

A HORRID PRESENCE

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THE LIMITATIONS OF ROMANTIC DISCOURSE

IN THREE POEMS OF JOHN KEATS:

"THE EVE OF ST. AGNES," "LA BELLE DAME SANS MERCI,"

AND "LAMIA"

By

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ABSTRACT

The theories of Luce Irigaray and twentieth-century Keats scholarship share a concern with the representation of the feminine in a discourse which they, and I, believe is patriarchal, or masculine. Some critics interpret Keats in much the same way that Irigaray theorizes masculine discourse, namely, by claiming that the feminine is not accurately represented, nor is it valued, except for purposes of appropriation. Other critics find in Keats a representation of the feminine that attests to its autonomy. This thesis adds to the latter position by exploring the problematic nature of the discourse available to Keats, which does not allow for an autonomous figuration of the feminine.

The guardians of masculine discourse are members of the male reviewing public and consequently, Keats is caught between challenging a discourse that limits his poetic potential or success, and acknowledging that that same discourse puts food on his plate. This thesis explores how, in "The Eve of St. Agnes," Keats reveals a feminine language that exposes the limitations of patriarchal discourse. In "La Belle Dame sans Merci" and "Lamia" Keats expresses the conflict between the challenge presented by the incorporation of the feminine in poetic practice, and the

pressure exerted by the patriarchal community to reject the feminine as anything but a mirror of masculine desire. Keats's poetry reveals the limits patriarchal discourse imposes on the masculine, something unacknowledged by Irigaray or twentieth-century Keats critics.

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CHAPTER ONE

Two hundred years after the birth of John Keats, the focus for criticism of his life and work appears to have come full circle. Disagreement over the representation of gender in Keats's poetry, supported or challenged by evidence from his private life, has re-surfaced in the late twentieth century in an attempt to delve deeper into the complexities of Keats's varying representations of the feminine. This concern with issues of gender in Keats's life and work is one that also occupied the first readers of his poetry in the early nineteenth century. Susan J. Wolfson summarizes the reviews of Keats's work by his contemporaries as follows:

The favorable reviews, mostly from friends, gave an inadvertently feminizing emphasis to his stylistic beauties, and/or celebrated a budding masculine power of intellect....[M]ore divided notices spoke of promising talent but also of unripe judgement; and the hostile views, motivated by political and class antipathy, mobilized Keats's youth in a ridicule of unmanly, adolescent affectation.

("Keats and the Manhood of the Poet" 1)

Now, at the end of the twentieth century, Keats and gender is the subject that once again dominates Keats scholarship: the Keats's bicentennial issue of European Romantic Review and the most recent issue of the Keats-Shelley Journal (vol

XLIV, 1995) each have at least one article that deals with this topic. A number of other critics have, in the last few years, engaged themselves in this issue, producing a host of articles and a book.

In the eighteenth century poetic practice was not immune to gendering. Philip Cox, in his discussion of Keats's reviewers, points out the explicit gendering involved in the critical responses to Keats's work:

both Hazlitt and Hunt perceive central flaws in Keats's poetry which could be charted in terms of a standard opposition between, on the one hand, 'feminine' weakness related to delicacy, superficiality, and sensual over-indulgence and, on the other hand, more 'masculine' virtues -which they associate with strength, intellectual depth, and self-restraint.

(42)

Cox adds, "Like Lockhart...Hunt establishes an antithesis between successful poetic production and the 'feminine'" (42). In other words, not only was the masculine aligned specifically with the male poet, but the feminine was seen to weaken the male poet's potential. If the feminine was too salient, there was assumed to be a corresponding lack of masculine presence, which, for a male poet, meant a deficiency in his "maleness." Wolfson's quotation from Hazlitt's essay "On Effeminacy of Character," demonstrates this idea that the feminine presence translates into inadequacy regarding the masculine. Effeminacy "arises from a prevalence of the sensibility over the will: or it

consists in a want of fortitude" ("Feminizing Keats" 319). The male poet, then, was required to privilege order, reason and strength over sensibility, sensuality, delicacy and vulnerability. The male poet must write 'masculine' poetry.

