before beauty. He cannot resist her beautiful form. Each and every part of her body fascinates him. She has a soft face, bright eyes and her breast has been described as 'earth's only paradise'. Her extreme sensuousness bewilders him. Keats does not want to banish and forget her. He wants his love to be reciprocated. Feminine power is acknowledged. The poet wants to see a feminine smile and gain sweet relief from the 'joy of grief'. He ends the poem by saying that, like Tuscan, he wants to dwell on his beloved all the time. He starts in fear and hatred, but concludes in appreciation. Mixed emotions characterize all of Keats's earlier works.

The sonnet 'As from the darkening gloom a silver dove' was written by Keats on the death of his grandmother. He compares her with a dove which is a symbol of purity, chastity and innocence. His grandmother played an important and affectionate role in his life, after his mother's untimely death. Keats has a very high opinion about his grandmother. We find that in accordance with the Romantic tradition he treats death positively and finds in it liberation from all worldly problems. His grandmother represents the maternal aspect of the ideal woman.
The sonnet ‘To Lord Byron’ was written as a dedication to Byron. Keats seems to be full of praise and admiration for him. He starts the poem using an oxymoron ‘sweetly sad’ to describe his melodious works which have a good effect not only on the body, but also on the soul. He compares his sad melody with ‘soft pity’ but he calls it her ‘plaintive lute’. He says that it seems soft pity has played her musical lute in a sad tone. Keats has a particular fondness for paradoxes and he was to use them in his odes also.

He says that the impending sorrow does not reduce his delight in any way. Keats says that his grief is dressed with a ‘bright halo’ shining like a cloud. It covers the face of the moon for a short while and its sides have a resplendent glow. The moon is a symbol of the goddess Diana. He desires to go on telling tales of ‘pleasing woe’. The theme of co-existence of pleasure and pain is recurrent in Keats’s works.

There are certain sonnets which Keats wrote on particular occasions. The sonnet ‘Written on the Day that Mr. Leigh Hunt left Prison’ is among the better known. Liberty, in the Romantic tradition, is celebrated. Keats compares Hunt to a lark that is free. The Romantics always look through the mind’s eye. In his imagination the poet is always free. His opponents put him in prison but his mind was never chained. Hunt admired Spenser and Milton. This is warmly expressed in his *Feast*
of the Poets. The feast is held in a ‘bower fair, ‘the place of nestling green’. Milton is hailed as ‘daring’.

The next poem ‘To Hope’ finds the poet in a gloomy mood, hoping to find happiness and comfort. The term ‘solitary hearth’ in the poem highlights poet’s loneliness. The hearth is a symbol of womanhood. He says that no happy thought or ‘fair dreams’ even cross in his imagination. His life seems to him barren and sterile. This can be rectified only by finding a mate. The poet acknowledges the most ancient role of women.

Keats says that at the fall of night when he wanders, the thick trees do not allow the ‘moon’s bright ray’ to come through. At that time ‘sad Despondency’ which has been personified here, retards the poet’s happiness. The poet tells Hope to slip in with the moon-beams through the thick leaves to keep the despondency far away. In next few lines, Disappointment personified as the mother of Despair, tries to give happiness to her son. She is maternal and is striving to fulfill her son’s desires. The poet emerges from grief and hopelessness to identify Hope as his only friend and comforter.

The poet’s mood changes in the next stanza. In a patriotic vein, he personifies his homeland as a woman. Keats also addresses liberty as a woman in simple attire. She has a sacrificing temperament. Keats goes on
to compare Hope to a star which glides from a bright summit to some ‘gloomy cloud’ and brightens the ‘half-veiled face’ of Heaven. This bevy of lovely women dispels unhappiness and brings comfort to him.

In ‘Ode to Apollo’ we find that Keats has projected the completely ‘male’ world of Shakespeare, Milton, Spenser and Tasso. He ‘celebrates quintessentially masculine attributes.’ He talks about the great male writers who influenced him. In the last stanza, he talks about women. The nine Muses are female. Apollo, the god of music controls all of them. Most of the words used here are musical e.g. lyre, band, trumpet. He concludes the poem by saying that poetic talent combined with feminine inspiration, creates music of the highest variety. Thus we find that Keats has a persistent consciousness of the female entity. The suggestion that she is significant appears as early as this.

‘To Some Ladies’ is written in response to the gift of a shell received from the Mathew sisters. In the opening line, the poet says:

What though, while the wonders of nature exploring,
I cannot your light mazy footsteps attend,
Nor listen to accents that, almost adoring,
Bless Cynthia’s face, the enthusiast’s friend.

(Ll.1-4)

He says that at the time when they are exploring the ‘wonders of nature’ he is unable to see clearly but their walk is ‘light, mazy’ in the fairy way. Their beauty is apparent from their beautiful gait. The poet is
also unable to hear their accents and interpret their words which seem loaded with adoration. They provide strength, beauty and blessings to Cynthia. Cynthia has been called the 'enthusiast’s friend' because the moon is loved by poets. He says that Cynthia is the moon goddess who provides inspiration to poets. He gives a description of the hills from where streams of water gush forth with 'kindest friends'. The idea of mountain streams gushing forth is very pleasing to the poet. In the third stanza, Keats poses numerous questions such as why they are walking at such a slow pace, in such a casual and labyrinthine manner and why they are getting 'breathless'. He muses that it is because they are unable to express their happiness. This is the Keatsian attitude toward happiness. He claims that the excess of it makes one unable to express it. He reminds us of the nightingale’s tender sympathy with Sylph. Sylph is a slender, graceful girl or woman. She is also one of the race of imaginary beings supposed to inhabit the air. We find the poet celebrating the feminine instinct of offering solace.

Now we find a shift of time. When the poem started, it was night time. The moon was in the sky but now it is morning and the flowers are bending because of the weight of dew drops. Now the poet beholds the fairy forms walking on the riverside. He sees them stooping to pickup the shell intended for the poet. Keats says that a Cherub on silver wings has
brought the gem from the ‘fretwork of heaven’. Cherub is a male baby angel. Keats awards women a high place and reserves his warm affections for the ‘fair sex’ or as he calls them ‘fair nymphs’. The last stanza shows Keats’s enjoyment of feminine company:

For, indeed, ’tis a sweet and peculiar pleasure  
(And blissful is he who such happiness finds)  
To possess but a span of the hour of leisure  
In elegant, pure, and aerial minds.  

(Ll.25-28)

Keats rises above physical attraction to higher thoughts of ‘elegant, pure and aerial minds’.

‘On Receiving a Curious Shell and a Copy of Verses from the Same Ladies’ is one of the poems, addressed to George Felton Mathew. The first three stanzas are in the form of a question. Keats asks him whether he possess a shell taken from the ‘caves of Golconda’, the old name for Hyderabad, famous for its diamonds. The colonial connection is visible here. He compares the shell to the ‘humming bird’s’ green crown which seems brighter when the bird dives into the fountain and the feathers glisten in the sunshine. He also wants to know whether he possesses heavy, gold goblet engraved with the tale of ‘Aramida the fair and Rinaldo the bold’. Keats depicts the heroes as bold and courageous and women as mute owners of beauty. The list of possessions acquires a fairy tale dimension as it enlarges to include a horse with long hair, a
sword to tackle enemies, a trumpet blowing rich melodies, and the shield of Britomartis. The ‘shield of famed Britomartis’ conjures up the presence of a woman garbed as a protectress. We can identify the struggle between the poet’s external claim to masculine independence and his internal deep-seated longing for feminine protection. The poet continues:

What is it that hangs from thy shoulder, so brave,  
Embroidered with many a spring-peering flower?  
Is it a scarf that thy fair lady gave,  
And hastest thou now to that fair lady’s bower?  
(Ll.13-16)

He wonders whether the embroidered scarf is a gift from his beloved and whether he now hurries to her bower. The image of the ‘fair lady’s bower’ has sexual connotations. The male’s entry into the bower suggests fulfillment of love. After putting so many questions to him Keats now addresses him as ‘courteous Sir Knight’ acknowledging his bravery and chivalry. Keats diverts his attention to the tale of the wreath and the chain and says that this particular tale gives him relief from the troubles of this world. We find King Oberon languishing beneath the shade of this shell:

‘When lovely Titania was far, far away,  
And cruelly left him to sorrow and anguish.’  
(Ll.27-28)

Queen Titania and King Oberon are characters from Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream. In the lament, the poet projects a weak man and
a strong woman. But the woman has also been accused of being cruel. Betrayal of a male by a cruel female occurs at many other places, e.g. in 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci'. The sad and dejected mood is alleviated by Oberon’s fairy music. The emphasis on Oberon’s pathos creates romantic melancholy.

‘To Emma Mathew’, begins by addressing Emma as ‘dearest Emma’ and begging her to come. The poet seems to be courting his beloved. There is natural scenery all around providing ease and comfort. The roses are in full bloom. The air is cool and the streams of water are clear. It is evening when the sun is setting and its rays are spreading in the westward. He asks her to accompany him to the opening glades where there are carved seats. In that calm and fresh atmosphere, fairies sing. Fairies are female, the sylphs are also female and they all swim lightly across and the poet goes on to say that he will find a bed of ‘mosses and flowers’ for her. Flowers and green moss are associated with the mating ritual. The earlier scene is a preparatory ritual. ‘There is little sense of physical eroticism in the early poems because the female is not yet a complete sexual being. True eroticism frequently involves a sense of physical and emotional risk, and there is nothing frightening about the early virginal representations.’ 22
He says that he will breathe fondly and sigh so softly that she will imagine that the highly sexual zephyr is breathing his love:

So fondly I'll breathe, and so softly I'll sigh,
Thou wilt think that some amorous Zephyr is nigh;
Ah, no!- as I breathe, I will press thy fair knee
And then thou wilt know that the sigh comes from me.

(L.13-16)

He concludes the poem asking her to accept his love with approval that shows in her beautiful eyes and gentle voice.

In 'O Solitude, if I must with thee dwell', Keats claims that the thing which gives happiness to his soul is the conversation of a woman who has refined ideas and an 'innocent mind'. The poem starts with the particular, but ends with generalization enveloping the entire human kind. In this way the poem deconstructs itself. We identify the presence of a woman whose conversation is sweet and who has an innocent mind, who is away from all the evils of the world and the words spoken by her gives a picture of refined ideas. She provides happiness to men through her conversation and her sweet voice. She is not only an object of male desire, but also a source of pleasure:

[...], and it sure must be
Almost the highest bliss of human kind,
When to thy haunts two kindred spirits flee.

(L.10-14)

'To George Felton Mathew' was written in response to Mathew's

To a Poetical Friend. Keats starts the poem by praising the pleasures of
poetry. He desires to devote his time to the 'coy muse', who combines poetry and femininity. Keats makes a significant beginning. He places women in a sphere where so far there had been only men. Ordinary women leading highly feminine lives are celebrated in the poems dealt with in this chapter.

The poet wonders whether the maid will be kind to him when he will move to a 'flowery spot, sequestered, wild and romantic'. He enlists the help of Mathew in finding a suitable place where he might greet the maid. He wants to sit and rhyme with him where like true poets they may adopt all of the 'soft humanity':

Felton, without incitements such as these,
How vain for me the niggard Muse to tease.
For thee, she will thy every dwelling grace
And make 'a sun-shine in a shady place'.
(Ll.72-75)

The poem 'Give me women, wine and snuff' projects a certain amount of chauvinism. He includes women in the category of wine and snuff. They are treated as objects of sexual desire, pleasure, entertainment and other intoxicating things. He wants to remain with them till the day of his death. The poem reveals the wayward excitement of youth.

'To Mary Frogleys' was sent to the lady concerned on Valentine's Day by Keats. The poem is full of praise of her physical beauty. Each and every part of her body is described with admiration, even to the point of
exaggeration. He is in raptures over her lively countenance. Her long hair is described as curls decorated with pearls. Her voice is admired ‘honeyed’; her two feet have been compared with two water lilies born in water. Keats says that if she had breathed at that time, the nine Muses would have become ten. Like every other valentine, he is overwhelmed by her beauty. Keats addresses his readers as if they are always male and likely to share his ecstasy.

The poem ‘To – [‘Had I a man’s fair form’]’ has probably been written by Keats as another valentine for Mary Frogley. The line ‘Had I a man’s fair form’ suggests that the poet has an earnest desire to achieve the qualities of a perfect man. It also suggests that although he is a man, he is not satisfied with his appearance. Keats seems to be negotiating an identity crisis here. Conventional thought defined masculine superiority through brute force. Keats is embarrassed by his lack of inches. In his letter of 22 July 1818 to Benjamin Bailey, he seems to have evolved when he says: ‘I do think better of womankind than to suppose they care whether Mister John Keats five feet height likes them or not.’

As we move ahead we find the presence of a woman, for the love of whom Keats desires to possess a ‘man’s fair form’. The poet suggests that she is beautiful and white like ivory but apparently hard like a shell.
The ivory shell is in contrast to her ‘gentle heart’. He expresses his sorrow when he says:

But ah! I am no knight whose foeman dies,
No cuirass glistens on my bosom’s swell;
I am no happy shepherd of the dell
Whose lips have trembled with a maiden’s eyes.

(Ll.5-8)

The poet says that if he had a fair form his love would have been reciprocated:

Yet must I dote upon thee – call thee sweet,
Sweeter by far than Hybla’s honeyed roses
When steeped in dew rich to intoxication.

(Ll.9-11)

He says that though he lacks those qualities, yet he longs to show much affection for her. Here he uses the word ‘must’ which shows his strong resolution. He refers to Hybla, a mountain in Sicily famous for its flowers, bees and honey. He compares the ‘honeyed roses’ of the Hybla with his beloved and says that his beloved is sweeter than the roses and when the dew falls on them it produces intoxication. He talks of the morning, but in the next few lines he talks about the night time and the moon. There is a shift of time. The line suggests a recollection of the magical rites practiced by Madea before the full moon in order to restore Aeson’s youth. This reference shows that Keats was interested in someone’s love and affection which he wants to acquire by any means including magic.
The title of the poem ‘Calidore – a fragment’, is taken from *The Faerie Queene VI*, ‘The Legend of Sir Calidore, or of Courtesie’. The poem begins with a picture of Calidore ‘paddling’ over the lake, eager to enjoy the beauty of a silent evening. The whole scene is resplendent with light and he is unwilling to leave the beauty of this world. He wants to take refuge in the green surroundings of ‘easy slopes’ in the shadow of the thick trees around the brim of water. The trees lean over the surface of the lake. Calidore has clear and quick eye movements but he is scarcely able to observe the ‘freak and dartings of the black winged swallow’.

The shore is bowery and moves by the gentle blowing of the wind. Bowers, in Keats poetry, represent the rendezvous of lovers. There is a light blue mountain, but no presence of human beings who can feel with a warm heart the beauty of nature and can pass through the natural objects. Ruins add to the picture of romantic beauty. There is a little ivy-covered chapel with a cross on top. A dove spreads its feathers on the window and makes a flight into the cloud. There are green islands across the lake. There are thick leaves and in the dim twilight appear ‘large dock leaves’, foxgloves, the bird’s eye glow in the dim light, the newly grown stems from the trees, or the long grass from a ‘little brook’. A small stream of water flows along edged with long grass. After such a long description of
natural surroundings, Keats reminds us of young Calidore. He is happy to meet his friends and eagerly turns his boat. A gloomy castle comes into view. Small birds with bright eyes fly in the clear sky on the air. Calidore recollects the greeting he offered to the ladies:

[...] What a kiss,
What gentle squeeze he gave each lady’s hand!
How tremblingly their delicate ankles spanned!
Into how sweet a trance his soul was gone.
(L.1.80-83)

He observes their delicate ankles trembling at the gentle touch of his hand. At that time he feels his soul has gone in a sweet trance. Female beauty enchants and fascinates him. These ladies express their love in whispers; bend over his neck with sweet intentions. In other words they take the initiative and he remains the passive recipient:

He feels a moisture on his check and blesses,
With lips that tremble and with glistening eye,
All the soft luxury
That nestled in his arms.[...
(L.1.90-93)

The word ‘blesses’ suggests male superiority in bestowing blessings to the female who is simply a recipient even in the area of love, her purpose is to satisfy him:

And this he fondled with his happy cheek
As if for joy he would no further seek.
(L.1.97-98)
His erotic activity was interrupted by the ‘Kind voice of good Clarimond’. We find that Keats is full of praise for him and his voice in Calidore’s ear makes him realize the presence of some one other than himself because he is engrossed in his love-games with those ladies. He unclasps his warm and passionate hands gently from their sweet enthrallment and thanks God for providing him such continuous joy and happiness. Further we find reverence and honour given to Clarimond by Calidore who is acknowledged as the helper and comforter of the suffering people. Keats talks of both of these men in high terms. The beautiful women simply provide a sensual background. He is introduced by a good man as ‘brave Gondlibert’ to Calidore. They move toward a hall well decorated, and ‘the sweet-lipped ladies’ greet them.

Valour and beauty appear side by side. Keats brings in a reference to Philomela. Philomel, a nightingale, in classical mythology, was an Athenian princess who was raped by her brother in law Tereus who cut off her tongue. She was consequently avenged and transformed into a nightingale.

The song of the nightingale is audible from her leafy shelter in a sweet smelling lemon tree. The sound of the trumpet is still clear and can be heard from a distance. The isolated picture of the moon in the sky is suggestive of inherent feminine loneliness. The sweet voices of these
happy human beings are also heard and their conversation has been compared to the ‘busy spirits’. The poet also mentions Hesperus who is the evening star Venus. Thus we find the image of women consistently present throughout the poem.

’Woman! When I behold thee flippant, vain’ is one of the three Petrarchan sonnets of 1817. The poem is a direct address to women. In this poem Keats has shown the double aspect of womankind viz. when she is proud vain and also when she is meek, kind and tender:

Woman! When I behold thee flippant, vain,
   Inconstant, childish, proud, and full of fancies,
   Without that modest softening that enhances
   The downcast eye, repentant of the pain
   That its mild light creates to heal again.
   (L.l.1-5)

These lines describe the immature and childish woman who is a dreamer. Keats says that even the look of that proud, vain, woman make his heart and soul leap with joy and excessive happiness and he has waited to get her love for a long time dormant. The poet says ‘meek and kind and tender’ women win his adoration. Keats glosses conventional women. He casts himself in the role of a protector:

But when I see thee meek and kind and tender,
   Heavens, how desperately do I adore
   Thy winning graces! To be thy defender
   I hotly burn – to be a Calidore,
   A very Red Cross Knight, a stout Leander,
   Might I be loved by thee like these of yore.
   (L.l.9-14)
He wants to gain the status of brave heroes like Calidore, Red Cross Knight and Leander and like them wants to get his beloved back from the hands of opponents.

The next poem ‘Light feet, dark violet eyes, and parted hair’, deals with Keats’s admiration for the physical beauty of a woman described with many adjectives like light feet, dark violet eyes, parted hair, soft dimpled hands, white neck and creamy breast:

Thus, whenever women appear in these early poems, they are indeed classed “with roses and sweetmeats,” or, as in “I stood tip-toe,” with “dandelion’s down” and “evening primroses.” While the poet stands away from the scene, attempting to peer into the poetic future, the unnamed maiden appears in as dreamy a state at the scene itself, “playing in all her innocence of thought.”

He accepts that he has not enough courage to ignore her beauty, even if he can not get her. He says that when he sees women talking with ‘mild intelligences’ he feels more fascinated by them and wants to listen to their divine voices. Here he undermines women by saying that they possess only mild intelligence. In one of his letters Keats says that, ‘These things combined with the opinion I have of the generality of women-who appear to me as children to whom I would rather give a Sugar Plum than my time’ (Letter, 14-31 October 1818). He refers to female beauty as alluring. He says that when beauty is added to intelligence it charms and fascinates.
‘Ah, who can e’er forget so fair a being’, begins with a question contained in the title, with the answer hidden in the question itself. The poem is an appreciation of female beauty and charm. However, we can identify a phallogocentric attitude when the poet says, ‘God! She is like a milk-white lamb that bleats | For man’s protection’ (11.3-4). Keats has depicted women as helpless, dependent, and comparable to ‘milk-white lamb’. Men have been projected as the powerful protectors of women. We see patriarchy at its height. Keats’s chauvinism is evident. The poet says Heaven will be denied to one who destroys a girl’s virginity. He visualizes his beloved playing a musical instrument and plucking a dewy flower from a place in shade of trees.

The poem discusses feminine beauty, charm and the enchanting and entangling influence of women. He considers women unsafe in this male dominated world. They are physically delicate and can be ruined by their protectors. The word ‘bleat’ shows the loss of the voice. He also knows that God will not forgive those men who seduce women but he also accepts like other men that nobody can escape from such beauty. ‘In truth there is no freeing | One’s thought from such a beauty’ (ll.8-9). This is the answer to his first question.

‘Oh, how I love, on a fair summer’s eve’, starts with the poet’s desire for love on a summer evening, when the west is resplendent with
the light of the setting sun and the silver clouds are taking rest peacefully on the ‘balmy zephyrs’ i.e. on the sky. They seem at a far distance from all mean, worldly affairs and he wants to go there for a temporary refuge and lose his soul in delight. We find Keats seeking inspiration from the great male writers:

Musing on Milton’s fate, on Sidney’s bier,
Till their stern forms before my mind arise.
(Ll.10-11)

In the last three lines he says that he will do so. He will fly ‘Perhaps on the wings of poesy’. Poetry is often represented as female. Once again his feminist instinct resurfaces. He will drop delicious tears when some ‘melodious sorrow’ will overpower him.

Keats’s keen observation is visible in the sonnet ‘To my Brother George’. He writes:

Many the wonders I this day have seen:
The sun, when first he kissed away the tears
That filled the eyes of morn; […]
(Ll.1-3)

He is describing a particular day when he has seen many beautiful scenes of nature. He first gives the picture of the sun which removes the tears from the eyes of the morning. He sees the image of poets leaning from the evening sky. The picture of the ocean also captures the poet’s attention with its green blue water, moving ships, the rise and fall of the
water. The voice of the ocean seems mysterious to its listeners. Keats says:

E'en now, dear George, while this for you I write,
Cynthia is from her silken curtains peeping
So scantly that it seems her bridal night,
And she her half-discovered revels keeping.

(Ll.9-12)

Keats talks about the time when he is writing this particular sonnet for his brother. This is the time when the moon, hailed as Cynthia, is trying to appear in the sky. She is peeping from her silken curtains, as if it is her bridal night and she is feeling shy. In the last two lines of the poem Keats is not satisfied with the natural beauty of sun, moon, ocean, sky and other beautiful surroundings and says:

But what, without the social thought of thee,
Would be the wonders of the sky and sea?

(Ll.13-14)

In his poem entitled ‘To Charles Cowden Clarke’, Keats pays tribute to Cowden Clarke’s knowledge of Tasso. He introduces Aramida. From her bowers a soft gentle music is produced and from there the fragrance issues. Thus we find the presence of woman soothing, balmy, providing freshness and comfort. Keats praises Clarke for his knowledge of Spenser and describes feminine beauty which is erotic. He says:

Small good to one who had by Mulla’s stream
Fondled the maidens with the breasts of cream;
Who had beheld Belphoebe in a brook,
And lovely Una in a leafy nook,
The picture of Belphoebe and Una in a leafy shade or bower has sexual connotations. Archimago the male character has been shown as 'leaning over his book'. In this image we can read Keats's attitude toward both the sexes. The activity of reading is a male dominion and women have been kept away from it. They are only associated with sexual activity.

Clarke read Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and commented on 'gay Titania' and 'divine Urania'. He also enjoyed Leigh Hunt's 'The Story of Rimini'. He could write beautifully about:

> Of troops chivalrous prancing through a city,  
> And tearful ladies made for love and pity,  
> With many else which I have never known.  
> (Ll.46-48)

The woman is in 'tears' asking for love and pity. The 'troops chivalrous' represent a procession of men. Keats modestly says that he is unwilling to try his 'unlearned' hand at writing. He uses Spenserian vowels which float with the ease of halcyons, traditionally associated with calm and ease. He talks about Miltonic characters, particularly of 'meek Eve's fair slenderness'.

'Cynthia's smiles' light up the dark night. The corn in the field turns golden, in the light of the moon. The picture of the moon peeping
through the cloudlet is recurrent in Keats's poetry. Poetic inspiration
seizes his imagination and he starts to produce poetry.

'How many bards gild the lapses of time' begins with a question. Keats
acknowledges them as his mentors. They create harmony and
balance. The music produced is pleasing and charming like the sounds of
nature e.g. the songs of birds, sounds produced by the moving of the
leaves in the wind, the splash of rivers and the bells of the church.
Together they produce music which is almost divine.

In the sonnet 'On First Looking into Chapman's Homer', Keats
records his excitement on reading the translation of Homer by Chapman.
The poet talks of the 'realms of gold' in terms of reaching a new world.
Apollo is a recurrent figure in the poetry of Keats. Apollo is known as the
god of the sun and of poetry. Apollo controls all the poets but they are
inspired by the Muses. Homer is presented as a representative of the
masculine world:

Oft of one wide expanse had I been told
    That deep-browed Homer ruled as his demesne;
Yet did I never breathe its pure serene
    Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold.

(Ll.5-6)

The poet talks of Homer as the strong and powerful ruler of the
wide expanse of poetry. He receives the translation of Homer by
Chapman like an explorer who has discovered some new planet. His
excitement can clearly be felt through this analogy. He compares his condition at that time with Stout Cortez who was also an explorer, when he ‘stared at the pacific’. Adjectives like ‘deep-browed’, ‘stout’, highlight the mental and physical superiority of men:

‘He stared at the Pacific, and all his men
Looked at each other with a wild surmise’ –
(L.l.12-13)

In the moment of discovery Keats has included only men and has excluded women totally. He believes that this kind of adventure is only for men.

The sonnet ‘Keen, fitful gusts are whispering here and there,’ was written after a visit to Leigh Hunt’s cottage in the Vale of Heath, Hampstead, when Keats was staying with his brothers at Cheapside. Here only one feminine figure is present and she is known for her charm and her dress. Petrarch has been shown as ‘faithful’ which also make us think that she was only lovely and not faithful. This reflects Keats’s inherent bias toward women.

In the sonnet ‘On Leaving Some Friends at an Early Hour’ Keats visualizes a female figure:

And let there glide by many a pearly car,
Pink robes, and wavy hair, and diamond jar,
And half discovered wings, and glances keen.
(L.l.6-8)
‘pink robes’, ‘wavy hair’, ‘glances keen’, evoke the picture of a dainty woman.

‘To my Brothers’ was written on Tom’s birthday. The opening lines show the description of an atmosphere which reminds us of winter. Warm flames issuing from the fresh laid coals create a cozy picture. As the coals burn, the hiss and crackle breaks the silence that has engulfed the poet and his brother. The burning of the fire and the silence of the poet depict his loneliness and highlight the absence of a feminine partner.

The most important work of Keats’s first volume is ‘Sleep and Poetry’:

What is more gentle than a wind in summer?  
What is more soothing than the pretty hummel
That stays one moment in an open flower
And buzzes cheerily from bower to bower?

(L. 1-4)

Similar questions continue until the poet reveals that he is talking about sleep. The female presence lingers throughout. While talking about sleep, he compares it with a female figure and says that sleep is more secret than the ‘nest of nightingales’, and even more serene than ‘Cordelia’s countenance’. Later he concludes that poetry, which is feminine, is more important for Keats.

