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# KEATS AND SHELLEY: A PURSUIT TOWARDS PROGRESSIVISM

SERENAH MINASIAN

58 Pages

An analyzation of the poems, letters, and works of John Keats and Percy Bysshe Shelley from a perspective focusing on the history of sexuality, breaking gender binaries, and pushing towards progressivism. This thesis proves how John Keats is both an effeminate man who displays exemplary ways of breaking gender expectations but also a man who possess misogynistic tendencies. Also, this thesis analyzes Percy Shelley's use of gender expectations and how he breaks them with the use of his characters. Studying these two British Romantics shows how these two cisgender, straight, white men provide an ability to push back on their time period's beliefs and impact the writing to come.

**KEYWORDS:** Keats, Shelley, Romanticism, gender, sexuality, feminisms, queer

KEATS AND SHELLEY: A PURSUIT TOWARDS PROGRESSIVISM

SERENAH MINASIAN

A Thesis Submitted in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

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KEATS AND SHELLEY: A PURSUIT TOWARDS PROGRESSIVISM

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## CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	i
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER I: JOHN KEATS: FEMININE MAN	7
CHAPTER II: PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY: ANDROGYNOUS CHARACTER	29
CHAPTER III: KEATS AND SHELLEY'S LEGACY	49
REFERENCES	56

## INTRODUCTION

Although John Keats and Percy Bysshe Shelley are two of the most famous white canonical poets of the Romantic period, in a variety of ways they used their writings to push back against normative cultural assumptions. In this thesis, I look specifically at how in their writings they cross gender binary expectations, explore gender and sexuality, and attempt to dismantle patriarchal reign. Both Keats and Shelley were straight white men who provide an ability to see the push back that they had on their time period and the writings to come.

Looking back to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries shows that there have been many changes in the hundreds of years that led up to contemporary times. To properly analyze and discuss eighteenth and nineteenth-century British society, we must erase contemporary views and focus only on the occurrences of that time. Tiffiny Wolf in, “Women’s Place in Society during the Romantic Era,” describes the social and political environment surrounding gender roles and expectations of men and women. In the late 1700s to mid 1800s, the Romantic period, the roles and expectations of British men and women were divided into a binary. Upper, middle, and elite white societies within Britain were divided along binary gender roles. For example, white men were expected to be successful while white women’s primary vocation was seen as marriage, motherhood, and reproduction of the white nation. N. Yuval-Davis and F. Anthias describe the gender expectations placed on British white women, “at certain periods white British women have been actively encouraged to reproduce for the nation” (16). As white women were encouraged to be mothers, this was not true in the same way for Black women. Black people of the period were positioned by white people primarily as enslaved labor in ways that their upper-class counterparts were not. Historically in Britain white men of the upper classes received the full benefits of privilege with white upper-class women being considered



inferior, though racial superior to people of color and the working classes. Further, categories of ethnicity also functioned to racialize even some white people: “For late eighteenth-century British women writers, ‘race’ was not reduced to polaric simplicities such as black and white; in their texts it was signified by ethical commentaries on black, French, Irish and Jewish ethnicity” (Wright 3). Such understandings of race during the Romantic period may be a reason behind the prominent gender binary.

As feminist work on the eighteenth century has long noted, white cultures of authorship were not only racist but also sexist, such that men were allowed to be themselves while women were often anonymized, stereotyped, dismissed, and “circumscribed by eighteenth century patriarchal relations as they waged ideological battles on the nature of women, and the social, political and economic world” (Wright 1). Men had the ability to write about any topic they wished. Although women had the ability to write about many different topics, they were often stuck writing about how they were oppressed in the patriarchal society and often times did so under an anonymized name of the opposite sex. Men had more freedom in their writing, but women writers did gain attention in the Romantic period eventually.

Wolf notes that the period was a time of significant cultural change around gender, and that many women writers did engage in debates about these changes:

[S]ociety began debating the proper role of women; not only were male poets and writers writing about their views of women’s changing role, but women were also increasingly prolific writers, writing about their own thoughts and experiences on the topic. Using language that was easy to understand, these women used their experiences to, in many cases, advocate for more egalitarian treatment from both men as individuals as well as society at large. (Wolf 1)

Women were finally having their voices heard through the writing of their literature. It is made evident that in the Romantic period, Britain had a divide between men and women because men were deemed superior in society solely due to their gender proving that it was patriarchal, they were seen as more capable and possessed more power in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in opposition to women.

In the Romantic era, men and women were cast into a binary. Men were more likely to succeed socially and catch public attention and gratitude because in a patriarchal society, men supported other men's works. Gender expectations were that: men perform as masculine (hardworking, providing, controlling) and women perform as feminine (maternal, submissive, controlled). These gender roles could be broken but there were certain consequences cast upon an individual who broke or crossed beyond assigned gendered roles. Effeminacy in this period, occurred when a man possessed characteristics that broadcasted femininity and excessive heterosexual desire towards women. Men and women were expected to perform within the gender identity they presented as: those white women assigned female at birth were to be feminine, and those male at birth were to be masculine. Upper, middle, lower, and elite class women were said to not have sexual desires and were usually expected to marry at a young age. Men worked and provided for their families while women served to complete basic household duties and educate the children. Men were given more freedom, women were unable to vote, and patriarchal reign was present. The upper, middle, and elite white men controlled the British society and benefited most from gender roles and expectations. Yet, importantly, even white men who gained the most from sexist gender roles were often curtailed through gendered expectations related to love, success, and presentation, such as I will discuss with John Keats and Percy Bysshe Shelley.

When exploring the word “effeminate” or “effeminacy” in both contemporary times and in past times it is important to grasp the understanding that the definitions of these terms have dramatically changed and almost swapped meanings completely. To call Keats an “effeminate” in the nineteenth century does not necessarily carry with it an association with homosexuality. As David Halperin explains, “[e]ffeminacy has not always implied homosexuality...Effeminacy has traditionally functioned as a marker of heterosexual excess in men” (266-267). This eighteenth- and nineteenth-century definition of effeminacy is how Keats and his works should first be analyzed. Halperin’s notion of effeminacy maps onto many aspects of Keats’s life and work: he was an effeminate man and that effeminacy showed additionally through his heterosexual excess. Through the use of Halperin’s approach to the history of sexuality, it is important to view the term, effeminacy, as it was defined as in the nineteenth century, which is essentially a man who possessed feminine characteristics but not in a way linked to homosexual desire. Keats, as an author—both in his poetry as well as in his love letters— shows this “heterosexual excess” by being very passionate, admiring and enamored with Fanny Brawne, all of which would have been deemed as signs of effeminacy. Being effeminate did not mean he was necessarily homosexual, but it was still not necessarily deemed as the “normal” or “proper” way of being according to stringent gender norms of the time.

Similarly to Keats, Percy Bysshe Shelley was a radical, outspoken writer during the Romantic Period whose life was also cut short. As Bruce Woodcock writes, “Shelley had a keen understanding that, like oppression, freedom is indivisible” (Woodcock VIII). Shelley’s bold attitude affected his desire to push towards equality for all. For Shelley, his poetry is made in an effort to push towards social improvement (Woodcock LIII), and his effort to break gender binaries for elite, upper, and middle class men and women was part of his push towards a radical

pursuit of freedom. Shelley's writing was frequently controversial and deemed socially dangerous and unacceptable (a form of judgment exemplified by Shelley's expulsion from Oxford University for publishing and refusing to disavow a pamphlet defending atheism). Shelley was unable to keep his thoughts and feelings to himself whether that be in relation to politics, religion, or other societal matters. Shelley's views and expression of his beliefs sometimes got him into trouble but that did not discourage him from his continuation to push towards progression and change.

In discussing gender, sexuality, and gender roles/expectations I argue that Keats and Shelley can be understood as breaking binary constructions of their time. Keats was a fluid figure that performed as a man who had an excess of heterosexuality but also possessed characteristics that one would see as feminine. Through the lens of the history of sexuality, Keats can be seen as a figure who does not remain stagnant but rather breaks binaries and crosses between characteristics by performing as a both/and figure. Along with Keats, Shelley provides readers with a new way to see issues of society that align with some feminist thoughts of his time through his writing of the play *The Cenci* and also by challenging typical roles of women and portraying his main character Beatrice as a masculine female character who is bound to receive justice for the patriarchally dominated circumstances she is in.

By engaging with the scholarship on Keats and Shelley I am reentering the scholarly conversation around both authors in regard to sexuality and gender. I explore how Keats proves to be a both/and figure that dismantles gender expectations and roles but also possesses some characteristics that align with misogyny. Additionally, I discuss how Shelley's use of a female character that breaks and crosses gender binaries proves that Shelley is attempting to break binaries in place but still has her fall victim to the patriarchal order in the play. Shelley's

progress is shown but his flaws are also shown due to allowing her to fall victim to patriarchal reign present in society. By engaging with the scholarship on Keats and Shelley I provide readers with an ability to see that Keats and Shelley both did things that benefit the breaking of binaries but also possessed problematic tendencies.

Within my analyzation, I will first, in Chapter 1, discuss Keats as an effeminate man. I do so by examining the language in his love letters to Fanny Brawne and through analysis of his shorter poems. In Chapter 2, I analyze Shelley's play *The Cenci* and the use of a masculine female character. Later in Chapter 3, I provide a compare and contrast section by viewing both Keats and Shelley, Shelley's work "Adonais," and their letters to one another. Finally, I provide a conclusion that sums up my work and tells readers what we must do to seek further progress. My thesis demonstrates the pros and cons regarding both Keats and Shelley and proves that they were doing good things to seek progression but also were flawed.