I believe Keats's sense of the poetic self did not accord with this gendering. In a letter to Richard Woodhouse, 27 October 1818, Keats says, "As to the poetical Character itself...it is not itself--it has no self--it is everything and nothing--It has no character" (Gittings Letters of John Keats 157). Although Keats predominantly aligns himself with the male poetic tradition,¹ his description of the poetic character is unusual in its frank inclusion of feminine aspects. Given the choice to possess a masculine or a feminine self, Keats chooses both. Whereas Hazlitt, as quoted by Wolfson above, situates the possibilities of character at two different poles, Keats seems to avoid the choice altogether.

Keats's theory of Negative Capability has convinced critics such as Anne Mellor that his "poetic theory is self-

¹ As Wolfson points out, "Keats is discussing, with men, the different ways 'Men' orient their thinking, social conduct, and writing. It is a 'Man of Achievement,' Shakespeare (not Katherine Philips, Ann Radcliffe, or Mary Tighe), who is his model for negative capability" ("Keats and the Manhood of the Poet" 3). It is important to keep in mind throughout this thesis that Keats is struggling to maintain his membership in a male poetic community and that he is ultimately accountable to men in terms of his success as a poet.

consciously positioned within the realm of the feminine gender" (Romanticism and Gender 174). While I agree that Keats is very aware of the feminine as a gendering of certain principles, and that his poetic theory includes the feminine as the opposite of the masculine, I would argue that Keats does not sacrifice one realm for another. In other words, his poetic theory incorporates both the masculine and the feminine realms. Of negative capability, Keats says it occurs "when a *man* is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason" (Gittings Letters 43, my italics). Let me stress that Keats's theory of negative capability acknowledges the value of the feminine, but not at the expense of his investment in the masculine. The root of Keats's predicament is the fact that feminine writing was perceived as the exclusive domain of female writers, and devalued even in that position. Male writers were discouraged from writing what was perceived as feminine writing, so while Keats is self-conscious about the positioning of the feminine within his poetic theory, he is equally conscious about framing that theory within a masculine context.

The strongest twentieth-century arguments regarding Keats and gender focus on how Keats positions the feminine in his writing. Many critics (for example, Wolfson and Alan

J. Bewell) argue that Keats challenges the social construction of gender boundaries, while others believe that Keats's representation of the feminine amounts to appropriation (for example, Margaret Homans and Anne K. Mellor). Keats was attacked by reviewers for being effeminate, and for producing poetry that lacked intellectual steadiness and purpose. The fact that he was widely read by women only reinforced the negative opinions of men. Wolfson maintains that in the early nineteenth century, men sensed their own femininity, but repulsed it, comparing themselves to men more effeminate than themselves, in order to satisfy their sense of masculinity. She argues that Keats's "vulnerable sense of masculinity" was constantly held "in relation to the social world at large" ("Feminizing Keats" 329). His poetry reflected the expectations placed upon him, and so his exploration of gender representation was, in effect, a means of challenging the social norms. Wolfson claims that Keats ultimately succumbs to the public pressure to write about gender in a specific way:

At times [Keats] is sensitive to tendencies in himself susceptible to interpretation as feminine; at other times, and with more irritation, he imagines the masculine self being feminized or rendered effeminate by women exercising power or authority; and at still other times, he projects feminine figures as forces against manly self-possession and its social validator, professional maturity.

(325)

Although Wolfson argues that Keats is unable to ignore the public constraints on his writing, she does believe that Keats attempts to "broaden and make more flexible prevailing definitions" of gender (318). While I do not agree that Keats challenges the binary opposition of masculine and feminine, I do believe that he pushes the limits of poetic gendering. The fact that he struggles with a sense of the feminine which is far from absent makes his figuration of female characters worthy of a closer examination.

Mellor takes Wolfson's argument a step further, insisting that a feminine writing is present in Keats's work. She claims that Keats "images the self as unbounded, fluid, decentred, inconsistent--not 'a' self at all" (Romanticism and Gender 174-5). Mellor believes that Keats places significant value on the mother-infant bond. She argues that Keats's "poetic self-development grows out of this primary mother-infant bond. For Keats, the mother is the source of life" (177). The self does not exist without the mother, who is representative of the feminine element. Despite this apparent incorporation of a feminine response, Mellor labels Keats's use of the maternal bond as appropriation (Romanticism and Gender 175).