Sleep is described as the ‘soft closer’ of our eyes, the silent entangler of a beauty’s tresses. Beauty suggests the presence of a woman,
with beautiful hair. Sleep also provides us with happiness and removes burdens. For Keats it appears that poetry has feminine association and is associated with intoxication and luxury. Through the intoxicating effect of poetry, he wants to die of an excess of pleasure. This is a typical Keatsian sentiment. The excess of pleasure casts a deathly effect. The poet is in a trance like state. He says that if he can resist the overwhelming sweets, he will visualize certain things. He is overwhelmed by the sweetness of poesy and a fresh vision appears before him. The vision of a ‘bowery nook’ is equated with ‘Elysium’. He fantasizes about women. He talks about the nymphs playing in the woods, and also about a sleeping maid. The bowery nook will inspire him to write poetry of extraordinary quality. His mind continues to be preoccupied with the thoughts of women, so in his visions beautiful women make repeated appearances. He thinks of women in different forms, playing, sleeping or solemnly meditating. The ‘enchanted grot’ has sexual connotation. The image of a veiled woman symbolizes mysterious possibilities.

Keats sees women as objects of desire. As a preamble to consummation, he tastes luscious fruit:

[...] First the realm I'll pass
Of Flora and old Pan: sleep in the grass,
Feed upon apples red and strawberries,
And choose each pleasure that my fancy sees;
Catch the white-handed nymph in shady places
To woo sweet kisses from averted faces,
Play with their fingers, touch their shoulders white
Into a pretty shrinking with a bite
As hard as lips can make it, till, agreed,
A lovely tale of human life we’ll read.

(Ll. 101-110)

The maid seems unwilling but he woos and persuades her and she gives in. A nymph teaches ‘a tame dove how it best | May fan the cool air gently o’er my rest’, another enchants him with her dancing and third seduces with air and graces. The poet loses himself in their sensuality:

Another will entice me on and on
Through almond blossoms and rich cinnamon,
Till in the bosom of a leafy world
We rest in silence, like two gems upcurled
In the recesses of a pearly shell.

(Ll.117-21)

The picture is full of erotic and sexual imagery. The image of the leafy world reminds us of the bower and of how far removed it is from the cares and stresses of every day life:

And can I ever bid these joys farewell?
Yes, I must pass them for a nobler life,
Where I may find the agonies, the strife
Of human hearts – […]

(Ll.122-25)

Keats’s poetry moves ahead from mere individual concern to a deeper understanding of human life.

The poet’s reverie is disturbed by a ‘lovely wreath of girls | Dancing their sleek hair into tangled curls’. The vision blurs and he returns to the reality which seems a ‘muddy dream’. Keats traces the
development of English poetry. His complaints underscore his belief that
writing poetry is specifically a male domain:

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? [...]  
(Ll.162-165)

We notice that he instinctively personifies the imagination as ‘she’. He
encourages the poets to let her fly. Without high imagination they can not
produce good poetry. Thus her role is high and honourable. The nine
Muses were the supreme sources of inspiration. Keats points out that,
ironically, the beneficiaries were men not women. ‘Men were thought
wise who could not understand | His glories’ (ll.184-85). He describes the
characteristics of poetry in the following manner:

[...] A drainless shower
Of light is Poesy; 'tis the supreme of power;
'Tis might half slumbering on its own right arm
The very archings of her - lids charm
A thousand willing agents to obey,
And still she governs with the mildest sway.  
(Ll.235-40)

Keats visualizes poetry as feminine again and again in his poetry.
She appears here as a mother because she never tires of providing
comfort. She has been described as a drainless shower of light. She is
beautiful, maternal and kind. Her followers are innumerable and always
ready to obey her. They are enraptured by her personality. She governs
but is not authoritative. The Muses provide inspiration for poetry. Keats says that strength alone is not sufficient to write poetry. He is aware of the limitations of intellect. He knows that the dark mysteries of human soul cannot be revealed. The matriarch leads him to ‘the end and aim of poesy’.

Keats draws our attention toward a host of images leading to the feminine entity. He describes the stirring of a half visible swan’s neck, a small grey bird among the bushes and a butterfly with golden wings. Suddenly, he is reminded of sleep. He finds his way to a temple around which the pictures of poets are hung. Fauns and Satyrs float around trying to pluck the fruit. A convoy of nymphs comes to greet him:

[...], and thereto a train
Of nymphs approaching fairly o’er the sward:
One, loveliest, holding her white hand toward
The dazzling sun-rise; two sisters sweet
Bending their graceful figures till they meet
Over the trippings of a little child;
And some are hearing, eagerly, the wild
Thrilling liquidity of dewy piping.

(Li. 364-71)

The loveliest is praying. Her white hands are stretched towards the sunrise. The two sisters with ‘graceful figures’ follow her. He discovers that ‘[...] nymphs are wiping | Cherishingly Diana’s timorous limbs’ (11.372-73). Diana, the moon goddess, is waited upon by the nymphs.
Keats again and again visualizes the image of feminine beauty and charm. Women are an inseparable part of his vision.

He finds that Sappho, the Greek poetess, has lost her inspiration and is busy thinking. It seems she is not able to think properly and she is left all alone without any ideas. The next image depicts a patriot beset with anxiety.

The image of Petrarch and Laura is romantic. He is enchanted with Laura and is incapable of turning his eyes away from her sweet face. They seem happy because:

For over them was seen a free display
Of out-spread wings, and from between them shone
The face of Poesy. From off her throne
She overlooked things that I scarce could tell.
(L. 392-95)

Poesy occupies a high place in the temple. She is royal. Keats gives more importance to poetry and as long as the poetic thoughts and inspiration come to him, sleep cannot overcome him.

'I stood tip-toe upon a little hill,' starts with a natural scenery and almost the whole poem is full of images of nature. The poet is standing upon a hill. The atmosphere is cool and airy. The almonds which are dropping have not shed the morning dew. The clouds have been compared to white flocks, sleeping on the blue fields of heaven in the sky. There is total silence around and there is a 'noiseless noise' among
the leaves, which is produced by the heaving silence itself. There seems to be darkness because of the shades of the thick green trees. Those who want to observe the beauties of nature can see a variety of things. The picture of the horizon is clear and also the 'fresh woodland valley' is all around. The poet feels light and free:

[...] I was light-hearted,
And many pleasures to my vision started.
So I straightway began to pluck a posy
Of luxuries bright, milky, soft and rosy.
(Ll. 25-28)

He tarries a while near the branch of a tree, leaning across the bank of a stream. He watches the water passing through that bend so silently that even the branches hanging over it remain ignorant. Small fish minnows peep through the water showing their heads and move through the streams where the sun rays fall. Keats projects a picture of mutual interaction between the water and trees. The ripples of water reach the plants, cool them, and the plants in turn provide freshness and moisture. So they provide a good exchange of favours, and Keats compares this interaction between them with the behavior of good men 'like the good men in the truth of their behaviors'. Keats praises only men for their good behaviour and excludes women.

From the prosaic thoughts of the masculine world, he turns to thoughts of women. He says that nothing can take his thought away from
these beautiful natural surroundings except the fantasies of a beautiful woman. Keats was naturally sympathetic towards women. His poetic self could not function without them:

That naught less sweet might call my thoughts away,
Than the soft rustle of a maiden’s gown
Fanning away the dandelion’s down;
Than the light music of her nimble toes
Patting against the sorrel as she goes.

(L1.93-98)

Her feet produce a kind of music as she walks passing the different plants. She is full of innocent thoughts and he desires to see her blushing:

Oh, let me lead her gently o’er the brook,
Watch her half-smiling lips, and downward look;
Oh, let me for one moment touch her wrist;
Let me one moment to her breathing list;
And as she leaves me may she often turn
Her fair eyes looking through her locks auburn.

(L1.101-106)

His desire to get her love is intense, he already loves her physical beauty. He grows passionate as he wants to touch her wrist and listen to her breathing. Keats may at this point be close to abandoning himself to sweet thrall, but the damsel leaves him before he fulfils his desire. He turns to the primroses and inhales the intoxicating perfume and sleeps. The moon emerges from the cloud spreading all her light.

Keats addresses the moon directly as the ‘maker of sweet poets’. Like all romantic poets Keats also feels the moon’s appeal to his imagination. She provides happiness to this world with her light:
[...] the moon assumes a central position in Keats’s poems about poetry by virtue of its possessing several metaphorical values, the most important of which is its sexual influence upon the poet. Special notice must be taken of the feminine moon’s power to fertilize the earth and its poets.²⁴

She is a benefactress for everyone and provides happiness and poetic inspiration:

O Maker of sweet poets, dear delight
Of this fair world and all its gentle lives,
Spangler of clouds, halo of crystal rivers,
Mingler with leaves and dew and tumbling streams,
Closer of lovely eyes to lovely dreams.

(L.116-120)

Nature, Beauty and poetry mingle:

For what has made the sage or poet write
But the fair paradise of Nature’s light?

(L.125-26)

In the beautiful natural surrounding, the soul of the poet is lost in ‘pleasant smothering’. There are ‘flowering laurels’, jasmine and grapes appear among the green leaves. The sound of bubbling water drowns the poet in oblivion.

For Keats, the poet is one who has given himself up to such sensations, and narrates tales such as those of Cupid and Psyche, Pan and Syrinx, Narcissus and Echo, Cynthia and Endymion. The descriptions of Psyche and Echo are amorous. Psyche seems to be full of happiness until she breaks her vow and sees Eros in the light of lamp. She experiences unhappiness and fear when he abandons her. However, a series of
hardships help her to redeem her love. Patience and determination worked for her.

He tells us about Endymion and Diana. Diana appears as a goddess at one place because she has a temple from where the incense winds up to her 'own starry dwelling'. Her face is innocent like an infant's. She experiences no pangs as she vacates her place for the smiling sun. The poet, sorry for her lone wanderings, gives 'meek Cynthia her Endymion':

Queen of the wide air! Thou most lovely queen  
Of all the brightness that mine eyes have seen!  
As thou exceedest all things in thy shine,  
So every tale does this sweet tale of thine.  

(Ll. 205-8)

The union of Endymion and Cynthia serves as a liberation for both. It heralds a period of universal happiness, health and love.

'To Georgiana Augusta Wylie' was written for Keats's sister-in-law, the wife of his brother George. He addresses her as a nymph and immortalizes her beauty and charm. The octave poses questions and the answer is given in the sestet. He is enchanted with her beautiful smile and eyes and asks her to define the pose in which she appears most beautiful. He praises her sweet voice and speech. Feminine beauty is treated as a chief ingredient of poetry.
In a journal letter he writes, ‘I have tenderness for you, and an admiration which I feel to be as great and more chaste than can I have for any woman in the world’ (letter, 14-31, October 1818).

The poet next addresses her intellectual capabilities. He claims she looks her best in ‘sober thought’. The poet gives Georgiana a high status when he furnishes her with a balanced sensibility. In the sestet the poet answers the questions posed in the octave. He says that she seems most lovely probably at the time when she parts her ‘ruby lips’ in order to speak sweetly and they remain tantalizingly apart while she listens. He is unable to capture one particular moment in which she seems most lovely. She has been brought up so properly and completely that it is almost difficult to say about her any particular moment and about her particular mood in which she appears best. She is beautiful, charming and pleasing. The poem concludes with an address to Apollo.

‘To Kosciusko’ is addressed, according to Miriam Allott, to a polish patriot admired by English liberals. He fought as a volunteer in the United States army in the American war of Independence and led his countrymen against Russia.

Keats, like other Romantics, justifies the wars fought for liberty. Keats praises him in elevated terms. Long after his death, he is listed
among heroes. Keats’s representation of the masculine world retains an austerity that blocks out feminine participation.

In ‘Happy is England! I could be content,’ Keats’s patriotism is visible. He celebrates English prosperity, flora and fauna. He, nostalgically, recollects his stay in Italy and sometimes yearns to return. This yearning represents a Romantic trait. In the sestet, England is depicted as a matriarch with ‘sweet artless daughters’ who will be moulded by destiny.

In the second quatrain of the sonnet ‘To Leigh Hunt, Esq.’, Keats talks about feminine beauty and charm:

No crowd of nymphs soft-voiced and young and gay,
   In woven baskets bringing ears of corn,
   Roses and pinks and violets, to adorn
   The shrine of Flora in her early May.

(L. 5-8)

We find the presence of the female entity. She is the worshipper as well as an object of worship. Happy and soft voiced young girls bring hand woven basket with corn and ‘roses, and pinks and violets’ in order to worship and decorate the ‘Shrine of Flora’, the Roman goddess of Flowers to celebrate the beginning of May. Women are shown participating in a devotional ritual. It appears that the poet consciously prefers Fauna to Pan. With this thought he feels free and is so content that he makes an offering of his verse.
The sonnet ‘Written on a blank space at the end of Chaucer’s tale ‘The Floure and the Leafe’’, starts by narrating a particular tale by Chaucer. The lines in the tale are described as honeyed and they are interconnected to keep the reader confined to a sweet little copse. Keats compares Chaucer’s tale to a small thicket of trees. The word ‘honeyed’ suggests that they possess the sweetness of honey to revive tired readers. Keats addresses his readers as ‘he’ and once again excludes women from the reading public.

Keats starts the sonnet ‘On a Leander Gem which Miss Reynolds, my Kind Friend, Gave Me’ by inviting the maids to come to him. They are chaste, young virgins. He depicts them as pitiable, meek, and humble, with tears in their eyes. He addresses them in this way:

Come hither all sweet maidens soberly,
Down-looking ay, and with a chastened light
Hid in the fringes of your eyelids white,
And meekly let your fair hands joined be.

(Ll.1-4)

Here we find the typical male voice directing the weaker sex. The fourth line ‘And meekly let your fair hands joined be’ shows the masculine appreciation of meekness. He wants to see them in humble postures with joined hands as if they are subservient to him. The next four lines are in the form of a question. Keats asks them why they are so innocent that they cannot realize that someone is enraptured by their ‘beauty bright’,
and is waiting for his love to be reciprocated. The essential virtue depicted here is the inability to comprehend sexual desire.

In the sestet he talks about young Leander. In classical mythology, he was a youth, the lover of Hero, a priestess of Aphrodite who drowned herself after her lover Leander drowned while swimming the Hellespont to visit her. Keats shows the dedication in love on the part of the Leander, who even on the verge of death with his tired lips wants to kiss his beloved Hero’s cheek and ‘smiles against her smiles’. He seemed to live and die for her. He wants to give her total happiness. Keats depicts Leander as a bold, courageous man struggling till the last moment of his life. He smiles for the sake of his beloved’s happiness. But the female Hero is underplayed as an object of male care, sympathy and an object of physical satisfaction, and the poet does not mention that she also drowned herself after her lover died.

The early poems of Keats treat women in all aspects viz. maternal, romantic, playful, meek, virginal as well as evil. Inspite of the restrictions of literary as well as social traditions of the age, Keats the poet could not marginalize them in his poetry.

Keats’s letters put the poet through the equivalent of Lacan’s mirror stage. They furnish him with a public image and a traditional
identity. Unlike other Romantics, Keats wrote no essays or treatise. His letters, hence, are the only available pre-text to his poetry.

The letters written in the year of 1817 are not as many as the poems. Most of the letters are addressed to the poet’s male acquaintances and his two brothers. The only woman he writes to at this time is his sister Fanny Keats. His letters shed light on his personal life, his views about poetry, his attitude towards women, his philosophy etc.

Keats’s deepest thoughts about poetry are expressed in his letters to John Hamilton Reynolds, who is one of Keats’s dearest friends. Robert Gittings says, ‘a young and approachable writer of about his own age, with a growing but not too overwhelming reputation.’ Reynolds came into contact with Keats at Leigh Hunt’s in October 1816. He introduced Keats to Brown, Rice, Bailey Taylor, Hessey, Dilke and others. Hyder E. Rollins comments:

He favorably reviewed the Poems of 1817 in the Champion; talked about poetry with him; inspired him to write poems like “Robin Hood” and “Isabella”, prevented him from publishing the first needless preface to Endymion and in various ways exerted a good influence that partly counteracted the bad influence of Hunt.26

In the letter addressed to J.H. Reynolds, 17 March 1817, Keats tells him about a proposed visit to the country in order to improve his health. He talks about his brothers who are extremely fond of him, we come to know
about their mutual relations. Keats's strong concern for his health is evident when he says in the same letter to Reynolds, 'banish health and banish all the world'.

While talking about his stay in Southhampton, in the letter to his brothers of 15 April 1817, Keats mentions many towns which he passes through. Keats also notes the presence of women, 'One Nymph of Fountain—N.B. Stone—lopped Trees—Cow ruminating—ditto Donkey—Man and Woman going gingerly along — William seeing his Sisters over the Heath — John waiting with a Lanthen for his Mistress — [...].’ We encounter Keats's appreciation of Shakespeare whom he quotes and says, "There 's my Comfort," (letter, 15 April 1817).

The letter to his friend J.H. Reynolds, 17, 18 April 1817 gives a full account of the place and talks directly about women in an ambivalent manner:

[...] I must in honesty however confess that I did not feel very sorry at the idea of the Women being a little profligate—The Wind is in a sulky fit, and I feel that it would be no bad thing to be the favorite of some Fairy, who would give me the power of seeing how our Friends got on, at a Distance [...].

Keats talks about women as profligate and a source of enjoyment, but he also accepts that they ignite the poet's power to perceive. This same letter records Keats's deep indulgence with poetry and he says, 'I find that I can not exist without poetry — without eternal poetry.' This letter shows that
for Keats poetry is an essential part of his life. He cannot exist without it. In his poems, Keats equates poetry with women.

In the same letter, Keats talks about his major inheritance from Shakespeare, Milton and Spenser. The idea is recurrent in his poetry of the same period. The poem ‘Imitation of Spenser’ makes a direct bid to this claim. In the poem ‘Ode to Apollo’, Keats talks about the influences upon him from various literary sources like Homer, Shakespeare, Tasso and Spenser. The declaration to write *Endymion* is evident in the same letter. For Keats a poet occupies a high place. He himself appears to be unaware of this unconscious decision to be a poet as he has said in a letter to Leigh Hunt, ‘[…] I have asked myself so often why I should be a Poet more than other Men, […]’ (letter, 10 May 1817).

Keats wrote a sonnet on Leigh Hunt when he was released from prison. Until then Keats had not met Hunt personally. The influence of Hunt on Keats is evident at many places. ‘The Calidore’ has been written under the influence of Hunt’s *The Story of Rimini*. He was the earliest and most enthusiastic supporter of Keats. He did everything he could to nourish his friend’s poetic career. Until his last days he praised his young friend’s work.

Sometimes, the language used by Keats in his letters is gender-biased. In the letter addressed to B.R. Haydon, he writes, ‘However I
must think that difficulties nerve the Spirit of a Man — they make our
Prime Objects a Refuge as well as a Passion’ (letter, 10, 11 May 1817).
The same blunder is evident once again in the same letter to B.R. Haydon
of 10, 11 May 1817 who was a painter by profession. For a time Keats
was greatly impressed by his paintings. He says, ‘A Man ought to have
the Fame he deserves — and I begin to think that detracting from him as
well as from Wordsworth is the same thing.’

This is one of the first letters he wrote to his sister Fanny Keats. He
shows a sense of responsibility and concern for her and considers her not
only a sister, but his friend, as he says, ‘[...]This I feel as a necessity for
we ought to become intimately acquainted, in order that I may not only,
as you grow up love your [for you] as my only Sister, but confide in you
as my dearest friend’ (letter, 10 September 1817).

Keats missed his family very much. His mother’s separation from
the family even when she was alive made him sad. She came only to stay
for a short while when she was on the verge of death. Keats was very
attached to her as he was the eldest son and even nursed her during her
illness. He was deeply attached to his brothers and sister. The
circumstances were such that Fanny had to live away from her brothers.
Robert Gittings records the brother-sister relationship, ‘He carried his
early sense of responsibility for her all through his life, writing her letters
that sound like those of a kind, wise young uncle, without the slightly patronizing tone that George always adopted to her.\footnote{27}

Keats says to Fanny in the letter:

> We have been so little together since you have been able to reflect on things that I know not whether you prefer the History of King Pepin to Bunyan’s Pilgrims Progress-or Cinderella and her glass slipper to Moor’s Almanack. However in a few Letters I hope I shall be able to come at that and adapt my Scribblings to your Pleasure [...].

(Letter, 10 September 1817).

Keats appears to be a caring brother. He exhibits a lot of tenderness for his younger sister. Further in the same letter he tells her of the plan of writing his next poem *Endymion*. He talks to Fanny about a woman writer, Miss Taylor:

> How do you like Miss Taylor’s essays in Rhyme – I just look’d into the Book and it appeared to me suitable to you – especially since I remember your liking for those pleasant little things the Original Poems – the essays are the more mature production of the same hand.

Keats suggests that Fanny should read Miss Taylor’s ‘Essays in Rhyme or Morals and Manners’ and ‘Original Poems for Infant Minds’ earnestly. He exhibits his deep reverence and appreciation for writings by women. This proves that he is not woman hater instinctively.

Keats gives her an account of the French language and he shows the superiority of Italian over French. He acknowledges that for ladies, Italian is more suitable than French, ‘ [...] I wish the Italian would
supersede french in every School throughout the Country for that is full of real Poetry and Romance of a kind more fitted for the Pleasure of Ladies than perhaps our own – [...]’ (letter, 10 September 1817).

Keat’s deep appreciation of the fine and the aesthetic aspects of life is visible here. His sister was the feminine aspect of himself. What he saw in her, he later was to be incorporated in his concept of the ideal woman. However, in a letter to Reynolds, he writes:

[...] The world, and especially our England, has within the last thirty year’s been vexed and teased by a set of Devils, whom I detest so much that I almost hunger after an acherontic promonition to a Torturer, purposely for their accommodation; These Devils are a set of Women, [...]  
(Letter, 21 September 1817)

He is extremely dissatisfied with these women. In the previous letter to Fanny, he advised her to read Miss Taylor’s works but in this letter he calls female writers ‘a set of Devils’, whom he detests. This contradiction has various connotations. It was firstly fashionable in those times to talk in this manner. Secondly, his ego did not permit him to accommodate women writers. In later years he was to reach a level of maturity where women did not encroach upon but facilitated the creative process. Susan J. Wolfson rightly comments:

In his effort to create a poetic identity and win acceptance as a poet, he profoundly internalises and struggles with social and psychological attitudes about gender: at times he is sensitive to tendencies in himself susceptible to interpretation as feminine; at other times, and with more irritation, he imagines the
masculine self being feminised or rendered effeminate by 
women exercising power and authority; and at still other times, 
he projects feminine figures as forces against manly self-
possession and its social validator, professional maturity.28

Keats asked Bailey to get married and have a caring wife. Keats accepts 
that women in their role as wife and partner bring happiness and love.

Here Keats's own deep longing to marry is evident:

There is nothing my dear Bailey I should rejoice at more that 
[for than] to see you comfortable with a little Paeona Wife – an 
affectionate Wife I have a sort of confidence would you do a 
great happiness May that be one of the many blessings I wish 
you [...].

(Letter, 28-30 October 1817)

In another letter to Benjamin Bailey, Keats says, ‘[...]The 
Imagination may be compared to Adam’s dream–he awoke and found it 
truth’ (Letter, 22 November 1817). Here credit has been given to Adam 
and Eve has been ignored. This letter is crucial to understanding the 
essence of Keats’s philosophy. It introduces the theme of imagination as a 
gateway to paradise. It also describes the poet's awakening to higher 
poetic realities. These realizations are visible in the poetry of the same 
period. The evolving ideology paves the way for later major poems. This 
deconstructing helps in filling the gaps in the poet’s coordination of form 
and theme.

Keats’s letter of negative capability clearly highlights his attitude toward 
both the sexes:
Keats resists the 'egotistical sublime' of Wordsworth and, in turn, prefers the negative capability by Shakespeare. This rejection of egotistical sublime over the negative capability shows Keats's inclination to move from his masculine self to the feminine. There is an indirect identification with femininity. Keats gives importance to irrational uncertainty against rational, mystery and doubt over clarity, reason and fact. Thus Keats's 'successful 'Man of Achievement' is ironically a man what has seemingly achieved a considerable degree of feminization.'

When we look back at the history of women, we find that they occupied an important place in the primitive age. They were considered as the 'holier sex' by men because they embodied the mysteries of childbirth. In primitive societies, in primeval times, the role of the father had not been identified. Women perpetuated the race apparently without male assistance. Women were active in different areas of life. Men were to some extent subordinate to them. Men simply used their common sense and did not allow their curiosity to go beyond. Gradually, men emerged from female domination. They discovered that a woman is not capable of conceiving independently without the male assistance. They started to
capture the areas where the women had complete hold. This included magic, farming, handicraft etc. Men made their position firm and established themselves gradually. Under the guise of protecting the weaker sex, they placed them as subordinate to themselves. They declared that women were spiritually as well as mentally inferior to themselves.

In the writings of great scholars we find the treatment of women as ‘other’. Aristotle declared “that The female is female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities” and St. Thomas Aquinas believed that woman is “an imperfect man”.

But some radical feminists of recent times want to remove the ‘complacent certainties of patriarchal culture’ and recreate their own world which is less oppressive and which has been inhabited by real women:

A real woman, according to Robert Graves, neither despises nor worships men, but is proud not to have been born a man, does everything she can to avoid thinking or acting like one who knows the full extent of her powers, and feels free to reject all arbitrary man-made obligations.

Robert Graves writes that ‘man’s biological function is to do, woman’s is to be. This difference is not a contrast of mere activity with mere passivity. Those males who consider biology as fundamental and
ignores the process of socialization are merely male dominated and undermine the woman.

An important stage in modern feminism was reached in Kate Millett’s *Sexual Politics* (1970). The term patriarchy has been used by her and considered as the main cause of female oppression. Patriarchy does not allow equal treatment to women. As Simone de Beauvoir puts it, woman is a product of our society generated by male biases of our culture. In the words of Simone de Beauvoir, ‘One is not born a woman but rather becomes a woman [...] It is civilization as a whole that produces this creature [...] which is described as feminine.' Women cannot be confined to a single definition.

Many of the recent critical studies on Keats’s life and work show that Keats’s self-projection can be termed as ‘effeminate’ or ‘feminine’. Even the earliest and the most infamous reviews by Lockhart highlight it. Hazlitt’s essay “On Effiminacy of Character” describes the apparent failings of Keats’s poetry in similar terms:

I cannot help thinking that the fault of Mr. Keats’s poems was a deficiency in masculine energy of style. He had beauty, tenderness, delicacy, in an uncommon degree, but there was a want of strength and substance... All is soft and fleshy, without bone and muscle.

But such ‘effeminacy’ was, for Keats, the central strength. Keats’s poetry has a well-wrought quality. In ‘Sleep and Poetry’ he defines the route he
plans to take in his prurient of fame. In ‘I stood tip-toe upon a little hill’ he identifies the myths he intends to use. He goes on to experiment with a wide range of forms e.g. the lyrical, the narrative, the mythic, the epic etc. This results in the emergence of forms of consciousness that cuts across formal definitions.