## CHAPTER I: JOHN KEATS: FEMININE MAN

Keats lived a short life, dying at the age of 25 from tuberculosis (Hancock 220), but despite his early death, Keats was able to show his readers in his brief writing career that it is okay to act outside of binary gender expectations and roles, and perhaps helped to slightly shift these cultural expectations. Many decades after his death, Keats continued to spur debate about gender and identity through his posthumous reception. After the unwanted publication of Keats's love letters to Fanny Brawne in 1878, Keats was again, just as he had been with the initial reception of his poetry, viewed by his critics as an effeminate male. Keats received criticism regarding his effeminacy throughout his entire life, and therefore the publication of the letters added to an already existing strain of the discourse. David Halperin describes effeminacy in the nineteenth century by writing that, "[e]ffeminacy has not always implied homosexuality ... Effeminacy has traditionally functioned as a marker of heterosexual excess in men" (Halperin 266-267). Drawing on Halperin, effeminacy has been historically ascribed to heterosexual cisgender men who demonstrate an excess of heterosexuality. Effeminacy during the Romantic period was cast onto a man who was excessively expressing his heterosexual love with emotions and deep displays of feelings. When done in excess of what was considered the norm in white upper- and middle-class circles, writing excessive love letters, expressing emotion, and being sentimental towards a woman could lead to a man being deemed effeminate. Effeminacy was a term used in Keats's time to depict a male that behaved in a sappy, emotional way towards a woman or women. Therefore, Keats embodied an excess of heterosexuality due to his effeminate nature. In this sense, he is a fluid figure that performs as a man who had an excess of heterosexuality but also possessed characteristics that one would see as feminine. By the use of both historical and queer feminist lenses, Keats can be seen as a figure who does not remain

stagnant but rather breaks binaries and crosses between characteristics by performing as a both/and figure.

There has been much work on Romanticism, gender, and feminism in the past few decades. Scholars such as Margaret Homans, Katherine Singer, Rachel Schulkins, Anne Mellor, and Lee Michael-Berger have opened up the conversation of Romanticism alongside issues of gender and feminism specifically with respect to Keats. Keats received a tremendous amount of literary criticism for his effeminacy but that did not stop him from performing as an effeminate man as he continued in his career. Keats had written several poems at the end of his writing career to Fanny Brawne or about his love for her, although they were not published until 1848, decades after his death. By viewing both his letters to Fanny Brawne, the conversation around the letters, and his poetry I will be arguing that with the help of both queer and feminist theories Keats is now able to be seen as both a man who broke gender binaries and somewhat aligned with elements of feminist theories but also was a man who sometimes had misogynistic tendencies. Keatsian love poems and his letters show him to be an effeminate man who embodies an excess of heterosexuality due to his inability to hold back his love for Brawne.

Despite being an openly heterosexual man, Keats still faced identity backlash and gender policing such as in “A Note on John Keats,” an essay by Arthur Symons written for *The John Keats Memorial Volume in 1921*. Symon’s work provides an illustration of how people viewed Keats in terms of gender by saying that, “Keats had something feminine and twisted in his mind, made up out of unhealthy nerves” (Symons 180). Symons claims that Keats’s mind was somewhat feminine, and, in that case, it was twisted in an abnormal manner, directing us to the ways in which Keats, while heterosexual, did not perform heterosexuality correctly according to the norms of the period, whiteness, and social class he was in. Symons’s commentary deems him

to be misogynistic. Symons classifies Keats as having something twisted in his mind because his mind was more feminine than other men. By being an effeminate man, Keats was seen as abnormal, unhealthy, and was insulted, ultimately demonstrating the centrality of gender and sexual policing that even affluent, accomplished white men faced. Keats was tantalized by critics such as Symons but that did not stop him from being an effeminate man and writing his “twisted” poems.

Straying away from the nineteenth-century for a moment and viewing Keats in modern times we could link the gender policing he was confronted with to the term “femmephobia.”

Rhea Ashley Hoskin writes that:

Ascribed femmephobia is embedded into daily lives through language, ideology, discourse, and processes of gendering... the words “emasculate” and “effeminate” connote a hierarchical placing of masculinity above femininity, whereby masculinity descends into the realm of femininity with implications for one’s power, dignity, sense of self, and social standing. Notably, there is no equivalent masculinized concept... It is a process of gendering, which denotes inferiority by making use of the subordinated status of femininity... Practices of feminization are used in a myriad of ways: to insult, humiliate, disempower, or even justify violence and subordination. These practices demonstrate how feminine signifiers are understood as innately inferior and those who adorn them are conceptually demoted. (102)

Hoskin’s explanation helps to show that as an effeminate man Keats is considered socially superior to a woman, but socially humiliated by his possession of feminine traits. It is ironic that effeminacy in men in Keats’s time was criticized because even if a man was an effeminate man, they were still abiding by the patriarchal order. An effeminate man would be an elimination of a



woman withholding femininity and instead be a man possessing femininity, which would deem masculinity to be superior which is what a patriarchy abides by. Femmephobia proves to be present in the criticism Keats received due to the fear of a male acting in a feminine manner. Femininity is deemed as inferior in relation to masculinity. Keats's critics would have had innate assumptions about femininity as inferior that were learned through socialization and supported through a patriarchal social system, and they used effeminacy as an insult to undermine Keats's masculinity and literary value in misogynist ways. Critics who had issues with Keats being an effeminate man, can be seen as misogynists due to the disapproval of a man who has feminine characteristics and the assumptions around the inferiority of femininity. I thus understand Keats as both a challenge to proper nineteenth-century masculinity and also a portrayal of fluid modern masculinity.

Through my analysis of Keats, I will provide a brief overview of how he is a challenge to nineteenth-century masculinity. In this chapter I look at several late poems written by Keats to/for his fiancée Fanny Brawne. Keats's sonnet "Bright star, would I were steadfast as thou art" describes his feelings towards his beloved Fanny, the woman to whom Keats had been engaged and who was the love of his life and his muse. It is unclear how Keats felt about these works being published but he was forced publicly to tell the world what their love meant to him due to the publication of the poems after his death. Another work of his, titled "To Fanny," explicitly outlines that Keats is again unafraid to publicly display his love toward Fanny and how strongly he feels towards her. He makes this so direct by even providing the poem with the title "To Fanny." Keats does not hesitate to continue writing about their love and does so in his poem, "The day is gone, and all its sweets are gone!" This poem depicts an individual who is madly in love, who is only able to sleep knowing that their lover is okay. He does not hesitate to make it

clear that his well-being and sanity depends on whether his beloved is well. Keats proves himself as an effeminate man again in his poem “I cry your mercy-pity-love! -aye, love!” through his expressing that he is desperate for their love. He makes it clear that he would give anything and everything for the love they possess which is also on display of effeminacy in his poem, “This living hand, now warm and capable.” The final poem encapsulating Keats’s effeminacy that I examine in this chapter is “What do I do to drive away,” in which he gets emotional regarding love. Keats’s circle of friends describes him as “a one-dimensional gendered interpretation, by critics and fans alike, of Keats as delicate, overemotional, and effeminate” (Kimberly 6). Keats had several homosocial bonds with his male friends, but above all he had Brawne at the top of his priority list. In all of these short poems, Keats is admitting that he is head over heels for Fanny and that he is willing to express that. These poems fit within my argument of Keats to be an effeminate man because they show his obsession with his heterosexual lover and how he excessively expresses his feelings for her by being overemotional.

Another important part of Keats’s posthumous reception revolved around the reception of his letters to Fanny Brawne, first published in 1878. During and after his life, Keats received a lot of criticism by contemporary scholars for the way in which he wrote his works and for being an effeminate man. Matthew Arnold writes of Keats’s correspondence with Fanny Brawne, claiming that “The sensuous man speaks in it, and the sensuous man of a badly bred and badly trained sort” (90). Arnold is depicting Keats as a man who was not raised in the “proper” way, instead giving Keats a class- based judgement and casting him as an improper man because he is too emotionally concerned with women. By viewing the conversation around “The Letters” as well as some of his works it is clear to see that Keats is a man that is both an effeminate and who

exhibits an excess of heterosexuality, as fits with Halperin's characterization of "effeminacy" in earlier eras.

The conversation around Keats's love letters to Fanny Brawne, detail the effeminate characteristics that Keats had possessed. These love letters were published by a bibliographer named Harry Buxton Forman in 1878. They sparked scholarly conversation and literary criticism about whether Keats rejected conservative gender principles that framed the literature of his male peer group or if Keats demonstrated less-than-progressive gender stances. In order to be open to new understandings of Keats, I take an approach that consciously brackets out academic preconceptions and assumptions of Keats as either "effeminate" or "misogynist" and view him as both. Viewing Keats as an effeminate is done widely throughout Matthew Arnold's Victorian reception of Keats. To provide a look at Keats being both an effeminate and a misogynist, Margaret Homans describes Keats's writing and his expressive mannerisms towards women. Homans writes, "As Keats's motive for treating women and especially lady readers as he does, I have stressed his resentment of their real and imagined power over him and his compensatory wish to assert his own masculine authority" (368). Both Arnold and Homans depict Keats in different ways, creating yet another binary. Informed by these debates, in this thesis I view him from the position of Halperin's queer historical discussion, which seeks to dismantle such binaries by proving an individual to be a both/and figure. The purpose of my research is to clarify how this love-letter publication scandal, which led to a debate about Keats's gender ideologies, is much more complicated than many academic analyses would have us to believe. Most prior investigations of Keats's correspondence with Fanny Brawne adhere to purely dualistic labels. My goal is to queer the publications and conversations around *Letters of John Keats to Fanny Brawne*, which shaped much of Keats's posthumous reputation. These letters

could be read in a way that complicates the Victorian readers' and contemporary scholars' tendency to view Keats's writing about women as a purely binary question: one in which Keats is either a sexist and a misogynist, or he is an effeminate and unconventional man who wholly destabilizes gender stereotypes. Rather than "either/or," Halperin's writing on queer histories works with the logics of "both/and" or "neither/nor" thinking, more in the spirit of my Keatsian analysis.