I agree with Wolfson that Keats wants to stretch the limits of gender boundaries as they pertain to the poet, but I believe that it is vital to remember that the reviewers

matched his challenge with insistence upon strict gender roles. As Wolfson herself points out, "concerns were growing over the softening of manly character, [and] the vocation of poet was being read within a cultural nervousness about the gender of the poet" ("Keats and the Manhood of the Poet" 5). I also agree with Mellor insofar as she argues that Keats is self-conscious about the feminine component of his poetic self.

Margaret Homans suggests that Keats aims to "repel [women's] interests and advances, to resist being read by women readers" ("Keats Reading Women, Women Reading Keats" 341). Despite Keats's portrayal of certain female characters as dominant, Homans believes that he rejects the idea of an aggressive female. She insists that he wishes to appropriate the qualities they possess for his own controlling purposes: "Keats equates his imaginative project...not only with male sexual potency but also with the masculine appropriation of the feminine" (344). Homans focuses on the predominant representation in Keats's writing, and thus stresses the patriarchal discourse comprising Keats's work.

Certainly Keats's language was determined by masculine discourse. I wish to probe the issues of control, however, that Homans scrutinizes in relation to women figures, in connection with poetic practice and language.

Was Keats, as a poet, in control of his own language, or did the patriarchal discourse determine his production to a greater extent than he desired? This is a question which he may not have resolved, but I suggest that Keats played out the answers in his representation of the feminine.

Keats's perception of the feminine is problematized by the fact that his illustration is not consistent. Because Keats displays negativity towards certain female characters in his poetry, but a positive attitude towards certain feminine elements, and because he appears to valorize the feminine only insofar as it can enhance his masculine status, some critics believe that Keats's use of the feminine is equivalent to appropriation. This, however, is not the case. By placing the feminine in the context of masculine power, I would suggest, Keats illustrates the very struggle he undergoes to achieve the language of a successful male poet. I do not believe that Keats's use of the feminine to explore his poetic strength means that the feminine is an allegorical representation of language. A parallel exists, however, between patriarchal expectations of poetic language, and attitudes towards the feminine.²

² Homans notes the scorn to which Keats was subjected because he aspired to a higher class of writing. His relegation to "'The Cockney School of Poetry'" (341) associated him with lower classes and the feminine. Wolfson makes note that these accusations excluded Keats "from serious consideration as a poet" ("Feminizing Keats" 320). The devaluation of Keats as

Both of these issues involve a controlling power, and Keats's portrayal of female figures of power demonstrates the potential of his poetic language to resist the control of the patriarchal discourse.

The textual opposition that Keats was expected to maintain in his poetry was such that masculine was equated with male, and feminine with female. The polar and hierarchical separation between the masculine and the feminine in the eighteenth century made it difficult for Keats to reveal the feminine in any other way than as the attribute of a female figure. When Keats wrote about male characters who possessed feminine qualities, they were considered too feminine, too passionate and sensitive (Wolfson "Feminizing Keats" 319). Keats's efforts to cross gender boundaries fails to liberate his poetry from the expectations of the male literary tradition because in order to succeed in the public sphere, he must accede to masculine superiority in his texts. The significance of Keats's efforts to resist limitations on his poetic self, and the resulting effect on the perception of discourse will be illuminated in the three poems this thesis will examine in detail.

a lower class poet is parallel to the devaluation of the feminine.

It is at this point that the distinction must be made between the feminine and the female. Keats reacted strongly against the labels "effeminate" and "cockney," among others, which class him with women, juveniles and the socially inferior (Wolfson "Feminizing Keats" 320). He had no desire to be an "honorary woman" (Homans 343). It is important to realize that Keats's attraction to the feminine is not indicative of a desire to reject his maleness. The feminine is that part of him that is productive, fluid and tuned to the sensation of things. In a letter to Benjamin Bailey, 22 November 1817, he exclaims, "O for a Life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts!" (Letters 37). Keats's poetic self incorporates that which is viewed as feminine because it is, for him, the source of his creativity as a poet. Keats's concern with the feminine principle is, however, often difficult to distinguish from his attitudes toward the women in his life. I deliberately make that distinction, however, in this thesis. I believe that Keats used the association between the feminine and the female to explore and express his concerns with masculine poetry's restrictive nature, but that this does not necessarily have a direct bearing on his private relationships.

