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# The Ambivalent depiction and presence of the feminine in the work of John Keats

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## Introduction

The role of women throughout literature has been of the object of men or to represent something, whether are affections such as love, hate, nostalgia, sexuality, inner conflicts and so on, it reflects the social attitude towards women and men's perspectives (Griffin 205), and during modern times, the gender affects its surroundings with its actions or its mere presence, therefore, the effects of women do not leave any form of expression out of their range, including its depiction of women on poetry but women in literature have many sides as in real life; their stereotype develops edges according the period of the work and how useful they are for the author to express feelings, emotions, concerns, fears, or simply thoughts. One of the faces which women possess is the feminine, generally and prejudicially associated to the female construct, and in some cases, to depict or characterized not only a gender but a tone, male characters or abstractions in general.

Despite women's part in art, it has mostly being portrayed from the men's perspective where the feminine voice does not take an important part, being left behind the shadow of authors and lyric speakers. Romanticism does that in most of the writings of the period, where the feminine helps to create the Other (Mellor 3) rather than portraying a full concept and figure of women. This genre postulates not an opposition between the masculine and the feminine but an intersection in a fluid continuum (Mellor 4) of forces which correspond each other by means of representation of both parts.

The spontaneous overflow of feelings or the sublime in front of a monumental poetic event were a few of the Romantic characteristics where the feminine was used to articulate words, in that sense, the feminine - rough emotions - and the masculine - tranquil state of the mind - united to help the lyric speaker in the art of creation. However, there is another side of the feminine which is the extreme side, where the female characters portrayed in poems are submissive or unnatural creatures. This opposition came due to the restricted freedom of expression that women possessed in that period. They were seen as wives and mothers, rather than individuals with desires beyond the domestic area; the free woman, in a sensual and sexual manner, was not possible to see on daily life or reality, but through a fantasy veil because "woman was to be 'fashioned' by men rather than by herself" (Barker-Benfield 288) then the sexual woman, unique without the man's influence was portrayed with unnatural

features; the feminine still used for men to express their own feelings, the accepted side of the stereotypical woman was depicted with sensibility and admiration.

Regarding the use of the feminine and its articulation in realistic or unnatural features in Romantic poetry, the writings that can be related to this area are the ones from John Keats who was 'influenced by women figures around him - be it in the form of mother, sister, beloved or even casual acquaintances' (Banerjee 1) . This influence will be analyzed in his literary works as well as in the letters he sent to friends, family or acquaintances but said influence will be of the poems, odes and sonnets in the configuration of the female figures in his life, whether his artistic words came first and then his emotions toward women, if the fictional works enunciate female characters under an ambivalent position and if this is reflected in his letters; as my concern falls in his writing to public knowledge and private entertainment, it caught my attention how women were portrayed in both spheres but most specifically the feminine defined in opposites as 'the positive feminine characteristics - sensibility, compassion, maternal love - ' as 'metaphorically appropriated by the male poet' and 'attributes of difference - independence, intelligence, willpower, aggressive action' as 'denigrated' for the masculine lyric speaker and from the woman (Mellor 29).

In order to prove this statement, the reading will be guided by two major theories of criticism; on the one hand New Criticism, where a 'close reading' was suggested 'and detailed textual analysis of poetry rather than an interest in the mind and personality of the poet, sources, the history of ideas and political and social implications' (Cuddon 468), in this side of analyzing a poet's work, the writing has to be seen as a structured body that sustains itself within the world of the written words; there should not be need of external influences to fully appreciate the tones, topics or styles used to articulate feelings, it is an organic body and at the same time a building with a firm base. It is self-sufficient and independent as an artefact which stays stable regarding the spatial and temporal historic tension. On the other hand the other literary criticism is the biographical criticism which stands the fact that 'authors' lives suggest meanings in their works' (Griffith 195), contrary to the previous perspective. It can be said that the works of the authors are a reflection of the time when they had lived, but mostly of their personal experiences where the biographical emotions might be mixed with the poetic ones, and his biographical knowledge can affect the development of certain edges in his writing where despite his male perspective he might have possessed a

kind of sensibility related to the feminine, and his depiction of women or the female figure in general could have been influenced by the women in his real life as a young british man.

This dichotomy will be studied through Keats' works, analyzing rhetorical devices or literary process of comparison such analogies and other elements, also his attitude towards the feminine figure in his poems, odes and letters; how he portrayed or depicted or utilized the feminine in his writing and how he articulated and what he had to say of the feminine in his life through his letters. Then a comparison or contrast will be processed to determine the ambivalence of this feature both in his poetry and his life and if it is correct to established a reading of his public and personal works through the previous criticisms mentioned.

## Theoretical Framework

In order to analyze the ambivalence present in both instances of expression of feelings and ideas, it is important to draw a clear line of knowledge about different concepts needed. The works mentioned below will provide discussion towards the necessary theories to support the interpretation of the writing of Keats, such theories are Biographical Criticism and New Criticism, next to the concept of the feminine; these three pillars will help to develop the thesis.

The base of this study is to discover the feminine in the writing of John Keats both in his poems and letters, hence the primary necessity to define said concept in the context of Romanticism. British Romanticism had not restrained the feminine in a tight ring compared to its antecessors; it was a dichotomy taken for granted within society but for this literary period it was in a greyish area as Mellor established in *Romanticism and Gender*. The seemingly opposing forces of the feminine and masculinity were united and intersected in a “fluid continuum” (4); for the Romantics gender was not limited to biological walls but it was translated in the discourse being a socially constructed concept therefore changeable.

It is possible to understand the feminine in two realms as well, which are in the feminine Romanticism, where female authors resided, and masculine Romanticism, where mostly male writer used feminine discourse. Regarding this aspect, Mellor stated that the masculine Romanticism was structured in male authors in poetry and drama due to the expanse production of works “on the primacy of human feelings and imaginative creation over the analytical calculations of Enlightenment rationality”. Originally, women were seeing as creatures dragged by “emotions, love and sensibility...not be[ing] able to think rationally, but they could love passionately, faithfully, purely” (23) specific characteristics that Wordsworth with his definition of poetry as “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” from a man who has “thought long and deeply,” took from women.

Thus “Romantic poets added a new dimension to the literary tradition of gender politics” (Mellor 23); male authors were more visible at that times but the new feelings carried by the literature of sensibility required characteristics associated with women such as tears, heightened emotions, excessive passion or love, extreme irrationality, wasting diseases, suicidal impulses and madness (175). Hence, it existed a dichotomy where the ‘positive femininity was associated with sensibility, compassion, maternal love’ and they are right for the male poet, ‘while attributes such as independence, intelligence, willpower and aggressive action’ have negative connotations (29). On the one hand, the voiceless and desirable woman

in erotic imagination was depicted in the otherness, in this case the mythical and supernatural, to not relate real woman in a sexual way, on the other hand, they defined moral knowledge based on the positive feminine features (Alexander 22-23).