Rather than being completely formalistic, it is suitable to assess the psychological complexities of Keats’s poetry as well. Derrida’s concept of sexual intactness and spiritual innocence synthesizes Keats’s attitude towards women.

The presence of women is evident throughout the early poems. They possess a significant place and role in his work. He cannot write without them. Women have been shown object of beauty as well as of reverence. ‘Fill for me a brimming bowl’ discusses women in a strong role. Keats’s feminist attitude is evident in most of his poems, but in some of his poems his chauvinism is visible e.g. in ‘Ah, who can e’er forget so fair a being’. This ‘undecidability’ according to Derrida is an ‘oscillation between possibilities’.

Keats’s attitude toward women in this part is explorative and tentative. Keats simply acknowledges that women are an essential part of nature. But consciously, he followed the tradition of the great male masters who believed in the partiarchy. This results in a tussle between
his conscious and subconscious self and it records acknowledgement and appreciation of the laws of nature. His attitude toward women fluctuates. He has no fixed and set opinions.

Keats creates primarily under the influence of Milton, Shakespeare and Spenser. The presence of women in his poetry was considered naive and sentimental by the nineteenth century societies. The romantic imagination concerns itself with intense poetic processes. The use of deconstructive phenomenology in this thesis highlights the psychological as well as tropological aspects of these processes.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


CHAPTER – III

Dream, Mystery and Enchantment
*Endymion*, composed between April – November 1817, is saturated in a feminine mood. Keats's hero is pitted against nature, beauty and sexuality. According to conventional western thought, passivity is associated with the feminine. *Endymion* is acted upon by the Moon-Goddess. He is thus feminized in order to be made receptive and creative. Led by Cynthia, *Endymion* is caught in a whirl of ardent pursuits, entanglements and self-destroying enthrallments. Traditional male power structures are discarded in favor of the pale, melancholy, tearful hero.

In the year of 1817, Keats frequently interacted with Wordsworth, Hazlitt and Hunt. The patriarchs influenced both his philosophy and his poetry. The feminized male in their view, was a distortion of nature's dictates. Keats's instinctive decoding of life's experiences led him to hitherto unexplored territories. The feminized hero's negation of the masculine self can be deconstructed as the affirmation of the spiritual self that ultimately helps him to sift the visionary from the illusory.

At this juncture Keats's friends at Teignmouth became acquainted with a widow who had four daughters. The young people were of the opinion that Keats was a fit companion for one of the girls. Keats's brothers perceived attraction of Keats to the Jeffery girls. Keats wrote to Misses Jeffery in a playful mood:
How do you like John? Is he not very original? he does not look by any means as handsome as four months ago, but is he not handsome? I am sure you must like him very much, but don’t forget me. I suppose Tom gets more lively as his health improves. Tell me what you think of John.¹

The mood may have been inspired by George’s plan to marry Georgiana Wylie and migrate to America. Georgiana was twenty years old and she impressed Keats with her kind, warm-hearted nature and appreciation of his work. As Sidney Colvin records, ‘He had a warm affection and regard for his new sister-in-law, and was in so a delighted for George’s sake. But at the same time he felt life and its prospects overcast.’² Keats described her ‘of a nature liberal and high spirited’ (Letter, 3 May, 1818).

In the spring of 1818 Keats published *Endymion* and shortly after that made his walking tour through Scotland with Charles Brown. The trip had a beneficial effect on the poet. It diverted his mind somewhat from his personal problems and it also made the friendship between him and Brown more intense. During this tour, Keats’s perception of life matured. Sidney Colvin writes:

A change, besides, was coming over Keats’s thoughts and feelings whereby scenery altogether was beginning to interest him less and his fellow-creatures more. In the acuteness of childish and boyish sensation, among the suburban fields or on the sea-side holidays, he had unconsciously absorbed images of nature enough for his faculties to work on through a life-time of poetry, and now, in his second chamber of Maiden-thought, the appeal of nature yields in his mind to that of humanity.³
But the effect of this exhausting trip to Scotland and particularly to Mull was very harmful. For the first time, the symptoms of failing health became evident. At the same time when Keats came back from his Northern tour, the attacks on him in 'Blackwood's Magazine' and the 'Quarterly Review' appeared. The 'Blackwood's Magazine' published an article on the 'Cockney School of Poetry' under the anonymous signature 'Z' in the August number, in which both Hunt and Keats were badly criticized and attacked.

Tom's condition became worse in Keats's absence. Now, nursing Tom was Keats's main task. But Tom died on December 1, leaving Keats completely alone. After his death, Brown invited Keats to live with him in Wentworth Place at Hampstead. Keats now completely absorbed himself in his writing.

Keats started *Hyperion* in September 1818 while nursing Tom. He finished it in April 1819. During August and September 1819, Keats was engaged in remodeling the fragment in the form of a vision, *The Fall of Hyperion*. But the subject was in Keats's mind as early as September 1817. In his letter to Haydon he informed him that he was going to write a 'new Romance' after completing *Endymion*. In another letter to Haydon of January 23, 1818 he compares *Endymion* and *Hyperion*:
[...] in Endymion I think you may have many bits of the deep and sentimental cast—the nature of Hyperion will lead me to treat it in a more naked and grecian Manner— and the march of passion and endeavour will be undeviating—and one great contrast between them will be—that the Hero of the written tale being mortal is led on, like Buonaparte, by circumstance; whereas the Apollo in Hyperion being a fore-seeing God will shape his actions like one.

_The Fall of Hyperion_ is a reconstruction of Hyperion, begun in July in the Isle of Wight. Its major part was completed by 21 September, 1819 while Keats was staying at Winchester. He described its progress to Fanny Brawne. He was busy in writing a ‘very abstract poem’. This abstract poem most probably has been referred to _The Fall of Hyperion_ because those days Keats was working on ‘Lamia’ and the play _Otho the Great_, none of them was an abstract poem and Hyperion has been abandoned earlier.

_Endymion_ begins by generalizing ‘a thing of beauty’:

A thing of beauty is a joy forever:  
Its loveliness increases; it will never  
Pass into nothingness, but still will keep  
A bower quiet for us, and a sleep  
Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing.  
(End. Bk.I.II.1-5)

But this generalization of ‘thing of beauty’ is not limited to abstractions rather he talks in terms of concrete reality. Keats gives a whole list of shapes which represent the concrete and natural phenomena:

[...] Such the sun, the moon,  
Trees, old and young, sprouting a shady boon  
For simple sheep; and such are daffodils
With the green world they live in; and clear rills
That for themselves a cooling covert make
'Gainst the hot season; […]

Keats’s obsession with the perfect shape is indicative of his appreciation of beauty both god–given and man-made. ‘Never pass into nothingness’ suggests immortality of the thing of beauty. As we move further we come to know that ‘a thing of beauty’ particularly the beauty of the moon, is dealt with throughout the poem. The Moon-Goddess falls in love with the Shepherd-Prince Endymion. The beauty of the moon represents feminine beauty which ‘keeps a bower quiet for us’. It gives us shelter, protection and also sleep which is full of ‘sweet dreams’. It has the power to soothe and delight.

*Endymion* has an abundance of women characters. Among them Cynthia is the central figure. The power of the feminine is strongly present in this poem. Keats comments that in the midst of the gloomy world and its sufferings where there is a ‘dearth | Of noble natures,’ ‘some shape of beauty’ gives life to our dark soul, suggests her creativity and capacity to provide life to us. Keats says that these beautiful objects not only give immediate delight but they remain in our memory for a long time and give happiness to our soul. Further the moon has been called ‘The passion poesy’ possessing ‘glories infinite’. Keats conceives of poetry as a woman.
The idea is expressed again while talking about the Mount Latmos, traditionally associated with Endymion. Keats tells us that on its sides, there is a mighty forest. The earth represents the mother who fulfils her maternal role as she provides sap and greenery to the plants:

Upon the sides of Latmos was outspread  
A mighty forest, for the moist earth fed  
So plenteously all weed-hidden roots  
Into ov’r-hanging boughs and precious fruits.  
(End Bk.I. ll. 63-66)

On Mount Latmos, the Festival of Pan is being celebrated; there is a marble altar with lush greenery. A troop of little children are gathering around it. Endymion provides a sharp contrast to the ongoing procession. He is sensitive isolated and alienated from the ‘fair faces’ and ‘garments white’. ‘Fair faces’ are suggestive of women and ‘garments white’ suggest their purity and chastity. The ‘damsels dancing’ along with the shepherds represent equal participation.

‘Nervy knees’, ‘trembling lower lip’, ‘forgotten hands’, ‘wan’, ‘pale’, ‘awed face’, ‘gentleness’ and ‘sighing’ are traditional symptoms of a woman in love. Thus Endymion by experiencing these symptoms has been effeminized. He is not the conventional epic hero rather an effeminate one. In spite of the Keats’s claims to working under the influence of great masters, his projection of Endymion is not manly but of a lover pining in love. Sidney Colvin comments:
In Keats’s conception of his youthful heroes there is at all times a touch, not the wholesomest, of effeminacy and physical softness, and the influence of passion he is apt to make fever and unman them quite as indeed a helpless and enslaved submission of all the faculties to love proved, when it come to the trial, to be a weakness of his own nature.4

Colvin’s inability to appreciate Keats’s inherent feminism is shared by many other critics of the period like Robin Mayhead. The traditional maternal role as the provider of nourishment is highlighted in the following lines:

Mothers and wives, who day by day prepare
The scrip with needments for the mountain air,
And all ye gentle girls who foster up
Udderless lambs, and in a little cup
Will put choice honey for a favoured youth.

(End. Bk.I. ll. 207-11)

The animal to be sacrificed is a heifers or a female calf, and the sheep have been called ‘fearful ewes’.

Keats compares the unhappiness of Endymion to Niobe. She represents the ultimate sorrow of maternity. Endymion’s sadness is like Niobe’s, it envelops his entire being.

Endymion’s sister Peona attempts to remove his problems through animated conversation. Peona is not only a sister to him but his dearest friends, and confidante. She is a guide, leading towards a ‘bowery island’. ‘She is a vehicle to more than beauty, as her predecessors were not; she is the channel to Endymion’s own knowledge and immortality.’5 The bower
provides shelter, protection and symbolizes the womb. A child remains safe inside it.

The bower image is a recurrent one in this poem and it plays a significant role for Endymion. Peona leads Endymion:

So she was gently glad to see him laid
Under her favorite bower's quiet shade
On her own couch, new made of flower leaves
Dried carefully on the cooler side of sheaves
When last the sun his autumn tresses shook
And the tanned harvesters rich armfuls took.
Soon was he quieted to slumberous rest,
But, ere it crept upon him, he had pressed
Peona's busy hand against his lips,
And still a-sleeping held her finger-tips
In tender pressure. […]

(End Bk.I.11.436-446)

The bower gives freshness and life to the troubled soul of Endymion and he is 'calmed to life again'. Peona is sensitive to her brother's feelings:

[...]'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 Parham 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!'

(End Bk. I. ll. 505-15)

Endymion now eases the burden 'Of secret grief, here in this bowery nest' by sharing it with Peona:

Guidance rather than the admonition that will come with the later females characterizes Peona's primary relationship to her brother. Peona is the only type of imagination in Keats's grasp at this point in his career – gentle, healing, and inspirational,
she represents the imagination that must be a “friend” to man – in this case, Endymion’s dearest friend.  

The moon-goddess appears in his dream and enchants him for the first time. He says:

[...] Ah, can I tell
The enchantment that afterwards befell?
Yet it was but a dream – yet such a dream
That never tongue, although it overteem
With mellow utterance like a cavern spring,
Could figure out and to conception bring
All I beheld and felt.[...]
(End Bk.I. ll. 572-78)

The appearance of the moon for the first time is described in these words by Endymion:

And lo! from opening clouds, I saw emerge
The loveliest moon, that ever silvered o’er
A shell for Neptune’s goblet. 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.
(End Bk.I. ll.591-97)

The moon appeared to him as the idealized form of a woman and is referred to as ‘that completed form of all completeness’ and ‘high perfection of all sweetness’. Endymion’s soul seemed to soar with the moon and to participate in her being, highlighting the phenomenological viewpoint. He is enraptured by her:

[...] yet she had,
Indeed, locks bright enough to make me mad;
And they were simply gordianed up and braided.
(End. Bk. I. ll. 612-14)
Keats gives a long description of her physical beauty. The circular pattern of his experience reflects phenomenology. Her feet appeared to him like the ‘sea born Venus’. She acted like a common maid and pressed him by her hand. His dream was a ‘dream within dream’. The male could not resist the female touch and he fainted:

[*] She took an airy range,
And then, towards me, like a very maid,
Came blushing, waning, willing, and afraid,
And pressed me by the hand. Ah, ’twas too much!
Methought I fainted at the charmed touch.
(End. Bk.I. II. 633-37)

She even lulled and lapped him and he sighed again to faint once more. Thus Endymion appears like a child lulled and lapped by the moon goddess. Then he sleeps.

When Endymion wakes up from his sleep, he feels sad at the loss of his dream. After coming back to reality he finds everything unpleasant. Peona provides help. She encourages him and does not want him to pine for his love and die in this way with sighs and laments like the roses which are destroyed by the northern blast. She wants him to be rather in the trumpet’s mouth. She tells him that he should not spoil his life which is high and noble, just for a dream. According to S.M. Sperry ‘Endymion’s affirmations of the truth of his visionary experiences are directly opposed by the counter arguments of his sister, Peona, who warns him against deceiving fantasies.’ She is more rational than
Endymion who remains in the world of fantasies and dreams. Her words appeared to him as heavenly dew which brings color of life upon his troubled face.

The third time he sees the face of the moon in the well and he recognizes her face. But the moon disappears again. The appearance disappearance cycle represents phenomenology. This is attested by Merleau-Ponty’s view, ‘We grasp external space through our bodily situation.... Our body is not in space like things; it inhabits or haunts space. It applies itself to space like a hand to an instrument.’ Endymion disconnects himself from theoretical knowledge of the moon and plunges into its entity and attempts to perceive its essence.

Book II of *Endymion* begins with Keats’s defense of love as the ‘sovereign power’ providing both grief as well as the balm. He emphasizes its importance by describing the love of Troilus and Cressida and calls history ‘gilded cheat’. In this context he makes a reference to great historical figures like Alexander, Ulysses and Cyclops but he gives more importance to lovers as compared to warriors:

[...] ... Juliet leaning
Amid her window- flowers, sighing, weaning
Tenderly her fancy from its maiden snow,
Doth more avail than these. The silver flow
Of Hero’s tears, the swoon of Imogen,
Fair Pastorella in the bandit’s den,
Are things to brood on with more ardency
Than the death-day of empires.[...]
(End. Bk. II. ll. 27-34)
He recollects women like Juliet, Hero, Imogen and Pastorella and celebrates them more than warriors.

Endymion, 'the brain-sick Shepherd Prince' is wandering on confused paths in search of his love in the forest. He reaches a 'shady spring' and stops to rest. His eye is caught by a wild rose bud. He plucks it, dips its stem in water, it flowers and a golden butterfly emerges. He imagines he is soaring with it in the sky and ultimately reaches a fountain side which is near a 'cavern’s mouth'. Thus he identifies with a butterfly and participates in her being. This is the phenomenology of the perceiver and the perceived. As the butterfly touches the water, vanishes and a nymph emerges. She feels sorry for his 'bitterness of love', calls him soft names and consoles him. She advises him to undertake another search. Endymion sits besides the pool and gazes into the water. The present world of realities is not pleasing to him and he wishes for death.

Endymion calls his 'thrice-seen love' the 'meekest dove of heaven'. She is 'divine', 'keen in beauty' and provides brightness to the world but her light is being contrasted with the darkness of Endymion's heart. He asks her to be favorable to him:

Oh, be propitious, nor severely deem  
My madness impious; for, by all the stars  
That tend thy bidding, I do think the bars  
That kept my spirit in are burst—that I  
Am sailing with thee through the dizzy sky!  
(End. Bk. II. ll. 183-187)
He calls her meekest and at the same time asks her favor contradicts each other and shows disunity in the text. Here Endymion participates with the moon in the journey of the sky and asks for her help. ‘Dear goddess, help, or the wide-gaping air | Will gulf me’ (ll. 194-95).

Endymion journeys down into the deep regions of the earth in search of his love. When he asks the help of the goddess, a voice echoing from the deep caverns, turns him into ‘senseless stone’. That voice says to Endymion to descend into the ‘sparry hollows of the world’. Keats further gives a description of the under ground regions he passes through, into the ‘fearful deep’ which was neither dark nor light but a mixture of the two. The echo sound in the cave is like the sound of heavy rain. He passes through a ‘mimic temple’, near which is a ‘fair shrine’ and just beyond is Diana in the role of a huntress. Endymion is feeling lonely and solitary. He invokes her and asks her favor which brings a gradual change in the atmosphere. Once again the female entity provides comfort to the lonely male. He requests her:

\[
\begin{align*}
  \text{Young goddess, let me see my native bower!} \\
  \text{Deliver me from this rapacious deep!} \quad \text{(End. Bk. II. ll. 331-32)}
\end{align*}
\]

After passing through many ‘winding alleys’ he at last reaches the bower of Venus and Adonis:

\[
\begin{align*}
  \text{With its accumulated store of cream and ripened fruit, the Bower represents a perfectly self-contained world of sensuousness and imaginative luxury, idealized beyond all}
\end{align*}
\]
threat of interruption, where the sleeper dreams of his coming joys with Venus […]. Although grown to a man, the sleeping Adonis resembles, as much as anything, the infant in the womb or cradle whose every need is gratified.

Adonis possesses beauty as well as ‘Apollonian curve | of neck and shoulder’ (ll. 399-400). Thus he possesses the characteristics of both the male as well as the female. Apollonius also figures in ‘Lamia’ as orderly, sober and conservative in character. We find Adonis now in the company of a woman amidst sensual pleasures:

[...] Sideway his face reposed
On one white arm, and tenderly unclosed,
By tenderest pressure, a faint damask mouth
To slumbery pout, just as the morning south
Disparts a dew- lipped rose. [...]  
(End. Bk. II. ll. 403-07)

Adonis meets Endymion there. He offers him wine, which is cool and purple more than the wine of Ariadne. We find a reference to Pomona, a wood nymph who is associated in classical mythology with gardens and fruit-trees, rejected Vertumnus, Roman deity of spring. The picture of sad Vertumnus appears who is fearful of losing his love. He offers him cream which is more rich and sweet than nurse Amalthea gave to the young Jupiter. Amalthea in classical mythology is a nymph who brought up the infant Zeus on the milk of a goat. The poet highlights the traditional motherly aspect of nursing. Further he offers Endymion manna which is taken from Syria from the daughters of Hesperus. Once again
the poet catalogues numerous females. Adonis relates his story of love to Endymion but he says:

And thus: 'I need not any hearing tire
By telling how the sea-born goddess pined
For a mortal youth, and how she strove to bind
Him all in all unto her doting self.'

(End. Bk. II. ll. 457-60)

Venus’s love for Adonis was so intense that Jupiter allowed him to return to life for six months every year. Venus’s devotion is visible. She is loyal, confident and has strong will power that even the high-throne Jove is moved by her petitions. Venus also possesses a reviving power. Even her shadow makes Endymion’s heart tumutous and provides new life to his eyes. Venus asks her son Cupid to look after Endymion. She sympathizes with Endymion:

[...]. I saw him throw
Himself on withered leaves, even as though
Death had come sudden; [...]  
(End. Bk. II. ll. 564-66)

S.M. Sperry Jnr comments:

Nevertheless from our first glimpse of him in the poem he seems pale and wan, alienated from the healthful pursuits of his fellow Laotians by his strange fits of abstraction. Indeed it is not long before Keats himself addresses him as ‘Brain-sick Shepherd-Prince’ [E. II. 43].¹⁰

Phoebe or Cynthia provides the backbone to the narrative. Endymion, unlike traditional epic heroes never take initiative but is guided or ‘led’. This may be defined as maternal subtext in patriarchal literature.
Endymion in spite of his loneliness is optimistic. With unusual happiness he wanders through caves and palaces, chasm with foam and streams and fountains where the sound of the water is compared to the sounds of dolphins. He sees there 'naiads fair', thousand jutting shapes and a 'vaulted dome'. He is comforted with the appearance of the Cybele. She 'revives' and brings him back to life and thus shows that she is true to the maternal principle. An eagle carries him to 'Jasmin Bower' which is filled with 'golden moss'. Endymion feels exalted with pleasure. To his capable ears even the 'silence was music from the holy spheres'. On casual reading these passages appear confusing and even unnecessary. J. Hillis Miller writes:

> The “unreadability” (if there is such a word) of a text is more than an experience of unease in the reader, the result of his failure to be able to reduce the text to a homogeneous reading. It is also always thematized in the text itself in the form of metalinguistic statements. These may take many different forms. The text performs on itself the act of deconstruction without any help from the critic.\(^{11}\)

Attended to in the light of Miller's theory we find that the bewilderment is an expression of Endymion's inability to recognize his love. He calls her his 'breath of life', asks her whereabouts but assumes that she is either a 'maid of the waters' or one of the 'bright-haired daughters' of Triton, 'a nymph of Dian's' or an 'impossible'. Endymion wants to be in her arms at that very instant and woo her among 'fresh leaves'. But he also realizes that it is not possible because of his earthly 'powerless self'.
In a dream he relishes the consummation of his love upon a 'smoothest mossy bed':

He threw himself, and just into the air
Stretching his indolent arms, he took – oh, bliss!–
A naked waist: 'Fair Cupid, whence is this?'
A well-known voice sighed, 'Sweetest, here am I!'
At which soft ravishment, with doting cry,
They trembled to each other. [...]  
(End. Bk. II. ll. 711-16)

Keats addresses the muse to give him poetic inspiration so that he can sing properly for 'this gentle pair'. The poet once again takes support from the female. Endymion talks to Cynthia and fears a separation again. Once again, the male appears weak and fearful and the female confident and the comforter. The poet uses the paradox 'known unknown' for her identity because it is not clear. J. Hillis Miller says:

The heterogeneity of a text (and so its vulnerability to deconstruction) lies rather in the fact that it says two entirely incompatible things at the same time. Or rather, it says something which is capable of being interpreted in two irreconcilable ways. It is "undecidable."²

Cynthia consoles Endymion that they won't be separated and assures him that he would be blessed and immortalized after his quest is over. The periodic interruption of the quest by the appearance of the 'quested' is the 'irreconcilable' factor.

Endymion constantly enquires about her identity. He even calls her an enchantress. He swears by her beauty and she also confesses her love for him. Endymion swoons and the goddess says:
Revive, dear youth, or I shall faint and die;
Revive, or these soft hours will hurry by
In tranced dullness; speak, and let that spell
Affright this lethargy! [...]  
(End. Bk. II. ll. 766-69)

She accepts that she will not be happy being away from him and her soul will not find rest in his absence. She reveals her inability to take him to her ‘starry eminence’. She is ashamed of accepting her love before everybody but she loves him deeply. She forbids him:

[...] Ah, dearest, do not groan  
Or thou wilt force me from this secrecy,  
And I must blush in heaven. [...]  
(End. Bk. II. ll. 779-81)

She is afraid to reveal her secrecy in heaven because she is known there for her chastity. Dorothy Van Ghent compares this sort of secrecy with Keats’s own, that ‘in all the love sequences in Keats’s poems there is the same need for intense secrecy. It is a need that Keats observed, to an extreme, in his own love affair.’

But later on, she bewails her loss of authority as the chaste goddess. She says that earlier she was like a ‘solitary dove’ chaste and pure and was unaware that ‘nests were built’. The word nest reminds us of family, home and the role of a woman in the making up of a home is very important. Cynthia assures to give him immortality. Then the complete union of lovers is seen:

Oh, let me melt into thee, let the sounds  
Of our close voices marry at their birth.  
Let us entwine hoveringly- [...]
She will be a heavenly muse to teach him 'lisping', 'lute breathing'. Cynthia is an embodiment of physical as well as heavenly love. Endymion finds control and solace in her presence, so sleeps. But as he awakes, he finds himself alone in sadness. He realizes 'love's madness'. Often he used to groan for his love like a lion. He says:

[...] Oh, he had swooned
Drunken from pleasure's nipple, and his love
Henceforth was dove-like. [...]  
(End. Bk. II. ll. 868-870)

Here we find the breast-feeding imagery from the word 'pleasure's nipple' and Endymion appears as an infant. Cynthia's motherly role is also evident. She is 'dovelike'.

There is a shift in focus from Endymion-Phoebe story to another parallel story of river god Alpheus and Arethusa, a water nymph attending Diana. Again, like Endymion, the male Alpheus is a wooer and wants her favor, asks Diana to help him to get his love. Arethusa says that if the moon goddess has suffered the same pang of love, she would have no fear to break her vow of chastity. It reality, she was in love with Endymion but no one was aware of it. Arethusa calls Alpheus an enchanter. Earlier Endymion calls Diana as 'enchantress'. In this way female only is not an enchantress, male is also an enchanter. Arethusa recalls her past days when she was happy and carefree in the woods, but
the day she took bath in his 'deceitful stream,' a 'panting glow' has arisen in her. In the same way Endymion also in Book I (ll.529-38) recalls his past days when he was bold and manly but after falling in love, he 'sinks low'. Thus we find the element of deconstruction where there is a lament for past rather than present showing the shift of time also. Arethusa blames Alpheus for cheating her in his 'deceitful stream'. He asks her to sigh no more and be patient:

[...] Innocent maid!
Stifle thine heart no more, nor be afraid
Of angry powers—there are deities
Will shade us with their wings. [...]  
(End. Bk. II. ll. 978-81)

Arethusa is fearful of Diana because she is going against the norms of chastity. But the irony is that Diana herself is involved in love affair forgetting her norms of chastity.

We find development in Endymion's character. From his own love and its pangs for the first time, he moves to the genuine love for humanity. He even weeps for these lovers, feels their sorrow deeply and is moved for them. But he is unable to do anything for them himself and wants his wish to be fulfilled by the gentle goddess:

[...] On the verge
Of that dark gulf he wept, and said, 'I urge
Thee, gentle Goddess of my pilgrimage,
By our eternal hopes, to soothe, to assuage,
If thou are powerful, these lovers' pains,
And make them happy in some happy plains.'
(End. Bk. II. ll. 1012-1017)
The power of the moon is elaborated upon in Book III of *Endymion*. She has been described as the ‘gentler mightiest of them all’. She is an embodiment of feminine power and beauty. She blesses everybody and everything, ‘She sits most meek and most alone’. She revives things. Every object of nature, little birds, shellfish, mountains, oceans, gets benefits from her. With all her power she is benign and benevolent to every one without discrimination:

[...] Thou art a relief
To the poor patient oyster, where it sleeps
Within its pearly house. The mighty deeps,
The monstrous sea is thine – the myriad sea!
O Moon! Far-spooming Ocean bows to thee,
And Tellus feels his forehead’s cumbersome load.
(End. Bk. III. ll. 66-71)

The moon is known as Cynthia and her abode is unknown. She experiences panic and her cheek is pale for Endymion who is in the same mood. She is a good guide and knows every route. The poet addresses the moon goddess as his love:

O love! How potent hast thou been to teach
Strange journeyings! Wherever beauty dwells,
In gulf or eyrie, mountains or deep dells,
In light, in gloom, in star or blazing sun,
Thou pointest out the way, and straight ’tis won.
(End. Bk. III. ll.92-96)

She has been generous and helpful to men like Leander, Orpheus and Pluto when they experienced difficulties in love. Endymion too has been sent her beam in the ‘deep-water world’. In this way she is not only
helpful to nature and its objects but also to the powerful men. We find Keats’s feminist attitude clearly in attributing power to women.