Whereas eighteenth-century ideology implies that feminine and female are one and the same, the difference between the two, in Keats's poetry, is distinct. Having

said this, I believe that Keats expresses the feminine through female figures, which, in turn, reflect the ambiguities and pressures Keats faces as a poet who is discouraged from incorporating a feminine style in his work. Expressing the feminine through a female figure creates the illusion that Keats privileges the masculine, that the feminine is, indeed, solely an attribute of female figures. What Keats accomplishes is the transference of his anxieties regarding language onto female characters.

Philip Cox finds, in Keats, a feminine response that exhibits itself as a personal quality rather than a construction of his self, the latter being indicative of appropriation of the feminine (56-7). He argues that "[Keats] typifies the 'literary world' as effeminate blue-stockings and postures as the writer of more 'manly' tragedies, and yet he aligns himself with [the actor] Kean's artistic practice, which, like his own poetic endeavours, has been gendered as 'feminine'" (55).

While the feminine is undeniably present in Keats's poetry, he attempts to frame it within masculine discourse, which controls the feminine and defines it in terms of a hierarchy where the masculine is superior. He aligns the feminine with female characters and superficially removes its autonomy. Wolfson notes that when Keats confers the properties of passion and sensibility onto his female

characters, those feelings are made accessible to male readers without threat of emasculation ("Feminizing Keats" 345). Because male readership is so important to Keats, he obscures his experimentation with the feminine.

As a result of the contradiction between Keats's views and those of his readers, the feminine in the text emerges as something I will call the 'pseudo-feminine.' The pseudo-feminine is everything that is attributed to the feminine in that it represents feeling and fluidity, except that it is positioned in hierarchical relation to the masculine. The pseudo-feminine is a space on which masculine control or narcissism can be inscribed. It is the feminine in masculine discourse, and it appears in relation to the masculine, desiring of and subservient to male dominance.

I aim to show that Keats includes the eighteenth-century view of the feminine in his theory of poetic creativity and selfhood. What problematizes this desire to include the feminine in his poetic process is its gendering, and its ideological position as 'unmanly.' Keats's fear of the feminine reflects the social attitude towards its perceived power to emasculate male poets. What draws him to the feminine is his recognition of it within his poetic character. He is dealing with creativity and sensibility that is gendered, but wanting to remove the limitations that

gendering imposes on his poetic practice. The negative attitudes towards Keats's lower class status include contempt for the feminine in poetry, because of the link between the lower classes and the feminine. Keats is therefore in a double bind: to rise above the writing of women and servants, he is required to reject any feminine style, but the feminine constitutes a vital component of his theory of poetic self.

I intend to prove that Keats is *incorporating* the feminine rather than appropriating it. Greg Kucich, in his examination of Keats's work in relation to that of Mary Tighe, argues for "Keats's own determination to continue, rather than to appropriate or colonize, [Tighe's] feminine priorities. That investment, we might conclude, argues for the fluidity of his own gender position and the openness of his response to feminine poetics" (36).

Because Keats's treatment of gender has claimed the attention of late-twentieth-century critics, and appears to have particular relevance to the current critical environment, one way to register Keats's progressive ideas is against those of a twentieth-century feminist theorist. Luce Irigaray is able to intersect with Keats at certain points, but what is particularly significant about a reading of Keats through the theories of Irigaray is the discovery that masculine discourse oppresses Keats's poetic process.

Keats reveals the limitations of masculine discourse by expressing the feminine, not in terms of female sexuality certainly, but as the principles of fluidity, sensation, creativity and uncertainty--as resistance to masculine discourse. Twentieth-century Keats critics recognize the confusion that surrounds Keats's representation of gender. Reading Keats through the theories of Irigaray helps the reader perceive the limits of Keats's language--of masculine discourse. Irigaray asks readers to examine why patriarchal systems of language are permitted to remain in place. When Keats's poetry is read with that question in mind, we see that even a male must struggle to change the systems.