Nevertheless, Masculine Romanticism, according to Wallace in *Enlightening Romanticism, Romancing the Enlightenment*, gained a name based on feminine attributes but it was still considered to seek an “autonomous, questing, visionary self-creating subject, capable of powerful feelings” celebrating the self as well (143), projecting an independent and self-sufficient author, on the contrary of the female one, who disregards individuality and “subordinates the writing subject to community”; the independent and rational female figure gains another perspective only through fiction. Mellor also mentions a Feminine Romanticism committed to “the domestic virtues, to home, to the equality of men and women, to the living of a good and happy life at modest expense” (76) when Masculine Romanticism focused in other tasks mentioned before and was the male Romantic was able to portray the “ultimate moral as well as intellectual authority” with two powerful tools: empathy, envisioned by Keats as negative capability, and the instinct and intuition of the poetic faculty, defined by Percy Shelley, they become creators of art, mothers of literature (Mellor 24).

Wolfson in *Borderlines: The Shiftings of Gender in British Romanticism* calls out the fluid nature of the feminine in this literary period. She states “Romanticism is nothing if not various, ever shifting force field of gender attractions and performances” where “men of feeling and deemed feminine” were not rejected within the frame of literature (28).

But this ambiguity is dismissed in term of rational analysis, as Löwe and Sayre state in *Romanticism against the Tide of Modernity*. The contradictory forces, themes, devices used in this literary movement create a unifying characteristic at the same time that confusion. One of these opposites is the feminine, and both academics gathered studies that condemned the lack of clarity regarding the subject; Carl Schmitt explains the confusing nature of Romanticism tackling its frivolity for aesthetics, he “emphasizes the passivity, the lack of virility, and the feminine exaltation” (3), following the same line through the chapter they mentioned how the feminine can be considered “synonymous of moral degradation or intellectual inferiority” (3), a description that might be traced back to the actual times of the period when Keats was a writer.

The feminine will be studied as an ambivalent element in the works of John Keats, not only in his literature but also in his personal life. Whether he saw this ambiguity in a positive or negative connotation, it affected several edges of his mind as an author and lyric speaker.



With the task in mind of analyzing his letters to look for the feminine is important to add a controversial literary theory for the Romantic poets, due to the fact that they believed in the creation of art self-sustained without external influences, but for the sake of the analysis in this study, it is necessary to guide it through the theory that includes other factors as molders of creativity, that theory being Biographical Criticism.

Firstly, to determining the state of the Biographical Criticism it is important to start by saying that the first author to apply this critic was Samuel Johnson in his work *Lives of the Poets* (1779, 1781) who analyzed writing with the influence of the author's biography (Griffith 195). This theory is often connected with historical criticism as both wings take into account the lives of the authors. Nevertheless, it exists a difference; where Historical Criticism includes the historical context of the author's life to understand his or her works, Biographical Criticism tries to pinpoint the individual struggles of the author as the influence put into writing (195). Griffith tackles both theories in the same framework but clarifies their separated meanings and function when analyzing literature.

However, to highlight the goal of Biographical Criticism she quotes the author of Historical Criticism, in that same line, the motif behind Biographical Criticism is to "understand every work on its own terms as the product of a particular mind in a particular setting" (195). This independent mind has a pushing force molding the way in which art is composed not by itself but as a conjunction of several factors. Griffith states how authors are enclosed in a specific thread or circle of external influence which is the current literary movement of each period. She says "authors...write within intellectual and aesthetic traditions...each of these is a network of practices and products based on ideas that differ from tradition to tradition", therefore affirming the push of these cultures within the minds of authors to develop their work.

The author, according this theory, has aims and some scholars go far enough to say that "interpretations are only valid if they are based on author's intentions" (196) said intentions being framed in a certain scheme of understanding within the life and culture surrounding the existence of the author.

Following the idea of external influences not only as in literary tradition but as forces in other contexts, Mc Gann (1979) discusses the dichotomy of stylistic or historical analysis in *Keats and the Historical Method in Literary Criticism*, trying to highlight the advantages and disadvantages of both perspectives but, regarding Keats, he takes a biographical biased point of view. In general terms, Biographical and Historical Criticism are responses to the formalist perspective of analyzing poems, where "the text" as "the integral language

construction of the poem” or poetic text should be the unit of study by scholars (991). But he states that poems should be analyzed beyond the text as a decontextualized product but as a social construct completed by the poetic text as “the sign of the poem’s completion” (992). The whole poetic event cannot be seen superficially but it has to include a “localized and time-specific set of human circumstances which enter our experience as if their connections with all of human history were clearly present” (992) where reading the poems will explore beyond poetic devices designed in times of Romanticism, which developed two strategies, one being the manipulative nature of writing making the poems a weapon to secure the audience’s attention, and the other being the audience as the creation of the author, where the author Keats established the making of a unique and personal world leading the reader to be able to understand on their own (1020).

Mc Gann tries to explain the importance of the author’s intentions as well as Griffith, but in this case the intentions are related to the bibliography of the works, that is to say, the “social relationship between author and audience” (993) which determines whether a poem is written to be published to the faceless mass or for a private account. The form of publication also has a saying regarding influencing on the writing; the intentions of the author are codified by choices of time, place and the factor mentioned before (993), what they say in novel, poems or letters may change due to the function of the literary expressions.

According to this author, Biographical Criticism and Psychological Analysis are not enough to get to the bottom of the artistic and aesthetic event; historical contexts are the ones that shaped the biographical circumstances, they need to complement each other in order to gather a profound analysis. For scholars and academic to be able to reach a complete vision on the poems they have to distant themselves of their immediacy and to scrape the isolation of the aesthetic effect of literature and place it in its correspondent time of construction (1026). This intimacy between work and life is the relation of poetry that “hold a mirror up to human life” but “it reflects -and reflect upon- human nature in its social and historical reality” (1026), a reality that imprints itself in words, metaphors, analogies and so on.

The echo of reality in works such as poems and novels can be seen in biographical spaces as Leonor Arfuch calls them in her *Biographical Space: Dilemmas of the Contemporary Subjectivity* (2010); in this framework she includes genres such as biography, autobiography, diaries and letters (91). The concept of biographical space, according the author, has a double value, the first one is of narrative nature and the second one leads an ethical orientation; the latter can have heroic value, transcendental or that fuels desires of glory, of prosperity, or based on love, understanding (57), all these qualities can be imprinted

in the genres mentioned before, but in a more personal level for the writers because of the nature of these works and the communicative purpose of them. Therefore, they operate as testimonies, records, documents, as much as individual story as a period one (91), registering authors' lives.

At the same time, the personal nature of these genres allows authors to introduce the narrative identity based on the acknowledgment of the implications of their own words speaking and portraying their own life and the entire luggage that carries within. Through the recognition of a writer of letters for example to friends and families that it might be different from the writer as in lyric speaker portrayed in poems and fiction in general, it is possible to reach beyond a unique identity toward the plurality of it (97). This new factor helps to read in a transversal configuration the whole of works of the same author, considering his or her split identity creating a contemporary subjectivity (102) that will be translated in both personal and public instances of narration.