Cynthia appears to Endymion and ‘soothed her light’ to his pale face. He ‘felt the charm to breathlessness’ and his heart glows with warmth. He tastes the ‘gentle moon’ by putting his head upon a ‘tuft of straggling weeds’. During his sea-journey Endymion sees many deadly things. At this time only Diana has saved him. She provides him comfort and joy and ‘chased away that heaviness’, highlighting the protective nature of women. Surprised by the fascinating power of moon, Endymion asks:

‘What is there in thee, Moon, that thou shouldst move
My heart so potently? When yet a child
I oft have dried my tears when thou hast smiled.
Thou seem ’dusty my sister. Hand in hand we went
From eve to morn across the firmament.
(End. Bk. III. ll. 142-46)

With moon, he keeps moving in his past and present, a romantic attitude. We find the element of deconstruction in this shift of time. Romantic poetry is an open invitation to deconstruction. They deconstruct their own writing by showing that the presence they desire is always absent, always in past or future. In his boyhood time also she was with him in his ‘every joy and pain’. But as he grew in years his fascination for her beauty increased and her role also widened. She is the ‘charm of women’ also.
Endymion’s ‘strange love’ which is the ‘felicity’s abyss’ is one aspect of the moon-goddess. With her appearance, the moon fades away partly. He begins to feel her ‘orby power’ over him. He requests her to be merciful and asks her forgiveness:

[...]
O, be kind,
Keep back thin influence, and do not blind
My sovereign vision. Dearest love, forgive
That I can think away from thee and live!
Pardon me, airy planet, that I prize
One thought beyond thine argent luxuries!
(End. Bk. III. ll. 181-86)

He asks pardon for his infidelity and will no more think about any one except her.

In the Glaucus-Circe episode, the story of Scylla is told by Glaucus and we hear his male voice in narrating it. He interprets it in his own way. He depicts her as a shy and ‘timid thing’ and declares his love for her ‘to the white of truth’ but she is not reciprocating it. Rather she is escaping from him. He has no consideration for Scylla’s likes and dislikes. Without considering whether she is interested in him or not, he starts chasing her. Her swift escape like a bird suggests her unwillingness but he interprets it as her timidity and shyness, the typical male tendency. As ‘Representation of the world’, Catherine Mackmnon quotes Simon de Beauvoir, ‘like the world itself, is the work of men; they describe it from their own point of view, which they confuse with the absolute truth.’

His passion for her grows intense as he sees her beauty. He consults Circe
to find the love favors of Scylla. But his declaration to love ‘Scylla to the white of truth’ is deconstructed when he swooned dead-drifting to that ‘fatal power’ the moment he sees her. He is unable to resist her charm:

Who could resist? Who in this universe?
She did so breathe ambrosia, so immerse
My fine existence in a golden clime.
She took me like a child of suckling time,
And cradled me in roses. [...]  
(End. Bk. III. ll. 453-57)

Glaucus finds himself ‘in a twilight bower’ but this bower is not going to soothe Glaucus for a long time. He is not guilty of his infidelity for Scylla but he is concerned for his own ill treatment by Circe. Circe’s first appearance is contrary to his later image. She appears to him ‘the fairest face that morn e’er look upon’. According to Glaucus she weaves a net with ‘honey words’ and tears and smiles. The tone of Circe’s speech changes from the soft and rich speech to the cruel, the moment he sees her real form.

His early comparison for Circe appears of a mother and he a child shows Keats’s fascination for his mother. He bows before her as a ‘tranced vassal’ and she takes the initiative of taking him like a child of ‘suckling time’ and cradled in roses. But she has been compared with snake, basically an evil creature. Her looks are fierce wan and tyrannizing. As Glaucus tells the story, Circe came near Glaucus, hovered over him. She takes the initiative in lovemaking. He is a passionate man
desiring and thirsting for her love. The moment she leaves, he is disappointed and desirous of her ‘smooth arms and lips’ in ‘greedy thirst’.

The representation of both these women Scylla as well as Circe is two extremes. One is shy and ‘timid thing’, the other one is the ‘angry witch’. Circe’s role of a nurse, mother with cradle and lullaby is unlike the conventional mother. Her ‘tenderest squeeze’ is a ‘giant’s clutch’. She is angry and seems merciless. He calls her ‘sea flirt’. Glaucus was not guilty of his disloyalty for Scylla that is why he suffers at the hands of Circe. But poor Scylla was a victim of death without any fault of hers. Thus we find that innocent one suffers and the guilty one prospers.

In the case of Circe as a ‘fatal power’ and ‘witch’ we find the patriarchal treatment of women. She is the ‘cruel enchantress’ who entraps the innocent male in her sexual trap. He is a victim in the hand of woman. On the other hand Glaucus as well as Endymion are shown gentle-hearted, benign and helpful for humanity.

Endymion is no more different from Glaucus. The voice of his lovely mistress is enough to make him giddy. He is unable to bear it, closes his eye and imagines her. He says ‘I die - I hear her voice- I feel my wing’. The power of female leads him near death in ecstasy. He wants to reach her through his imagination. There is a complete merging of the perceiver in the perceived. The role of the Nereids also provides the
maternal aspect of a woman and the male gets comfort from her. The place they lead him to is a bower suggestive of the womb of a woman. At the end of his adventure under the sea Endymion hears the voice of his beloved. We find the imagery of the mother dove hatching her eggs, suggest the creativity in woman.

Book IV of *Endymion* opens with an invocation to the muse calling her ‘Loftiest Muse’. The Indian-maid is introduced. She is grief stricken and laments for her ‘native land’. Endymion hears her voice and searches for her like an ‘anxious hind toward her hidden fawn’. The comparison invokes mother-child affinity typical to Romantic poetry. The Indian maid succeeds in catching the attention of Endymion:

[...]

For canst thou only bear
A woman’s sigh alone and in distress?
See not her charms! Is Phoebe passionless?
Phoebe is fairer far – oh, gaze no more.

(End. Bk. IV.II.54-57)

He says that he cannot help loving a lovely woman. He is helpless before her beauty, remembers his first love Phoebe and dizzily attempts to sort out tangle of emotions. Endymion’s dilemma results in a pricking conscience:

Upon a bough
He leant, wretched. He surely cannot now
Thirst for another love. Oh, impious,
That he can even dream upon it thus!
Thought he, ‘Why am I not as are the dead,
Since to a woe like this I have been led
Through the dark earth and through the wonderous sea?
Goddess, I love thee not the less! From thee
By Juno's smile I turn not-no, no, no.
(End. Bk. IV. II. 86-93)

But at another moment he contradicts his own statement by saying:

I have at triple soul: Oh, fond pretence —
For both, for both my love is so immense,
I feel my heart is cut for them in twain.'
(End. Bk. IV. II. 95-97)

The very word 'surely' suggests that he is not going to 'thirst for another love' anymore but his declaration to love both equally deconstructs the word surely. As J. Hillis Miller says, 'In a deconstructionist reading, the two meanings are asymmetrical and irreconcilable, like rhetoric and logic. Such doubleness is only one of the things deconstruction finds in texts.' On beholding Cynthia, Endymion 'groaned as one by beauty slain'. Serenading in his patriarchal mode he calls himself her servant to 'Kneel here and adore' her. Her closeness makes him giddy and drowsy.

When Endymion awake, he finds the Indian-maid as 'bed fellow'. She is so beautiful that he kisses her. Then he thinks about Phoebe for a while forgetting about the Indian-maid. He turns again to the sleeping maid and 'all his soul was shook'. He asks her forgiveness but repeats the same thing. Bewildered, he laments:

[...] As it is whole
In tenderness, would I were whole in love!
Can I prize thee, fair maid, all price above,
Even when I feel as true as innocence?
I do, I do. What is this soul then? Whence
Came it? It does not seem my own, and I
Have no self-passion or identity.
(End. Bk. IV. ll. 471-77)

Endymion’s identity represents the poet and the beloved represents poetry. The double manifestation causes major complication in the poetic process. He seems to lose his own identity by merging in female.

Endymion goes to sleep in a dark cave which is suggesting the womb:

There anguish does not sting, nor pleasure pall.
Woe-hurricanes beat ever at the gate,
Yet all is still within and desolate.
(End. Bk. IV. ll. 526-28)

He sees a vision of the marriage of Diana and the constellations are joining the marriage festivities. From the airy regions, Endymion comes back to the earth and realizes that for heavenly beings there is no sorrow or grief. Now, in reality he sees the grass and ‘feel the solid ground’. His return to reality makes him realize that he has seen nothing or felt but a great dream. He prefers the world of reality to the dream. He says:

[...] My sweetest Indian, here,
Here will I kneel, for thou redeemed hast
My life from too thin breathing. Gone and past
Are cloudy phantasms. Caverns lone, farewell,
And air of visions, and the monstrous swell
Of visionary seas! No, never more
Shall airy voices cheat me to the shore
Of tangled wonder, breathless and aghast.
(End. Bk. IV. ll. 648-655)

But he does not forget her totally and says:

Adieu, my daintiest dream, although so vast
My love is still for thee. The hour may come
When we shall meet in pure elysium.
(End. Bk. IV. ll. 656-58)
He also expects her to shine on him and her 'damsel fair'. He kneels before his Indian-maid and shows his indebtedness towards her. He promises to talk 'no more of dreaming'. He plans his future life with her. The picture of Endymion appears before us of a helpless man persuading to restore his love. He urges heaven to protect her beauty and loveliness. He is ready to live with the Indian maiden. But she refuses that she may not be his love. She is forbidden and she cannot tell the reason.

Through Indian-maiden's refusal of Endymion's proposal we find that Keats has shown women capable to take such a bold step. Disappointed by her rejection, he decides to live the life of a hermit in his mossy cave where only Peona can meet him. Once again Peona fulfils her role as a nurse and friend. Endymion's condition is really to be pitied. He appears as a frightful dreamer rejected by a woman. But his dilemma is finally resolved when he finds that the two women are one. The Indian maiden is transformed into the golden-haired maiden. Her black hair turns golden and her eyes turn blue. She was no more the Indian maiden but Phoebe herself and she tells the reason of her delay:

[...] But foolish fear
Withheld me first; and then decrees of fate;
And then 'twas fit that from this mortal state
Thou shouldst, my love, by some unlooked-for change
Be spiritualized.[…]

(End. Bk. IV. ll. 989-993)
The picture we get of Endymion at the end is very submissive and gentle. He kneels down before his goddess into a ‘blissful swoon’ and vanishes away. Thus he is giving woman a higher place like a goddess. Endymion’s final choice is the Indian-maiden. She is an embodiment of reality. In Keats’s preference for reality we find he phenomenological viewpoint clearly. But later on we find that Keats by uniting the two women has shown a unification of the two, both ideal as well as real.

The Indian maiden represents a more realistic and emancipated version of womanhood. She has the power to reject a male proposing her for marriage unlike the traditional woman. On the other hand the golden-haired maiden represents the ideal woman and the motherly aspect of a woman. The Indian maiden gives way to a new kind of emergence to society based on independence of the female and also projects a society where women have equal right as their male counterpart. Thus Keats emerges as a feminist in his role to provide the high status to women as goddess, worthy to be adored.

*Hyperion* opens with a tabloid of defeated patriarchy. Saturn sits in absolute quietness like a statue. An overwhelmed Naiad presses ‘her cold finger closer to her lips’ and participates in his sorrow. His large foot prints trace his enormous stature. He has lost his ruling position and
reduced to this pitiable condition, he turns to his mother for comfort and kneels before her. She is Mother Earth symbolic of nurturing maternity:

While his bowed head seemed listening to the Earth,
His ancient mother, for some comfort yet.

(Hyp. Bk. I. ll. 20-21)

Thea, the consort of Saturn, stretches her ‘kindred hand’ to his wide shoulders to awake him:

She was a Goddess of the infant world;
By her in stature the tall Amazon
Had stood a pigmy’s height; she would have ta’en
Achilles by the hair and bent his neck,
Or with a finger stayed Ixion’s wheel.

(Hyp. Bk. I. ll. 26-30)

Her physical strength is greater than that of the Amazons and of Achilles. She serves as a contrast to the fallen image of Saturn. In her role as the matriarch, she imbibes the pain of eternity. She is not the traditional, meek, submissive woman of Keats’s early poem who ‘bleats | For man’s protection’ (‘Ah, who can e’er forget so fair a being’ (ll. 3-4) but powerful and fearless. Her comparison with the Sphinx shows her strong body. Her Beauty also is per excellence. Her beautiful face depicts sorrow. She has intuitive powers and knowledge of the coming trouble is visible in her face and demeanor. Thea is a partner in Saturn’s sorrow. The term ‘bended neck’ shows Saturn’s total breakdown. She utters consoling words to him in ‘a feeble tongue’. Thus she is humble and emotional also:
The frozen God still couchant on the earth,
And the sad Goddess weeping at his feet;
Until at length old Saturn lifted up
His faded eyes, and saw his kingdom gone,
And all the gloom and sorrow of the place,
And that fair kneeling Goddess;[...]  
(Hyp. Bk. I. ll. 87-92)

Her face serves as a mirror to him. Saturn has lost his identity but wants to regain it with the help of Thea. The poem is an epic yet the female dominates the poem giving wisdom, knowledge, and teaching humanity to the male. Saturn is moving his hands in the air as if fighting in a battlefield, showing his might and power. According to Newell F. Ford ‘Saturn and his ruined brethren understand only one law in the universe – the law of might.’\textsuperscript{16} Thea serving as an anchor to the sorry visage of patriarchy encourages Saturn to continue and regain his courage and impart it among other Titans. She assumes the role of a guide who ‘turned to lead the way’ whom Saturn ‘followed’.

The Titans who were once fierce are now shedding tears, groaning for their old power. Hyperion has his sovereignty and majesty but is also feeling insecure. His picture comes royal and full of wrath which was to certain extent responsible for their present condition. Hyperion represents evolved masculinity. Apart from Thea, we meet other feminine characters like Cybele, Themis, Thetys, Clymene, Asia, Ops and Mnemosyne in Book II of Hyperion. This cluster of women represents different aspects
of womanhood. Mnemosyne, the ancient Greek goddess of memory is presented as bold, free and ‘straying in the world’.

Asia, born of the Caf ‘though feminine than any of her sons’ is the only one of the Titans except Oceanus who is not a victim of sorrow. She possesses more thought than woe unlike the desperate male Titans:

More thought than woe was in her dusky face,
For she was prophesying of her glory;
And in her wide imagination stood
Palm-shaded temples and high rival fanes,
By Oxus or in Ganges’ sacred isles.
   (Hyp. Bk. II. ll.56-60)

Thus ‘She is the very figure of Hope, strikingly contrasted with the dejection and misery surrounding her.’

Encleadus, one of the Titans, ‘tiger-passioned, lion thoughted’ represents the untamed aspect of patriarchy. He is full of wrath and going to wage a war against the new gods by using only physical powers. Oceanus’s wife Tethys and daughter Clymene, Themis, and Ops the ancient Roman goddess of plenty, also appear on the scene. The Muse also has been invoked and her high imaginative and inspiring quality has been accepted. Thea is a leader with initiative unlike the traditional patriarchy-bound follower:

For when the Muse’s wings are air-ward spread,
Who shall delay her flight? And she must chant
Of Saturn and his guide, […]
   (Hyp. Bk. II. ll. 82-84)
Oceanus is sensitive enough to accept the reality that the new gods are more powerful, strong and beautiful. He clarifies his point by giving the example of earth which is the ‘dull soil’ that feeds and nourishes huge forests. He focuses on the maternity, generosity, sacrificing and nurturing qualities of Mother Earth. In the same way, he says, the tree on which the dove coos and has golden wings is not jealous of its freedom. Thus the male accepts the sacrificing nature of female. Oceanus says that in the same way this new race is more beautiful. ‘Oceanus is thus a kind of inchoate poet among them, the first recognizer of the power of beauty in the world, and also of the prefigurative veracity – and possible creativity – of the imagination.’ Oceanus equates beauty with might by saying that ‘first in beauty should be first in might’. Clymene, the daughter of Oceanus is presented as ‘over-foolish’ and Oceanus ‘over-wise’ by Encleadas. Her words are termed ‘baby words’.

Apollo and Mnemosyne appear together. She is solemn and serious and represents the eternal woman:

Goddess! I have beheld those eyes before,  
And their eternal calm, and all that face,  
Or I have dreamed.’ [...]  
(Hyp. Bk. III. ll. 59-61)

In reply to his question, she says:

‘Thou hast dreamed of me; and awaking up  
Didst find a lyre all golden by thy side,  
Whose strings touched by thy fingers all the vast  
Unwearied ear of the whole universe
Listened in pain and pleasure at the birth
Of such new tuneful wonder. [...] 
(Hyp. Bk. III. ll. 62-66)

Mnemosyne is depicted as one who has observed the growth of Apollo 'from the young day' till his arms 'could bend that bow heroic to all times'. 'She is the creative mother of the muses,' a source of inspiration to Apollo and gives the power of creation to him which gives pleasure to humanity. She tries to know the reason of his sorrow and feels sad about it. She says, 'for I am sad | When thou dost shed a tear'(ll. 69-70). Thus she is affectionate and has compassion for others. She is like a caring mother who looks after her child, knows about her growth since childhood, and has an intuitive character. He says:

[...] 'Mnemosyne!
Thy name is on my tongue, I know not how;
Why should I tell thee what thou so well seest?
Why should I strive to show what from thy lips
Would come no mystery? [...] 
(Hyp. Bk. III. ll. 83-86)

She is full of knowledge. To him, she is the 'Goddess benign' and her silent face is an object of lesson to him. He says:

Mute thou remainest-mute! Yet I can read
A wondrous lesson in thy silent face:
Knowledge enormous makes a God of me. 
(Hyp. Bk. III. ll. 111-13)

In her face, Apollo is able to read knowledge that gives him the place of god. Thus she is the mother of the Muses who provides inspiration to Apollo, the god of poetry. She gives him the essential knowledge. She
prophesies him. 'If she is eternal beauty and truth, it is the beauty and truth always to be attained. She sanctions the struggle toward an ultimate perfection.' She prophesies his future.

_The Fall of Hyperion_ is a reworking of _Hyperion_. It has been recast in the form of a vision in which the defeat of the Titans is narrated by a priestess Moneta through the dream mechanism. Keats thus endows Moneta with oracular and prophetic properties.

The narrative opens with highlighting the power of poetry. In Keats, poetry is generally seen as a female as he says that ‘poetry alone can tell her dreams’. She has the liberating function because poetry gives us power, enables us to express ourselves. The poet finds himself cocooned in nature. A sacramental feast is being served which has been tasted by the ‘mother Eve’. The drink makes him swoon. This imagery of sacramental feast and ‘arbour with a drooping roof’ is replaced by the old palace, cathedrals and marble. But the maternal image is more dominant than before.

The poet sees an image huge like the cloud at whose feet is an altar with steps on both sides. He proceeds toward the altar with reverence slowly and finds the image of Moneta ruling majestically whose voice is threatening and commanding:

> [...] If thou canst not ascend
> These steps, die on that marble where thou art.
Thy flesh, near cousin to the common dust,
Will parch for lack of nutriment- thy bones
Will wither in few years, and vanish so
That not the quickest eye could find a grain
Of what thou now art on that pavement cold.
(The Fall of Hyp. I. ll. 107-13)

This ordeal of the stairway represents the rebirth. It is not an easy flight but a laborious and tortured climb. He requests Moneta, the 'veiled shadow':

[...] 'High prophetess,' said I, 'purge off,
Benign, if so it please thee, my mind's film.'
(The Fall of Hyp. I. ll. 145-46)

He wants Moneta’s help to understand things clearly, to bestow on him truth and knowledge as she possess. She provides him the basic knowledge of his own identity both as a poet and as a human being through the journey of pain and suffering. Her being in veil suggests her mysterious personality and depth of vision. She is benign and merciful as well as threatening as Dorothy Van Ghent asserts that ‘Moneta embodies “the dangerous aspect of the presence,” with her terrifying deathly pallor, her tyrannous attitude and fierce threats.’ Thus in Moneta, we find the picture of complete womanhood.

According to Moneta, the poet and the dreamer are distinct and have different functions. The poet has knowledge and understanding through which he tries to remove the suffering and problems of people. A 'poet is a sage | A humanist, physician to all men.' He puts balm upon the
world, ‘The other vexes it’. He enquires about himself as well as about her:

Majestic shadow, tell me where I am,
Whose altar this; for whom this incense curls;
What image this whose face I cannot see,
For the broad marble knees; and who thou art,
Of accent feminine, so courteous?'

(The Fall of Hyp. I. ll. 211-15)

Though she is majestic, she is courteous also with feminine accent. Thus she is a combination of both these aspects suggestive of perfect woman. She has a ‘tall shade’, ‘majestic shadow’ and she is the goddess of eternal sorrow. She is sad over the lost glory of the Titans. She is the ‘sole priestess of his desolation’. Her personality sometimes terrifies the poet:

But yet I had a terror of her robes,
And chiefly of the veils, that from her brow
Hung pale, and curtained her in mysteries.

(The Fall of Hyp. I. ll. 251-53)

Seeing him in terror, the goddess parted the veils with her ‘sacred hands’.

Her face is wan, and reflects the tolerance and permanence of suffering.

According to Robin Mayhead:

She is both tender and frightening, serene in her sad authority
and also profoundly disquieting. ‘Not pined by human sorrow’,
she yet stands as an embodiment of the very idea of sorrow itself, as an ‘immortal’ level far above the incidental sorrows
of the individual human being.21

Her eyes have an arresting quality, a ‘benignant light’. They are free from all ‘external things,’ have been compared to the light, splendor of the mild moon who ‘comforts’ everyone without knowing about them all. Her
eyes are of the same type who soothes even those whom she does not know. She has selfless love for humanity.

The sad picture of Moneta made the poet inquisitive ‘to see what things the hollow brain behind enwombed.’ The image of her hollow brain reminds us of the womb as Dorothy Van Ghent says, ‘Moneta’s brain is conceived of as the “entails” of an earth cavern, as a womb.’22 He calls Moneta ‘shade of memory’ and Mnemosyne also signifies memory. Thus he has combined both of them. Mnemosyne can offer only the past to Apollo while Moneta derives its strength from the future as well as the past. He again asks her the cause of her sorrow and she relates the tale to the poet as described in Hyperion. Her role here is like a historian and interpreter. The whole thing is described again by the Moneta to the poet. The fallen Titans are not described again individually. In this part we find Saturn’s loss of power, hope and strength. His voice is not as commanding and authoritative as before in Hyperion. His voice is feeble, poor and sickly. Canto II of The Fall of Hyperion is not described in a new theme but a recast of the first part of Hyperion. The description of the Hyperion ends abruptly leaving the poem fragmentary.

In both the books the male persona gets wisdom, knowledge and comfort out of the female who is not a meek and weak person but a source of inspiration. ‘She is to be distinguished from the merely coy and
mute forms of loveliness of earlier poetry by virtue of her role as a sage, warning the poet that he no longer be a dreamer, but a “humanist, physician to all men.” Thus the power of Keats’s women is found at its height in this poem.

Through the 1818 letters, Keats emerges as a mature person in comparison to his self of 1817. His love for his brothers and sister is not affected by the passage of time, rather it remains the same. His concern and love for his sister is revealed in the letters to George and Tom Keats, Haydon and also to Georgiana. This year is very important from the viewpoint of his experience and his understanding regarding women. He realizes his mistake in judging and making his opinion of them but often his views appear contradictory to each other. Most of his views about women are expressed in his letters to Benjamin Bailey whom he became acquainted with at the Reynolds’s in London in 1817. He came close to him during his stay at Oxford in the same year. Through these letters, a whole picture of women is visible. He talks at length about particular women among them Georgiana is praised and admired in high terms as the most ‘disinterested woman in the world’. Mrs. Isabella Jones and Jane Cox also attracted him.

Keats was fully aware of his duties towards his sister Fanny and tried to fulfill them to his capacity. He was the eldest one in the family so
he was to play the role of both mother and father for his younger brothers and sister. Fanny was to Keats a person whom he has to protect and treasure. The picture of Fanny appears as meek, dependant, helpless under the supervision of an authoritative person Mr. Abbey. This aspect of woman is sometimes visible in Keats's poetry. In this letter to Tom and George 5 January 1818 Keats informs them about his sister with whom he is very concerned and caring. Being an elder brother he also instructs his brothers to keep contact with her:

[...] I have seen Fanny twice lately- she enquired particularly after you and wants a Co-partnership Letter from you – she has been unwell but is improving – I think she will be quick – Mrs. Abbey was saying that the Keatses were ever indolent – that they would ever be so and that it was born in them – Well whispered fanny to me 'If it is born with us how can we help it? She seems very anxious for a Letter-I asked her what I should get for her, she said a Medal of the Princess.

The responsibility of Fanny is felt by Keats constantly. He cannot ignore her and gives her preference over other people. The pang of being away from her always pricks Keats. Keats further talks about his sister in his letter to B.R. Haydon 10 January 1818:

I should have seen you ere this, but on account of my sister being in Town: so that when I have sometimes made ten paces towards you, Fanny has called me into the City; and the Xmas Holyday[s] are your only time to see Sisters, that is if they are so situated as mine.

Keats gives an account of Scotland and Ireland to Tom, his younger brother:
[...] yet I can perceive a great difference in the nations from the Chambermaid at this nate Inn kept by Mr Kelly – She is fair, kind and ready to laugh, because she is out of the horrible dominion of the Scotch kirk – A Scotch Girl stands in terrible awe of the Elders – poor little Susannas – They will scarcely laugh they are greatly to be pitied and the kirk is greatly to be damn’d. These kirkmen have done scotland good (Query?) they have made Men, Women, Old Men Young Men old Women, young women boys, girls and infants all careful [...].

(Letter, 3-9 July 1818)

He really feels sympathetic toward the fate of Kirk women at Scotland.

The picture he draws of these women is really to be considered. He has an inherent sympathy for women. He perceives the difference in the treatment of female by male. From these points Keats’s real feminist feelings emerge. He further continues his point regarding them in the same letter of 3-9 July:

[...]The present state of society demands this and this convinces me that the world is very young and in a verry ignorant state – We live in a barbarous age. I would sooner be a wild deer than a Girl under the dominion of the kirk, and I would sooner be a wild hog than be the occasion of a Poor Creatures pennance before those execrable elders [...]

The picture he draws of them is really pathetic and shows Keats’s deep-seated reverence and sympathy for womankind. In the same letter Keats stresses that experience is necessary to enjoy a work fully:

No Man in such matters will be content with the experience of others – It is true that out of suffrance there is no greatness, no dignity; that in the most abstracted Pleasure there is no lasting happiness: yet who would not like to discover over again that Cleopatra was a Gipsey, Helen a Rogue and Ruth a deep one?