Luce Irigaray's theory of the "economy of the Same" is one of the most important arguments she presents. It is in one sense, or perhaps should be, very familiar to us as we enter the twenty-first century. Looking closely at psychoanalysis and Western philosophy, Irigaray postulates the theory that only one sex exists in our present language system (This Sex 86). She claims that the feminine is never identified except by and for the masculine (This Sex 85). The refusal of Western philosophers and psychoanalysts to represent the feminine except in masculine terms is tantamount to resisting the concept of femininity itself. There is no feminine autonomy represented in language, and where there is no representation, there is no existence

signified through language. She examines how and why this has happened in order that she might bring the existence of the feminine into language.

In order to fully understand Irigaray's theory of the economy of the Same it is necessary to return briefly to her reading of Freud's psychoanalytic theories. It is through a close re-reading that the writing of the feminine by the masculine emerges. Freud's Oedipal theory reveals a masculine ideal that by its nature is the only choice offered to women. Freud's theory states that all children are essentially male and that young girls *become* women. Freud's conviction is that woman's motivation stems from her longing for the phallus and the power that it signifies (This Sex 40). The only way for women to have that power is to be Other, that is, the feminine as it is written in masculine terms. There exists a distinction between the pseudo-feminine that is written in masculine terms and the feminine that is erased by those terms. By reducing every motivation to desire for the phallus the feminine is neither valued nor desired, nor accurately represented. Irigaray stresses this sublimation of the feminine by the masculine, in order to demonstrate that neither man nor woman has access to the feminine in patriarchal discourse. She sees the masculine as the only sex represented in language.

The feminine is written, Irigaray argues, in such a way as to reflect the masculine back upon itself. This pseudo-feminine is false, but is disguised as a contradiction of the masculine. There is an implied sexual difference that does not exist. Feminine desire is written as the desire for the masculine, but since it is the pseudo-feminine that desires, what is being enacted is the male desire for himself. It is a male fantasy that is being projected onto the female. Not only that, but male desire to return to the womb (Sexual Difference 39) is written in such a way that it appears to be a feminine need for the masculine rather than vice versa.

Irigaray does not fully explain the reason for masculine self-desire, but it is connected to the mother-infant bond. Psychoanalytic discourse destroys the mother-infant bond, but the daughter can become mother, and so return in that sense. The son is left always searching for, but never finding, himself. In response to his shame, man places woman in the position of desire. The feminine as Other is a mask for male narcissism, and is disguised as Other so as not to reveal the fact that there is no sexual difference acknowledged, that the male subject is desiring himself or searching to find himself (This Sex 98). Woman has a two-fold function in order to satisfy male narcissism. Her anatomical makeup is appropriated for use as a second

womb to which man wants to return. He can continually re-enact a return to the womb through the sexual act. In addition, woman's representation as space also means she is empty or incomplete without the male sex.

Historically, then, woman is posited as lacking, complete only when she has achieved a substitute for the phallus--initially her father, then a husband, and finally a male child (This Sex 41-2). To be complete, a woman must be the possessor of the phallus or a phallic substitute. To be complete, then, is to be masculine. Woman is defined by the masculine signifier, and simultaneously erased by it. By this description female is a hole which man can fill with himself. He is complete; she is incomplete. Everything about her is negated except her lack, and that space is seized by man for his own purposes.

Irigaray argues, "*To inhabit* is the fundamental trait of man's being" (Sexual Difference 141). Man fills the space that should be occupied by the feminine, but in so doing, appropriates that space for himself, leaving woman no representation. Irigaray also believes that by language man may represent himself, but does not know himself. The womb is his first home, and in searching for that home, he finds neither himself nor the feminine. He does not see woman because he looks for mother (Sexual Difference 142). Irigaray claims further that "by willing to be master of

everything, he becomes the slave both of discourse and of mother nature" (Sexual Difference 94).