Continuing with the biographical space, the author tackles an important genre for this thesis which is letters; this type of dialogue gives more information than biographies and it can be seen through the simple organization of the letters in chronological order to show systematic phenomena, more authentic due the intention of the writing to not been published but the posthumous nature of some authors' letters that permits the intrusion of the reader (113); the broken intimacy allows scholars to study the author's mind instead of the lyric speaker's one.

For the purpose of the analysis, Biographical Criticism will help to analyze the letters in of John Keats in chronological order, introducing the possibility of seen beyond the writer in the poem but the man in Romantic period, by identifying the depiction of the feminine and seen if it exists a correlation between his words regarding the topic in both his letters and poems; if he reflects his personal vision of the feminine rendered in his letters as well as in his poems and odes allowing his narrative identity to go beyond reality into fiction.

On the contrary of the previous theory, there is New Criticism which was a response against historical and biographical criticism. The term New Criticism appeared from a book by John Cramson (1941) according Griffith's investigation. The followers of this theory believe that analyzing "a work of literature need have little or no connection with the author's intended meanings, with the author's life, or with the social and historical circumstances that may have influenced the author (Griffith 179); they stated that all the necessary information to understand a text is within the text itself.

New Critics believed that literary language and their method, which consists of close reading to access literary elements that carry artistic and meaning intention, were accessible to all types of readers (180); this detachment of historical and biographical background allowed critics to appreciate the aesthetic purpose of creation and the intrinsic value of the work in itself. It is self-contained based on language and literary conventions (179). Literary language possess a metaphorical nature, according to Cleanth Brooks, that does not allow ideas to be separated from the work or the form and meaning will be lost (179) due to its unity and irony which Griffith mentions as well in her book.

Both elements complement each other in the structure of the poem and make sense in that framework. Irony is defined as the clash of elements that causes tension but the unification with literary language in the works themselves functions to give meaning (179) to elements apparently different. Because of the decontextualized nature of the theory, new critics will analyzed works that were “away from social and historical subject matter and dealt instead with private, personal, and emotional experience” (180), poetic events that were the product of a lyric speaker supposedly different from the author.

According to Griffith, New Criticism was the American version of the Anglo-American Criticism where modern critics believed this analysis deserved the same importance than religious texts had in the past comparing “great works of literature” as “timeless and expressions of universal truths”, therefore they “deserve the same reverence and attention as religious icons” because they reflected human emotions and value in the work itself (180).

As this theory bases on the analysis of the writing as a whole, Selden (1989) introduces his vision of the literary study in his ignorance of the weight in elements such as imagery, form, tone, paradox, irony, tension, ambiguity and unity that, at the end, are a consisting part (25). Nevertheless, he tries to clarify that New Criticism was not developed in Russian Formalism which was the theory that possessed a scientific-like analysis with “knowledge of the formal effects (devices, techniques, etc) which together make up what they call literature” (38), where emotions and experiences were transformed in order to produce narration.

Regardless of the influence of Russian Formalism, New Critics were limited with the Romantic legacy trying to tie “two central assertions” (25): the fact that poems were “organic and unified structures” and they provided understanding of experiences. Despite the experimental part, the poem was a “process of composition” not an exact reflection of said event in life, thus the composition was the important matter for analysis.

In order to portray the crucial role of the process in New Criticism, Sendel mentions T.S. Eliot as a big influence for this theory, specifically in the remark that “the best poems do not derive from personal experience” (25) and that the “poet’s mind is a type of impersonal laboratory in which materials of many sorts are given new form”, and “the meaning of the poem cannot be reduced to anything outside the poem” (26), establishing the clear difference with Biographical Criticism.

Due to the elaborated composition of the poems with literary devices, the language cannot be reproduced in “ordinary words”, otherwise the embodiment of the experience through contradiction and unresolved tensions will lose its beauty (26). This analysis makes authors moderators between experiences and readers. This ambiguity and tension is accepted in Romanticism as John Keats called it negative capability “when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason” (27); the emotion reasoning is what Russian Formalism lacks due to its “rigorous and less subjective form” (29).

Nevertheless, Sendel pinpointed how texts are perceived nowadays as “discursive spaces through which all kinds of other texts and contexts criss-cross in an unstable signification” (29) regaining the socio-cultural factor into the analysis along with the psychological and intertextual contexts. Now the new critic study is complemented with “close reading” which is the “rhetorical study of poetic figures” in the romantic period concerning the “the special nature of poetic language and its value as a form of response to human experience” (29).

According to Eagleton, said human experience was highly desired by writers of the Romantic period due to the clashing of opposing forces such as nature and science; “scientific rationalism was ravaging the aesthetic life” (40) and “human experience was being stripped of its sensuous particularity, and poetry was a possible solution”. Therefore, poetry has to be isolated of external influences such as rationalism to conserve the “sensuous integrity of its object” reconstructing a vast and natural world (40); New Criticism was the perfect theory to maintain literature true to its essence. Poetry, in that sense, became solace for artist in an industrial society.

New Critics supported the technique of close reading that disregarded social and historical context for the text to become self-sufficient and understandable without extrinsic forces, that way it was able to be “hoisted into a sublime space above it” (42). Some elements related to this analysis and, remarkable devices that provoke ambiguity are paradox, irony and ambivalence, these “suggest the economic fusion of two opposite but complementary

meanings: the New Critical poem is a taut structure of such antitheses, but they never really threaten our need for coherence because they are always resolvable into a closed unity” (45), This ambivalence has a role that creates confusion on the reader until it reaches completion in the whole of the literary work but this is different from the acceptance of uncertainties because said mystery may not be solved outside of the poem, but on the contrary, it finds “balance” in its function within the organic body and structure of the poem.

The independence of the text will not be taken into account for the analysis but close reading will be, in order to find instances in which the ambivalence is present in poems or odes created by John Keats; these instances of the ambivalence that will depict the feminine through metaphor, representation, symbolism, ironies or any other possible literary device would be compared with the events of the feminine in the letters written by the same author. Thus close reading, from New Criticism, and the consideration of his letters, an analysis related to biographical criticism, will work together with the purpose of highlighting important characteristics of the feminine and if they are interchangeable somehow between the two genres and if the ambivalence observed in one is compatible with the other one.

## The Feminine presence in John Keats' selected poems, odes and sonnets

The female figure is a constant on Keats' poetry through his short but fruitful career. For the analysis, the chronological order will guide the placement of the poems and odes in this section and close reading, for trying to identify each representative element of the feminine.

One of the poems believed being written in 1815 or 1816 was published in 1817; it is called "Woman! when I behold thee flippant, vain" and shows two sides of the same woman who attracts the lyric speaker. Here, the woman is portrayed as a two faced person; in the first lines she is seen as 'flippant, vain/ Inconstant, childish, proud, and full of fancies' (1-3), conveying immaturity from the female figure, and in this state his love for her exists but it lies inactive, he has 'dormant lain' (10-11) with a love which could have been possibly wild and free due to the fact that dormant is often associated with natural elements in a calm state, as volcanos and animals, even diseases that do not show symptoms but there are present. His love that could 'leap and prance' (8-9) like an animal in a prairie and 'dance' (10) freely regains its energy when the lady is 'meek, and kind, and tender' (13-14), all submissive characteristics that produce such a love in him till the point of wishing to be a knight as stated in the next lines of the poem. He continues describing his woman but now it is her physical appearance and she is described as a woman with 'light feet, dark violet eyes, and parted / hair/ soft dimpled hands, white neck, and/ creamy breast' (22-25) taking away the voice he gave her in the previous lines, she is an element-like figure to please him.