E.C. Pettet expresses the same philosophy when he says that, ‘Pure experience, which is the sole source and kernel of all our knowledge of
reality, can never be sought elsewhere than in our simple, original perceptions.\(^{24}\)

On his return from Bellfast Keats met a ‘Sadan – the Duchess of Dunghill’. Her picture we see is really pathetic. Keats seems to participate in her being:

[...]It is no laughing matter tho – Imagine the worst dog kennel you ever saw placed upon two poles from a mouldy fencing- In such a wretched thing sat a squalid old Woman squat like an ape half starved from a scarcity of Buiscuit in its passage from Madagascar to the cape, - with a pipe in her mouth and looking out with a round-eyed skinny lidded, inanity – with a sort of horizontal idiotic movement of her head - sqab and lean she sat and puff’d out the smoke while two ragged tattered Girls carried her along-What a thing would be a history of her Life and sensations.

(Letter, 3-9 July 1818)

Thus these letters show Keats’s inner concern for women which he got from his early experience. Marjorie Norris says about him:

His mode of apperception, viewing the world around him by participating in its being, reflects a phenomenology, the study of which illumines the structure of Keats’s poetry. Unlike Shelley, for example, who rises up from nature into a mystical flight, or Wordsworth’ who seeks a mysterious, saving force in nature or the memories of nature, Keats, like Wallace Stevens, wants to see the truth or reality of being. They both want to penetrate, by sharing its essence, into the core of reality.\(^{25}\)

Most of Keats’s personal views about women are expressed in his letters to Benjamin Bailey. The letter to him of 23 March, 1818 shows his deep concern for women. He remembers one of the sayings of Bailey while his stay at Oxford where he says “Why should Woman suffer?” and

From his heart Keats was sensitive and caring for women. He feels pain to see a woman suffering. His innermost feelings about them were sympathetic and concerning.

Keats is very much concerned for his brother George. He tells Bailey that his brother has an independent and liberal mind. He is dissatisfied with the place ‘[...] in which a generous Ma<n> with a scanty recourse must be ruined’ (Letter, 21-25 May 1818). That is why he has decided to immigrate to America. Further Keats tells Bailey more about him and his would be wife Georgiana in the same letter that ‘[...] he will marry before he sets sail a young Lady he has known some years – of a nature liberal and highspirited enough to follow him to the Banks of the Mississippi.’

Keats is a sensitive person, feels more of his brother’s separation. After George’s departure to America, he is planning to go on a walking tour with Brown through the North of England and Scotland.

With the concern and love for his brothers his attitude toward women is evident through this letter to Benjamin Bailey of 10 June 1818:

[…] My Love for my Brothers from the early loss of our parents and even for earlier Misfortunes has grown into an affection ‘passing the Love of Women’–I have been ill temper’d with them, I have vex’d them – but the thought of them has always stifled the impression that any woman might
otherwise have made upon me – I have a sister too and may not follow them, either to America or to the Grave[…]

He realizes what he is doing. He is conscious of his bad temper towards them. In the same letter about Georgiana, George's wife, Keats says:

I had known[n] my sister-in-Law some time before she was my Sister and was very fond of her. I like her better and better – she is the most disinterested woman I ever knew - that is to say she goes beyond degree in it – To see an entirely disinterested Girl quite happy is the most pleasant and extraordinary thing in the world –[…]

Keats was extremely fond of Georgiana and he himself admitted that his affection for her gradually increased with time. He was also impressed by her intelligence, disinterestedness and character. He noticed that Georgina had “something original” about her; though not strictly handsome, “she had the imaginative poetical cast”. After praising Georgiana a little further he says:

Women must want Imagination and they may thank God for it – and so m[a]y we that a delicate being can feel happy without any sense of crime. It puzzles me and I have no sort of Logic to comfort me – I shall think it over.

(Letter, 10 June 1818)

Here he considers woman a ‘delicate being’ and does not want her to possess imagination to be away from any sense of crime. He seems considerate towards them but it also shows his attributing superiority to men by providing them imaginative faculty and power. Keats sometimes seems to be under the social pressure to adopt the norms of masculinity.
But he accepts that he is not clear and has no logic to assert his point, depicts his ambivalence towards women.

In letter to Benjamin Bailey 18, 22 July 1818, he expresses his views regarding women:

_I am certain I have not a right feeling towards Women – at this moment I am striving to be just to them but I cannot – Is it because they fall so far beneath my Boyish imagination? When I was a Schoolboy I thought a fair Woman a pure Goddess, my mind was a soft nest in which some one of them slept though she knew it not – I have no right to expect more than their reality. I thought them ethereal above Men – I find then [for them] perhaps equal-great by comparison is very small – Insult may be inflicted in more ways than by Word or action – one who is tender of being insulted does not like to think an insult against another – I do not like to think insults in a Lady’s Company – I commit a Crime with her which absence would have not known- Is it not extraordinary?_

(Letter, 18, 22 July 1818)

Keats here clearly states that his feelings regarding women are not positive and right. With the ripening of his mental faculty, his conception of women also seems to be matured but not completely. In his childhood his feelings were good and even to the point of idealization and adoration but with the unpleasant experience he encounters with them, his feeling shift from equality and goddess hood to their reality as he says ‘I have no right to expect more than their reality.’ In reality he finds their picture different as in the case of his mother. He adored her but she left him for a second hasty marriage. Things like these made a bad impression upon the young mind of Keats. He tries to overcome these feelings but finds himself unable to do so.
His greatest fear is to be insulted in the company of ladies. He is a sensitive person and susceptible to perceive things easily because ‘without man’s subjectivity no affirmation of reality has meaning and without any affirmation of reality all words and formulas are empty shells.’\(^{26}\) He even does not want to think about it.

In the company of women Keats feels uncomfortable, shy and hesitant. But quiet contrary to this, the company of men does not affect him. He feels comfortable and free to communicate with ease. Keats’s anxiety and instability in the company of opposite sex is clearly revealed when he says in his letter to Benjamin Bailey 18, 22 July in these words:

> When among Men I have no evil thoughts, no malice, no spleen – I feel free to speak or to be silent – I can listen and from everyone I can learn – my hands are in my pockets I am free from all suspicion and comfortable. When I am among Women I have evil thoughts, malice spleen – I cannot speak or be silent – I am full of Suspicions and therefore listen to no thing – [...] for an obstinate Prejudice can seldom be produced but from a gordian complication of feelings, which must take time to unravell and care to keep unravelled – [...] for after all I do think better of Womankind than to suppose they care whether Mister John Keats five feet hight likes them or not.

This sort of unease, discomfort and shyness made Keats label the brand of effeminate and exclude him from the domain of masculinity. He accepts that his feelings and attitude towards women earlier was not normal but it is not so easy to remove and a lot of care is needed to do away with it. Now he says that his feelings are good about womankind without caring for their response. Thus we find contradictory opinion
here which shows that a text can be used to support two contradictory points. In the letter to J.H. Reynolds, 19 February 1818 Keats supports the role of woman over man. He says:

[...] Now it appears to me that almost any Man may like the Spider spin from his own inwards his own airy Citadel – the points of leaves and twigs on which the Spider begins her work are few and she fills the Air with a beautiful circuiting: man should be content with as few points to tip with the fine Webb of his Soul and weave a tapestry empyrean – [...] 

We find Keats imploring men to take inspiration from the female spider. She is patient and satisfied with what she has and utilizes her inner capacity to make her own ‘airy citadel’ without any outward help or support. Thus with the preference for woman Keats’s feminist feelings are evident. The creation of the poet is compared to a spider’s spinning a web. It is an internalization of the experiential world and a living in its “thingness” to which Keats, like Wallace Stevens, constantly returns. Further in the same letter of 19 February 1818 Keats appreciates the role of the female when he says:

It has been an old Comparison for our urging on – the Bee hive – however it seems to me that we should rather be the flower than the Bee- for it is a false notion that more is gained by receiving than giving – no the receiver and the giver are equal in their benefits – The f[l]ower I doubt not receives a fair guerdon from the Bee – its leaves blush deeper in the next spring – and who shall say between Man and Woman which is the most delighted? Now it is more noble to sit like Jove that [for than] to fly like Mercury – let us not therefore go hurrying about and collecting honey-bee like, buzzing here and there impatiently from a knowledge of what is to be arrived at: but let us open our leaves like a flower and be passive and receptive – budding patiently under the eye of Apollo and taking hints from
every noble insect that favors us with a visit – sap will be given us for Meat and dew for drink –[...]

Keats stresses on the value of being passive and receptive like women, the attributes which are conventionally associated with femininity. But the association of passivity is made with a masculine figure Jove that seems contradictory. Thus Keats follows Derrida’s subversion of binary oppositions. After this subversion, Derrida leaves these appositions in a state of undecidability, without fixing on anyone but Keats here indirectly seems to prefer the role of Jove as a model of masculinity but deep inside, Keats feels comfortable being the Mercury or humble bee.

Keats’s letter to J.H. Reynolds, 3 May 1818 reveals that during these days he has been upset because of his brother Tom’s illness. Now he feels a bit relieved. He says, ‘[…]one would think there has been growing up for these last four thousand years, a grandchild Scion of the old forbidden tree, and that some modern Eve had just violated it; […].’ Keats makes Eve whole sole responsible for the act of violation and Adam has been excluded.

Keats in the same letter talks about Milton and Wordsworth compares them and says that we cannot understand their work fully until we have gone through the same experience. While saying this ‘Keats reflects the phenomenological method of getting back to phenomena, a return to things themselves, and of suspending or “bracketing” what we
presuppose about the object. He seems to disconnect the theoretical knowledge of a thing to plunge into its being by experiencing it, by "gearing" himself to his world.'\textsuperscript{27} We find the phenomenological viewpoint very clearly in these words of Keats which is similar to the theory of Merleau Ponty that 'perceived space is orientated and rooted in the experience of the body. Perceived space is "lived space" rather than objective, Euclidian space.'\textsuperscript{28}

\textit{[...]} for axioms in philosophy are not axioms until they are proved upon our pulses: We read fine ---- things but never feel them to thee full until we have gone the same steps as the Author. – I know this is not plain; you will know exactly my meaning when I say, that now I shall relish Hamlet more than I ever have done-[...]

\textit{(Letter, 3 May 1818)}

Keats finds the same similarity with Hamlet in his mother’s immediate marriage after his father’s death. It suggests that Keats has gone through the same experience as Hamlet in his life as Gittings clearly says that, 'The clear parallel between Keats and Hamlet is his mother’s remarriage after only two months’ widow hood, and this implies something more if he has really proved upon his pulses, as he claims, the situation of Hamlet.'\textsuperscript{29}

In the letter to J.H. Reynolds 11, 13 July 1818, Keats talks about his marriage:

\textit{[...]} I have spoken to you against Marriage, but it was general- the Prospect in those matters has been to me so blank, [...]

but believe me I have more than once yearn’d for the time of your
happiness to come, as much as I could for myself after the lips of Juliet.

His attitude toward marriage now seems to change. He is not against marriage now but supports Reynolds. He realizes his earlier immaturity and inexperience regarding this matter. He even desires the same happiness for himself. He suggests for marriage. His suggestion to marry depicts his growing awareness of women. In his letter to J.H. Reynolds 22 September 1818, Keats says:

[...] I never was in love – Yet the voice and the shape of a woman has haunted me these two days – at such a time when the relief, the feverous relief of Poetry seems a much less crime – This morning Poetry has conquered – I have relapsed into those abstractions which are my only life-[…]

Keats has an admiration and an especial fascination for Georgiana Keats. He declares that his admiration for her is maximum in the world. He also talks of his sister Fanny but she does not affect him more than Georgiana. In his letter to George and Georgiana Keats, 14-31 October 1818, Keats says:

– Your content in each other is a delight to me which I cannot express- the Moon is now shining full and brilliant – she is the same to me in Matter, what you are to me in Spirit- If you were here my dear Sister I could not pronounce the words which I can write to you from a distance: I have a tenderness for you, and an admiration which I feel to be as great and more chaste than I can have for any woman in the world. You will mention Fanny – her character is not formed, her identity does not press upon me as yours does. I hope from the bottom of my heart that I may one day feel as much for her as I do for you –
Keats mentions of their company and content in each other as a delight for himself but it shows his deep yearning for a partner like Georgiana. Georgiana appears perfect to Keats and even Fanny, his sister, does not possess those characteristics which he expects for her in future. He considers her not only a sister but a ‘glorious human being’. Further he says:

She is not a Cleopatra; but she is at least a Charmian. She has a rich eastern look: she has fine eyes and fine manners. When she comes into a room she makes an impression the same as the Beauty of a Leopardsess. She is too fine and too conscious of her Self to repulse any Man who may address her – from habit she thinks that nothing particular. I always find myself more at ease with such a woman; [...] They think I dont admire her because I did not stare at her – They call her a flirt to me – What a want of knowledge? she walks across a room in such a manner that a Man is drawn towards her with a magnetic Power. This they call flirting! they do not know things. They do not know what a Woman is.

(Letter, 19-31 October 1818)

He says that he feels ease in her company because she is different and thinks nothing that particular. She is not conscious of the male company like other woman. So Keats also feels comfortable in her company. Keats’s letter shows that he was not in love but almost near to it. He has little conversation with this charmian because of the Miss Reynoldses on the look out.

Further Keats says in the same letter, ‘As a Man in the world I love the rich talk of a Charmian; as an eternal Being I love the thought of you.
I should like her to ruin me, and I should like you to save me’ (Letter, 14-31 October 1818).

Keats was deeply impressed by Georgiana’s intelligence. Here he categorizes both these women, treating one as an object of pleasure and satisfaction and other as an ideal form of maternal love and protection. He likes both these aspects of a woman equally.

Another woman came into Keats’s contact is Isabella Jones. She seems to impress him for a short while. Keats talks about her to George Keatses in the letter of 14-31 October 1818, ‘She has always been an enigma to me - she has never been in a Room with you and with Reynolds and wishes we should be acquainted without any of our common acquaintance knowing it.’ But Keats clarifies his point about her in the same letter:

[...] I have no libidinous thought about her - she and your George are the only women à peu près demon age whom I would be content to know for their mind and friendship alone - I shall in a short time write you as far as I know how I intend to pass my Life [...] Though the most beautiful Creature were waiting for me at the end of a Journey or a Walk - I cannot think of those things now Tom is so unwell and weak.

Keats is impressed by their mind as well as friendship. Thus uplifting the position of women but the same treatment will not be given to all women according to him. Keats is occupied by his family problems. He announces his decision not to marry. He says that the chances for his marriage seem less but the fascination for women is not finished and they
are waiting for him at the end of Journey or a walk. In the same letter the
distinction between subjectivity and objectivity is blurred:

[...] The roaring of the wind is my wife and the Stars through the
window pane are my Children. The mighty abstract Idea I have
of Beauty in all things stifles the more divided and minute
domestic happiness – an amiable wife and sweet Children I
contemplate as a part of that Beauty. [...] These things
combined with the opinion I have of the generality of women –
who appear to me as children to whom I would rather give a
Sugar Plum than my time, form a barrier against Matrimony
which I rejoice in.

(Letter, 14-31 October 1818)

Though earlier Keats said that he will never marry but the desire
for a wife and children are not away and indispensable from him. In
nature and its objects he identifies his wife and children, considers them
amiable and sweet. There is an ‘organic relatedness between the perceiver
and the perceived. Perception is a “meaning-giving” act which relates the
self and the not-self through the motility of the body.’ But in the same
letter a little further Keats seems to contradict himself which depicts
Keats’s male chauvinism where he generalizes women for their
‘generality’ suggests that they do not possess any individuality. They
have no identity of their own according to him. They are all alike like
masses and compare them with children, not worthy to pay proper
attention and take seriously. His conception of women of this sort makes
a hindrance in his decision to marry.
In his letter to J.A. Hessey 8 October 1818 Keats says that the real genius is not dependent upon anybody. It does not need any external thing or law but needs inner ability and worth:

[...]The Genius of Poetry must work out its own salvation in a man: It cannot be matured by law & precept, but by sensation & watchfulness in itself-That which is creative must create itself- In Endymion, I leaped headlong into the Sea, and thereby have become better acquainted with the Soundings, the quicksands, & the rocks, than if I had stayed upon the green shore, and piped a silly pipe, and took tea & comfortable advice.

Through this letter Keats’s similarity with Cassirer is evident where he says, ‘We do not apprehend the real by attempting to attain it step by step over the painful detours of discursive thinking; we must rather place ourselves immediately at its center.’

Critics like Sir Sidney Colvin, Robert Bridges and Earnest de Selincourt considers Endymion as a deliberate allegory in which the poet is longing for a union with the spirit of the beauty. Sidney Colvin also finds that ‘in the main body of the work, beauties and faults are so bound up together that a critic may well be struck almost as much by one as by the other.’ But its allegorical character has been attacked by the critics like Newell Ford and E.C. Pettet. They ‘have drawn attention to a notable discrepancy between Keats’s supposed allegorical intention and the discursiveness and incoherence of his narrative.’ To them Endymion is a ‘frank love poem, powerfully energized by Keats’s adolescent desires.’
S.M. Sperry opines that *Endymion* is 'not fully coherent as an allegory for the reason that it embodies new truths and insights Keats discovered only in the course of composition which could not be perfectly expressed within its old design.'

Edward E. Bostetter asserts that *Endymion* is Keats's most elaborate and optimistic development of the dream pattern. Susan J. Wolfsan considers that 'the larger plot of Endymion equates quest romance with erotic adventure.' To Walter Jackson Bate, 'Endymion was Keats’s most serious early attempt to answer fundamental questions about the relation of the artist to his art and to the world.' While Karla Alwes considers that 'Endymion is the prototype of the speaker who will emerge in Keats’s later poetry, especially in the odes where the 'dream becomes an obstacle rather than a channel to immortality.'

The two poems, *Hyperion* and its revision *The Fall of Hyperion* are considered important works by John Keats. Although both are unfinished, these poems are the projections of Keats’s most powerful women. *Hyperion* is often considered Miltonic in style and theme while *The Fall of Hyperion* has been compared to Dante’s *The Divine Comedy* in terms of its structure as a dream-vision and in its use of a Muse figure. Even Robin Mayhead claims that 'Hyperion gives us a blend of Spenser and Milton.'
Kenneth Muir finds that 'in the first two books of *Hyperion* we are given to understand that Apollo is superior in beauty and wisdom to the old gods but on his first appearance in Book III we find him overcome with sorrow.'\(^{41}\) Stuart M. Sperry views the poem as an allegory for poets and poetry. Walter Jackson Bate views that 'the lines in *Hyperion* have less of nature and of self, and more of the rise and fall of nations, the whole chaotic story of man’s troubled past.'\(^{42}\) While *The Fall of Hyperion* according to him is 'Keats’s last effort to integrate his poetic faculties and impulses.'\(^{43}\) Marjorie Levinson ‘binds ‘Hyperion’ and ‘The Fall’ by their common subject matter and distinguishes them with respect to their antithetical ways of framing this material.’\(^{44}\)

Edward E. Bostetter looks at Keats’s focus on the female figures in both the poems. He asserts that the 'difference in the conceptions of the two poems is dramatically represented by the difference between the two goddesses, Mnemosyne and Moneta.'\(^{45}\) Karla Alwes finds ‘Moneta as an active rather than passive force as Mnemosyne was.'\(^{46}\) Christoph Bode characterizes the ‘Hyperion poems as a developing expressions of Keats’s poetics and of his understanding of his “negative capability.”’\(^{47}\)
NOTES AND REFERENCES


28. *Ibid*, p. 44.


33. Sperry, *op.cit.* p.82.


42. Bate, *op.cit.* p. 38.


47. Hyperion John Keats

CHAPTER IV

Fancy, Femme Fatales and Fanny Brawne
The period in which Keats wrote his odes and ballads is considered the period of his mature creations. But this period was also one of great upheaval in Keats’s personal life. His brother Tom died. Keats nursed him during his last days. He saw death closely and describes it to the George Keatses in the letter of 16 December 1818—4 January 1819:

The last days of poor Tom were of the most distressing nature; but his last moments were not so painful, and his very last was without a pang—I will not enter into any parsonic comments on death -- yet the common observations of the commonest people on death are as true as their proverbs.

Keats had been acquainted with Fanny Brawne for some time. Fanny fascinated Keats. She took interest in his work and appreciated it. His letters bear proof of his attachment to her. During this time Keats’s poetic creation was affected due to Tom’s death. He was not able to restart his work. Keats’s friends, Severn and Reynolds, did not like Fanny. Brown’s excessive attachment burdened Keats. Robert Gittings Records Brown’s attitude toward Keats as well as towards Fanny:

Brown, though a welcome companion against depression, was also a complicating force. If he resented Keats’s intimacies with other men, he was even more likely to resent the influence of women. He resorted to strange methods, while proclaiming the purest motives to “protect” Keats; he even, so he himself said, put indecent verses of his own making among Keats’s manuscripts to prevent female prying. In Fanny Keats he seems to have recognized a lively and shrewd appraisal of masculine tactics that needed a different approach.
Keats wrote 'The Eve of St. Agnes' in January 1819 during his stay at Bedhampton and Chichester. His throat was getting painful and he could not go outdoors. He writes to Bailey about 'The Eve of St. Agnes' and 'Isabella' in his journal letter of 14 August 1819, 'I have written two Tales, one from Boccacio call'd the Pot of Basil; and another call'd St. Agnes' Eve on a popular superstition; and a third call'd Lamia [...]' 

In late April, Keats started work on 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci'. After the gap of a few weeks, he started to write the most beautiful of his creations viz. 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', 'Ode to a Nightingale' and 'Ode on Melancholy'.

The first draft of 'Ode to a Nightingale' was written on April, 30 when Keats was working in the garden under a plum tree at Wentworth Place. 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' was composed in the mean time while revising 'Ode to a Nightingale'. Keats moved to Wentworth Place at Brown's invitation from Wellwalk. Fanny Brawne was living in the other half of the same house. He cherished the double benefit of the beauty of nature and his growing love for her. Robert Gittings considers that the inspiring force behind Keats's Odes is Fanny Brawne:

Neither of the great odes could have been written by a man against whom all the world had turned. They are the work of a man overpowered in the midst of distress, by a joy of a greater beauty than even he can express. 
He continued writing 'Ode on Indolence' in early June. 'Ode to Psyche' was completed next.

Keats moved to Shanklin Isle of Wight by July I from Wentworth Place to a cottage near the sea. The painful separation from his beloved was immensely troubling. His friend Rice was with Keats at that time. Keats was not able to write properly due to his illness. Soon he went away with Brown and began to write with intensity. During that time he was working upon 'Lamia' and Hyperion. With Brown he planned to compose Otho the Great with the intention of earning money.

Thus it was a period of high creativity in Keats's life. However, it was also a period of hardship and turmoil. At this time Fanny Brawne distracted the poet's mind and gave him some respite from troubles and unhappiness.

In the odes Keats's projection of femininity is at its height. To a certain extent, Keats's ambiguity toward the feminine persona, which dominates his earlier poetry, is resolved in this part. Their power and energy is acknowledged by Keats throughout the odes.

In the 'Ode to Psyche' Keats's poetic persona undertakes a certain quest which ends in an erotic encounter:

I wandered in a forest thoughtlessly,
And, on the sudden, fainting with surprise,
Saw two fair creatures, couched side by side
In deepest grass, beneath the whispering roof
Of leaves and trembled blossoms, where there ran
A brooklet, scarce espied.

(L. 7-12)

The feminine figure, Psyche, is addressed as a ‘Goddess’ when the poem opens. Keats has given her the status of a goddess and writes this ode to glorify her as she has been neglected for a long time. The male persona is trapped in the passive act of gazing at the goddess. He is unable to bear the impact of her beauty. As a result he faints. He wakes to a vision of mating lovers in a green bower. The recurrent green bower symbolizes the womb.

Psyche represents imagination or soul while Cupid symbolizes love and passion. She is called the ‘latest born’ and ‘loveliest vision’. The poet compares her to Phoebe and Vesper but finds her fairer than them.

According to Mario L.D ’Avanzo:

This comparison suggests that his vision of the imagination is more beautiful, more gracious, and more radiant (that is, “fairer,”) than the other two goddesses of imagination in “Olympus’ faded hierarchy” into which Psyche now enters. For Phoebe’s light remains inconstant and dimmed, and Venus’ starlight cannot match the brilliance of Psyche. Here again, Keats identifies the imagination as the source of spontaneous, generative light inspiring the poet with vision.

Keats confessed in his letter of 14 February – 3 May 1819:

You must recollect that Psyche was not embodied as a goddess before the time of Apuleius the Platonist who lived after the Augustan age, and consequently the Goddess was never worshipped or sacrificed to with any of the ancient fervour – and perhaps never thought of in the old religion - I am more
orthodox that [for than] to let a hethen Goddess be so neglected.

In the ode he is concerned about her marginalization. She was not worshipped and she had no temple and no patron. As a compromise the poet says that she is the ‘brightest’ and represents the ideal beauty that inspires the artist to create. He wants to restore her lost status and be her voice, her lute, her shrine, her grove and oracle. He declares that he will be her priest:

Yes, I will be thy priest, and build a fane
In some untrodden region of my mind,
Where branched thoughts, new grown with pleasant pain,
Instead of pines shall murmur in the wind.

(Ll. 50-53)

Thus the poet assumes the status of a priest and gives Psyche, the status of a goddess in the tradition of the other Romantics.

The goddess is so important for him that he places her in his thoughts which remain a pure and ‘untrodden region’. In that ‘wide quietness’ the poet promises to create a ‘rosy sanctuary’. This will be nurtured by the gardener ‘Fancy’. Psyche will be provided ‘soft delight’ by the poet. Thus Keats suggests that Psyche, the imagination, functions along with Cupid, who represents poetic passion. Both passion and imagination play their parts in the creation of poetry. Keats places Psyche beyond the ‘fixed model’ defined by Irigaray. Patriarchy, according to
Irigaray reduces women to being simply ‘representations’. Keats’s psyche is a total subject unoppressed by societal or cultural boundaries. By placing her in the timeless sanctuary of the poet’s mind, he leaves her free to evolve.

In ‘Ode to a Nightingale’ the nightingale is addressed as a ‘light winged Dryad of the trees’. The poet is charmed by her song and driven into oblivion. He wishes to enter the world of the nightingale and ‘fade away’. Jonathan Culler claims that in a feminist reading ‘the appeal to experience is veiled but [...] as a reference to maternal rather than paternal relations.’ The poet by merging with the nightingale whom he endows with a female identity, operates within this mode.

The poet progresses to lose his identity completely and merge with her. Her world which can now be identified as the maternal world is preferable to the world of reality which is full of worries and troubles. He wants to flee on the power of this song to an eternal temple of delight where the ‘cloying’ and ‘fading’ the ‘fever and fret’ of the mortal or patriarchal world shall be left behind forever. In the patriarchal world young age gives way to the old which is full of decay and thinking is associated with sorrow. In this transitory male dominated world everything will decay. ‘Beauty’ associated with the beloved is a fleeting thing. Even the lovers will not remain to admire her ‘lustrous eyes’. The
nightingale evolves into a feminist messiah and leads the poet from the world of mortality to the world of permanence and ultimate happiness.

The poet chooses poetry as his medium to enter in the world of the nightingale. He says:

Away! away! For I will fly to thee,
    Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,
But on the viewless wings of Poesy,
    Though the dull brain perplexes and retards.
Already with thee! Tender is the night,
    And haply the Queen – Moon is on her throne,
Clustered around by all her starry fays.