In the 1878 British periodical *The Academy*, Edmund Gosse writes of the publication of Keats's letters and discusses the poet's friendships and romantic relationship alongside the discussion of the love letter publication scandal and Keats's rapidly declining health. Many scholars use the same verbiage in relation to Keats's romantic relationship with Brawne and his solely homosocial, platonic relationships with other men, which causes potential social confusion but can be made more transparent with the use of queer historical analysis. Queer historical analysis aids contemporary readers to realize that terminology changes and that what something was once defined as does not mean it remains unchanging in definition (Halperin 266-267). It is also important to consider the era in which the matter is being discussed, in this case, nineteenth-century London, which means that postmodern mindsets have not yet been developed. As a historian of sexuality, David Halperin, helps to show these evolving changes in "How to do the History of Male Homosexuality." Halperin discusses male-male friendship and emphasizes male-male non-intimate friendships were very common and not understood through the framework of homosexuality or gay identity at the time. Halperin writes: "True friends have a single mind, a single heart in two bodies ... The language used to convey such passionate male unions often appears to modern sensibilities suspiciously overheated, if not downright erotic" (271). As Halperin points out, the language used in the past, in this case the nineteenth-century,

can be seen as resonant with gay identity to contemporary readers, even when it was not always so. Further, drawing on Michael Foucault's *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, both heterosexual and homosexual identity categories were not in use until later in the nineteenth century, meaning that even sexual behavior between men would not have been understood in Keats's time as "gayness" per se, let alone romantic and close friendships between men. Rather, seeing same-sex intimate friendships as evidence of gay identity involves an ahistorical projection of contemporary definitions and understandings. While it is impossible to fully determine, Keats and his male peers can be seen as simply having a very close, compassionate, and loving friendship that were not necessarily gay, sexual, or romantic. Keats's excess of heterosexuality is ultimately what can be seen within his friendships: at the center of his friendships was often a motive, which was his relationship with Brawne. He often was organizing a team to care for her once he had passed away. When it came to Brawne, Keats was overemotional, caring, and always making sure she was taken care of which is problematic due to his misogynistic tendencies shown when he is overly controlling and jealous.

Another example of a similar notion of a platonic friendship is found within "The Academy," when Gosse writes: "Keats never did actually sever the bond of affection between himself and Brown ... writing most affectionately to Brown from off the Isle of Wight, he commends Miss Brawne to Brown's care and affection" (112). The man referred to as "Brown" is Charles Armitage Brown, a very close friend of Keats whom Keats feels will take care of Brawne after Keats passes away. Keats is again putting Brawne first which is showing his mild misogyny and not only care but also the belief in a patriarchal system where white middle and upper class women need to be protected and cared for by men. He is being a bit patronizing because he is trying to create a plan for her once he is gone, which proves that he acts as if she

needs him in order to be successful and survive without him but also shows that he cares about her as a person. Gosse writes of Brown and Keats as having a “bond of affection” which in the nineteenth-century would have been a typical homosocial friendship. As Jay Prosser writes in the article “Judith Butler: Queer Feminism, Transgender, and the Transubstantiation of Sex,” “the production of normative heterosexuality depended on a degree of male identification—and yet importantly, the disavowal of this identification—with women as the object of desire” (33). A homosocial bond as Prosser describes is exactly what can be seen as occurring between both Keats and Brown. Keats has decided that due to his poor health he wishes for Brown to care for and tend to his beloved Brawne. Again, Keats has placed Brawne at the center of his world, tending to her even in thought of his last days simply to make sure she will be taken care of. Keats’s possession of a homosocial relationship with a man in this case proves Prosser’s claim to be true because Brawne is the source of attention for this affectionate bond and help that Keats feels he can ask his dear friend for. Keats can be seen as a caring man due to his homosocial bond shared with Brown because he overall had the best interest for Brawne in mind and was doing what a good romantic partner should do, which is to care for their partner, but he was also performing in a patriarchal way that assumes she cannot care for herself. Keats’s enthusiastic display of affection, heterosexual excess, and love towards Brawne often casted feminine characteristics onto him that developed into beliefs that he possessed an effeminate persona.

An unknown writer in *Appleton’s Journal* writes of Keats in a degrading fashion regarding his display of effeminacy. One such instance reads: “Why, a boy might have told Keats that the way to woo and win a woman was not to bare his heart before her, as he did before Fanny Brawne, and not to let her know, as he did, that he was her captive” (381). The writer in *Appleton’s Journal* is making Keats’s presentation of love and admiration for Brawne out to be

something that should not have been done whether it was kept private or even published. The journal writer even deems this as a mistake that even a child could have warned Keats to not do. Keats is so heavily degraded by this writer that they even think that Keats's effeminacy is so horrid that a juvenile would have been able to perform in a better manner than him. This writer tarnishes Keats's name but does not provide any significant evidence for their accusations, which weakens this critique and claim. Keats's possession of nineteenth-century effeminacy was criticized due to the publication of his love letters because at this time the way that a male in a heterosexual relationship should have behaved was apparently not aligned with the persona and characteristics that Keats expressed.

Within the letters themselves, it is evident that Keats and Brawne shared a love that many would be envious of. The two lovers shared an emotional, sentimental love but also a sensual love that was written about between Keats and Brawne (and only a half-century later made public). Keats remained willing to express his love through his language and verbiage to Brawne. In a letter written by Keats to "My sweet girl," he uses affectionate language that indeed can be cast as effeminate. Keats writes: "You cannot conceive how I ache to be with you...I am in deep love with you" (18). He expresses his deepest affections to Brawne and makes sure she knows just how he feels. He aches to be with his beloved, which shows just how deeply he feels for her and how much she really means to him. Keats's language in this letter proves him to be an effeminate man due to the expression of heterosexual desire, love, and emotion towards the woman he is crazy about.

Keats's language in his letters to Fanny Brawne is elegant, charming, and full of love and admiration. In the earliest extant letter written to Brawne, from 1 July 1819, he does not hesitate to fill her and the page with love and emotion. Keats writes: "The morning is the only proper

time for me to write to a beautiful Girl whom I love so much” (3). In this sentence, Keats capitalizes the word “Girl,” emphasizing how highly he thought of Brawne. Usually in letters, an individual would capitalize the name of the recipient but not the gender of the recipient. Keats thought of Brawne in a way that is quite spectacular and admirable, he saw her as more than simply a girl but as one that is personal and stands out from the rest.

Throughout “The Letters,” Keats’s language changes and becomes a bit aggressive towards the love he possesses and longs for. In “Letter IX” to Brawne, he writes, “I could be martyr’d for my Religion- Love is my religion- I could die for that. I could die for you... My love is selfish. I cannot breathe without you” (41-42). He claims that love is his religion, therefore love seems to be the most important thing to him. He also asserts that he could die for love and die for his beloved. Keats’s language has shifted from an emotional praise to a need or necessity that he acts is necessary for happiness and life. To Keats, his love for Brawne was like the air he breathed; it was so crucial and important that he needed it to feel alive. At this time love was obviously present, but it was embarrassing for a man to write about his love and romance so openly and emotionally. Keats can be seen as an effeminate man for this very letter, in which he is not only emotional and loving but is excessive for the love he has and the love he longs for. Viewing Keats as a nineteenth-century effeminate man proves that Keats was a heterosexual man who was fluid in terms of gender roles and expectations due to him not performing as a nineteenth-century white man of his class in love with a woman would have been properly expected to.

Accusations of effeminacy were thrown at Keats not only after the publication of the letters to Fanny Brawne, but also during Keats’s writing career in response to his poems, long before anyone knew anything about his relationship with Brawne. There is an expansive amount



of Keatsian criticism that is not just around the publication of “The Letters” and an example of this criticism is in regard to his engagement in the “Cockney School of Poetry,” which was a group of poets in the Romantic period. The “Cockney School of Poetry,” faced several attacks by *Blackwood’s Magazine* and others on various individuals regarding issues of gender, class, and accusations of effeminacy. Emily De Montluzin explains the culture of this school and who it affected by writing:

The well-known attacks of *Blackwood’s Magazine* upon the so-called ‘Cockney School of Poetry’ the literary circle composed of Leigh Hunt, William Hazlitt, and Keats, with their satellites and affiliates, Barry Cornwall (B. W. Proctor), Cornelius Webb, and John Hamilton Reynolds-are frequently cited as evidence of the wit of the *Blackwood’s* staff, the venom of early-nineteenth-century periodical reviewing, or the difficulties the second-generation Romantics encountered on the road to acclaim. (87)

Keats’s engagement in being a part of the “Cockney School of Poetry,” was another blaspheme on his highly criticized name. The second generation of Romantics, of which Keats was a part, were often all criticized. The “cockney” label is a degradation of an individual by referring to them as a part of the lower class and having less education as compared with upper classes. Keats often was criticized for this as well as for being a physician early in his life. Being a physician in the nineteenth-century was a damper on Keats’s poetic name because at this time it was not highly regarded to practice medicine, and poetry was still largely regarded as properly the province of the leisured classes as opposed to middling professionals. In her article, “Killing the Cockneys: ‘Blackwood’s’ Weapons of Choice against Hunt, Hazlitt, and Keats,” De Montluzin describes how the group was classified as vermin: “What else could be expected from Hunt, Keats, Hazlitt, and company- ‘vermin, deserving to be altogether spat upon’” (100). The group of

poets were seen as nothing but social pretenders that deserved to be degraded. *Blackwood's Magazine* provides another view of how many critics saw Keats as less than other men of his time. Keats was not only criticized for his effeminacy and his excess of heterosexual desire, but the "Cockney School of Poetry" attacks are predicated upon, in part, his improper masculinity. John Gibson Lockhart describes Keats as "a still smaller poet, and he is only a boy of pretty abilities, which he has done every thing in his power to spoil" (6). Keats is compared to being only a boy due to his writing and the content he writes about and emasculated and perhaps even feminized with the "pretty abilities" phrase. Within his short life, Keats faced much negative critique but that did not stop him from being the poet he wished to be. Adding to the heavily criticized depiction of Keats are his shorter poems that he composed towards the end of his writing career.

In Keats's poem, "To Fanny" he puts no constraint on his demonstration of love and feelings towards Brawne. Keats's first exclamation of love is through the title, making it clear who the poem is dedicated to. Keats also confesses that Brawne is like his home and praises her and their shared love throughout the poem. In stanza two, Keats writes:

Ah! dearest love, sweet home of all my fears  
And hopes and joys and panting miseries,  
To-night, if I may guess, thy beauty wears  
A smile of such delight,  
As brilliant and as bright,  
As when with ravished, aching, vassal eyes,  
Lost in a soft amaze,  
I gaze, I gaze! (9-16)

Keats presents his love for her through these works but did not publish them during his lifetime. Despite the poems not being published until after his death, it ultimately seems as though he is only worried about Brawne and the love they share. He puts her above most things and does not let the outside world affect how he feels and expresses his feelings to her. In this poem, Keats displays an excess of feelings in phrases like “panting miseries,” “ravished, aching, vassal eyes.” Also, the repetition of gazing at the end of the poem portrays him to be almost in a trance of emotions. Keats does not worry about his critics; he instead proclaims his feelings and presents himself again as an effeminate man, and arguably in even more extreme fashion than in his earlier poetry.