The last description of the woman plus his desire of being a knight for her, recall for the ideal of love in the neoclassical period with courtly love; a woman who is unreachable when the positive feminine characteristics are highlighted in her. The negative feminine, whiny and immature personality with 'willpower' condemned her undesirable for the speaker.

Nevertheless, in her damsel status she only produces the most intense love from the man when he mentions how he stares at her 'picture' (28-29) and waits to listen her 'voice divine' (43) that conveys admiration in him. She projects a light and fresh aura in the following lines when the speaker says he saw 'her form seem[ingly] floating palpable' (46) in the 'arbour' taking a 'dewy flower', concepts related to natural landscape in soothing tone. Her figure now unites two concepts, the untouchable ideal woman from courtly love and the ethereal creature of the forest. More unreachable she becomes with the two significances but

produces an intense kind of obsession when he states how her beauty cannot leave his thoughts (43-44).

The following piece of work, 'published' on March 21 of 1818, was a Keats a group of verses called "Devon Maid" sent through letters to his friend Benjamin Haydon; academically speaking they are not considered a poem or an ode, that is why the unusual name. The stanzas followed the description of a sexual woman, this woman has no voice but she is just the object of the lyric speaker's affection, is characterized by supernatural and natural element, specifically with metaphor related to nature, a feature vastly known as singular and constant by Romantic poets seeking for solace from the abrupt and rational city life; he was visiting Devonshire as he claimed in his letters in early 1818 and the place was of big change for the author due to its countryside landscape.

The first stanza starts with questioning said maid for her path depicting her as a fairy as he says 'Ye tight little fairy' (3) where this creature, a mythical creature, allows the lyric speaker the license to add sensual elements in the following lines; the sexual in women was a strong edge which was not characteristic of real life women in that period, they should be delicate and sensitive for men to seek for them. Then he follows describing this fairy with natural element, probably from the landscape of Devonshire; he loved her 'meads', 'flowers' and 'junktets' which are associated with the 'diary' and 'milk' mentioned in previous lines, these could be innuendos of her female anatomy, now she is not only a mythical creature but a woman as well that produces desire from the speaker. Later, he stated 'ind the door, I love kissing more' alluding to what underneath her clothes which are compared to the 'door'. In the next lines, he describes the anatomy of the fairy with love towards her 'hills', 'dales' and 'flocks' intensifying the comparison with the natural landscape related to a sensual and sexual experience; he wants to lie with her and share a bed that is included with the words 'green grass pillow' in the last line. The playful tone of the poem highlights the theme of young and free love depicted with admirable essence of Nature.

This sexual passion was often associated with hysterical and uncontrollable emotions, therefore with women as irrational humans, and it was now projected from the masculine speaker but these characteristics were negative towards women and a woman guided by passion was not honorable, thus for a female figure to fit the sensual experience had to be a mythical creature. The negative feminine, the aggressive action of sexual desire, should not be express from the male poet or the female figure, but in both instances the speaker refugees in Nature and the fantastic element.



In the next poem, the feminine is represented in a mixture of purity and sin. “Sharing Eve’s Apple” was, supposedly, published in 1818 without any more specificity. The title gives us at first an idea of the possible topic or theme of the poem by referring in two instances to the Christian story of Adam and Eve in the apple representing temptation and the prohibited.

In the first stanza, the lyric speaker uses anaphora by repeating the word ‘O BLUSH not so! O blush not so!’ trying to prevent the possible consequences of that simple act because the speaker might interpret it as acceptance of the later explicit idea of ‘maidenheads going’, as in losing the virginity or the temptation of sex will happen. Then, in the following line the word ‘blush’ is repeated anaphorically to portray the eager desire of falling or not in taking the forbidding, ‘blush’ represents for him ‘won’t’, ‘shan’t’, and ‘having done it’, later he uses for ‘thought’, ‘nought’ as in nothing, and for ‘begun it’, all related to the sexual act in the metaphor of the apple, the ‘blush’ will be a response from the hearer, a woman maybe, that the speaker observes and seduces flirting with the idea.

Later on, he uses the word ‘sigh’ with repetition as well, as it represents for him finally the time when the female figure had fallen for “eating” the apple, it is a display of anxiety and how the desire is taking the female body to express itself through it. The references to Eve, ‘loosen’d lips’ and ‘amorous nipping’ are accounts of the increasing of lust on the woman for him to interpret as he pleases. Following the anxiety of the act, the speaker encourages the female to fall before their time is doomed because they only have their ‘youth’ to enjoy; and by the agricultural term of ‘nice-cut-core’, which means to remove the core of a fruit allowing the root to take position and accommodate in a better way, it can be interpreted as the removal of clothes from the woman to do the sexual act.

Finally in the last stanza, the sexual appearance of the woman keeps going and the questioning of the speaker too by the anaphora (sigh) wondering if it is a ‘yes’, ‘no’ or ‘I can’t bear it’, showing uncertainty that works till the end of the poem with the question ‘what can be done’, ‘shall we stay or run’ and the ultimate display of sharing the guilt with the statement ‘cut the sweet apple and share it!’, where the apple returns to represent the temptation.

For the speaker, the woman is his object of desire but within the passiveness in her display of innocence with the blushing and sighing, even though these actions are cynical for the speaker because they show the opposite, it is provoking sexual craving in him. She carries an innocent and positive feminine approved by society, but underlying it is the flirtatious masculine perspective of the accepted female.

In "Ode on Indolence", written on March, 1819, the feminine figure is used to portray three different people, some academics (Mellor, Cox) established this ode as a sort of study of the self-conscious mind of the speaker as a writer too. On the first lines, the speaker describes the presence of three figures in front of him in a 'marble urn', all of them are 'With bowed necks, and joined hands, side-faced' (3-4), in a praying action manner, wearing sandals and white robes (6-7), the image can recall a religious authority, as a priest or monk. They circled the urn once, and once more giving the sense that the speaker was actually moving around it, due to their static and artistic condition. In the second stanza, the speaker states these figures as 'Shadows' that came to silently toward him 'to steal away, and leave without a task [his] idle days' (23-24), establishing him in a 'drowsy' manner, where the 'blissful', therefore welcomed, 'cloud of summer-indolence' calmed and slowed down his mind and life; he was left feeling lethargic.