(Ll. 31-37)

He rejects the male world of ‘Bacchus and his pards’ and chooses ‘viewless wings of poesy’. ‘Poesy’ in Keats’s poetry is seen as a woman. Thus Keats is constantly charmed by the feminine persona. His letters also reveal his pursuit of poetry in real life. He accepts that his mind is already intoxicated by her voice. The night is presented as tender, symbolizing feminine characteristics. The moon known as ‘Queen Moon’ is royal and ruling on her throne majestically. She is authoritative and powerful surrounded by stars symbolizing fairies. She projects maternity by assimilating stars around her like a mother. The images that Keats associates with the nightingale are representative of femininity. The night shows the tenderness and softness while the moon shows royalty and her majesty. Thus he has shown all aspect of womanhood.
In spite of the moon and stars, the poet finds himself in darkness which is ‘embalmed’. This image of darkness with boughs and flowers reminds us of the green bower. This re-entry is soothing and comforting to the poet. Dark caverns that signify the womb acknowledge the superiority of the feminine ability to give birth. This return to the primitive, natural origin marks a new beginning. The poet, in the later part of the poem, uses the image of opening windows. This image may be deconstructed to imply an acknowledgement of the power of the feminine, in this case symbolized by the nightingale. He desires death at this time. To the Romantics death gives relief from sorrow.

The nightingale is described by the poet as an ‘immortal bird’. She is immortal and cannot be destroyed by anyone. The song of the bird elevates the poet’s mood but the euphoric bubble bursts and he comes back to the real world. He realizes that his new perspective is not for any particular generation or time. It is beyond time and age. It influences everyone alike. It soothes the sad and lonely heart of Ruth when she was alone in a forlorn and unknown land. The poet feels immense sympathy for her. ‘But the moment of revelation is the moment of despair: the fairylands are “forlorn”, with no reality except in the dream of the poet.’ The realization of feminine power was too radical and too frightening for the poet. Keats’s superior poetic instincts led him to a realm that was
heavily obscured by the patriarchal culture. Stunned and stupified by his
discovery, he let go of it:

Adieu! The fancy cannot cheat so well
    As she is famed to do, deceiving elf,
Adieu! adieu! Thy plaintive anthem fades
    Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
    Up the hill-side; and now ’tis buried deep
    In the next valley-glades:
Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
    Fled is that music... Do I wake or sleep?
(Ll. 73-80)

But the effect was so strong that in spite of bidding her adieu he is
not completely out of the spell of the song of the nightingale. His last
question ‘Do I wake or sleep?’ shows his delirium and leaves him in a
state of uncertainty whether he is still dreaming or out of her spell.

In ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’, the urn is a feminine entity. She is
addressed directly by the poet as a female:

Thou still unravished bride of quietness,
    Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,
Silvian historian, who canst thus express
    A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme!
(Ll.1-4)

Being an ‘unravished bride’ she is virgin and chaste. Her purity and
chastity is highlighted by the poet. Patriarchy has always set high values
on female virginity. She is also silent, serene and calm. This is presented
as the idealized image of womanhood. Patriarchal definitions of the
perfect woman automatically privilege rationalism over emotionalism,
seriousness over frivolity and reflective over spontaneous. The urn is a cold, voiceless, feminine creation by a man.

Its maternal aspect is evident by its images of wholeness, embracing all nature and man in her own. Being silent, she performs the role of ‘silvian historian’ who expresses a ‘flowery tale’. She is being haunted by men as well as gods. The maidens are portrayed as shy and traditional. There is a scene of mad pursuit, struggle and ‘wild ecstasy’.

The limitations of the feminine entity carved out of stone are visible in the poet's comment. The youth on the urn is addressed ‘Fair youth’ suggestive of beauty like a woman but on the other hand he is also called ‘bold lover’. He is never going to achieve his love so it will remain passive forever. Keats tells him not to grieve because ‘she cannot fade’ and always ‘be fair’. Her beauty is arrested in art. The lover’s love on the urn is always warm, panting and young. While the human love results in a ‘burning forehead’ and a ‘parching tongue’. The fear of losing love and the desire to be loved is evident.

The Urn does not depict only sensuousness of young lovers, their energy, enthusiasm and warm love but it also assimilates the other aspects of life, the emptiness, desolation of the town as well as the sacrifice of the heifer.
The urn is addressed as a ‘silent form’ highlighting the silence of a ‘perfect’ woman. Being silent she depicts a whole view of life. The poet eulogises her as the ‘Attic shape’ and says:

Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought
As doth eternity. Cold pastoral!
When old age shall this generation waste,
Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say’st,
‘Beauty is truth, truth beauty’—that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.
   (Ll. 44-50)

The urn reveals the mystery of life which ‘tease us out of thought’. Yet the poet is dissatisfied and calls her ‘Cold pastoral’ in the last stanza of the poem. But she is not cold and lifeless because the urn manifests ‘a “magical view of life” that gives purpose and meaning to human life in the midst of suffering.’ The poet considers the urn a companion and ‘friend to man’. She removes the pain and woes of mankind. Thus ‘in this ode the urn becomes the means of fulfillment by objectifying the artist’s vision, giving it form and permanence, so that it becomes an enduring source of comfort not only to himself but to generations of men.’ It assimilates the qualities of serenity, maternal aspect of embracing everything into herself and even friend and companion to mankind.

‘Ode on Melancholy’ valorizes yet another feminine aspect. The andocentric vision seeks to simplify feminine existence. However in
Keats’s poem, projected as the phantasm Melancholy, the feminine persona performs in the boundary-free region of the poet’s imagination.

In the first stanza of the poem ‘Ode on Melancholy’, the poet refuses to go to Lethe, wolf’s bane, nightshade, beetle or yew berries to arouse melancholy because it will not provide the true melancholy he is seeking. The poet has provided melancholy with regeneration and life giving functions:

\[
\text{But when the melancholy fit shall fall} \\
\text{Sudden from heaven like a weeping cloud,} \\
\text{That fosters the droop-headed flowers all,} \\
\text{And hides the green hill in an April shroud.} \\
\text{(Ll. 11-14)}
\]

The appearance of Melancholy is sudden like a fit. She has been compared with the ‘weeping cloud’ which gives freshness and new life to ‘droop headed’ flowers. Thus she is a symbol of fertility and life and revives even the dead objects of nature.

Melancholy has its presence everywhere. She is all pervasive from the morning rose, sand wave, globed peonies to the mistress’s anger. The poet suggests that life must be enjoyed fully by absorbing the natural beauty of a morning rose. It fades as the time passes. In the same way the rainbow like appearance of the sand-wave is visible for a short time. So we must enjoy it rather than be sad over its transience. Keats shows the futility of his mistress’s anger through these lines:
Or if thy mistress some rich anger shows,
Imprison her soft hand, and let her rave,
And feed deep, deep upon her peerless eyes.

(L1. 18-20)

The lover derives pleasure out of her anger by feeding on her eyes. She lives in the company of Beauty as well as Joy. They cannot be separated from her. In the same way she is associated with pleasure. She is not weak or humble. She is veiled, serene and powerful and even strong in her sadness:

Aye, in the very temple of Delight
Veiled Melancholy has her sovran shrine,
Though seen of none save him whose strenuous
tongue
Can burst Joy's grape against his palate fine;
His soul shall taste the sadness of her might,
And be among her cloudy trophies hung.

(L1. 25-30)

'Veiled Melancholy' assumes the status of a matriarch ruling majestically in the temple of delight. She cannot be attained by everyone but by those who can bear her sadness and serenity. In the end of the poem the poet gives supremacy to the female psyche. The male persona will realize her power 'the sadness of her might' and is reduced to one of her 'cloudy trophies'.

'Ode on Indolence' creates an aura of what Keats described as 'effeminacy'. This stereotypical, patriarchal criticism of everything artistic being feminine or effeminate cannot be adhered to very long by the poet. Three figures, Poetry, Ambition and Love, appear serene and
calm with ‘bowed necks, and joined hands, side faced,’ dressed in white. The long white robes suggest the oppression of identities. The poet says:

[...]Ripe was the drowsy hour;
   The blissful cloud of summer indolence
   Benumbed my eyes; my pulse grew less and less;
   Pain had no sting, and pleasure's wreath no flower.
   (Ll. 15-18)

He is feeling dull and his eyes are 'benumbed'. His pulse is slow and cool. There is no excitement and he is insensitive to pain or pleasure. Thus Keats has linked poetic productivity to the capacity for passivity and submission. The state of indolence and lethargy is desirable to the poet because it is filled with creativity. Keats in his letter of 14 Feb–3 May 1819 equates indolence and nothingness to the state of effeminacy:

– This morning I am in a sort of temper indolent and supremely careless: [...] – In this state of effeminacy the fibres of the brain are relaxed in common with the rest of the body, and to such a happy degree that pleasure has no show of enticement and pain no unbearable frown.

Women, in patriarchal society, are excluded from the male camaraderie and conceived of as the 'other'. Kate Millet claims that 'Women have been placed in the position of minority status throughout history.' Keats too subscribes to this misconception by describing the act of creativity as effeminate. The poet treats the apparitions with hostility:

Oh, why did ye not melt, and leave my sense
   Unhaunted quite of all but – nothingness?
   (Ll.19-20)

But the poet is victim of the attraction repulsion archetype:
Then faded, and to follow them I burned
And ached for wings because I knew the three.

(II.23-24)

Consciously, Keats was following the patriarchal norms but his instinct led him deep into the feminine world. He identifies the three figures one by one. The first, described by him as ‘fair maid’, is love. Keats’s women are generally young and attractive. The second is Ambition, described as ‘pale of cheek’ and ‘ever watchful with fatigued eye’. But the third is the poet’s favorite:

The last, whom I love more, the more of blame
Is heaped upon her, maiden most unmeek,
I knew to be my demon Poesy.

(II.28-30)

The poet is ravished by Poetry. He simultaneously loves and hates her. The poet’s sympathy is with her. She is also the ‘maiden most unmeek’ unlike the traditional women. He wants wings to go to them but at the next moment he shows his dislike for them. Ambition now turns into ‘poor Ambition’ and is treated as undesirable. He discards Poetry by saying:

For Poesy! No, she has not a joy-
At least for me-so sweet as drowsy noons,
And evenings steeped in honeyed indolence.

(II.35-37)

The poet is confused in his thoughts. He declares his love for poetry ‘I love more’. But then he says, ‘No she has not a joy | At least for me’. The poet’s tussle needs to be deconstructed. But in his letter of the 14
February - 3 May 1819, Keats realizes that poetry is deserting him which is not good for him. He says that, ‘[…] I know not why Poetry and I have been so distant lately I must make some advances soon or she will cut me entirely.’ Thus he wants poetry as his life long companion without any thought of separation.

To the poet indolence is desirable and sweet, because it is full of creativity. It is termed ‘honeyed indolence’ because ‘An indolent day fill’d with speculations even of an unpleasant colour—is bearable and even pleasant alone[...]’ (Letter, 14 February – 3 May 1819).

He wants to be away from ‘busy common sense’. Thus the poet wants a mood conducive for creativity where there is no dominance of reason. Reason, traditionally, is a masculine attribute. This state of indolence is equated with ‘effeminacy’ by the poet. Thus once again Keats’s inherent wish is for passivity and indolence which are feminine attributes. The poet is sleepy but this sleep is ‘embroidered with dim dreams’. Thus sleep is full of imaginative creation. The poet’s soul is like a garden of poetic fertility with flowers, stirring shades, and baffled dreams. The morning is personified as feminine. Her ‘lids’ are filled with tears but these are the tears of May, symbolizing spring which is full of regeneration. He is unable to raise his head which is ‘cool-bedded in the flowery grass’. He wants to remain in this indolent state. So he asks these
figures to fade softly from his eyes and calls them ‘Phantoms’ and ‘Ghosts’. The poet’s exposure to the full range of activities of Love, Ambition and Poesy creates fatigue in him. According to Helen Cixous, ‘Women’s imaginary is inexhaustible, like music, painting, writing: their stream of phantasms is incredible.’

The poem, when read in the feminist perspective, provides an example of Keats’s futuristic vision of women triumphing over patriarchy not only by favouring sexual strength but through creativity and truth. The poet’s inability to raise his head indicates a masculine dilemma of self-definition.

‘To Autumn’, the last of the major odes was written a few months after the May Odes. Autumn is personified as a female figure. Autumn is the ageing companion of the ‘maturing sun’. Keats now delinks gender from sexuality. Autumn, the feminine persona, continues to hold her power till the end of the poem. She can achieve this by following the natural scheme of things. Paul de man says:

The deconstruction of a system of relationships always reveals a more fragmented stage that can be called natural with regard to the system that is being undone. Because it also functions as the negative truth of the deconstructive process, the ‘natural’ pattern authoritatively substitute its relational system for the one it helped to dissolve.

The first stanza describes the traditional functions of autumn. With the sun she conspires to give life and nourishment to the fruits. She plans
to ‘load and bless’ the vines with fruits. Her role is benevolent and maternal. She provides juice to the fruits. She even provides the opportunity for ‘budding more’. In the company of sun, autumn gives new life to plants. The buds bloom and grow into flowers which serve as food for bees. Autumn’s beneficence follows a natural circular pattern. In the second stanza, autumn is actually seen by the poet:

Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find
Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,
Thy hair soft lifted by the winnowing wind;
Or on a half-reaped furrow sound asleep,
Drowsed with the fume of poppies, [...]  
(Ll. 13-17)

She is a familiar figure, calm and serene, amid her store of food. She sits with abandon, replete with contentment. Autumn is presented in multiple roles. Sometimes she is seen as a reaper who unusually enough takes a break. She is laborious and hard working. The smell of poppies makes her drowsy. She is a ‘gleaner’ also who gathers grain left by reapers after the harvest and keeps her loaded head across a brook. ‘Finally she appears as a vintager, still wonderfully relaxed in her vigilance ;[...].’ She has a ‘patient look’ and watches the oozing patiently.

In the last stanza, the poet encourages autumn not to think of the spring. The songs of spring are no more in autumn but the poet is not bothered. He says that autumn has her own music. The ‘barred clouds’
revive the ‘soft dying day,’ and give new life to ‘stubble plains’. The clouds have a regenerative effect. Autumn provides new life to dead lands. Autumn is gracious and regenerative. Keats’s vision of ‘sad, grey’ humanity of ‘Ode to a Nightingale’ has now changed to a calm and logical vision of old age.

The personified figure of autumn is replaced by concrete image of life, and of life unafflicted by any thought of horror. Moreover it is life that can exist in much the same way at other times than autumn.

Each one of Keats’s ballads projects a central female character. Each ballad narrates a love theme. The woman’s role in love relationship has been analyzed from different perspectives by the poet.

*Isabella* is about ‘fair Isabel’ who turns into poor ‘simple Isabella’. Lorenzo is a young pilgrim in search of love. He fails to complete his pilgrimage. The rather sinister note in the introduction implies that something unpleasant is going to happen to the lovers.

Glimpses of happy days give way to problems. The lovers live in the same mansion. The ‘Continual voice’ of Lorenzo appears to Isabella ‘pleasanter’ than the ‘noise’ of the trees. Noise traditionally is not pleasant. It is harsh and not soothing. Isabella reduces her lover into a mere noise. But the discordant sound is pleasant to her.
Lorenzo has been compared to the ‘falcon spies’. He watches Isabella when she opens the door. He continually spies on her and tries to catch glimpses of her at the chamber-window. He spends all night longing to hear her morning footsteps.

But Lorenzo is unable to express his love. Through Keats’s narrative it is evident that Lorenzo is nervous of declaring his love. He wants to take initiative but like Endymion he is ‘waked and anguished’, his forehead ‘pale and dead’. He says:

And to his heart he inwardly did pray
For power to speak; but still the ruddy tide
Stifled his voice and pulsed resolve away-
Fevered his high conceit of such a bride,
Yet brought him to the meekness of a child.
Alas! when passion is both meek and wild!

(Stanza VI. ll.43-48)

Unlike the traditional woman waiting endlessly for her lover’s initiative, Isabella has to take the initiative of speaking to him because he is languishing in love and is unable to find the courage to express it. When Isabella sees his pale and deadly look she calls his name ‘Lorenzo’. Through her voice he gets the courage and energy to speak and declare his love for her. The reason of his delay may to be that he is afraid of her response. But Isabella’s can see Lorenzo’s condition. Lorenzo for the first time addresses Isabella directly in stanza VIII and declares his love for her in words. He assures that he will not do anything against her will:
[...] I would no grieve
Thy hand by unwelcome pressing, would not fear
Thine eyes by gazing, but I cannot live
Another night and not my passion shrive.

(Stanza VIII.11.61-64)

The role of Isabella as described by Lorenzo is that she leads him from wintry cold to the 'summer clime'. She is the healer and comforter. Cold symbolizes death. Thus she leads him from death into life and regeneration. She regenerates his head into a plant. He also accepts that he gets the power of expression through her. His 'erewhile timed lips grew bold'.

For the first time we get information about Isabella's brothers. The two brothers represent patriarchy. In this poem the woman is not given any choice. They are cruel and hard hearted. Everyone is afraid of them. They appear totally evil not only to Isabella and Lorenzo but also to pearl divers, to miners and factory workers. 'In the name of glory' they are proud. They are rich, greedy, dangerous and violent. In short they are torturers who 'set sharp racks at work, to pinch and peel'. They are also called 'blood-hounds' and 'money bags', Isabella and Lorenzo meet each other secretly. However, Lorenzo's eyes betray a 'straying from his toil'. The brothers are not satisfied only after killing Lorenzo who is below their status.
In contrast to her brothers, Isabella is pure and chaste. She is religions and performs her ‘matin song’. She is beautiful with ‘features bright’ and soft footsteps. Her happiness is short lived. After Lorenzo’s departure she is seen weeping alone in distress. She makes a ‘gentle moan’. Her health as well as beauty decline rapidly. She enquires about Lorenzo time after time, ‘with an eye pale’. She loses her glow. But the brothers create a false tale to appease her.

Lorenzo’s voice appears strange when she sees him in a vision. When he was alive he was unable to speak. As a ghost, he speaks with great effort. To Isabella, this strange sound seems like music. His voice is hoarse and tremulous. His eyes are very significant. They reveal the hidden secrets to Isabella about her brothers. But once the ghost of Lorenzo speaks, it speaks eloquently. He asks her:

Go, shed on tear upon my heather – bloom,
And it shall comfort me within the tomb.
(Stanza XXX VIII. ll. 303-304)

Through Isabella Keats represents the motherly aspect of a woman. She is a comforter and soother to Lorenzo. The comfort giving role of Isabella within the tomb reminds us of a mother who carries her child within her womb. As Argha Banerjee writes, ‘Women figures in Keats, are often seen as mother figures-fostering maternal care, affection, and
protection. She is going to sing a lullaby for Lorenzo as if he were her child.

Keats highlights the glory of love, patience and tolerance of a woman through Isabella. His attitude toward Isabella is sympathetic but her representation is not of a meek and helpless woman. She has enough courage to go and search for her dead lover with full patience and hard work. She says:

Love never dies, but lives, immortal Lord.
If Love impersonate was ever dead,
Pale Isabella kissed it, and low moaned.
'Twas Love - cold, dead indeed, but not dethroned.
(Stanza L.II. 397-400)

She goes to the place where Lorenzo was slain, cuts his head with a knife and takes it to her bosom like a mother does to her crying child. The old nurse, a confidante to Isabella is astonished to see that sight first but she pities her ‘dismal labouring’. The image of labor is also associated with childbirth. Isabella forgets everything except his dead body.

The garden pot is like a tomb to the dead Lorenzo. She buries his head inside that pot and nurtures it with her tears. It has a life-giving and reviving impact. Her dedication and sacrifice for her love without caring for her health and beauty shows her motherly attitude. Keats’s nostalgia for his mother is evident.
She never raises her voice against her brothers even after coming to know that they have killed Lorenzo. They do not want her to live happily. In the patriarchal tradition the ruthless brothers believe that she must be hounded because she dared to make a choice. Isabella does not leave the pot even for a moment. She does not leave the basil pot alone because it contains her love. The rather macabre attachment has Gothic elements. The vicious brothers feel their authority is being challenged by the flourishing basil so they steal it and damage it. Isabella is now doomed to a lifetime of tears. Helena Nelson says, ‘Keats was, I think, imaginatively drawn to a type of love which has no future. Isabel and Lorenzo’s union is simply not a possibility: they are doomed from the start by social circumstances.’

‘La Belle Dame sans Merci’ is biased right from the beginning:

‘La Belle Dame Sans Merci’ or the beautiful woman without mercy passes a judgement in the title itself. Everything that goes wrong in the relationship of the knight and the Belle. Dame is blamed on the Belle Dame. This is one of the identified attitudes of the patriarchy. The patriarchy stereotypes women as ornamental, supremely virtuous or terrible evil. Elaine Showalter defined a feminist critique that focuses on ‘... images and stereotypes of women in literature, the omissions and misconception about women in criticism, and woman-assign [sic] in semiotic systems.’

We find the knight ‘alone and palely loitering’. He is haggard and woe-be gone. He does not look like a traditional knight who is supposed to be heroic and bold. He is filled with ‘anguish moist and fever dew’. The
knight’s pathetic and degenerate appearance is the result of his encounter with the Belle Dame whom he meets in the meads. She robs him of his manhood. The knight describes his encounter with the lady:

I met a lady in the meads
   Full beautiful, a fairy’s child,
   Her hair was long, her foot was light,
   And her eyes were wild.

(Stanza IV. ll. 13-16)

The Belle Dame exudes magical charm. Her wild eyes captivate him with their sensuousness. The knight, representative of patriarchy, treats her only as an object of beauty. He prepares a garland for her head, bracelets for her wrist and a girdle for her waist. In return for these presents he says, ‘she looked at me as she did love’.

He ‘set’ her on his ‘pacing steed’ and subjects himself to the pleasure and entertainment she offers him. She sings a fairy song and feeds him some heavenly food like honey and manna dew.

The Belle Dame takes him to her ‘elfin grot’ and ‘sighed full sore’ which made the knight consider her a weak being. He feels powerful because he consoles her with ‘kisses four’. She lulls him to sleep and deserts him forever.

In his dream the knight encounters pale kings, princes, pale warriors, all representatives of the patriarchal forces of society. As Susan J. Wolfson points out:
It is significant that the chorus who identifies the lady as 'La Belle Dame sans Merci'- kings, princes, warriors, knight- are representative figures of a patriarchal order defined by quest, battle, conquest, and government, and secured by rejection of the indulgences the Knight associates with her, namely a zone of erotic luxury, sensuality, and near infantile pleasure.

Keats’s poem elicits such a meaning when analysed in a deconstructionist-feminist perspective. Thus she is the target of all attack and offence. But she is not solely responsible for what happens to the knight, rather ‘The poet-knight takes an active part in the process that is enthralling him.’ The lady is blamed by the patriarchal forces because she acts according to her own will without caring for what they will say about her. Thus through Belle Dame Keats represents that women are not dependent or weak. They prove themselves more powerful than men.

The role of the deserter, in traditional literature, has been the man’s role. Women suffer, pine and languish. Keats has reversed the roles. Keats’s knight has a feminine behaviour pattern, according to the patriarchal perspective. In the feminist perspective, however, we would treat this as a mark of evolution of the poet’s craft. Gayatri Spivak says:

> Deconstruction demonstrates that a certain view of the world, of consciousness, and of language has been accepted as the correct one and if the minute particulars of the view are examined, a rather different picture (that is also a no-picture [...] emergest!

‘Lamia’ deals with love strategies. Hermes strikes a bargain with a lamia, who desires a human shape. In return for the favour, she promises
to release a nymph from her power. The nymph has been made invisible by Lamia:

And by my power is her beauty veiled  
To keep it unaffronted, unassailed  
By the love-glances of unlovely eyes  
Of Satyrs, Fauns, and bleared Silenus’ sighs.  
(Lamia I. ll. 100-3)

Lamia expresses her desire again and again to achieve a woman’s shape in order to win her love. She says:

‘I was a woman, let me have once more  
A woman’s shape, and charming as before.  
I love a youth of Corinth—Oh, the bliss!  
Give me my woman’s form, and place me where he is.  
(Lamia I. ll. 117-20)

The nymph is the representation of the traditional woman. She is shy with ‘fearful sobs’. When she feels the touch of Hermes, her ‘chilled hand’ turns warm and she blooms like a morning rose.

Lamia’s metamorphosis is painful from the snake into a woman, ‘a lady bright, | A full born beauty new and exquisite’? She is chaste, pure and virginal. Virginity is a highly valued patriarchal virtue. Lamia has been given a brain also. Thus Keats presents an ideal and complete woman who possesses beauty as well as intellect.

Lycius is first seen by Lamia on a chariot looking thoughtful. His reason fades in the calmed twilight of ‘Platonic shades’. He is unlike the traditional male in ‘indifference’, lost in mysteries, his mind ‘wrapped
like his mantle'. Lamia falls in love with him. The fear of desertion is one of her first emotions:


(Lamia I. ll. 244-46)

Lycius is charmed by her ‘delicious’ words. He relishes her beauty and reciprocates:

‘Leave thee alone! Look back! Ah, Goddess, see
Whether my eyes can ever turn from thee!
For pity do not this sad heart belie-
Even as thou vanishest so shall I die.
(Lamia I. ll. 257-60)

He reiterates his point revealing that he too is afraid of separation:

So sweetly to these ravished ears of mine
Came thy sweet greeting, that if thou shouldst fade
Thy memory will waste me to a shade-
For pity do not melt’[...
(Lamia I. ll. 268-71)

Lamia creates a beautiful palace in the middle of the wilderness lost in her charms; Lycius spends all his time in the magical dwelling. Thus Lycius is not the traditional hero fulfilling the needs and desires of the beloved. Instead he swoons, became pale and remains dependent on her for love. Lamia is called the ‘cruel lady’ who does not express sorrow or sympathy for his ‘tender favorites’ woe’. Thus Lycius is tender not strong. Lamia provides the regenerative power by her kiss to the pale Lycius. He experiences one trance after another. She raises his ‘drooping head’, ‘clear his soul of doubt’ by her song. Thus it is asserted that a
woman is compassionate and understanding. Also, a woman’s love can provide nourishment for the soul. Lycius forgets all his learning in her company.

Keats’s poetry is dominated by women. They are an inseparable part of his writing. At the time when Keats wrote poetry, patriarchy was dominant. He talks of the male poets of his time whose poetry is devoid of women:

Let the mad poets say whate’er they please
Of the sweet Fairies, Peris, Goddesses,
There is not such a treat among them all,
Haunters of cavern, lake and waterfall,
As a real woman, lineal indeed
From Pyrrha’s pebbles or old Adam’s seed.
(Lamia I. ll. 328-33)

Apollonius comes to the wedding feast at the end of the Part I. He is the representative of patriarchy. He appears in philosophic gown with grey beard, sharp eyes, smooth bald crown, walking with slow steps. Seeing him Lamia gets nervous and trembles. Lycius too does not want to face him. She enquires about him and Lycius says:

‘’Tis Apollonius sage, my trusty guide
And good instructor; but to - night he seems
The ghost of folly haunting my sweet dreams.’
(Lamia I. ll. 375-77)

Apollonius’s rational thinking terrifies Lamia. She fears she will be ‘houseless’ but Lycius reassures her and tells her not to feel sad because he plans:
How to entangle, trammel up and snare
Your soul in mine, and labyrinth you there.
(Lamia II. II. 52-53)

Lycius’s plan is to take Lamia’s bridal car through the crowded street to be seen by everyone. This desire represents the male ego. She grows ‘pale and meek’ and tries to persuade him to change his plan. She even kneels before him and weeps because ‘very little that is good in Keats happens in public before an audience of men.’