Historically, in the nineteenth-century Keats would be deemed as an effeminate man due to his language usage and expression of feelings. Despite his critics, Keats did not stop doing the things that ranked him to be an effeminate man. In his poem, “I cry your mercy—pity—love!—aye, love!” he begins to describe himself in love. Keats writes:

I cry your mercy—pity—love—aye, love!  
Merciful love that tantalizes not,  
One-thoughted, never-wandering, guileless love,  
Unmasked, and being seen—without a blot!  
O! let me have thee whole, —all —all —be mine!  
That shape, that fairness, that sweet minor zest  
Of love, your kiss, those hands, those eyes divine,  
That warm, white, lucent, million-pleasured breast,  
Yourself— your soul— in pity give me all,  
Withhold no atom’s atom or I die

Or living on perhaps, your wretched thrall,  
Forget, in the mist of idle misery,  
Life's purposes, — the palate of my mind  
Losing its gust, and my ambition blind! (1-14)

Keats is crying out in this poem; he strays away from an emotional love that is desired and instead focuses on a physical lustful love. His proclamation of “all—all—be mine!” is an exclamation of wanting all of Brawne to be his entirely in a sexual manner. Keats also writes: “Unmasked, and being seen—without a blot!” which is entailing that he is seeing Brawne naked and is not ashamed of doing so. Also, it is proving that Brawne is pure and unblemished whether she is a virgin or not. Keats is proclaiming that he wants all of Brawne or else he will die; this is misogynistic in the sense that he acts as if he controls her and must have her such as one has an object. Keats reveals that their sexual relationship is as present as the emotional one described in the other poems, proving him to be both an effeminate man, misogynistic, and showing an excess of heterosexuality.

Thus far it is evident that Brawne can be seen as Keats's muse, as he writes countless letters and works to her. Another poem Keats wrote that engages in the theme of love is “Bright star, would I were stedfast as thou art.” Keats writes:

Bright star, would I were stedfast as thou art—  
Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night  
And watching, with eternal lids apart,  
Like nature's patient, sleepless Eremite,  
The moving waters at their priestlike task  
Of pure ablution round earth's human shores,

Or gazing on the new soft-fallen mask  
Of snow upon the mountains and the moors—  
No—yet still steadfast, still unchangeable,  
Pillow'd upon my fair love's ripening breast,  
To feel for ever its soft fall and swell,  
Awake for ever in a sweet unrest,  
Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,  
And so live ever—or else swoon to death. (1-14)

This sonnet is full of love and longing for one's beloved. Keats's effeminacy allows him to appeal to his beloved in a way that is incomparable to other works. In the final six lines of the poem, Keats describes Brawne's chest rising and falling as she is breathing and says that if this eternal love does not work, his only other option is to perish himself, and to perish in a collapse. To die in a swoon is a very conventionally unmasculine way to die; Keats presents himself as potentially dying of a broken heart which declares him to be excessively expressing his emotions of love towards his beloved. He is comparing a loss of love to death, showing the importance that love holds in his heart and thoughts. Keats's effeminacy allows him to share a love that is very personal to him with his readers in a way where they can feel it and imagine it line by line. Keats's possession of feminine characteristics makes him a unique poet because not many other poets of his time were doing this writing. He is not only an effeminate man but also one who possesses an excess of heterosexuality as is depicted in his romantic works.

Language within both Keats's love letters to Brawne and his poems to or about Brawne share a common verbiage. In the letters, he uses words and phrases such as: "my sweet girl," "my dear love," "how I ache to be with you," etc. In the letters the language is sentimental,

loving, and caring. Within the poems Keats uses words and phrases such as: “sweet love” in “To Fanny,” and “merciful love” in “I cry your mercy—pity—love!—aye, love.” The language used in both the letters and the poems are centered around romantic love. It is made obvious that Keats absolutely adores Brawne and is madly in love with her. His language in these works is archaic love language. Keats’s language use is not what a typical masculine man of his time would use; it is instead very feminine language because it is what binary gender expectations would deem as feminine, being very detailed and full of emotion. Language used by Keats clearly entails his effeminate qualities and how they were used in heterosexual excess in order to please, woo, and tell Brawne how he truly felt about her.

Keats’s poem, “The day is gone, and all its sweets are gone!” is likewise full of erotic, emotional, and romantic language. Keats’s heterosexuality is presented through this poem as he writes to his beloved Brawne:

The day is gone, and all its sweets are gone!  
Sweet voice, sweet lips, soft hand, and softer breast,  
Warm breath, light whisper, tender semi-tone,  
Bright eyes, accomplish’d shape, and lang’rous waist!  
Faded the flower and all its budded charms,  
Faded the sight of beauty from my eyes,  
Faded the shape of beauty from my arms,  
Faded the voice, warmth, whiteness, paradise—  
Vanish’d unseasonably at shut of eve,  
When the dusk holiday—or holineight  
Of fragrant-curtain’d love begins to weave

The woof of darkness thick, for hid delight,  
But, as I've read love's missal through to-day,  
He'll let me sleep, seeing I fast and pray. (1-14)

The "He" in the final line of the poem is in reference to love. The speaker is describing all of the beautiful assets of their beloved along with all of the joyous elements of love itself. The speaker knows that since they have possession of this one-of-a-kind love, they will be able to sleep at the end of the day. This is a romantic, lovely poem (if also clichéd) describing someone who is in love and knows that because of the love with their beloved they have the strength to sleep and be ready for another day. An excess of heterosexuality is present due to the descriptive, elegant, romantic, and sentimental language that a man, Keats, is presenting to a woman, Brawne.

Keats and Brawne shared a relationship that truly lasted until death did them part. To Keats it is evident that Brawne was his entire heart and he would always be there dreaming, longing, and waiting for her until his last day. Keats was criticized in a friendly fashion for his love by William Hazlitt, who also suffered from embarrassment stemming from love. Hazlitt describes Keats in relation to the seasons: "[h]is mind was redolent of spring. He had not the fierceness of summer, nor the richness of autumn, and winter he seemed not to have known, till he felt the icy hand of death!" (216). Hazlitt is discourteous to Keats yet again; he is implying that Keats was a dandy who smelled of spring. He states that Keats did not have the ferocity that summer has, he does not have power such as autumn has, nor does he even have knowledge to know winter. Hazlitt implies that Keats only knows spring because it aligns with beauty and fertility that alludes to femininity. Keats is also accused of not knowing harsh winter because it is rather instead something that one will only know once he is dead. Keats is metaphorically being

insulted now by Hazlitt and is being classified as only knowing the season that brings life, which alludes to Keats being in touch with femininity and the maternal bringing of life.

Despite the criticism, Keats continues to write as he wishes. Keats's poem, "This living hand, now warm and capable" highlights the significance of his and Brawne's relationship while they were both living and explains that his feelings will not alter even after his fleshly being does in passing away. Keats again performs as an effeminate man, displaying his love publicly towards Brawne through this poem. He writes:

This living hand, now warm and capable  
Of earnest grasping, would, if it were cold  
And in the icy silence of the tomb,  
So haunt thy days and chill thy dreaming nights  
That thou would wish thine own heart dry of blood  
So in my veins red life might stream again,  
And thou be conscience-calm'd—see here it is—  
I hold it towards you. (1-8)

Hazlitt criticizes Keats again for exactly what this poem is doing, which is possessing feminine characteristics that entail beauty, love, and desire. Hazlitt says, "I cannot help thinking that the fault of Mr. Keats's poems was deficiency in masculine energy of style. He had beauty, tenderness, delicacy, in an uncommon degree, but there was a want of strength and substance" (215). I believe Hazlitt is stating that Keats's works were lacking masculinity, therefore claiming that Keats indeed had a presence of effeminacy in his works. "This living hand" provides an instance where Keats does not seem to be expressing effeminate characteristics. Rather, he seems to be controlling what can be seen as a masculine trait. In the poem, the hand is persistent and



does not stop trying to gain control, which can be seen as Keats continuously trying to control Brawne's life even after he has passed away. Keats's language in this poem is masculine due to its controlling nature. This poem is an alternative if directed towards Brawne because it is not emotional, caring, or effeminate but instead misogynistic and possessive.

Keats's effeminacy shows again but in a new way through his love letters and heterosexually passionate, erotic poems. Keats possesses characteristics that show his alignment with female sexuality by acknowledging that women also have sexual desires. He writes to Brawne in an erotic and emotional way, suggesting that Keats and Brawne not only shared an emotional love but a sensual one as well. Rachel Shulkins describes how women of the time were portrayed as desexualized beings. Shulkins writes: "[d]espite the fact that there was nothing to support the idea of female asexuality, the dominant opinion during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was that women do not have sexual drives, and the minority that did exhibit any sexual symptoms were categorized as morally, mentally and physically diseased" (20). Similarly, Nancy Cott has argued that white women were considered "passionless" up until 1850—devoid of sexual feeling and impulse and overdetermined by maternal love. Keats did not agree with this dominant way of thinking which is shown clearly through his promotion of sexual agency and erotic writings to Brawne.