The third time the figures passed by the speaker wanted to follow them because he recognized them and, in the next lines, the female figure is used to portray these three mysterious but powerful creatures. In the third stanza, Love, Ambition and Poesy were placed and named as the guilty or the temptations for the speaker's mind to become numb; the first one was Love and she was 'a fair Maid' (42), the second figure was Ambition 'pale of cheek,/ And ever watchful with fatigued/eye' (44-46) and the last one was Poesy, the figure or abstraction, at this point, which/who the speaker loves more, even though she is blamed for being the 'maiden most unmeek' (49-50) and becoming his 'demon Poesy' (51); all of them had female characteristics and they were immersed in the speaker's consciousness despite of him being a male.

Near the end of the ode, the figures disappeared but first their presences left an emotional event in the speaker; he wanted to chase the three of them, Love made him a fool, looking for her meaning and place as he says 'O folly! What is love? and where is/ it?' (54-55), then Ambition leaving his 'little heart' (57) in a feverish state when dreams are too much for a fool like he pictures himself. Finally, Poesy as a demonical female figure tempting him toward indolence, gives him 'no joy' but unawareness of his surroundings. She was 'sweet as drowsy noons/ and evenings stepp'd in honied indolence, /O, for an age so sheltr'd from annoy' (59-61) causing a contradictory mix of feeling due to her luring qualities portrayed through the words sweet, honied and shelter; she was his solace from reality as it can be seen in the lines 'I may never know how change the moon, /Or hear the voice of busy commonsense' (62-63), where the change of the moon was a metaphor for how days end and

time, and commonsense can be interpreted as the rational part of his mind that was dull because of Poesy.

In the final stanza, he says goodbye definitely and as ghosts they faded to never return, he states 'Ye cannot raise/ my head cool-bedded in the flowery glass' (13-14) standing up for his mind not to be numb again, even though he is strong to do that he is still fragile as 'a pet-lamb in a sentimental farce' (16); they returned to the urn but seeing his fragile state he has visions at night and faint ones during the day (19-20) but he is adamant on pushing them far away.

Other poem which uses female figure is "On Fame" and its continuation "Another On Fame", both were sent through letters dated April 30, 1819. Fame is described as a tricky and elusive feminine figure she has both natural and supernatural elements, where she is a 'rose' that would not 'pluck herself' (5) to ill-mannered men as the speaker points out at the beginning, men that 'cannot look upon [their] mortal days with temperate blood' and 'vex all the leaves of [their] life's book' (2-3), these qualities make them not worth it of Fame. She continues being addressed as an element of Nature when even her 'misty bloom' in her 'plum finger' should not get close to the undeserving men; then the supernatural quality appears when she is compared to Naiad, a nymph 'associated with freshwater, lakes, rivers and springs' (Bane 241) and also an elf, another mythical creature that in England can be divided in domestic or rural (Bane 122), and for setting and developing there is evidence that Fame is a rural elf, a creature that should not 'darken her pure grot with muddy gloom' (8), the muddy gloom of the 'feverish'd' (1) man. She is left undisturbed in 'the brier' (9) surrounded by Nature with 'winds to kiss and grateful bees to feed' (10), a natural landscape which in Romantic period had been the place of inspiration for poets; Fame lay there, wanted for men and poets but tranquil in her our world, being also a 'fierce miscreed' that could doomed men as she could 'spoil [their] salvation' (14), this miscreed feature of false religion adds a more mischievous side to Fame.

In the continuity of Fame, "Another On Fame", she keeps her 'coy' (1) nature, as the speaker describes her as a 'wayward girl' with unpredictable behaviour toward men with submissive or 'slavish knees' (2), she does not like the weak of mind. She will listen to 'the thoughtless boy' and with 'heart at ease' (3-4), she is now a 'Gipsy', a stereotype of a free woman living passionately and travelling without limitations (Glajar 189), that 'will not speak to those who have not learnt to content without her' (4-5) due to her wanderer nature, Fame is still elusive as mentioned before to the dependent and ill men.

Her evasive nature continues as the speaker characterizes her as a 'Jilt' (6) with no worries of her reputation of capricious rejective lover, she does not listen the 'scandals about her' (7). At the end, he calls out the 'lovesick Bards' (10) and 'Artists lovelorn' (11), all in love with Fame, wishful to be recognized by their artistic works, and tells them to 'bow' and say 'adieu' (12), to not push their luck with the fairy Fame and maybe 'if she likes it, she will follow' (13) them, when she sees the change of mind on them she will think of them worthy of her presence. The female figure is a subtle and playful creature, characteristics only applicable to women in fiction when they are mythical beings and not real ones in a limited world.

This division is present between the fictional woman and the real woman is the same as the supernatural creature and the tender one. The last one can be seen clearly in the last sonnet of the poet called "Bright Star", dated between September or October of 1820. Due to the fact that this part of the analysis is purely new critical, there will be no accounts on the poet's personal life until the second part where his letters will be addressed.

The sonnet is written in the Shakespearean style with rhythm of *abab, cdcd, efef, gg*. This style of work is direct and short, giving the opportunity to the poet to use images and metaphors that will tackled the topic without hesitation.

To begin with, the star is a image to the desire of the speaker of things being eternal, immortal and unwavering. The star is an element of Nature that causes the speaker melancholy for things that might not happen; at first, it is described as a lonesome and observant device, it 'hung aloof the night' with 'lone splendour'(2), immortal in the night sky with 'eternal lids apart' (3) where 'lids' is a metonymy of the eyes of the star, observing as 'Nature's patient sleepless Eremite' (4), a comparison that carries the previous characteristics plus now the distinction of the Christian hermit or recluse. This religious allusion continues when this hermit watches 'The moving waters at their priestlike task'(5) in solitary contemplation as a priest, and grazes 'the snow of mountains and moors'(8). But this alienate life is not desirable for the speaker as he states in line 9, where he wants the 'steadfast' and 'unchangeable' privileges of being a star but with the company of his tender lover, portrayed in particles that the speaker gives us. She should be with him to 'Pillow'd' him in her 'fair love's ripening breasts' (10), and to feel the 'soft fall and swell'(11) rhythm of her breath; he wants to be 'awake' in 'sweet unrest' (12) to 'hear her tender-taken breath' (13), all words conveying kindness and purity from her: a 'soft' 'pillow', her 'fair love' and 'sweet' eternity with her. Nevertheless, the calmness stated by the last lines is broken by the end where he decides that he will only live forever in her arms or 'swoon to death' leaving an uncertainty

about his love, about what it is to come if it is not the star to be forever with the affectionate female figure.

## The Feminine presence in John Keats' selected letters

To analyze the selection of letters, it is necessary to apply the literary theory of Biographical Criticism and some points contained in it, such as biographical space and the ethical orientation of said spaces; the letters are organized in chronological order as well as the works in the section above.

### 1. Letter To John Hamilton Reynolds. September 22, 1818.

The female figure in this case is represented as the object of attention of Keats; he writes his friend how he has never been in love, but he met a charming woman, '[her] voice and shape of a woman is haunting me' and he finds 'relief in Poetry' and for that cause his writing 'feels less of a crime'. It seems that the presence of the Lady produces inspiration and desire to write and escape from a previous 'strange and threatening sorrow'. Later on, he says this haunting woman and poetry made him happy in the present moment.