The erasure of the feminine, of woman, Irigaray postulates, occurs through the discourse of philosophy and psychoanalysis. A double erasure occurs: first, by positing the feminine as something that is masculine, and second, by representing that pseudo-feminine as a lack, as Other. Because the discourse does not recognise the feminine, it exists outside of language, which is essentially no existence, in terms of feminine autonomy. Philosophic discourse, Irigaray argues, has the power to "eradicate the difference between the sexes" (This Sex 74). The difference cannot be retrieved into language, however, because the patriarchal discourse itself is maintained by the absence of the feminine. The fact that the only existing discourse is masculine, gives men power over women and the opportunity to oppress. The female wills nothing but what the male attributes to her (This Sex 94).

On the one hand, Irigaray says the masculine/feminine dichotomy "has always operated 'within' systems that are representative, self-representative, of the (masculine) subject," systems which posit women as a lack; on the other hand, she refuses any distinct representation of women, for fear of subscribing to the masculine discourse (This Sex 159, 155-6). Her hesitancy can be explained by

her desire to see discourse change, or to see another discourse emerge alongside the existing one. Irigaray attributes (male) psychoanalysts' belief that women know nothing of their own sexuality to the fact that men cannot accept that there could be a different logic from their own. Woman cannot be heard; her language cannot be understood (This Sex 90). Irigaray argues that a feminine language that is different from patriarchal discourse must be developed, and her own language is a different type of language inasmuch as it resists linearity and order. Women are deprived of a speaking voice, Irigaray argues, since the existing language is masculine (Sexual Difference 107). This is because feminine language has been unwritten for so long, that men (and women too?) would not know how to recognise it. What Irigaray achieves, in a sense, is a discourse that speaks of, or about, the feminine. What the masculine discourse perpetuates is ignorance of sexual difference.

Irigaray attempts to sidestep masculine discourse, to speak of the feminine in terms that are unfamiliar to the prevailing discourse. She attempts to break down masculine language in order to discover where the feminine has been removed from representation and where it should be situated. There is a discourse *about* the feminine, but no feminine discourse, and certainly no discourse which expresses

feminine pleasure (This Sex 95). Language does not represent feminine pleasure because it has been hidden for so long. Everything is expressed in relation to masculine pleasure. Irigaray attempts to express herself, not as all women, but as a woman. Her point is that language as it is structured excludes the existence, and of course the particular experiences, of women. The creation of a new language would acknowledge the fact that women have autonomous being. She also insists that we must examine the systems which have allowed sexual indifference to exist and the conditions under which those systems are preserved (This Sex 74).

Irigaray claims that we must recover from this economy of the Same what is feminine or what is owed the feminine (This Sex 74). What Irigaray wants in language is sexual difference without hierarchization (This Sex 159). Irigaray suggests that men's sexual pleasure is essentially an economic pleasure in which women are objects of exchange, without value in and of themselves (This Sex 184). A discourse of feminine pleasure would challenge the pseudo-feminine that shields masculine self-desire. The space that is the pseudo-feminine would no longer be available to be inscribed by masculine desire.

The language Irigaray uses to describe feminine pleasure resists the language she views as masculine.

Irigaray does not want to appropriate that which belongs to the masculine: "I have no desire to take their speech as they have taken ours, nor to speak 'universal'" (Engaging 64). Also, Irigaray has no wish for the "dream of reappropriation of power" which comes from women separating and interacting only amongst themselves (except temporarily, to re-acquaint themselves with their own feminine experiences) (This Sex 161). What she does wish, is to be able to define femininity in feminine terms. But is that the same as defining femininity in female terms? The difficulty Keats faces is the assumption that feminine equals female and, as such, threatens his position as a male. If Irigaray wishes to draw a model of femininity from the female body or from female sexual pleasure, this does not exclude men from accessing the feminine. Principles of fluidity, multiplicity and openness, as feminine, are not exclusively the property or possession of the female, although Irigaray seems to argue that they are what determine the *sexual* difference between men and women. Men can verify Irigaray's model of femininity, because fluidity and multiplicity do not have to come from the body to be part of experience. Defining femininity in feminine terms is, actually, to remove the gender boundaries while maintaining the sexual differentiation that Irigaray insists is obliterated by masculine discourse.