Schulkins claims that "Keats's poetry helps reveal a man who was not afraid of female sexuality; who was in favour of acknowledging that women, like men, are sexual beings" (10). One can see this attitude expressed repeatedly in Keats's late lyrics written to Fanny. At the same time, he tends to express his desire in extremely possessive ways with respect to Fanny. For instance, Keats writes in "To Fanny:"

Ah! if you prize my subdued soul above

The poor, the fading, brief pride of an hour:

Let none profane my Holy See of Love,

Or with a rude hand break

The sacramental cake:

Let none else touch the just new-budded flower;

If not—may my eyes close,

Love, on their last repose! (50-56)

Keats begins this final stanza of “To Fanny,” by telling Brawne that she must not let anyone else love her or be with her sexually as Keats has (or as he desires to be). Keats then writes in the final three lines of a “new-budded flower” referring to the female genitalia of Brawne. He states that no one else may touch Brawne in a carnal manner and if one does his eyes shall close in death. In this poem, he clearly is writing about sensual embrace between himself and Brawne, entailing that they shared both an emotional and sexual relationship. Keats proves to not only be an effeminate man but also presents himself to be one who acknowledged and celebrated the existence of female desire. In comparison to other men of the time, this is an atypical way of thinking. Nonetheless, he did not always accept women’s autonomy with respect to their sexual desires. He may have been an effeminate man and emotional, but he was not always in tune with putting his beloved’s sexual desires first. Keats was an effeminate man who was sentimental, passionate, and loving to Brawne in an emotional way. He was also a man who frequently recognized female sexual desire, but he tries to curtail it with the suggestion that Fanny can have desire but for no one besides him.

Letitia Elizabeth Landon (LEL) asserts in her brief poem elegizing Keats that he is one “[W]hose rich breathings are remembered still; / Whose tone can never be forgotten” (34-35).

While LEL expressed that idea in 1824, it remains true today that Keats truly can never be forgotten for a number of reasons. Despite the harsh, degrading criticism Keats faced during his life and even after his death, he was consistently true to himself and his beliefs. Keats wrote in the way he wanted to write and displayed all aspects of himself despite all of the backlash he was to receive while living and even while deceased. He was truly a man who wrote with effeminate language to his beloved Brawne, setting him apart in the Romantic era. He was not a typical masculine man in the nineteenth century and instead was an effeminate man who possessed sentimental language, displayed emotions, and publicly expressed his excessive heterosexual desires. By viewing Keats through a historical feminist lens, it is evident to see that he is a nineteenth-century effeminate man. Through the use of the field of history of sexuality, it is clear that Keats was an effeminate man, exhibiting an excess of heterosexuality, and was one who saw women to have sexual desires. Keats's language in his letters to Brawne and his short poems all prove him to be an effeminate man who was in love with a woman and was unafraid of who knew it. As I have argued, Keats proves to be an effeminate man, demonstrating an excess of heterosexuality, and a believer in women's sexual agency even while he still benefited from and supported patriarchal systems. Overall, my analysis of Keats proves him to be a both and figure when studied through a history of sexuality lens.

## CHAPTER II: PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY: ANDROGYNOUS CHARACTER

Percy Shelley was a peculiar, unique author and man who grew obsessed with particular stories, events, and news. A specific story that Shelley found much interest in was that of the Cenci family which later led to his writing of the play *The Cenci*. As Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin—daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft, the British feminist philosopher and author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792)—became married to Percy Shelley, they both became interested in similar topics that influenced their own writings. One of the stories that the Shelleys were interested in is that of the Cenci family story. In the biography, *Shelley: The Pursuit*, Richard Holmes writes of the Shelleys' encounter with the Cenci Manuscript:

Finding the Shelleys' interests were peculiarly adapted to such things, the next day [Mary] passed a copy of the 'Cenci Manuscript,' the grim story of the evil Count Cenci of Rome, who had committed incest with his daughter the beautiful Beatrice, and was subsequently murdered by her. Mary was copying the manuscript into a small, dark calf notebook in a rounded copper-plate hand for Shelley to brood on, at the end of May.

(425-426)

Shelley had help from his wife, who aided him to be on his way to producing the writing of *The Cenci*. She provided him with information regarding the true Cenci family and also aided his progressive line of thinking. Shelley's play provides readers with a new way to see this true familial story come to life in a way that expresses issues of society that align with some feminist thoughts of his time.

The actual Cenci family upon which the story is based was a powerful family living in Rome in the 1600s: "Beatrice was the daughter (by his first wife) of Francesco Cenci, a vicious and violent Roman nobleman of great wealth and influence. In 1595 he took his second wife,

Lucrezia, with Beatrice, to the lonely castle of La Petrella, in the province of Aquila, imprisoning them there and treating them with great brutality” (Britannica 1). Alongside Giacomo, her brother, and Olimpio Calvetti, she organized the murder of her father. The events planned out eventually occurred:

[Count Cenci] was assassinated on Sept. 9, 1598, and his body thrown from a balcony to create the appearance of an accident. The facts, however, soon came out, and the whole Cenci family was arrested. Lucrezia, Giacomo, and Bernardo, another brother, confessed the crime, and Beatrice, who at first denied everything, even under torture, also ended by confessing. Great efforts were made to obtain mercy for the accused, but Clement refused to grant pardon and Beatrice, Lucrezia, and Giacomo were executed, Bernardo escaping death because of his youth. The Cenci property was confiscated, and this, it was rumored, was the pope’s object in destroying them. (Britannica 1)

Differing from Shelley’s play is the way in which the Count was killed, character names, and the confiscation of the Cenci property.

Before reading the play, it is important to note that Shelley had written this play in account of a real-life tragedy that had occurred. Also, during the 1600s family dynamics were much different than during Shelley’s time, as the father was in complete control of the family dynamics. The women in the family did not have a voice and family was not a matter that was ever discussed publicly. In the 1600s, family was typically under patriarchal control and was “[c]onsidered as a private realm, a family is insulated from outside intervention, and the patriarch can have full access to female family members and exert absolute power over them. The most crucial aspect of the Count's rape of his daughter in *The Cenci* is that while such a heinous crime is easy for the Father to commit, it has no name and thus no appropriate channel to be exposed

and prosecuted” (An 40). During the time period, the father of the family had complete control over his family, in whatever way he wished to. As Gleadle writes, “Under common law, once a woman married she became ‘*feme covert*.’ All her personal property became her husband’s and any freehold land passed into his possession; a married woman was not even able to enter into contracts” (Gleadle 52). Women in familial life were given no control, the head of the household was the father, and he dominated the family. In this case, Count Cenci used his control to sexually abuse his daughter and to act as an evil and dominating patriarch who could not be penalized by law for his actions.

Despite the progressivism that exists within the expansion of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century people’s thoughts, beliefs, and values there is still in Shelley’s time a lingering presence of what once existed (and ultimately still exists now): the patriarchal order, sexism, and the obstacles to equality for all individuals. Societies change and are slowly continuing to change because of oppressed groups demanding change and organizing for it, such as Britain had after the Peterloo Massacre. At the gathering intended to promote parliamentary reform, which became known as the Peterloo Massacre after soldiers violently suppressed and dispersed the crowd gathered at St. Peter’s Field in Manchester, the assembled speakers “argued that extending the vote to working men would lead to better use of public money, fairer taxes and an end to restrictions on trade which damaged industry and caused unemployment. Only a minority campaigned for women to have the vote, but women were nevertheless active in the movement” (Mather 2). The Peterloo Massacre was a violent event that did in fact cause change and eventually led to women gaining more of a voice and being heard. This Massacre provides insight on how little of a voice women had publicly prior to the event but how their male counterparts were quite often the ones being initially fought for as they slipped into the

background. As Ashley Cross explains in her essay on Shelley's play, "Not unlike French Revolutionary times, political threat was figured as sexual threat and, in particular, as violent male aggression against a passive female, or at least feminized, victim" (Cross 168). Britain's divide between men and women alongside class and race during the time of the French Revolution was prominent and caused conflict between men and women as much as between the social classes. Cross argues that "This gendering of dominance seemingly constructs and reinforces difference as a simplistic opposition between masculine power and feminine passivity" (Cross 168). Women during this time were dominated by their male counterparts and were oppressed by male power and the overarching female passivity that some women were afraid to rebuke against. At this time, the division of gendered bodies of white upper, middle, and elite classes presents two stagnant categories, the binary of male masculinity and female femininity. Percy Bysshe Shelley resides during this period but works to resist the binary gender categories in his work *The Cenci*.

As a writer during the Romantic Period, Shelley stood out because of his alignment with some feminist ideals of his time, especially the breaking the binary of gender roles and expectations. Shelley may not be a contemporary embodiment of a feminist, but I see him as possessing some feminist values and pushing towards feminist ideals. Shelley respected his wife as an author and as an individual. Shelley's use of female characters in his works also shows that he is in support of women being main characters and being strong roles in his works. Some of Shelley's thoughts regarding women resonate with those of the late Mary Wollstonecraft as she believes that "if women are to be excluded, without having a voice, from a participation of the natural rights of mankind, prove first, to ward off the charge of injustice and inconsistency... will ever shew that man must, in some shape, act like a tyrant, and tyranny, in whatever part of

society it rears its brazen front, will ever undermine morality” (67). If women are excluded and have no voice then it will prove that men have unfair patriarchal control and dominance over society and proves that society is immoral, which is what Shelley’s push towards freedom in both his writing and in society proves he stands for and believes. Relating to Shelley’s progressive push towards gendered freedom, Cross claims that, “Shelley attempts to challenge the status quo, including the representation of women, by calling into question the binary structures of oppressor and oppressed and, ultimately, his own act of representation” (169). Shelley challenges the relationship of oppressed and oppressor in his play and proves that he does not wish for the oppressors to be successful. Shelley’s writing of *The Cenci* does exactly what Cross claims: he provides the use of a character, Beatrice, that breaks the status quo and fights back in regard to her oppressor, her father.

Shelley’s play *The Cenci*, presents a main character, Beatrice, who falls victim to her father, Count Cenci. Count Cenci has rank and reigns over the other characters; he is an oppressor and patriarch, a representation of the patriarchal domination of society. Count Cenci has raped his daughter and she is not going to let him get away with it without him facing consequences. As Cross notes of the play’s protagonist, “raped by her father, Beatrice embodies the violence of oppression” (Cross 188). Shelley’s character Beatrice proves how oppression is very violent due to her being killed in result of her being oppressed by her own father. As a character Beatrice is a portrayal of the violence and harm that oppression causes. Count Cenci acts as Beatrice’s oppressor, proving the force and violence of patriarchy. As Cross claims, there is a gendering of dominance that shows the male to be powerful and the female to be vulnerable and to fall victim (168). Female survivors are common amongst a patriarchal society and often are the ones who never receive justice, especially in cases of sexual violence and abuse.



Shelley's play begins with what readers would deem as a conventional play of the period that falls into the gender binary of men being oppressors and women being oppressed which promotes male dominance.