### 2. Letter To George Keats. October 13 or 14, 1818.

The woman of the previous letter has a name now and with that, more interesting characteristics. He describes Jane Cox as a wicked woman, not a superior as 'Cleopatra but at least a Charmian', who was the servant of the queen and through literature she has been portrayed as a witty character. Her presence is impressive compared to inferior woman therefore Keats states she is hated by her pairs; she shows no concern for what the female voices say around her.

This woman produces overwhelming emotions on Keats and compares her dangerous 'Beauty as a Leopardess, an elegant and strong animal. Keats is so blasted by her ways that he writes he really is comfortable with her because his feelings cannot go beyond admiration, he has not time to think of her as a lover, 'time to be awkward or tremble'.

He continues establishing a divisionary line; she is good enough in a 'wordly way' but there is more than that. He postulates there are 'two distinct tempers that we can judge things with', first the wordly, theatrical and pantomimical, and second the earthly, spiritual and ethereal'. The first instance is accepted by him in his condition of Man in the world where 'rich talk' is always appreciated and Charmian is one of those types again. The second one is

in his desirable status of 'eternal being' loving 'the thought of [his brother]'. He also prefers the woman ruins him and his brother to save him, not the other way around.

3. Letter to George Keats. October 25, 1818.

In this case, the author tells his brother about his clear opposition to marry with a woman. The female figure he envisions as a wife does not appear on her own but with a house that Keats builds part by part when explaining the things that could not make him happy. He writes 'Though the most beautiful Creature were waiting for me at the end of a Journey or a Walk, though the Carpet were of Silk, the Curtains of the morning Clouds' constructing the dreamt house for normal men including the beautiful woman but all seems superficial and materialistic, when as a poet he looks for something more than the mundane concept of marriage, he says 'I should not feel — or rather my Happiness would not be so fine, as my Solitude is sublime', the ultimate mind state that Romantic poets were looking for. And he found sublimity 'welcome me home' when '—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', in the actions related with element of Nature and the contemplation of these. He characterizes the wind as a woman and the stars as his children, natural concepts that he transfigures as home due to the high status that Nature possessed for Romantics, and how this provided them with the nostalgia of the sublime in a rational world.

Then he, to be even more specific, adds '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', his words could not be clearer about women and the stereotypical vision that was predominant on that period, the capricious and immature creature.

4. Letter To George Keats, March 19, 1819.

The case of this letter is special because even though, there is no direct allusion or connection to the feminine as the use of pronouns such as she or her, the female figure is present because of the intertextuality of the concepts with the work "Ode on Indolence". It was obvious that while Keats wrote this letter he had been thinking about the ode. First he states his mood 'This morning I am in a sort of temper, indolent and supremely careless',

hinting his temporary disposition to other kind of distractions that will appear later. His mind and soul plagued with passion as tempestuous as the emotions of an animal had been 'weakened...to a delightful sensation', 'asleep from my having slumbered till nearly eleven', and then the female figures appears but we are only are of their feminine description once we read the ode, he says 'Neither, Poetry, nor Ambition, nor Love have any alertness of countenance as they pass by me ; they seem rather like figures on a Greek vase' where they resided in the ode as well, tempting him without and effort because in the ode at first it is the speaker the one that wants to follow and then get away from them. His current state,, because of indolence is 'happiness', and '[it] is a rare instance of the advantage of the body overpowering the Mind' as Keats seemed a man in constant journeys and visits to his friends and family.

5. Letter To Fanny Brawne. July 3, 1819.

Despite his aversion to women seen in the previous letter, months later he falls in love with his neighbor Fanny Brawne. Their story is famous because of the passion that Keats professed toward her in his letters and also the fact that they were never able to marry, first because of the disapproval of her family seeing him unstable financially, and secondly he died at a young age of 25 years under tuberculosis.

In this case, the female figure, now with a dearly face and name, meets the fictional desire for the sublime with the real woman. Fanny is the cause of his uncertainties, his previous distant attitudes when he spoke about women changed to an anxious and troubled soul that can be seen when he tells her 'Ask yourself my love whether you are not very cruel to have so entrammelled me, so destroyed my freedom', he is at her mercy in a submissive position. The hysteria, supposedly characteristic of the weak women of those times, was taking control of the fragile state of the poet when he demands her to clarify the situation, whether she loves him as well 'Will you confess this in the Letter you must write immediately and do all you can to console me in'. She has the power to his troubled soul.

6. Letter to Fanny Brawne. July 8, 1819.

Now they reciprocated their feelings, and his are more intense than never and that is what he expresses in this letter. He constantly repeats in his letter addressed to her that he loves her for her Beauty and tenderness. She is a symbol of Beauty for him mixed with the



positive feminine of kindness but this Beauty seems sensual and it can be seen when he says that 'if you will fully love me, though there may be some fire, 't will not be more than we can bear when moistened and bedewed with Pleasures' implying the sexual act will tampered the burning desire that, at least, he has already reached in the relationship.

He has a fixation with her Beauty, it is so powerful that he cannot stop speaking about her and he is afraid she will use in other places but he will not suffer as long as the Pleasures of Love are fulfilled for both.

7. Letter to Fanny Brawne. July 15, 1819.

He talks about reading an oriental tale of a city with melancholic men. All of them are in this state because at some point they reached a garden similar to Paradise 'where they meet with a most enchanting Lady; and just as they are going to embrace her, she bids them shut their eyes — they shut them —and on opening their eyes again find themselves descending to the earth in a magic basket'. This charming woman was similar to Fanny in the eyes of Keats but the comfort in his case was that she was 'in the same world with [him]self'. He compares Fanny with a Lady from another world, from Paradise.

8. Letter To Fanny Brawne. July 27, 1819.

He is in the feverish state of love, he confessed to be her vassal since the first week they met, implying her superiority over him. He is self-conscious of his vehement profusion of love and ask her to imagine him 'on [his] knees' hurt for some words and in a praying position for his admiration for her Beauty.

She has a power in him to she 'absorb[s]' him 'in spite of himself' when he states 'I tremble at domestic cares but for you I would meet them', he is willing to lose himself in the Pleasure and Beauty of his lover.

The female figure carries natural elements when he says 'I will imagine you Venus tonight and pray, pray, pray, pray to your star like a Heaven', he is a religious and pagan man praying to a woman instead of a establish God. She is a Goddess and he is a faithful prayer.

9. Letter To Fanny Brawne. October 13, 1819.

The religious motif continues in his letters; he states 'I could be martyr'd for my Religion —Love is my religion — I could die for that. I could die for you. My Creed is Love and you are its only tenet' implying her powerful and undeniable force upon him, she is an external creature of this world, not a simple woman.

She might not be exactly a mythical creature but she possessed 'a Power' he 'cannot resist' and he continues 'yet I could resist till I saw you ; and even since I have seen you I have endeavoured often « to reason against the reasons of my Love.' but reasoning was for men stronger of mind, not a trembling lover like him.