Lamia is aware of Lycius’s pompous nature and his desire to show her off like a trophy. He invites guests in spite of her unwillingness. Thus ‘it is not the pursuit of pleasure but of respectability and masculine approval that kills Lycius.’ Lamia calls the guests ‘revels rude’, ‘dreadful ghosts’, ‘gossip rout’ who spoil her solitude. Lycius’s act is not considered sensible. He is called ‘senseless Lycius! Madman’, who has invited the ‘herd’. Keats’s attitude toward Lamia is sympathetic. Her loneliness is highlighted again and again.

Apollonius, the representative of traditional masculinity, tries to solve the ‘knotty problem’. His looks were severe making her nervous and cold. He ‘gazed into her eyes’. He said to Lamia ‘Begone, Foul dream!’ As a result Lamia was ‘no longer fair’. Lycius condemns Apollonius and says:

Corinthians! Look upon that grey-beard wretch!
Mark how, possessed, his lashless eyelids stretch
Around his demon eyes! Corinthians, see!
Thus Lycius realizes Appollonius true nature and calls him ‘demon eyes’. He still considers himself wise and Lycius a fool but ‘He is ignorant of the limitations of his own knowledge, he overrates how much he knows.’\textsuperscript{21} He considers Lycius will work under his guidance and follow his instructions. He keeps gazing on her and discovers that she is a serpent. Then ‘with a frightful scream she vanished’. Thus Apollonius wants to destroy Lamia and protect Lycius but in the act of destroying her he destroys Lycius too. The tussle between reason and emotion culminates in the disintegration of both. Apollonius’s cold logic does not permit either to flourish. Patriarchy, through slow decay, had already begun to die away.

‘The Eve of St. Anges’ opens with the old beadsman. He is a ‘patient, holy man’, meagre, barefoot, wan. The poet’s attitude is sympathetic. The beadsman loves humanity, and prays for its betterment. The warm and glowing atmosphere inside the castle contrasts with the cold outside. The old beadsman represents the positive and beneficent aspect of patriarchy.

Madeline is an innocent, young virgin who believes in love. She is guided by the ‘old dames’ to perform certain ritual to get the ‘visions’ of
delight' and 'soft adoring' from her future husband on the eve of St. Agnes.

Her chastity is reflected in her 'eyes divine'. Many an amorous cavalier tried to pursue her but she did not pay attention. She is 'hoodwinked with fairy fancy'. Thus she is the idealized projection of femininity.

Porphyro undertakes a dangerous task. He comes across the moor 'with heart on fire'. But the manner in which he enters the palace is not heroic. He hides behind a broad hall pillar and waits for her. Angela the old nurse advises Porphyro to go away. She calls Madeline's family 'the blood-thirsty race'. Everyone is cruel and unkind 'in that mansion foul' excepting her who is physically old and weak. She is the maternal figure full of compassion and love. In contrast to her, Keats has portrayed in the form of Madeline's brothers the patriarchal society of his time. For Porphyro, Madeline's family and her brothers are 'Hyena foeman, and hot-blooded lords'. They have an open enmity with Porphyro's 'lineage'.

When Angela tells Porphyro his lady's plan, he immediately makes a strategy and 'his eyes grew brilliant'. At this Angela reacts:

'A cruel man and impious thou art--
Sweet lady, let her pray, and sleep, and dream
Alone with her good angels, far apart
From wicked men like thee.[...]

(Stanza. XVI. ll. 140-43)
But he assures her that ‘I will not harm her’ and ‘displace her soft ringlets’ or ‘look with a ruffian passion’. Thus Angela allows him to do ‘whatever he shall wish betides her weal or woe’. But she is concerned for Madeline and says to him, ‘Ah! thou must needs the lady wed | Or I may I never leave my grave among the dead.’

Madeline is compared to a ‘missioned’ spirit, carrying a ‘silver taper’. She has a glory ‘like a saint’:

She seemed a splendid angel, newly dressed,  
Save wings, for Heaven. Porphyro grew faint;  
She knelt, so pure a thing, so free from mortal taint.  
(Stanza XXV. ll. 223-25)

Before her purity and chastity ‘Porphyro grew faint’. He could not resist her charm like Endymion before the moon-goddess and faints. She is an object of beauty as well as desire for her lover. Keats invites Porphyro:

[...] Now prepare,  
Young Porphyro, for gazing on that bed--  
She comes, she comes again, like ring-dove frayed and fled.  
(Stanza XXII ll. 196-98)

Pale and frightened, Porphyro rouses Madeline from her enchanted sleep. She wakes to encounter a pathetic version of her heroic dream lover. Prophyro’s actions are not heroic. He walks silently, peeps and talks in whispers:

‘And now, my love, my seraph fair, awake!  
Thou art my heaven, and I thine eremite.  
(Stanza XXXI. ll. 276-77)
Madeline admired Porphyro's 'spiritual and clear' eyes and sweet voice in her dream. But now the real Porphyro appears changed. She says:

How changed thou art! How pallid, chill, and drear!
Give me that voice again, my Porphyro,
Those looks immortal, those complainings dear!
Oh, leave me not in this eternal woe,
For if thou diest, my love, I know not where to go.'
(Stanza XXXV. ll. 313-15)

Thus the mortal Porphyro is urged to act. Madeline's voice represents the strength of womanhood. Her words appear to him 'voluptuous accents'. He feels 'ethereal, flushed' and 'into her dream he melted'. Thus, recharged by her encouragement, Porphyro regains his confidence and the lovers flee from their warring, insensitive families.

Madeline is the 'silver shrine' and Porphyro a 'famished pilgrim'. His search for the love of Madeline is like a pilgrimage which is achieved by him after many hours of toil and quest. He wants to be her 'vassal' her 'beauties shield'. However, at the end of the narrative we find that it is Madeline who provides strength to the unhappy, fearful and disintegrating Porphyro. This deconstructionist reading inverts the conservative narrative where the male was always the source of strength and the weak female recharged through his power. This disempowerment of Porphyro implies a complete overhaul of power relations.
Keats's letters of the year 1819 are very important as they include his love letters to his beloved Fanny Brawne. These letters trace the growing intimacy between them and Keats realizes her growing power over him. He is very attached to her.

He was in touch with George Keatses and Fanny Keats as well. To George Keats he wrote lengthy letters talking about family matters, the death of their brother Tom, about Fanny Keats as well as about his feeling about women. Keats gives an account of Fanny Brawne to George in his letter of 16 December 1818 - 4 January 1819:

Mrs. Brawne who took Brown's house for the Summer, still resides in Hampstead - she is her a very nice woman and her daughter senior is I think beautiful and elegant, graceful, silly, fashionable and strange we have a little tiff now and then - and she behaves a little better, or I must have sheered off.

He praises her mother as a nice woman. He says that Fanny is a combination of good as well as strange qualities. But she also appears silly to him. He is, however, impressed by her beauty. This is the reason Keats keeps contact with her otherwise he probably would not have paid attention to her.

One aspect that impresses Keats is her height. Keats has a complex about it:

- Shall I give you Miss Brawn[e]? She is about my height – with a fine style of countenance of the lengthen’d sort – she wants sentiment in every feature – she manages to make her hair look well – her nostrills are fine – though a little painful – he[r] mouth is bad and good he[r] Profil is better than her full-face
[...] she is not seventeen—but she is ignorant-monstrous in her
behaviour flying out in all directions, calling people such
names—that I was forced lately to make use of the term Minx.
(Letter, 16 December 1818 – 4 January 1819)

Keats's perception of life changes to widen with the passage of
time. He says that more knowledge makes people more inquisitive. He
discusses this point with George in his letter of 16 December 1818 – 4
January 1819, 'Mrs. Tighe and Beattie once delighted me—now I see
through them and can find nothing in them—[...] This same inadequacy is
discovered [...] in Women with few exceptions -'

He does not seem a satisfied person. He wants to discover new
things in the world. Poets like Mary Tighe and James Beattie were once a
source of pleasure to Keats. He enjoyed reading their works. But their
close observation and knowledge made him dissatisfied with them. He
finds nothing in them now but weaknesses. But this is not so with every
woman.

Keats treats Georgiana like a friend. He tells her about his dinner at
Brawnes with Mr. and Mrs. Dilke. He says that it did not give him any
amusement because nothing unusual happened there. Keats likes beauty
in everything so also in women. He likes young and attractive women as
he frankly says, 'I never intend hereafter to spend my time with Ladies
unless they are handsome- you lose time to no purpose [...]’ (Letter, 16 December 1818 – 4 January 1819).

In his letter to George Keatses, Keats talks about his empathy with Georgiana. He says his poetic creativity is influenced by his association with her in the same letter, ‘I never forget you except after seeing now and then some beautiful woman but that is a fever.’ Thus thoughts of women keep recurring in his mind. They are part and parcel of his very existence.

In another letter to George Keatses of 14 February – 3 May 1819, he imagines his poetic pursuit as a sexual drama where he perceives poetry, his coy muse, as a woman wooed by him. He says, ‘I know not why poetry and I have been so distant lately I must make advances soon or she will cut me entirely.’

He makes advances toward her as a suiter in order to maintain his love otherwise she will desert her. Thus the images he uses are often feminine and his poetic pursuit is similar to the sexual pursuit. In the same letter of 14 February-3 May 1819 he says ‘[...] In this state of effeminacy the fibres of the brain are relaxed in common with the rest of the body, and to such a happy degree that pleasure has no show of enticement and pain no unbearable frown.’ But this state is a state of calmness. The mind as well as the body is cool and relaxed. It is a
condition of complete bliss. The poet is able to relish the pleasure as well as the pain. It is a state of creativity.

The letter to George reflects a phenomenology which is quite similar to the view expressed by the Merleau Ponty that 'perceived space is orientated and rooted in the experience of the body.' Keats presents his view that '[...] Nothing ever becomes real till it is experienced – Even a Proverb is no proverb to you till your Life has illustrated it – [...]'. Further in the same letter the heart has been compared to teat, a life giving source from where the mind sucks its identity.

Keats maintains his contact with his sister Fanny Keats during these years. He is always concerned for her and realizes his responsibility. He says to her, '[...] I feel myself the only Protector you have. In all your little troubles think of me with the thought that there is at least one person in England who if he could would help you out of them [...]' (Letter, 11 February 1819). Keats is always aware of his separation from her. But she has always been in his thoughts. He tries to communicate his brotherly affection.

The letters addressed to Fanny Brawne show Keats's deep feelings for her. Though apparently he accuses her of being cruel sometimes, she fascinated him very much. In his letter of 1 July 1819, addressed to Fanny Brawne, Keats expresses his unhappy state. He says that he has not
enjoyed ‘unalloyed happiness’ for many days. He has been disturbed by
death and sickness constantly. He writes to her, ‘Ask yourself my love
whether you are not very cruel to have so entrapped me, so destroyed
my freedom’ (Letter, 1 July 1819). She has power to attract him and
influence him.

His love and devotion for Fanny grows gradually in further letters.
He feels her power and influence upon him. These letters show Keats as a
lover who is overwhelmed with the passion of love. He misses her in her
absence. Keats always expresses his attraction for women. Sometimes
they appear good but at times a ‘set of Devils’. He keeps mentioning
them in his letter when he encounters them. But they never stay in his
heart for a long time. ‘I never knew before, what such a love as you have
made me feel, was; I did not believe in it; my Fanny was afraid of it, lest
it should burn me up’ (Letter, 8 July 1819).

In the same letter he takes the role of a ‘Mentor’ for her and is
ready to protect her from any harm. He likes to discuss her beauty in the
letter of 8 July 1819, ‘Why may I not speak of your beauty, since without
that I could never have lov’d you - I cannot conceive any beginning of
such love as I have for you but Beauty.’ Keats describes his feelings to
Fanny Brawne in his letter of 25th July 1819, ‘[...] the very first week I
knew you I wrote myself your vassal;[...]’
Thus Keats does not assert authority over her rather he takes the humble and submissive role. In Keats’s mind, there is always the fear that women may dislike him especially because of his physical appearance. In the same letter he says:

[...] I cannot be admired, I am not a thing to be admired. You are, I love you; all I can bring you is a swooning admiration of your Beauty. I hold that place among Men which snub-nos’d brunettes with meeting eyebrows do among woman - [...].

(Letter 25 July 1819)

Keats himself accepts that his attitude toward women has changed to a certain extent. Earlier his eyes were of a wandering suitor. He observes them carefully. But now he has found his goal. ‘I am indeed astonish’ed to find myself so careless of all cha[r]ms but yours – remembering as I do the time when even a bit of ribband was a matter of interest with me’ (Letter, 25 July 1819).

With the maturity and attainment of his love, his feelings toward women also change and his thoughts are centered on one woman. He says, ‘My love has made me selfish. I cannot exist without you – I am forgetful of every thing but seeing you again – my Life seems to stop there – I see no further. You have absorb’d me. I have a sensation of the present moment as though I am dissolving - [...]’ (Letter, 13 October 1819).
In the same letter he says that ‘I feel myself at your mercy’. This shows that Keats’s love has overpowered him. He is enchanted by her love. Thus through these letters Keats’s deep feelings for Fanny Brawne are evident. He is unable to come out of her spell.

The treatment of women is an important concern in Keats’s poetry. The period when Keats was writing his poems was male dominated. He was working under the predominant social pressure to accept prevalent standard codes of masculinity. Keats was a poet of instinct. In his work there is a flexibility regarding gender for which Keats has often been criticized. He has often been termed effeminate and juvenile. The reason is obvious to a certain extent through these words:

That Keats did not fit conventional figures made him a convenient focus for ideological debate; indeed, a manifold of literary style and sensibility, personal appearance, class origin, and the legend of his death made him a magnetic focus. Keats’s peculiar position on the boundaries of discrimination, as we shall see, makes highly legible the systems of power, both social and psychological, that inform the language of gender and influence its uses.\(^{23}\)

There is a constant tussle in Keats’s work between the masculine and feminine perspectives which is responsible for Keats’s ambivalent attitude. Susan J. Wolfson says that ‘In his effort to create a poetic identity and win acceptance as a poet, he profoundly internalises and struggles with social and psychological attitudes about gender.’\(^{24}\) which made his varying attitude possible.
Anne Mellor is concerned about Keats's feminine attitudes. She proves herself effective by citing Adrienne Rich and Barbara Gelpi who rely on Keatsian 'negative capability' for his ideological crossover into a feminine poetic identity. Margaret Homan holds Keats's 'humble origins and poverty' responsible for exempting him from classification with poets of the dominant masculine tradition. The presentation of women in Keats's odes and ballads shows this ambivalent attitude.

In the sonnets and odes addressed to Fanny Brawne, Keats realizes the true power of womanhood. There is a gradual change in his attitude toward Brawne. He recognizes the status of the feminine entity that cajoles and controls through her multi faceted personality. This is the time when he surrenders completely before Fanny. In this way Keats delinks from the norms of patriarchy where women are given an inferior place and 'were incorporated as second class participants; as such could be controlled and dominated.'

Keats gives an account of Fanny Brawne to George Keatses for the first time in his letter of 31 December 1818 –4 January 1819 where he described her as a combination of good as well as bad qualities. But later on he idealizes her as a complete woman. As Julia Kristeva says, 'Love, for example, is impossible without the capacity for idealization and
identification. Keats achieves the recommended level. His voice is intense and fully absorbed in his beloved.

The sonnet 'The day is gone and all its sweets are gone', was written when Keats met Fanny Brawne after a separation of many months. The meeting overwhelmed the poet. He was overcome by her beauty and charm that seemed enhanced. He says:

The day is gone, and all its sweets are gone!
Sweet voice, sweet lips, soft hand, and softer breast,
Warm breath, light whisper, tender semi-tone,
Bright eyes, accomplished shape, and languorous waist!

(Ll.1-4)

He is dazzled by her beauty and tenderness. Her presence permeates his being. But at the end of the day when she is not with the poet, every joy and happiness evaporates. Thus she becomes the agent of hope and happiness for the poet. Those flowers and buds which were 'a sight of beauty' fade from his eyes because the 'shape of beauty' was no more in his arms. The poet is fascinated by Fanny's voice, energy and enthusiasm. The poet's conception of her is unlike the traditional conception where women are seen 'as being 'naturally' material and spiritual, formless and confined as well as exhibiting passivity, instability, irrationality, piety and compliancy.' She is his paradise. All symbols of her beauty fade with the end of the day.
The poet mourns her departures. It seems premature because with the end of the day their love should have come to fruition. However, in a mood-shift, the poet feels satisfied that he has attained full knowledge of love by reading the holy book of love. This knowledge is enough to keep him calm and satiated. For the Romantics, 'beauty' meant internal or spiritual beauty. In these lyrics, Keats encounters and explores the inner beauty of Fanny.

The poem 'To [Fanny]' was written one hour after Keats's visit to Fanny Brawne. She made her impact upon the poet who 'wrestles with love and tries to get back to serenity and poetry.'

In the opening lines of the poem, the poet desires to remove her memory from his eyes. After seeing her, he is occupied with her memories and gives into the temptation of dreaming about her. His eyes recollect the beauty of his 'brilliant' Queen. Her memories are fresh for him. Even her touch has a memory. He is imprisoned by her thoughts and completely helpless before her unlike the traditional male who has power and authority. Keats expresses his desire to enjoy full freedom as he used to do before. He wants to be liberated from her obsessive thoughts. He feels nostalgic for those days when he was not controlled by love. He shows his helplessness when he says:
What can I do to kill it and be free
In my old liberty?
When every fair one that I saw was fair,
Enough to catch me in but half a snare,
Not keep me there.

(Ll. 5-9)

At that time every woman seems beautiful to him. Every one attracted him for a short while but no one fascinated him for such a long time. In his letters he declared the same thing, 'I am indeed astonish'd to find myself so careless of all cha[r]ms but yours – remembering as I do the time when even a bit of ribband was a matter of interest with me' (Letter, 25 July 1819).

Keats feels that his poetic creativity has been affected due to his love for Fanny Brawne. He has become excessively attached to her and finds it a hindrance. She has absorbed his mind and thoughts. He accepts that she is his muse and the inspiring source of poetry. Earlier he thought that his imaginative faculty was at its height. He managed it in his own way. Now he wants to attain that power again. He desires poetic inspiration and wants to go beyond the 'reach of fluttering love' and for a while surmounts love to attain higher poetic creativity.

Her memories fill his mind and he is unable to think of other things. In order to create poetry he wants to go beyond thoughts of love. Keats’s friends considered Fanny an obstacle to his poetry because 'she was offered, by the poet, a privileged and idealized status.'
‘Ode to a Nightingale’, where the poet resorted to wine, in this poem too he exhorts wine to make him forgetful of his beloved so that he can create poetry. But at the very moment he realizes that wine is not allowed in the premises of love. He wants to banish the thoughts of unpleasant things associated with America which he refers to as hell. He longs for a ‘sunny spell’ and realizes that she is no one else but his lady bright who approaches him like the dawning light which is fresh and life generating. Thus she tantalizes the poet by her spell. Finally, he takes shelter and finds comfort upon that dazzling breast. Thus the poet contradicts his earlier statement desiring to banish her thoughts from his mind.

According to Derrida:

The process of ‘deconstruction’ which investigates the fundamentals of Western thought, does not do so in the hope that it will be able to remove these contradictions, nor does it claim to be able to escape the exigencies of this tradition and set up a system of its own account. Rather, it recognizes that it is forced to use the very concepts it sees as being unsustainable in terms of the claims made for them. In short, it, too must (at least provisionally) unsustain these claims.

The poet desires physical contact. The ideal woman in Keats’s poetry represents all factors of womanhood viz. mother, sister, daughter and beloved. Fanny is presented as the epitome of womanhood. This image shows his maternal longings. Keats desires to place his ‘aching arms’ around her waist. He wants to possess her. She has intoxicated him. She represents the ‘sweetness of the pain’.
In the sonnet, 'I cry your mercy, pity, love,' Keats surrenders before his love. He is humble and appeals for mercy. He asks for help, requests her to pity him. She has absorbed him and her love has made him an object of pity. The poet claims that 'Merciful love' is true love and gives complete satisfaction. He wants her to be 'One-thoughted' and 'unmasked', pure and chaste 'without a blot'. Irigaray says, 'Female sexuality has always been conceptualized on the basis of masculine parameters.' Fear of desertion keeps recurring in his mind. So he desires her to be single minded, stable and constant. If she does his bidding, he will be consoled. Keats is very possessive about her:

Oh, let me have thee whole — all, all, be mine!
That shape, that fairness, that sweet minor zest
Of love, your kiss-those hands, those eyes divine,
That warm, white, lucent, million-pleasured breast;
Yourself-your soul - in pity give me all,
Withhold no atom’s atom or I die.

(Ll. 5-10)

The poet’s imploring reduces him to an object of pity before his love and passion. He pledges to give full possession. He says that if she retains even a small portion of her love, even ‘atoms’ atom’ he will die for the lack of it. Even if she remains alive, his life will become purposeless. There will be no joy and enthusiasm left in his mind. Her love has life-giving properties for him

In the sonnet entitled ‘Bright star! Would I were steadfast as thou art’, the poet desires to be like a star. Her wants to integrate its
steadfastness and ‘unchangeable’ nature into the love of his beloved Fanny Brawne. He says:

No – yet still steadfast, still unchangeable,
   Pillowed upon my fair love’s ripening breast,
To feel for ever its soft fall and swell,
   Awake for ever in a sweet unrest,
Still, still to hear her tender taken breath,
And so live ever-or else swoon to death.

(Ll. 9-14)

He wants to remain constant and still, and rest upon the ‘ripening breast’ of his beloved, feeling its rise and fall and relishing the pleasure. The use of the word ‘ripening’ suggests that the poet is looking forward to growing old along with his beloved. The poignancy is borne out by the fact that Keats knew that he was going to die. In his imagination, the poet creates an ideal life. What destiny denied in life, he achieved in poetry.

In the poem ‘Ode to Fanny’, the love of Fanny is celebrated. All his joys, sorrows, hope, fears are associated with her. Her beauty is enhanced by her smile and happiness. She appears to him ‘brilliant’ and ‘bright’.

Keats is possessive about his love. He calls Fanny his ‘feast’ but does not want others to share. He says:

Let, let, the amorous bum,
   But, prithee, do not turn
The current of your heart from me so soon.
   Oh, save, in charity,
The quickest pulse for me!

(Ll.20-24)
His earnest request in not to be deserted in love and he wants certainty in love. Keats requests Fanny his ‘sweet love’ to save her quickest pulse for him. The poet requests her to be true and loyal to him. This shows Keats’s deep attachment to her. He does not want Fanny to go out to dance. According to patriarchal society women are supposed to live in the domestic sphere:

An ideal state of affairs was supposed to be one in which men and women operated in ‘Separate Spheres’ (the term comes from the 1860) women worked in the domestic sphere, protected from painful reality outside, but also acting as moral guides to their men folk, in that they provided for them also a pleasant refuge as respite from their external tasks. In this way, women’s role was to act as the enabler of culture, who made culture possible but she was not finally a participant in culture.

Keats makes suggestions to Fanny in these words:

Be like an April day,
Smiling and cold and gay,
A temperate lily, temperate as fair;
Then, Heaven, there will be
A warmer June for me.
(Ll. 28-32)

He asks her to be like a soft and moderate lily. The lily, conventionally has served as a symbol of purity. Also, it can bloom anywhere without much nurturing.

Keats wants certainty in his love. He reiterates this in his letters. According to him a woman should not be like a ‘feather on the sea’ which moves with the blowing wind. Fanny’s thoughts occupy his mind all the
time. It is not only her presence which fascinates him but when she is away he misses her and feels uncomfortable. Keats accepts that he is jealous of her admirers. The jealousy often seems unbearable. Love itself is enough to give pain but jealousy adds further troubles. The poet assumes a humble aspect before her. Thus she is not the 'negative object or “Other,” to man as the dominating “Subject” who is assumed to represent humanity in general.' He earnestly requests her:

Let none profane my Holy Sea of love,
Or with a rude hand break
The sacramental cake;
Let none else touch the just new-budded flower.
(Ll. 51-54)

He does not want her purity and chastity to be destroyed by anyone. She is pure like a religious object, fresh and delicate like the new budded flower.

The Fanny poems represent Keats’s own experiences of love. His attitudes oscillate between those of Keats the man and Keats the poet. The human lover experiences human weaknesses like jealousy and possessiveness. The poet gleans out eternal passions.

The most important aspect of Keats’s attitude toward woman is found in his relationship with Fanny Brawne. She plays an important role in his life. She has been treated unfavorably and harshly in Keats’s lifetime and even in the century after his death. R.H. Stoddard on the
publication of Keats’s love letters to Fanny Brawne, April 1878 writes, ‘The influence of Miss Brawne was the most unfortunate one to which Keats was ever subjected. She made him ridiculous in the eyes of his friends and he hated his friend’s accordingly.’34 The Victorians considered Keats a ‘dying poet consumed with unsatisfied love for a heartless flirt.’35

Edward E. Bostetter writes that ‘Keats’s love for Fanny Brawne had turned out to be far different from the love he had so blithely envisioned in Endymion. Fanny’s beauty gradually takes on sinister connotations, it enslaves him and threatens to destroy him.’36 Keats’s disproportionate degree of care and attention toward Fanny Brawne bothered even Severn. He considered her not only a hindrance to Keats’s craft, ‘but she was offered by the poet, a privileged and idealized status of which, the painter believed, she was not worthy.’37

Fanny was the object of a raging passion. He was emotional and passionate about his love. ‘Fanny became the other great passion of his life and another cause to mourn when illness struck.’38 Keats shows excessive emotionalism in his letters to Fanny Brawne which, made his male admirers uncomfortable regarding his manliness. His excessive emotionalism is the result of his ill health and unfulfilled poetic ambition.
The image of Fanny Brawne was redeemed gradually. The accusation that Fanny Brawne was a ‘heartless flirt’ began to fade. The redemption came for Fanny Brawne in 1937, when thirty-one letters were published by Oxford University Press. These letters were written by Fanny Brawne to Keats’s sister, ‘Though the letters did not really reveal very much, they at least showed Fanny Brawne in a pleasant light.'\(^{39}\) The letters projected her love for Keats. These letters proved a means to protect Fanny. Thus she was ‘either transformed into a pillar of strength or else sentimentalized in a way she would have been the first to scorn: as a clinging, gently naive girl, ready to surrender herself with passive simplicity.’\(^{40}\)

Keats’s feelings were profound regarding Fanny Brawne. She was considered a distraction for his poetry by his friends. She became the great passion of his life. The more his sickness aggravated, the more he worried about his love. His insecurity regarding his love intensified his doubts, fears and uncertainties.