Irigaray's theory of the erasure of the feminine, however, is possible if only the pseudo-feminine is present in language. When the feminine is present in the language of the text, it can undermine the pseudo-feminine, as I aim to reveal from an exploration of Keats's texts. Irigaray writes the feminine in her own texts without creating a new language system. She demonstrates a limit to how thoroughly masculine discourse can dismiss the feminine. Thus, even as she argues that masculine discourse must be replaced by a new language, she writes her own discourse within the existing language system.

Although Irigaray is insistent upon difference between the sexes, she allows for movement between them. The two images she uses to express this movement are fluidity and growth. Irigaray, with the help of the seasons, proposes a model of alternation without contradiction:

Spring is not autumn nor summer winter, night is not day. This is not the opposition that we know from logic in which the one is opposed to or contradicts the other, where the one is superior to the other and *must put the inferior down*. There is a rhythm of growth in which both poles are necessary, or so it seems. Winter does not destroy summer, it allows the sap to flow down into the earth and take new root.

(Sexes 108)

With this model in mind, man and woman are involved in an exchange which is constantly flowing, not at the expense of

one or the other, but by means of both sexes which are different from each other. A symbiotic relationship, if that is possible. Each sex is "both complete and changing" (Sexes 113). Irigaray notes, "As soon as this passage from one to other is erased in favor of an opposition between one and other, we find a sacrifice and an exclusion of women" (Sexes 133). For Keats, this opposition creates the exclusion of the feminine, but also means the sacrifice of his poetic potential.

We can see that the breaking down of discourse, for which Irigaray campaigns, is already begun in the poetry of Keats. The space for the "feminine imaginary" which Irigaray seeks is present in Keats's texts. Keats was, in a sense, breaking down his discourse self-consciously to achieve the impression that the feminine did not play a part in the male self or in masculine writing. Keats writes in such a way that his characters participate in the economy of the Same. Keats's romances reveal the feminine as a reflection of masculine desires and discourse. There is, however, evidence that Keats also attempts to undermine the economy of the Same. This attempt is self-conscious, since Keats, I believe, is working to defeat the masculinizing purpose of patriarchal discourse. Keats sees the feminine as different from the masculine (the distinction that Irigaray supports), but he also sees autonomy of the

feminine without hierarchy between the two. While Irigaray argues that masculine discourse asserts the transcendence of language over the body, Keats reveals non-verbal expression, showing that the feminine can, in fact, possess language. The pseudo-feminine, separate from and opposite to the masculine on a vertical hierarchy is a superficial construction.

By writing the pseudo-feminine as he does, Keats intersects with Irigaray's theory of language as a construction. She insists that language has refused to represent the feminine as autonomous. Both Irigaray and Keats manipulate language such that patriarchal discourse is challenged. To a certain extent, Keats's constructed language refuses to eradicate the feminine from existence. This means that although the feminine may be submerged within the text, it is not absent from it, and the feminine is represented not only in masculine terms.

Keats's recognition of the feminine and its value in "The Eve of St. Agnes" coincides to a certain extent with the model of the feminine which Irigaray provides. Whereas Irigaray suggests a model that has not yet achieved representation in language, Keats's poetry demonstrates the existence of the feminine in language, and indeed, as something that is not merely Other. In "La Belle Dame sans Merci" and "Lamia" the struggle with representation is more

problematic and confusing. We can look at Keats through Irigaray's theories and see the exclusion of the feminine by masculine discourse, but Keats does much to undermine the economy of the Same, and provides a model of the feminine despite the presence of the pseudo-feminine in his poetry.

Irigaray argues that autonomy and value are refused the feminine by the construction of language. Keats's self-consciousness regarding his construction of the pseudo-feminine in masculine terms indicates the reverse. Keats, however, is limited by patriarchal discourse. Although Keats's calculated manipulation of language appears to undermine the impression that only the masculine is represented, his writing proves Irigaray's theory to the extent that the patriarchal language systems only represent one sex. At times Keats toys with patriarchal discourse, while at other times he appears to be bound by it.