10. Letter To Charles Armitage Brown. August, 1820.

A change on addressee gives other perspectives toward the female figure in Keats' life. Even though brief, he mentions to his friend the slow sell of his books, a constant in his life when he was never recognized for his literary talent but after he was dead. The reason he believes for the poor sell of his work is 'the offence the ladies take at me' because 'there is a tendency to class women in my books with roses and sweetmeats, —they never see themselves dominant' and he was seen as a chauvinist.

11. Letter To Charles Armitage Brown. September 28, 1820.

Keats had falling sick on February of the same year, and this disease was the one that killed him on February of 1821. In this letter he writes about his 'state at the present in which woman merely as woman can have no more power over [him] than stocks and stones' continuing with his disdain toward women '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', making the difference between the love of his life, powerful and unbreakable and his sister whom he 'seldom think of her'.

Moreover, everything surrounding Fanny seems overwhelming, the 'overflow of feelings' necessary for Romantic poets does not longer come from Nature by itself, but with the connection that he provides with the female figure. He cannot bear 'The thought of leaving Miss Brawne' for his love gave him life, but he is dying and there is a 'sense of darkness coming over [him]' and even though death gives the ephemeral sense of time and

uncertainty he ‘eternally see her figure eternally vanishing’ out of his mind and soul, making him suffer for the loss of this woman.

12. Letter To Charles Armitage Brown. November 1, 1820.

He writes his friend to express his sorrow for the impending death, not for himself but for not seeing Fanny ever again. Death for the illness is just one push for the real suffering as he expresses ‘The persuasion that I shall see her no more will kill me’ conveying the importance of her presence upon his own death and repeating it in ‘I can bear to die—I cannot bear to leave her’.

He would not write to her because could not stand to see her handwriting or the name in it. He died from the illness that had taken away his brother as well, and never gained the fame he deserved or got years later. Now he is a representative poet of the Romantic sensibility and his works are studied for students and academics.

## Ambivalence of the female figure

At the beginning, his writing in “Woman! when I behold thee flippant, vain” showed the female figure as ‘childish and immature’, and from that statement came a certain hatred toward women in his years of writing in 1815 or 1816 but this idea continued prevalent even till October 1818 when he wrote his brother his idea of not marrying with the concept of a woman, even if she was the most beautiful creature and she was included with a marvelous house; at that moment he was married with Nature and the fulfilling sentiment of the sublime, that was happiness to him. Later on, he clarifies vehemently his idea of unworthy women as children; this reason gave more power to his love for Poetry and nothing more.

Despite his disdain for the childish woman, there was an attraction toward the physical appearance of the Lady, when she was quiet and submissive in the second part of the poem. This admiration for the mystery of an attractive woman followed to real life when he mentions the presence of Jane Cox in his letter of September of 1818. He compared her to Charmian and a Leopardess, a dangerous Beauty but he was not romantically attracted to her; he felt the same kind of admiration for Jane as the speaker in the poem, an attraction for her Beauty, but the difference was in the fact that “Woman!”’s attractiveness was in her innocence hidden in her soft manner that appeared at times, and Jane’s was in her mysterious and seductive features. Jane was hated by her pairs according to Keats in his letters due to her flirtatious ways, her attitudes can qualify as negative feminine and for that reason Keats did not consider her in an ethereal way but a wordly one as he stated the difference in letters analyzed before, nevertheless, she inspired him to write Poetry and came out of a strange and sorrowful state in which he was before.

The speaker in “Woman!” is desiring to become the knight of his Lady to profess the intense love that made him weak, this weakness was associated with females in real life and condemned in them, but in the speaker, the masculine Romantic, is was allowed and encouraged because that state of feverish desire was accompanied with feelings and emotions to be processed in the form of a poem.

The following poem in the analysis, “Devon Maid”, has a turn in the sense of the associations related to the Maid. Her figure is built in base of the natural landscape with reminiscence of a rural area with green grass, hills and valleys in the middle of spring. The sublime is achieved through the delicate feminine features of the woman; her fairy nature helps the speaker to admire her beauty in a sexual perspective as it was seen in the analysis of that poem. The sublime in the fictional character was reached at the moment of

contemplation of the speaker and later, it was achieved at the moment of appreciation of the Beauty of Fanny Brawne, his love. The intensity of his desire and love was mixed in the admiration for this woman that was as present as distant due to their circumstances.

The young and free love portrayed in “Devon Maid” was not a reality for the author until months later; and this charming woman with nature as her model was recalled when Fanny reminded him of an enchanting Lady from Paradise in the oriental tale in the letter of July 15th, 1819. She was in a garden meeting the men, and the “Maid” was as a garden meeting his eyes and desires.

Fanny did not have a hysterical character not the “Devon Maid” or the Lady from the garden, but the speaker and author, John Keats, with his sensual and pleasures trying to emerge due to the Beauty of the female figure. These features were accepted in the male poet as long as they produced poetry but, in this case, they go beyond the fiction to real life, all due to Fanny Brawne and the overwhelming love of Keats.

The third poem, “Sharing Eve’s Apple” where the female figure conveys the pure and the sin, can be a premise of the female in the first two letter of Keats. The woman is not appreciated because of her mind, or her ideas but because of the physical or carnal response from the masculine poet, he is transformed in a superficial men diminishing the psyche of the female figures. The speaker in the poem finds joy in the cynical innocence of the woman that produces sensual temptation from him, to bite the forbidden fruit, for ‘maidenheads’ to be lost while both fall in the sin.

In “Ode on Indolence” written in March 1819, the speaker identifies his mind with three different female figures Love, Ambition and Poesy, all of them present in the author’s life through his struggling career. Poesy was his “demon” in the sense that it always seduces him to dedicate his life to it, even though he was not successful or appreciated by his colleagues. Love, at that moment, was not present therefore the question ‘what is it’ and ‘where is it’, months later it was going to appear in the form of Fanny. Her Beauty was love as he stated in his letter of July 8th of 1819, and as time passed by, he noticed his love was everywhere and in everything.

He builds his mind, forms an structure based on the feminine figures despite his fight against them to not fall on Indolence. He tries to shush them, and stay away from them in the second part of the ode; the feminine is not welcomed or seek as it was at the beginning. It was his disdain for women talking, his rejection of the feminine in his consciousness but even after leaving, they keep haunting him in the form of ghosts and shadows during day and night.

Following the same lines, he keeps rejecting the feminine as it can be seen in the last stanza, he says he 'would not be dieted with praise, /A pet-lamb in a sentimental farce' forced to a submissive state for these three figures. The female figures with feminine characteristics had no clear positive or negative connotations per se but their woman-like form repelled the speaker to as he still seemed apathetic toward women.

Keats in the letter referring intertextually to this ode is content with the laziness of the moment, the absence of the female figures in his mind, staying static in the Grecian Urn, leaves him at ease. The ambiguity of the situation does not attack yet to Keats, but it had reached the speaker in the Ode. And in both cases, Keats and the speaker, the feminine is rejected because they produce another feminine response which is hysteria for the overwhelming amount of emotions. That are only well received after a moment of solitude and then to the production of the artefact called ode in this case.