Thus Fanny Brawne is of central importance in Keats’s personal life. She is not a negative force damaging Keats’s artistic creation. From the feminist perspective she appears as a source of strength for Keats and brings some respite to his problems. He is very sensitive and possessive about her and this makes him jealous and uncertain at times. Edward E.
Bostetter says, ‘It was inevitable that with his intense idealism Keats would fall violently in love and demand what no one could return. It was inevitable that he would discover there by the darker side of love, no matter who the woman was.’

Keats’s letters of 1820 are mostly addressed to his beloved Fanny Brawne. These letters express his deep love and concern for her but they also reveal his disbelief and uncertainty about woman which is the result of his own childhood experience. He was not able to concentrate on his work as she distracted him. His health deteriorated badly at this time plunging him into severe emotional distress.

Keats was advised to stay indoors for sometime. He was satisfied with his confinement because he was living next door to Fanny Brawne. He was also conscious that she loved him. Even the house which was a virtual prison appeared habitable because Fanny was a frequent visitor.

In the letter of 4 February (?) 1820, Keats responded to her complaints. He with indulgence says that she may complain of his being plain and unromantic because love and her response are a continuous source of pleasure as well as inspiration for him. He writes:

[...]You had a just right to be a little silent to one who speaks so plainly to you. You must believe you shall, you will that I can do nothing say nothing think nothing of you but what has its spring in the love Which has so long been my pleasure and torment.

(Letter, 10 February 1820)
But his views regarding Fanny Brawne keep fluctuating. In the letter to Fanny Brawne, February (?) 1820, Keats exhibits a mixed response of his fear as well as certainty about love:

My greatest torment since I have know you has been the fear of you being a little inclined to the Cressid; but that suspicion I dismiss utterly and remain happy in the surety of your Love, which I assure you is as much a wonder to me as a delight.

(Letter, February (?) 1820)

This fear of uncertainty and insecurity is the result of his childhood experiences with his mother. In the letter of February (?) 1820, Keats talks about his separation and subsequent grief:

According to all appearances I am to be separated from you as much as possible. How I shall be able to bear it, or whether it will not be worse than your presence now and then, I cannot tell. I must be patient, and in the meantime you must think of it as little as possible. [...] No more of this -I am not strong enough to be weaned[...].

(Letter, 14 February 1820)

The separation tormented him. During this time Keats suffered a severe hemorrhage while returning from his visit to his friends in London. He was advised by his friends as well as doctor to remain indoors. He had to avoid excessive emotion and anxiety. The separation from Fanny troubles him and he jealously desires that she should abstain from company too. He fears that she will forget him. He assures her that he cannot stop loving her because his love is sincere and mature.
In yet another letter to Fanny Brawne, February (?) 1820, he assures her of his love. His failing health makes him feel helpless. He loves her so deeply that death seems preferable to a separation. These letters show Keats's deep commitment to his beloved Fanny Brawne. He expresses this in most of the letters of this period. He says:

My sweet creature when I look back upon the pains and torments I have suffer'd for you from the day I left you to go to the Isle of Wight; the ecstasies in which I have pass'd some days and the miseries in their turn, I wonder the more at the Beauty which has kept up the spell so fervently.

(Letter, February(?) 1820)

Keats suffered a lot in separation during his visit to the Isle of Wight. He recalls those days which he passed in extreme happiness in her company. It turned to misery after her separation. Keats wonders at the ever growing charm of the beloved who is able to maintain her spell over him. When separated Keats pines for her. The intensity of Keats’s passion is reflected when he writes to her:

The power of your benediction is of not so weak a nature as to pass from the ring in four-and twenty hours—it is like a sacred Chalice once consecrated and ever consecrate. I shall kiss your name and mine where your Lips have been—Lips! why should a poor prisoner as I am talk about such things. Thank God, though I hold them the dearest pleasures in the universe, I have a consolation independent of them in the certainty of your affection.

(Letter, 1 March 1820)

The chalice, if once used in religions ceremony, must always be used. Their names are engraved on a ring that Fanny gave to him. He
laments that a prisoner like him can only talk about things like a kiss. But he consoles himself with the belief that he is confident about her love. His confidence, however, fluctuates. He sometimes has doubts but at other time he feels confident. Sometimes he console her. He writes:

You fear, sometimes, I do not love you so much as you wish? My dear Girl I love you and ever and ever without reserve. The more I have known you the more have I lov’d. In every way – even my jealousies have been agonies of Love, in the hottest fit I ever had I would have died for you. I have vex’d you too much. But for Love! [...]. Have I nothing else then to love in you but that? Do not I see a heart naturally furnish’d with wings imprison itself with me?

(Letter, March (?) 1820)

This letter proves that Fanny had expectations from Keats. He, in turn, assures her that he loves her and will never desert her. Intimate association with her makes the love of the poet deeper. He feels terribly jealous of those who show an inclination towards her.

Her beauty has always attracted and tantalized Keats. It always seems ever new and more attractive to him. So when she passes his window, he admires her as if he has seen her for the first time. Even though Fanny complains that Keats loves only her beauty, he was aware that she had a beautiful heart too. Thus a very contrary view is found regarding Fanny’s beauty in the letter of 1819. This difference shows Keats’s gradual maturity regarding Fanny. At one time Keats pledges his entire love and devotion to her. He writes in the same letter:
Even if you did not love me I could not help an entire devotion to you: how much more deeply then must I feel for you knowing you love me. My Mind has been the most discontented and restless one that ever was put into a body too small for it. I never felt my mind repose upon anything with complete and undistracted enjoyment—upon no person but you.

(Letter, March (?) 1820)

To Keats there is no way out. He says that he will devote himself totally to her. His love for her would be much deeper if she declares her feelings for him. He is restless and dissatisfied. He begs for an answer. There is a strong undertone of passionate surrender. In the same letter Keats says that her company makes him forgetful of everything except her:

When you are in the room my thoughts never fly out of window: You always concentrate my whole senses. The anxiety shown about our Loves in your last note is an immense pleasure to me: however you must not suffer such speculations to molest you any more: nor will I anymore believe you can have the least pique against me.

(Letter, March (?) 1820)

She overwhelms his senses. Her anxiety, which is an expression of love, pleases the poet. But he is also concerned about her well-being. So he instructs her not to take pains to think about such things. Thus he exhibits care and concern for her. He writes in a letter of March (?) 1820 to her, ‘Perhaps on your account I have imagined my illness more serious than it is: how horrid was the chance of slipping into the ground instead of into your arms - the difference is amazing Love-[…].’ He declares that due to her he is more worried about his illness. Love seems to him amazing. He now wants to make her realize the mature intensity of his love. Here
Keats emerges as a passionate and possessive lover. He writes in the letter of May (?) 1820:

I shall be selfish enough to send it though I know it may give you a little pain, because I wish you to see how unhappy I am for love of you, and endeavor as much as I can to entice you to give up your whole heart to me whose whole existence hangs upon you.

He wants to make her realize the intensity of his love. He decides to entice her more and more to receive her whole love. Even if she is not ready he will try again and again because his whole life depends upon her. He seems adamant to get her response. If she does not favor him he will do his best to elicit an answer. He is now committed to her. He is extremely possessive of her and wants his monopoly over her. He claims in the letter of May (?) 1820:

[...] I am greedy of you – Do not think of anything but me. Do not live as if I was not existing – Do not forget me – But have I any right to say you forget me? Perhaps you think of me all day. Have I any right to wish you to be unhappy for me? [...], you must think of no one but me, much less write that sentence.

Keats is obsessed by her beauty. He instructs her to love him and think only about him. He wants to possess her. He constantly fears that she may prefer someone else. He is possessive of her and reacts when he finds her in the company of other men. In the same letter of May (?) 1820 he writes:
— upon my Soul I can be contended with nothing else. If you could really what is call'd enjoy yourself at a Party — if you can smile in peoples faces, and wish them to admire you now, you never have nor ever will love me — I see life in nothing but the certainty of your Love — convince me of it my sweetest. If I am not somehow convinc'd I shall die of agony.

The same idea is expressed by Keats in his Fanny poems also. In his letters to Fanny, Keats again and again asks for a commitment of love. Her interaction with others made him feel insecure. He is excessively sensitive regarding her.

Keats feels jealous of his close friends when they turn their attention toward Fanny Brawne. He tries to convince her that his love is deeper and his feelings finer than his friends. In most of his letters, Keats cajoles Fanny constantly. This may be the result of his own experience with women, particularly with his mother. He earnestly pleads in the letter of May (?) 1820:

I do not pretend to say I have more feelings than my fellows—but I wish you seriously to look over my letters kind and unkind and consider whether the Person who wrote them can be able to endure much longer the agonies and uncertainties which you are so peculiarly made to create— My recovery of bodily hea[1]th will be of no benefit to me if you are not all mine when I am well. For god's sake save me— or tell me my passion is of too awful a nature for you.

Keats is afraid that her attention may wander. That she is meeting other people makes him insecure. His letters reveal his true and earnest love for her and so he wants her to read those letters. He is unable to bear
the agonies and uncertainties of the situation. The expression of Keats's excessive and intense emotions toward Fanny Brawne made him seem effeminate or unmanly to eyes of some of his friends. He was heavily criticized for this. Swinburne, in a highly patriarchal manner, says that 'a manful kind of man or even a manly sort of boy, in his love making or in his suffering, will not howl and snivel after such a lamentable fashion.'

Keats, however, was simply a young man in love. The maturity of the poet created high expectations from the man. In the letter to Fanny Brawne, May (?) 1820, Keats emerges as only a lover pining for his beloved. Fanny is a highly desired woman. Her presence is life-giving and health generating. The intensity of love increases and reaches a dizzying height:

You are to me an object intensely desirable— the air I breathe in a room empty of you is unhealthy. I am not the same to you— no — you can wait — you have a thousand activities — you can be happy without me. [...] You do not feel as I do — you do not know what it is to love — one day you may — your time is not come. Ask yourself how many unhappy hours Keats has caused you in Loneliness.

Keats loves Fanny intensely and wants to dream about her all the time. He fears that she does not want to do the same. Fears beguile him incessantly. Primarily, the fear of death haunts the unfortunate young man. What was to come naturally to other people was denied to him. He could not approach her for a permanent relationship. He uses the agency of poetry and letters to express his feelings. Letters represent a highly
personal communication. Particularly letters written to a beloved are not intended for public viewing. The duality of certainty and uncertainty should be viewed simply as the experience of new found love doomed from the start.

In his letter to Fanny Brawny June (?) 1820 Keats declares his whole hearted love to her. He constantly brooded over her thoughts:

Upon my soul I have loved you to the extreme. I wish you could know the Tenderness with which I continually brood over your different aspects of countenance, action and dress. I see you come down in the morning: I see you meet at the Window— I see every thing over again eternally that I ever have seen.

He wants to make her realize that he loves her passionately. In the same letter he clarifies her complaint of ill treatment through words and deeds. He claims that this too is an expression of love. Keats's letters present the image of a lonely young man whose illness hampers him from enjoying the company of his beloved.

Keats wants to maintain high privacy in love. His friends sometimes joked about Fanny. This embarrassed the shy, young man. He values the reputation of the girl he was not able to marry. Some letters contain lovers' quarrels. In the letter of June (?) 1820 he attempts to appease her with compliments and persuasions:

If I have been cruel and injust I swear my love has ever been greater than my cruelty which last[s] but a minute whereas my
Love come what will shall last for ever If concessions to me has hurt your Pride, god knows I have had little pride in my heart when thinking of you.

The letter takes on a serious note when he thinks of his impending death. The build up of pressure on Fanny must have been immense. Keats’s desperation to win back her good humor is visible in the following lines:

My dearest love, I am afraid to see you, I am strong but not strong enough to see you. Will my arm be ever round you again. And if so shall I be obliged to leave you again. My sweet Love! I am happy whilst I believe your first Letter. Let me be but certain that you are mine heart and soul, and I could die more happily than I could otherwise live. If you think me cruel— If you think I have sleighted you— do muse it over again and see into my heart - [...].

(Letter, June (?) 1820)

In a letter to Charles Brown, 30 September 1820, Keats talks about his plan to leave England for Italy. He was aware of his fate, so he nominated Brown as a caretaker for Fanny Brawne after his death. Keats at one stage prohibited Fanny from meeting him in the company of Brown. He says in the letter of 29 (?) February, 1820, ‘I think you had better not make any long stay with me when Mr. Brown is at home.’ But after his death Keats appointed Brown to look after her. Keats tells him to ignore Fanny’s faults for his sake. Keats’s feelings regarding women have changed greatly. His thoughts are not rigid anymore. In the letter of 30 September 1820 he says:
I am in a state at present in which woman merely as woman can have no more power over me than stocks and stones, and yet the difference of my sensations with respect to Miss Brawne and my Sister is amazing. The one seems to absorb the other to a degree incredible. I seldom think of my Brother and Sister in America. The thought of leaving Miss Brawne is beyond everything horrible [...].

During his last days the thoughts of Fanny Brawne kept recurring in his mind. He visualized her all the time. He also used to remember her all the time when he was at Hampstead. At that time he was hopeful to see her again but in his last days, he felt helpless. At times, he wished to be buried near her house. He became so sensitive that he could not read her letters. Her handwriting became a source of torture.

The Keats Fanny love affair emerges as a tragic saga of unfulfilled and prematurely terminated love. The deep, intense passion of the young poet, doused with the consciousness of his impending death, provided his poetry with sensitivity much beyond his years.
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9. Kate Millet 1968, *Sexual Politics*


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http://englishhistory.net/keats/fanny brawn, html


CHAPTER V

The Realms of Gold
When we look back at the history of women, we find that they occupied an important place in the primitive age. They were considered the holier sex by men because they embodied the mysteries of childbirth. In primitive societies, in primeval times, the role of the father had not been identified. Women perpetuated the race apparently without male assistance. Women were active in different areas of life. Men were to some extent subordinate to them. Men simply used their common sense and did not allow their curiosity to go beyond. Gradually, men emerged from female domination. They discovered that a woman is not capable of conceiving independently without male assistance. They started to capture the areas where women had complete hold. This included magic, farming, handicraft etc. Men made their position firm and established themselves gradually. Under the guise of protecting the weaker sex, they placed them as subordinate to themselves. They declared that women were spiritually as well as mentally inferior to themselves.

An important stage in modern feminism was reached in Kate Millett’s *Sexual Politics* (1970). The term patriarchy has been used by her and considered the main cause of female oppression. Patriarchy does not allow equal treatment to women. But some radical feminists of recent times are attempting to remove the evils of patriarchal culture and
recreate their own world which is less oppressive and which is inhabited by real women.

The treatment of women is an important concern in Keats's poetry. The period when Keats was writing his poems was male dominated. He was working under the predominant social pressure to accept prevalent standard codes of masculinity. Keats was a poet of instinct. In his work there is a flexibility regarding gender for which Keats has often been criticized. He has often been termed effeminate and juvenile.

In Keats's poetry there is an abundance of women. They are an integral part of his poetry and letters. They enter into all aspects of his writing and cannot be contained in a single definition. This thesis examines the changing determinations of women in Keats's creative processes. Keats presents them in individual as well as universal identities. Keats conceives the poetic muse as feminine.

Women live in Keats's mind, imagination and emotions. They surface in his letters and poetry. They have presence; they trigger action, raise questions and provide solutions. Women are an inseparable part of Keats's work. The presence of women is evident throughout the early poems. They possess a significant place and role in his work. He cannot write without them. Women have been shown object of beauty as well as of reverence. 'Fill for me a brimming bowl' places women in a strong
role. Keats’s feminist attitude is evident in most of his poems, but in some of his poems his chauvinism is visible e.g. in ‘Ah, who can e’er forget so fair a being’.

Keats’s attitude toward women in this part is explorative and tentative. Keats simply acknowledges that women are an essential part of his existence. The early poems of Keats treat women in all aspects viz. maternal, romantic, playful, meek, virginal as well as evil. Inspite of the restrictions of literary as well as social traditions of the age, Keats the poet could not marginalize them in his poetry.

The juxtaposition of John Keats’s poems and letters of 1817 within the intersections of feminism and deconstruction identify narratives that pose relevant questions rather than define a convergence or reconciliation of the two literary theories. The ‘rethinking’ thus stimulated highlights the different roles of women, mediates their actions, and investigates the ideal balance and harmony between women, men and nature.

Peona in Endymion has wisdom unlike the maidens of 1817. ‘She is neither autonomous like Moneta nor dependent like the early maidens: Peona is the first of Keats’s early female figures to break away from the dependence and sanctuary of earth, but not yet autonomous, she remains an extension of her brother.’
The image of Endymion is not of a conventional hero rather he is, presented by Keats with 'nervy knees, trembling lower lip,' 'awed face' sighing. He is 'pale and wan, alienated from the healthful pursuits of his fellow Latmians by his strange fits of abstraction.'\(^2\) Keats compares the sorrow of Endymion to Niobe who represents the ultimate sorrow of maternity. He appears like a child lulled and lapped by the moon-goddess, Cynthia who 'soothed her light' to his pale face. Endymion assumes his benign role before her. Her closeness makes him giddy and drowsy. But the moment he sees the Indian maid, her beauty attracts him. He is torn between the two women. Finally he decides to live with the Indian - maid. But she rejects his proposal.

The rejection of Endymion's proposal by the Indian-maid shows the refusal of the patriarchal voice and authority. Endymion feels disappointed by her rejection. Peona works as guide and well-wisher to Endymion. The projection of Indian-maiden depicts the more realistic and bold version of woman who has the power to reject the male. The golden-haired maiden, on the other hand, projects the idealized woman. She attracts Endymion through her beauty and charm.

Mnemosyne, the other female character in *Hyperion* is the embodiment of knowledge and wisdom. She is the emancipated version of female. There is a development in the presentation of Keats's female
characters. They emerge from the mere objects of beauty and loveliness to the bold and independent beings that possess knowledge and wisdom. Mnemosyne is an affectionate and motherly figure who watches over Apollo’s growth and provides him inspiration. Among Keats’s women characters, Moneta is the representative of the most powerful and autonomous woman in The Fall of Hyperion. She is majestic and commanding. She possesses knowledge and truth and provides the poet with the basic knowledge of his own identity both as a poet and as a human being. She is the ‘veiled shadow’ and the maternal figure:

Homan writes that the mother Figure is the “most powerful feminine figure in Romantic poetry” (14). Moneta has gone beyond not only the boundaries of the feminine, however, but she surpasses even the masculine excesses of patriarchy that are variously uncovered in the poetry, making her, in Keats’s idiom, the most powerful of either gender.3

She is benign, merciful as well as threatening and fierce. She has selfless love for humanity. ‘The goddess is closest thus far to the maternal ideal and is therefore liberated from the sexuality that has proven destructive in the previous poems.’4 In both the books the male persona gets wisdom, knowledge and comfort from the feminine entity, which is neither meek nor weak but a source of inspiration. ‘She is to be distinguished from the merely coy and mute forms of loveliness of earlier poetry by virtue of her role as a sage, warning the poet that he can no longer be a dreamer, but a “humanist, physician to all men.”’5 Thus the
power of Keats’s women is found at its height in this poem. Keats does not conceive of women as the weaker gender. They populate his verses in all aspects. Cynthia, the golden haired maiden and the Indian maid represent the three stages of womanhood viz the maid, the matriarch and the crone. The powerful Moneta towers over the Titans as an emblem of intelligence, patience and humanity. The bruised and wounded poet, too, regenerates under her beneficence. Keats’s letters serve as testimonials to his poetic claims.

In the ballads, Keats’s heroes lack the traditional manly power. The women are beautiful and courageous. Lorenzo in ‘Isabella’ is unlike the traditional hero. He has no courage to express his love to Isabella. His looks appear pale and deathly to her. Her role is of a healer and comforter. She regenerates his head into a plant and nurtures it. Through Isabella, Keats represents the motherly aspect of a woman. She is the symbol of patience and tolerance. Her brothers represent the patriarchy.

In the ‘Eve of St. Agnes’, Madeline is presented by Keats as an innocent, young virgin. Her purity and chastity makes Porphyro faint. He is unable to resist her charm. Porphyro is pale and frightened. His actions are not heroic rather he is afraid of Madeline’s family which maintains a tradition of revenge with his clan. He walks slowly, peeps and talks in whispers. Yet in the patriarchal vein, he wants to be her vassal and to be
her 'beauties shield'. Thus we find that it is Madeline who provides strength to the unhappy, fearful and disintegrating Porphyro. This deconstructionist reading inverts the conservative narrative where the male is always the source of strength and the weak female is recharged through his power. This disempowerment of Porphyro shows the change in power relations.

Lamia in her human form strives to get what she loves. ‘Perhaps Lamia can be seen as the poet’s poetic power, his shakti, perhaps his Kundalini [...].’ Lycius is unlike the traditional male in ‘indifference’, lost in mysteries, his mind is ‘wrapped like his mantle’. He swoons, becomes pale and remains dependent on her for love. She raises his ‘drooping head’. She clears his soul of doubt by her song. Lycius forgets all his learning in her company.

Apollonius is the representative of patriarchy. He wants to kill Lamia but in the act of destroying her he destroys Lycius too. ‘He fails to realize that her beauty, while enthralling, is at the same time life-sustaining.’

In ‘La Belle Dame Sans Merci’, the knight is ‘alone and palely loitering’, woebegone with anguish moist and fever dew. He considers her as an object of beauty, so prepares garlands, bracelets and a girdle for her. She makes him sleep with her lullaby. The Knight accuses Belle
Dame for what happens to him. She is blamed by the patriarchal forces of kings, warriors and princess because she acts according to her own will without caring for their response. Thus through Belle Dame Keats proves that women are not dependent or weak. They can even deal with powerful men. The role of the deserter, in traditional literature, has been the man’s role. Women suffer pine and languish. Keats has reversed the roles. Keats’s knight has a feminine behavior pattern, according to the patriarchal perspective. In the feminist perspective, however, we would treat this as a mark of evolution of the poet’s craft.

The power and energy of women is realized and acknowledged by Keats in the odes. They are dominant throughout the odes. The male gets power and energy through them. In the ‘Ode to Psyche’, Keats gives the status of a goddess to the feminine figure, Psyche, who has been neglected for a long time. She is so important for him that he places her in his thoughts which represents a pure and ‘untrodden region’. ‘And Psyche, the feminine soul of imagination and a fallen goddess like Mnemosyne and Moneta, provides a more indirect yet still considerable influence on the poet, who resolves to worship her memory in poetry.' Keats’s Psyche is a subject who is not limited by social or cultural boundaries.
In the ‘Ode to a Nightingale’, the poet loses his identity completely and merges with the nightingale. Her world symbolizes the maternal world which is away from the troubles of the real world. He rejects the masculine world of Bacchus and his pards and chooses poetry as his means. Poetry is often seen as a woman in Keats. Thus Keats is constantly charmed by feminine persona. His superior poetic instinct leads him to a realm that is heavily obscured by the patriarchal culture.

The urn in the ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’ is a feminine entity. She is virginal and chaste. She is the idealized image of womanhood. The maternal image is evident by its wholeness, embracing all nature and man. In spite of being silent she expresses a flowery tale. The urn reveals the mystery of life. Keats considers the urn a companion and friend who remove the pain and woes of mankind.

Melancholy, the female entity, in ‘Ode on Melancholy’ has regenerative and life-giving functions. She is a symbol of fertility and life and revives even the dead objects of nature. Her presence is everywhere. She lives with beauty as well as joy. She is not weak and humble. She is veiled, serene and even strong in her sadness. ‘Veiled melancholy’ assumes the status of a matriarch ruling majestically in the temple of delight. Her power will be realized by the male figure and he will be reduced to one of her trophies.'
In the ‘Ode on Indolence’, the state of indolence and lethargy is desirable. Thus once again Keats’s inner wish is for passivity and indolence which are feminine attributes. The poet sees the apparitions one by one, the fair maid, Ambition and poetry. The poet’s favourite is the third one. She is the ‘maiden most unmeek’ unlike the traditional woman. Thus Keats’s maiden of this poem is different from the maiden of 1817 Poems. She is no more meek, humble and coy. He acknowledges her power and strength. From the feminist perspective she proves herself by being a creative agent.

Keats personifies autumn as a female entity in ‘To Autumn’. Her role is benign and maternal. Through her Keats has presented the image of a calm, serene woman who has contentment and patience.

The Fanny poems represent Keats’s own experiences regarding his love. The most important aspect to his attitude toward women is to be found in his attitude to Fanny Brawne. Her role is very important in his life. His poems are the expression of his overwhelming love. In these poems, Keats talks about her beauty which fascinates and overwhems him. He is unable to resist her beauty and charm. Her thoughts imprison him and he feels helpless before her like his male characters of poems.

In his poems and letters to Fanny Brawne, the fear of desertion keeps recurring in Keats’s mind. Uncertainty looms around him. He
desires Fanny to be stable, single minded and constant. He is possessive about her and requests her to be true and loyal to him. Thus Keats’s feelings are profound regarding Fanny Brawne. She is not a hindrance in Keats’s artistic creations as she was once believed to be. When seen from the feminist perspective she seems to provide strength to Keats.

Keats’s letters show his ambivalent attitude about women. He sometimes seems to be under social pressure to adopt the norms of masculinity. But at other times, he accepts that his attitude toward women has changed with maturity.

Keats’s letters are considered as a pretext to his poetry. They are an inseparable part of his work because they reveal his philosophy, his views on life as well as his attitude toward women. She is very dear to Keats. But Keats’s views regarding women keep fluctuating. Sometimes he calls them ‘a set of Devils’ but at other times, he rejects the egotistical sublime of Wordsworth over the ‘negative capability’ of Shakespeare. This shows his inclination from his masculine to the feminine self. Keats’s thoughts are not fixed on any particular woman in the 1817 letters. He gives his general opinion about women.

Through 1818 letters, Keats emerges as a mature person in comparison to 1817. This year is very important regarding his experience and understanding about women. In the 1819 letters Keats accepts that his
attitude toward women has changed to a great extent with maturity and attainment of his love. His thoughts are now concentrated on Fanny Brawne. He is enchanted by her love. Thus through these letters Keats’s deep feelings for his beloved are evident. The letters of 1820 are the letters of a lover who is deeply in love. But the deep intense passion of the young poet who is aware of his approaching death provides his poetry with sensitivity much beyond his years.

This thesis shows that Keats has reversed the role of women. They are not considered deviant and abnormal. Most of Keats’s heroes lack the traditional manly power. They are deserted by women, disempowered and dependent upon female favors. ‘They do not conform to ideals, always inscribed as male-gendered by their male creators, such as firmness, consistency, activity and intellect’ (Moi 1885, 34).

Due to Keats’s rejection of the patriarchal modes, and his acknowledgement of feminine power, he has been criticized as effeminate but through the feminist perspective this can be termed as a mark of evolution of the poet’s thoughts and craft. Philip Cox defends Keats’s position and says that ‘if Keats’s poetry is “effeminate”, then the pronouncement made in his letters concerning his poetic beliefs would lead one to the conclusion that such effeminacy, was for the poet the central strength rather than weakness of his poetic undertakings.’

Keats's superior poetic instincts led him to a realm of feminine power beyond patriarchal culture. Keats's poetry, when read in the feminist perspective, provides a delineation of Keats's futuristic vision of women triumphing over patriarchy not only by favouring sexual strength but through creativity and truth.
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