In his book *Female Masculinity*, Jack Halberstam focuses on masculinity and how masculinity can be present in a female-bodied person. Halberstam defines masculinity as "extend[ing] outward into patriarchy and inward into the family; masculinity represents the power of inheritance, the consequences of the traffic in women, and the promise of social privilege" (2). Count Cenci is a portrayal of Halberstam's definition of masculinity, as he takes advantage of his privilege and unjustly dominates the individuals around him. Shelley's rewriting of *The Cenci*, provides readers with a sense of performed masculinity that is present within a female who is not masculine-presenting and without a male, which is what Halberstam calls female masculinity. Beatrice performs masculinity in the sense that she behaves as a man of her time would. Alongside masculinity, Beatrice also needs to be understood intersectionally as a white woman of an upper class due to her rank as a Count's daughter. Shelley casts Beatrice as a character who stands out and is unlike other characters; she is a female that is not conventionally feminine. Beatrice is fluid in terms of her gender identity and performs as a masculine female. Halberstam defines female masculinity as "generally received by hetero- and homo-normative cultures as a pathological sign of misidentification and maladjustment, as a longing to be and to have a power that is always just out of reach" (9). A female that is masculine is often understood as a sign of abnormality and as a woman who is striving to obtain power that is always too far out of her ability to obtain. Beatrice can be understood as performing female masculinity in order to regain her power that her father has taken from her. She is a character who challenges gender roles and pushes across the binaries of gender expectations and performs as both a woman and as

masculine. Shelley's *The Cenci* is worthy of conversation because it does what other works of its time do not, which is align with an unconventional gender system, model the fall of the patriarchal system, and represent the take down of an oppressor by the oppressed. Other plays written during Shelley's time would provide a main character that is a male or a woman who performs as a dainty, feminine maternal figure. Shelley challenges these typical roles of a woman and portrays his main character Beatrice as a strong woman who is bound to receive justice for the circumstances she is in.

Before proceeding to analyze Shelley's depiction of female masculinity through Beatrice, it is worth summarizing the main events of the drama. Act I of Shelley's play begins with Count Francesco Cenci complaining to Cardinal Camillo about his age, life, and his daughter, Beatrice. Orsino is a prelate who is in love with Count Cenci's daughter. Orsino is becoming a Priest but is still determined to be with Beatrice. Act I concludes with a banquet along with Beatrice being sexually assaulted by her father. Act II begins with Lucretia, the Count's wife and stepmother to the children, speaking to the Count's son, Bernardo, about how she has suffered from violence from the Count as well. A plan is devised to murder the Count because of all the wrong he has committed. Act III starts off with Beatrice discussing the plan with her stepmother, Lucretia. The murder begins to be carried out and they devise a plan for people to kill Count Cenci. In Act IV it seems the murder has taken place, Marzio and Olimpio are the assassins who have been hired to strangle the Count. In the last Act, Act V, the assassins have been caught but ultimately Beatrice is held accountable for organizing the plan and she is executed.

Beginning in Act I, the play starts off by alluding to the presence of typical gender roles and expectations that are yet to come. In Act I, Scene II Orsino, a romantic admirer of Beatrice is speaking and begins talking about Beatrice; Orsino says:

I know the Pope

Will ne'er absolve me from my priestly vow

But by absolving me from the revenue

Of many a wealthy see; and, Beatrice,

I think to win thee at an easier rate. (Shelley 321)

Early on in the play it is made clear that the women are seen as property. Orsino is describing Beatrice as an object that is to be “won.” Orsino tells Beatrice that he does not think the Pope will let him have Beatrice as his bride, but that Beatrice is something that can be won easily. These lines frame Beatrice as an object. Despite Beatrice being an unconventional display of a woman due to her masculine traits, she still falls victim to objectification and sexualization such as through being presumed to exist only for men’s leisure or as a prize that a man can win rather than as a human that is equal to a man. Wollstonecraft critiqued these circumstances, writing that “the only way women can rise in the world [is] by marriage” (74). Women gaining success in this time only due to marriage shows the gender expectations placed on elite women at this time, expecting them to be seen as fair ladies who are to be won and handed from their fathers to their rightful grooms, in this case displaying a similar idea that Shelley shows Beatrice still does not conform to. As the play continues the gender roles and expectations deepen and are even expressed by the female characters.

In Act 1 Scene 3, Beatrice begins to speak her mind to the men and women in the play and react to her father’s belittling of her. Count Cenci provokes her into giving a speech as a response to what he initially says:

I hope my good friends here

Will think of their own daughters- or perhaps

Of their own throats- before they lend an ear

To this wild girl. (Shelley 326)

Despite Beatrice being a grown woman, her father still belittles her by calling her a “wild girl.” Count Cenci seemingly has no respect for his daughter or other women referring to them as “girls” but even more so girls who are out of control, and not of a sound mind. Beatrice does not hesitate to call attention to Count Cenci for what he has said and for his wrongdoings. Beatrice gives a speech and says:

Can one tyrant overbear

The sense of many best and wisest men?

Or is it that I sue not in some form

Of scrupulous law, that ye deny my suit?

Oh, God! That I were buried with my brothers!

And that the flowers of this departed spring

Were fading on my grave! And that my father

Were celebrating now one feast for all! (Shelley 326)

Beatrice is wishing to seek revenge on her father for what he has done to her. She is calling out for assistance and looking for a solution to end the patriarchal reign her father has cast over everyone. Contrary to how some other writers would portray a female character, Shelley depicts Beatrice as a strong, willful, and determined woman who will obtain justice and push back on the patriarchy that is trying to take her down and victimize her.

Moving into Act II, Beatrice does not hold back from expressing what she thinks. Shelley gives Beatrice characteristics that at this time would have deemed as masculine due to her

willingness to fight back, her effort to speak her mind, and her strength to not give up. Beatrice speaks to her stepmother and tells her what her father has done. Beatrice states:

It was one word, Mother, one little word;  
One look, one smile. Oh! He has trampled me  
Under his feet, and made the blood stream down  
My pallid cheeks. And he has given us all  
Ditch-water, and the fever-stricken flesh  
Of buffaloes, and bade us eat or starve,  
And we have eaten. (Shelley 329)

The “we” in the last line is presentation of a struggle that is societal, not individual. This passage provides an allusion of her father’s patriarchal domination. The patriarchy has caused damage to Beatrice and society, hurting all people, not just certain individuals. In this scene, Shelley is using Beatrice and her father as a parallel to patriarchal reign in society and how it hurts all people and how society must either fall victim to it or they must “starve.” The last line reads “we have eaten,” which shows how she has done her part in defeating the patriarchal system as much as she could, she did not give up and nevertheless she did persist.

As Act II continues, Beatrice acknowledges her difference from other women her age. As she is speaking to Lucretia, her stepmother, she says:

Even though the Pope should make me free to live  
In some blithe place, like others of my age  
With sports, and delicate food, and the fresh air.  
Oh, never think that I will leave you, Mother! (330).

Other individuals her age are living lives that include lavishness such as sports, food, and bliss while she is left in a tense situation where she performs as not only a woman but also a support for her stepmother to lean on. Beatrice is again challenging gender norms by being a lady and daughter of Count Cenci, while also performing as the backbone for her stepmother. Also, she is an unmarried woman and is not yet a mother. She is an emotional consultant to her stepmother and often times seems to be keeping her sane while Count Cenci fails to provide support, as gender roles would indicate men to not be as emotionally supportive as women, therefore proving that conventional gender roles are in place in some ways but also being broken in others.

As the play continues into Act III, Beatrice constantly is seen challenging ideologies of what a woman should perform as and should embody. Shelley provides the depiction of Beatrice as being more masculine than a woman is usually portrayed as. He depicts Beatrice as a masculine female: she speaks her mind and does not let society make her become a victimized feminine figure due to the trauma she has faced, and she instead persists to find her sense of freedom. In Act III, Beatrice has a conversation with Lucretia, and she does not hesitate to speak her mind. Beatrice says:

Ay, something must be done;

What, yet I know not—something which shall make

The thing that I have suffered but a shadow

In the dread lightning which avenges it;

Brief, rapid, irreversible, destroying

The consequence of what it cannot cure.

Some such thing is to be endured or done:

When I know what, I shall be still and calm

And never anything will move me more. (Shelley 340)

She is expressing her feelings and thoughts to her stepmother which is an emotional therefore typically feminine characteristic. Beatrice is presenting her ill emotions and saying that she will not feel anything anymore which a woman is not supposed to do. Sara Ahmed discusses one's will by saying "When one's wills are at war, one is at war with oneself. This internal war is represented as war not only between wills but between body and mind" (Ahmed 12). Beatrice is suffering from being at war externally and internally. She has been abused and is now at war with herself trying to get the justice she deserves. She feels emotionally uneasy and her wills are at war with herself such as Ahmed describes. Throughout this Act, Beatrice is displaying her displeasure with her father, Count Cenci. His actions towards her dissatisfy and upset her so she is plotting revenge and a way to gain back the control stolen from her. Contrary to representations of women of her time, she closes herself off to any sort of emotional swaying. Beatrice speaks her mind and is unwilling to silence herself all the while doing so in a steady and calm manner which here are more masculine-coded traits.

Gender roles and expectations take a shift of focus in Act IV. In Scene I, Count Cenci is speaking and begins to describe how he is feeling. Cenci states that:

I do not feel as if I were a man,  
But like a fiend appointed to chastise  
The offences of some unremembered world.  
My blood is running up and down my veins;  
A fearful pleasure makes it prick and tingle:  
I feel a giddy sickness of strange awe (Shelley 357)

In this passage, Cenci is describing himself as not feeling as a man but rather as a villain that is placed on Earth to disappoint the world. Feeling this way seems to make him feel uneasy which is not how a man of power is supposed to feel. Count Cenci admits that he does not feel as if he were a man, that within himself is a loss of proper masculinity. A man that holds masculine traits will feel manly, act as a man should, and not fall short of what a white upper, middle, or elite man in society is supposed to perform as. Shelley has Count Cenci admit his shortcomings and ultimately pulls him away from masculinity and proves him to be a display of improper masculinity. By Cenci beginning to feel unlike a man, this shows that Beatrice has gained power and is slowly challenging the patriarchy and her oppressor within the play. Overall, the play is demonstrating how patriarchy itself dismantles masculinity through the Count's extreme extension of patriarchal logic which leads him to losing his identity as a human being entirely.