The fifth poem called more attention to this analysis because of the topic, which was "On Fame" and his continuation "Another on Fame", and just by the title is possible to considering the lack of fame of the writer among the literary circle and an identification with the poem from part of Keats.

Fame is a mischievous and elusive mythical creature with feminine characteristics that escapes out and faraway of the hands of poets and artists, it is ideal to include John Keats himself. "On Fame" gives us the description of a mythical and enchanting female figure, she is a 'rose, 'nymph', 'gypsy', 'jilt', 'coy', and 'wayward'. She is an extremely negative feminine creature that lures men as Keats who desire to live on their art, men that seem weak and trembling in front of her, full of regret because 'they cannot look upon [their] mortal days with temperate blood' as it was analyzed in the previous section.

However, always desirable she does not maintain the same form or shape, the immortal creature changes several times during both the poems increasing the volatile nature of the figure as well as fame, that one day is splendidous for the artists and the next one leaves them alone. But that moment of acknowledgment is so valuable for the creators that they consistently look for it again.

Nevertheless, she escapes unless the 'lovesick Bards' and 'Artists lovelorn' learn how to survive without her, say goodbye. An artist has to work for art itself not for others, and in that moment of sublimity for their work, Fame might follow.

Now, this creature can be recognized in the way Keats depicts Fanny and his fervency for her love. In the letters from July 7th, 1819 and October 13th, 1819 she is portrayed as a 'Goddess in Heaven', 'Venus', 'star' and again 'religion'. She changes and is many things at

the same time due to the emotions flowing from Keats based on love, he is a 'lovesick Bards' and 'artists lovelorn', begging for Fanny's attention. On the first letter, Keats says 'I know I wrote myself your vassal' giving her a great power upon his person and mind, also he continues expressing his uncertainties for his vehement feelings and if they are too much 'fancy me on my knees' humiliating himself once more to be worthy of her love, the same as Fame and the artists. In this case, Keats embraces the negative feminine in him, the submission and uncontrollable emotions that she produces, but it not a conscious decision, he omits the acceptance and just do it; there is no negation of the negative as in his previous poems and odes, in real life he let them be.

On Fame dated on April, 1819, he questions the character of the men in the lines 'why should man, teasing the world for grace,/Spoil his salvation for a fierce miscreed?', judging their intentions of fame that they put above the grace of the world, asking it from a pagan figure. But in his letter to Fanny dated on October 13th of the same year, he directly calls Fanny his religion and his willingness to die as a martyr for her. He says 'My Creed is Love' taking a pagan vision of what religion is ruled by omniscient Gods, not by a mortal woman. The ardour of his emotions made him to change his disdain for women.

Onwards, the female figure in this letters is mainly depicted to show the love for Fanny, and when other women are addressed is with total indifference from his part, as it is possible to see in a letter to his friend Brown when he talks about his book and the low sell of them. Apparently it is because women in his poems, odes and tragedies are quiet as 'roses and sweetmeats' and not dominants, but he does not say more about it, on how women are children or unattractive. Perhaps Fame was no longer needed but Fanny was a vital part of his life.

The last work is his last sonnet and due to the context of his life at that moment on of the most personal and emotional. "Bright Star" was written in October of 1820, 4 months before dying of tuberculosis, away from his beloved Fanny.

In this case the feminine is subtle in words but strong in feelings. As it was seen before in the analysis of the sonnet that begins with the star has an unreachable and solitary creature, that the speaker wishes to imitate, eternal and produces nostalgia for the impossible immortality for the speaker. But this lonely life is unwanted if it is not shared with his 'fair love's ripening breasts' listening 'soft fall and swell' and sweet mannerisms, as it was analyzed all words conveyed kindness and purity from her to live an eternal and sweet companionship. The female figures changes to not a so passionate product of emotions as in previous literary works of Keats, but it is a pure form of innocent love.

Her presence during the eternity is all what he needs from her, this ultimate commitment can be seen as well in the last letters of Keats to friends. He suffers from his diseases but more because of his inability to see Fanny in his last days; he had to leave to Rome looking for a relief from tuberculosis but he was alienated just as the bright star. In the last two letters analyzed he claims how Fanny is everything that he sees, vividly with just his imagination and vanishing from his side. The female figure is an escapist but not because of her own or his faults but circumstances of destiny; it is a story of 'a pair of star-cross'd lovers...whose misadventured piteous overthrows' (Romeo and Juliet Prologue, 6-7) unlucky the life of John Keats and his love for Fanny Brawne.



## Conclusion

The female figure, as it can be seen through the analysis, is an unsteady concept to defined in the work of John Keats. The feminine at first is divided in the positive and negative connotations and the author tries to remain faithful to his own gender and be a masculine romantic, to condemn wrong behaviour in his letters but use it as a tool to keep moving the plot in his poems. Later on, when he falls in love and grows old, his childish perspective of women changes, and it is possible to see from 1819 to the end, that the feminine is a more mature temptation and more mythical for him to be able to express the sensual emotions that the opposite gender produces on him, even if they were abstract concepts.

The ambiguity works in the feminine in a changeable path through his poems, odes and sonnet, specifically the ones analyzed in this thesis. This feature can be translated in his letters, therefore in his daily life and the struggle with women and the effeminacy in his own identity where a Romantic poet had to have a high sensibility to the events surrounding him to produce a self-sufficient and stable work. This kind of sensibility was a problem to develop when modernity and the Enlightenment were taking control of society in every aspect.

It was possible to prove, until a certain point, that the author's configuration of the feminine in his works was acknowledge in his letters, where the depiction of the female figure was pretty similar. To reach that goal, two seemingly incompatible literary theories were applied and there was closeness to the personal life of Keats conveyed in biographies and bibliographies.

Concerning this, John Keats was a misunderstood poet while he was alive, but his posthumous acknowledgment put him at the same level those grand poets of his times.

Despite the centrality of this work in the feminine, it can be suggested to follow the same pattern of analysis to other concepts in Keats' literary creation; death seems a worthy topic to study due to the fact that several acquaintances and familiar died during his diminished life.

It is recommendable to expand this mixed analysis to see how poetry can modified our own point of view in life regarding every aspect of it; there should be studies conducted to other writers who created letters and poems as well.

Nevertheless, it is not possible to give an ultimate statement about John Keats concept of the feminine with just a selection of work, the ideal is to revise all his bibliography and

analyze every female figure present in it. This study intended to give a thoroughly account within its limitations.

Future research is suggested to create a literary theory that does not separate the close reading method and the analysis of the biographical spaces to convey together an interpretation of different concepts because, as it was possible to see, even the faithful Romantics were affected and produced art that was inspired from personal experience.

Poetry is not just aesthetically pleasant but also can move feelings and emotions, it can offer solace to solitary and troubled souls as the same of John Keats. He molded words and use them to reflect life or to help the reader to see beyond reality unconsciously or not, due to the fact that poetry, as all form of literature, opens doors to worlds where the sensible poet guides the audience and tells them: look!, where you have not look before.

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