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.

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.’
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 head 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 Carisbrooke, 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.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.'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 figurings 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.  
> (L.l.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 Mid Summer 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.'
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.

(Lf.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.

(Lf.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 Froglely' 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 tremblyngly their delicate ankles spanned!
Into how sweet a trance his soul was gone.
(L1.80-83)

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 cheek and blesses,
With lips that tremble and with glistening eye,
All the soft luxury
That nestled in his arms.[...]
(L1.90-93)

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.
(L1.97-98)
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.

(Ll.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.

(Ll.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,
And Archimago leaning o'er his book.
(L.33-37)

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.
(L.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’ –
(Ll.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.
(Ll.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?

(Ll. 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 nympha 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:

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

(Ll. 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.
(Ll. 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:

 enfermed, 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.

(L. 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.

(L.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 blushed:

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.

(L.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 fulfills 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. 

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 livers,
Spangler of clouds, halo of crystal rivers,
Mingler with leaves and dew and tumbling streams,
Closer of lovely eyes to lovely dreams.

(Ll.116-120)

Nature, Beauty and poetry mingle:

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

(Ll.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.

(ll. 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.

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 Southampton, 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 one 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.\textsuperscript{27}

Keats says to Fanny in the letter:

\begin{quote}
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).
\end{quote}

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 \textit{Endymion}. He talks to Fanny about a woman writer, Miss Taylor:

\begin{quote}
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.
\end{quote}

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.  

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 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 feminity. 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 Effeminacy 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


30. Serpil Tunç Oppermann, ‘Feminist Literary Criticism: Expanding the Canon as Regards the Novel’,