As Act IV carries on, the characters begin to put the plot to kill Count Cenci into action. Beatrice continues to be cast as a character who possesses masculine characteristics and pushes against what a typical woman should perform as. In Scene II, she is devising a plan to have her father killed even though a woman of the time is supposed to know her place and not fight back against a man. Beatrice is the brains behind the operation—she organizes the plan to have her father killed and seek revenge on him due to what he has put her through. As Cross notes “Beatrice's violent retaliation against her father inverts and thus reaffirms the gendered opposition between oppressor and oppressed ... Shelley's [aware] of the way in which gender is used to signify power” (Cross 189). Shelley displays the gendered difference between the oppressor, Count Cenci, and the oppressed, Beatrice, making the power inequalities visible. He is well aware of how gender casts certain roles and expectations onto the individual and how that comes with power or lack thereof. Shelley uses this play to show a reversal of gender roles:



Count Cenci is displayed as the weak male character while Beatrice is the strong female character, which shows a complete reversal of what gender expectations would be typically assigned. Within this play, Shelley dismantles gender roles and expectations due to his use of a masculine female character, Beatrice.

In Act IV, Scene III, the plan begins to become unsteady as Olimpio and Marzio become unsure if they can follow through with killing Count Cenci. Beatrice displays masculine characteristics yet again due to her inability to keep quiet and releases her anger towards them. Beatrice exclaims:

Miserable slaves!

Where, if ye dare not kill a sleeping man,

Found ye the boldness to return to me

With such a deed undone? Base palterers!

Cowards and traitors! (Shelley 361)

In the first line Beatrice calls the men “miserable slaves.” During the time of Shelley writing this play enslavement played a key role in British empire building. Shelley’s word choice could allude to the horrendous practice of enslavement and it might be comparing men in the play to those slaves enslaved who were treated unjustly. Beatrice also questions how these men could return back to her if they had not even finished the task she had ordered them to complete. After being shamed by Beatrice, the men then say they will go and kill the Count. Beatrice had been made victim by her father but has reversed the roles, she is now in control of her father’s people and ultimately of her father’s life.

Scene IV of Act IV depicts Beatrice gaining back what Ahmed describes as one’s will. Beatrice is now emotionally content with herself. Beatrice is aware of her father’s murder and

Lucretia is confiding in her. Lucretia is afraid that the source of the murder plot will be discovered but Beatrice responds by saying:

Mother,

What is done wisely, is done well. Be bold  
As thou art just. 'Tis like a truant child  
To fear that others know what thou hast done,  
Even from thine own strong consciousness, and thus  
Write on unsteady eyes and altered cheeks  
All thou wouldst hide. Be faithful to thyself,  
And fear no other witness but thy fear.  
For if, as cannot be, some circumstance,  
Should rise in accusation, we can blind  
Suspicion with such cheap astonishment,  
Or overbear it with such guiltless pride,  
As murderers cannot feign. The deed is done,  
And what may follow now regards not me.  
I am as universal as the light;  
Free as the earth-surrounding air; as firm  
As the world's centre. Consequence, to me,  
Is as the wind which strikes the solid rock  
But shakes it not. (364)

Within this passage Beatrice shows exactly how strong she is. She is providing her stepmother with a sense of strength and with confidence to lean on. Now that her father is gone, Beatrice has

reclaimed his position of keeping the family together and keeping them strong. Beatrice looks at what happened and sees the deed as done; it is a relief to her that her father is dead and there is no going back. The family must move forward and must move past what has brought them down in the past. In this way Beatrice performs as a masculine female character by taking on the role of a father figure. Her grasp and withholding of masculinity in this case allows her to regain power that was stolen from her and allows her to now have the control.

By the final Act of the tragedy, Beatrice's plan does not unfold as anticipated. She had advised two men to murder Count Cenci but despite one of the men admitting to the murder, Beatrice was still found to be guilty as well. Beatrice is taken to prison but is happier in prison than she was in the presence of her father. She says:

I was just dreaming

That we were all in Paradise. Thou knowest

This cell seems like a kind of Paradise

After our father's presence. (Shelley 378)

Beatrice was abused by her father, had her father killed, then was victimized after her father's death by the law. Shelley shows the reader that despite Beatrice being a woman who is unconventional and willing to fight back, she will still remain oppressed in some way. Shelley could have done this to show that women's rights are slowly increasing but that women must still fight to obtain their rightful equality with men. Shelley's presentation of rage against sexism allows him to align with some feminist views but his act of Beatrice ultimately ending up under man's control again shows him to potentially align with some aspects of misogyny or to be showing how women need to keep fighting to become equal and destroy the patriarchal control.

Ashley J. Cross analyzes the events in the play and claims that, “Beatrice's mistake is revenge; the only option she sees is to retaliate violently against her oppressor. Shelley's mistake is to impose his views on his characters, to appropriate their speaking voices and speak for them” (199). Cross is claiming that Beatrice made a mistake by retaliating against her father with violence and stating that Shelley should not have had her do this. In doing so, Cross’s analysis still ends up in the same kind of binary assumptions that Beatrice herself is struggling against. Also, Shelley does impose his view on his characters, as his misogynistic views are able to be seen within the Judge in the play and also within the Count Cenci. Cross’s claim that Beatrice made a mistake by seeking revenge through violence is a bold statement that is not completely true and a bit problematic. If Beatrice was a man and sought revenge would Cross disagree? As a man Beatrice would simply be seen as a valiant warrior fighting for what he deserves. Beatrice was a victim and sought justice in the way which she felt was doable in her society and time period. She was punished for what she had done but was not wrong in seeking justice. She could have sought for justice in other ways, but Beatrice clung to violence against her oppressor because she did not see any other choices that presented themselves. She called on others to perform the act of violence because she herself did not wish to partake in the violent act. Overall, Beatrice acted in revenge because she was tortured simply for being born as a female in a male-dominated society, and therefore she fought back.

In the article “Beatrice’s Gaze Revisited: Anatomizing *The Cenci*,” Young-Ok An, summarizes Beatrice’s position by stating:

[Due to] the socially imposed silence surrounding sexual violence, Beatrice sees herself squarely implicated in the unbreakable chain of oppression. That is the reason we need to rearticulate her position within a gender-specific intersubjective network in order to

analyze Beatrice's action and reaction against the Count and against the system. We need to note, in other words, that individual characters resisting systemic violence are also constrained by the sexual politics of the social structure, resulting in utterly different conditions of possibility for each. (37)

An is stating that in order to properly analyze the actions Beatrice took against her father we must first discuss the unbreakable chain of oppression that Beatrice has fallen into. Beatrice has been doomed from the start; she is an oppressed individual that has essentially no way of defeating her oppression until she has defeated her oppressor. She takes fatal action towards her father because the only way she sees fit to escape her oppression is by taking down the oppressor, therefore her thought process is morbid but essential for an individual in her position.

As a person, Beatrice suffered many wrongdoings, such as being raped by her father and never receiving justice for it. As a woman, Beatrice received even more scrutiny than she would have if she were a man. As a woman, Beatrice suffered being dominated by the patriarchy under the violent rule of her father. She did not have as many rights and privileges as she would have had if she were the son of Count Cenci. A man who is the son of a tyrant has a lot more privilege than a woman who is the daughter of a tyrant. She fought back against her male oppressor but still did not receive justice despite being honest. She sought a plan to be rid of her oppressor but was ultimately persecuted for it in the end. Act V thus ultimately shows that as woman, Beatrice did not stand a chance. She ends up imprisoned despite one of the men already admitting to the murder—she was still found guilty and was executed along with the man who admitted being guilty. Throughout the play, Shelley provides his readers with a female character who challenges her gendered lot in life and crushes the expectations that a woman must be submissive, but Shelley still overshadows the play with the ultimate triumph of misogyny and patriarchy.

Shelley's writing of the tragedy, *The Cenci* proves that he is both in alignment with some feminist views such as women's right to freedom from sexual abuse, independence from their fathers, and women's rights more broadly, but also continues to depict the persistence of some misogynistic tendencies like women being suppressed if they fight back. Shelley demonstrates that a woman can fight the patriarchy, defeat her oppressor, be masculine, and not be conventionally feminine but he also displays that these gender-breaking actions are not enough and that they will be punished. The ending of this play proves that ultimately to be assigned female at birth is to live a life of restriction. Beatrice performed outside of her gender expectations but still did not receive the justice she deserved. Shelley seems to be alluding to the assumption that a woman in society can perform in whatever way, but she will still be oppressed in the end and ultimately will not win. Shelley possesses a misogynistic mindset in the last Act of the play, as is suggested by the turning of events. Beatrice ultimately fails simply because of her sex. She is held responsible and punished by patriarchal society for seeking to avenge her sexual assault and lack of power at the hands of her father, Count Cenci. Shelley's ending of the play depicts Beatrice living in a world where a woman only has so much power. As a woman in this context, you can fight back but you will never receive a full amount of justice unless you are a man.

Shelley's use of Beatrice provides both a vision for women's willful resistance against violence under patriarchy and a delimited understanding of the costs attached to this resistance. Throughout the entire play Beatrice suffered first from the distress of growing up without a biological mother. She then was a victim of sexual abuse from her father, Count Cenci. She suffered later due to the societal norms in place regarding the gender she is assumed to identify with. If Beatrice was a man, the play would have definitely turned out differently. In the

nineteenth century, it was bold of Shelley to align with some feminist views and support them within his works, but it was contradictory of him to also align with misogynistic views in how the play ended. Ultimately, Shelley proves to be both in alignment with some feminist views and to expose some misogynistic views, as reflected by how he represents men and women.

As Beatrice died, she spoke her last words: “My Lord, / we are quite ready. Well, ‘tis very well” (Shelley 366). These last few lines allow her to exit the world at peace despite the circumstances. Beatrice proved to be a masculine female character that tried her best to fight back against a male-dominated society and paved the way just a little more for more robust representations of women. Shelley captured societal gender roles and gender expectations by grasping and retelling this actual event and making it clear that there are many issues revolving around gender at this time and that in order to reframe misconceptions regarding gender one must not only be a both/and figure but must instead be a feminist.

### CHAPTER III: KEATS AND SHELLEY'S LEGACY

The Romantic authors, Keats and Shelley, both made an impact on the Romantic period and without them, the period would surely not have been the same. Both men were white, born into wealthy families and were well educated. The men exchanged some number of letters in the few years that they knew one another, wishing good health and wellness towards one another. They also both provided support and feedback in regard to their writing. In July 1820, Shelley wrote a letter to Keats stating: "*The Cenci* I hope you have already received: it was studiously composed in a different style" (Rossetti 15). Keats then responds back to Shelley about *The Cenci* by writing:

I received a copy of *The Cenci*, as from yourself, from Hunt. There is only one part of it I am judge of— the poetry and dramatic effect, which by many spirits nowadays is considered the Mammon. A modern work, it is said, must have a purpose, which may be the God. An artist must serve Mammon: he must have 'self-concentration' —selfishness perhaps. You, I am sure, will forgive me for sincerely remarking that you might curb your magnanimity, and be more of an artist, and load every rift of your subject with ore. The thought of such discipline must fall like cold chains upon you, who perhaps never sat with your wings furled for six months together. (Rossetti 17)

Keats provides Shelley with ideas and detailed feedback in consideration of his work. The letters to one another, the content, and language in these letters show the two authors to share a friendship. Both Keats and Shelley found a friend in one another and were able to rely on one another for feedback, solace, and company.

When Shelley's deceased corpse was found washed up on the shores of the Gulf of Spezia in Italy, it was made clear that he possessed respect and love for his friend Keats: "In the



pocket of [Shelley's] jacket had been found two books —an Aeschylus, and the Lamia volume, doubled back as if it had at the last moment been thrust aside” (Rossetti 24). In Shelley's final moments the work he turned to was Keats's final book. It is evident that Shelley and Keats shared a homosocial bond and deep friendship for one another. Both men cared for each other deeply and Shelley made that even more visible in his elegiac poem to Keats titled “Adonais.” In the first stanza Shelley writes:

I WEEP for Adonais—he is dead!  
Oh weep for Adonais, though our tears  
Thaw not the frost which binds so dear a head!  
And thou, sad Hour selected from all years  
To mourn our loss, rouse thy obscure compeers,  
And teach them thine own sorrow! Say: with me  
Died Adonais! Till the future dares  
Forget the past, his fate and fame shall be  
An echo and a light unto eternity. (1-9)

The first lines emphasize and reiterate that the subject, Keats, is dead, while the speaker also claims that he will weep because of this death, and he wishes for others in the future to also weep over this death. The end of the stanza proclaims that Keats has died but the future will not dare to forget him, and his legacy will shine on forever and impact so many other people, which is what Keats's legacy has done. Shelley's poem thus far affirms that Keats is a poet unlike others and is worth celebrating and remembering.

Shelley's use of language throughout “Adonais” is a declaration of his appreciation for Keats. Shelley's language provides specific references to Keats's works: “the lorn nightingale”

(79), “autumnal Night” (81), “Sublimely mild” (88), all alluding to Keats and his works. The final stanza of the poem reads:

The breath whose might I have invoked in song  
Descends on me; my spirit’s bark is driven  
Far from the shore, far from the trembling throng  
Whose sails were never to the tempest given.  
The massy earth and sphered skies are riven!  
I am borne darkly, fearfully, afar;  
Whilst, burning through the inmost veil of heaven,  
The soul of Adonais, like a star,  
Beacons from the abode where the Eternal are. (55-63)

This stanza indicates that the speaker has tried to connect with the deceased subject through a song, which alludes to Keats due to Keatsian poetry being written sometimes as odes and melodic works, such as a Nightingale’s song. The speaker then goes on to say that the subject’s soul is now gone, it has surpassed the earth and risen above the skies and is long gone. The stanza ends by providing the reader with closure. The speaker states that the soul of Adonais is visible like a star and lingering around forever to inspire and encourage others. Shelley’s elegiac poem “Adonais” displays Keats’s legacy to live on forever and proclaims that he will never stop being a muse for other writers.

In regard to women writers during the Romantic period, Keats and Shelley were very different. Percy Shelley was married to Mary Shelley, a popular, successful, brilliant, and feminist writer of the period. Also, Shelley’s mother-in-law, Mary Wollstonecraft, was a writer who pushed towards feminist ideals and women’s rights, despite her passing away before ever

meeting her daughter or the man who would become her son-in-law. Shelley had influence from educated women in his life, so he was more in touch with his alignment with feminist ideals. Keats on the other hand was not quite in touch with feminist ideals—he was an effeminate man, but he was also an evident misogynist. Nonetheless, Rachel Schulkins suggests that “[Keats’s] rendering of the female and his rejection of women writers and readers are indicative of his political and social ideas rather than any psychological barriers he might have had towards the opposite sex” (Schulkins 9). Keats’s rejection of specific women writers, according to Schulkins, had more to do with his specific social and political ideas than with his attitudes toward women more broadly. Even so, as can be seen from how Keats often wrote to and about his beloved Fanny Brawne, he still saw himself as the male protagonist in charge of the situation. By breaking down the dynamic of a love letter from Keats to Fanny Brawne, it is evident to see that Keats needed to be in control of each situation. Keats would compose the letter, send Brawne the letter, and he would expect her to read the letter, and respond to him. Keats even went as far as organizing her life for her in the event that he was to pass away. His poems, gestures, and letters to and about Brawne may seem romantic, but they can also be seen as a sense of Keats’s need for masculine domination. Overall, Shelley was more in tune with feminist ideals, whereas in comparison Keats at times performed in brief ways that would align with feminist ideals but overall possessed rather misogynistic tendencies.

When analyzing the history of sexuality and gender in the Romantic period, Keats and Shelley are the two authors that come to mind due to their similarities and their abundant differences. Keats provides readers with a sense of gender division and a mashup of gender binaries. As Greg Kucich notes, “Keats's writings and their reception history make him a highly provocative subject of analysis for this continuing reevaluation of Romanticism” (Kucich 29).

With respect to gender, Keats provides Romanticism with a breakable division between masculinity and femininity. Keats is a man who does not hesitate to act as himself whether that makes society deem his actions as either feminine or masculine. He was classified as an effeminate man but that did not discourage or offend him. Keats aligned with effeminacy but was also a misogynist due to his control seeking and patriarchal persona as well as due to his sexist views of women as a social group. An analysis of Keats has proven to me that Keats is a both/and figure: he is a fluid figure that is sometimes aligning with feminist ideals but more often with misogynistic ones.

Shelley and his works provide readers with unconventional gender norms and expectations that readers can find comfort in. In his work *The Cenci* he casts Beatrice as his main character and allows her to express herself in a masculine way despite her being a feminine presenting woman. Beatrice is a new way for a woman to be seen, as she is a representation of a woman who is able to construct her own gender expectations. As Amanda Berry writes, “For Shelley, in *The Cenci*, a set of anxieties about the relationship between sexual behaviors, gender, and nation” (Berry 21). Out of representation of these anxieties, Shelley’s play provides readers with a vision of white upper-class womanhood that breaks with gender norms, seeks retribution for injustice and sexual violence, and models masculinity. Shelley’s use of a character that is a woman who performs outside of her gender expectations is a bold move for his time and provides an alignment with feminist ideals and the breaking of gender norms and expectations.

Through a historical gender and sexuality lens, an analysis of John Keats and Percy Bysshe Shelley proves that both authors pushed for progressivism for their time. Despite still dwelling in misogynistic tendencies, both authors proved to make progress towards feminist ideals through their works and their own lives. Keats himself lived a very emotionally telling life

that led him to be cast as an effeminate man. He did not shy away from this effeminacy but instead broadcast it even more prominently in his works written to, for, and about his beloved Fanny Brawne. Keats's lived experiences prove that a man can perform as an effeminate male and still live a heterosexual life—one full of an excess of heterosexual love, homosocial male friendships, and misogynistic tendencies all at the same time. Keats changed the binary conception of men being masculine and women being feminine by being a man who was feminine but who was also misogynistic at the same time. By Keats exhibiting sexist and misogynistic tendencies and performing as an effeminate man, binary gender roles and expectations are able to be tarnished. As for Percy Bysshe Shelley, he was unafraid to speak his mind despite the consequences. Through Shelley's authorship of a female protagonist who took on masculine characteristics he was able to show that binary gender expectations do not need to exist. His character, Beatrice, performed as a masculine female character who broke gender norms and provided a role model for other young women readers. As such, Keats and Shelley provide progression but also provide some obstacles. Shelley breaks gender norms through his character but still allows the patriarchal system to defeat Beatrice by the end of the play. Ultimately, Shelley aligns with some feminist ideals such as ungendered norms and expectations, but he also pushes in the opposite direction due to allowing the patriarchy to reign supreme in the play. Both Keats and Shelley align with some feminist ideals, but they take a few steps back because of the presentation of some patriarchal and misogynist ideals.

As society moves forward, steps must continually be taken towards progression. One necessary aspect of progression in this area of scholarship is further research that must be done on the women writers of the Romantic period. Intersectionality must also be a factor in this research, with a focus that extends beyond writers who are only white and upper class to also

include women writers of color and women writers marginalized in other ways such as class identity. To progress towards a more equitable future we must uncover the rights and wrongs of the past such as I have done, but we must next do so in literature that is unconventional and off the beaten path. Romanticism, sexuality, gender, and feminism are very dense, rich topics of research that have many more possibilities for analysis, and therefore as scholars we must take time to do so. As time passes, issues of sexuality, race, gender, and equality must be faced and must be understood and brought to light. We must acknowledge what canonical Romantic authors did wrong such as supporting and benefitting from a patriarchal and white supremacist system, as well as and what they did right and how they struggled against conventions of their time. We must also expand and view non-canonical writers. Moving forward, there remains extensive, crucially important research to be done within the Romantic period alongside race, class, ableism, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, and the incorporation of intersectionality. As scholars we must uncover the past within literature to help push towards a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive future.

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