I have already suggested that some critics believe that Keats's use of the feminine amounts to appropriation. I believe that there exists a genuine fear of postulating that Keats *is not* appropriating the feminine. The marginalization of women, real and perceived, has made many critics shy of allowing male writers *any* access to the feminine. It is admittedly risky to contradict Irigaray's perception that neither sex has access to the feminine with the claim that a male writer has access to it. Oddly

enough, if discourse is patriarchal, one would think that the power to change lies with men. To say that Keats merely challenges gender boundaries is safe, but Keats, in fact, provides us with more of a model of the feminine than we are willing to give him credit for. Keats's writing parallels Irigaray's concept of a language of feminine autonomy. His writing shows that the feminine can exist in language. Unfortunately, even Keats cannot escape the patriarchy.

What complicates Keats's project is his position vis à vis masculine discourse. By virtue of his maleness, Keats is granted a position of privilege. In terms of his poetic practice, Keats needs to have access to those principles which he believes are requisite for his success. Those principles, gendered feminine, are devalued. As such, Keats's attraction to the feminine becomes problematic, at times a source of shame, but always something he cannot relinquish. The oppression that masculine language can exert on women also applies to the male poet who wishes to push beyond the boundaries of gender differentiation, as we can see in Keats's situation, but the new discourse that Irigaray desires is present as subtext in Keats's work.

Throughout the three poems examined in this thesis, Keats grapples with perspectives on the feminine, and the conflict between masculine identity as defined by patriarchal discourse and poetic identity, which, in the

case of Keats, values the feminine principle. In "The Eve of St. Agnes" Keats is able to use the framework of masculine discourse to undermine its project, namely the representation of the masculine. The pseudo-feminine is revealed as a false construction. In "La Belle Dame sans Merci" Keats changes focus slightly, in the sense that he centres on the discourse as a means of understanding the representation achieved. In other words, in the former poem, Keats focuses on representing the feminine, whereas in the latter poem, he illuminates the manner in which masculine discourse limits the possibilities for representation. In "Lamia" the issues become more complex, but masculine representation of the feminine is shown to be false.

CHAPTER TWO

On first reading "The Eve of St. Agnes" through the theories of Irigaray, the characterizations of Madeline and Porphyro can be observed in terms of the economy of the Same. The feminine appears only to be identified in relation to the masculine, the masculine is reflected back upon itself, and no feminine autonomy is evident. Madeline is defined and bound by the legend of St. Agnes which, although it is delivered to her through the tales of "old dames," is a masculine discourse. The oral community itself is feminine, but the legends are not serving Madeline's interests, when, as Angela tells Porphyro, "[g]ood angels her deceive." If anti-romances "expose the drawbacks and danger of their heroines' dreamy preoccupation with other-worldly realms, to the neglect of the real world" (Lau, 30), then romances are guilty of creating those very heroines. Even if "St. Agnes" is an anti-romance, the legend of St. Agnes' Eve takes the position of a romantic discourse. It is founded on a discourse in which heroines are constructed in such a way that they are open to deception, indeed, almost desirous of it, it would seem. Madeline is written into the text as the supposed feminine element, but the

discourse that motivates her presumes a lack on her part, which will be remedied by her union with the male hero. The text suggests that she confirms this lack and its remedy. What Madeline represents is the pseudo-feminine.

The legends of St. Agnes present a difficulty that lies in their construction. According to the text they are produced by the language of women. They are, however, only serving the satisfaction of the masculine, in that they render the female participant passive to the point of relinquishing her self. The feminine desire is not written, except in relation to the masculine. A closer reading, however, will reveal that, although the poem is written in masculine discourse, a feminine language *is* alluded to. It is not a verbal discourse, and yet the fact that a feminine language is hinted at by means of the masculine discourse suggests significant limitations on the latter. In this chapter I will show how Irigaray's economy of the Same is simultaneously represented and criticized, and by means of a close reading of the text of "St. Agnes" I will prove that the non-verbal discourse pointed to is indeed a feminine one, serving the interests of the female rather than the male.

As a tale, "St. Agnes" is self-consciously directed toward the reader, and aims to achieve a certain response. The language manipulates the reader's interpretive process

by creating a meaning for the reader to grasp. In a sense, romantic signposts are strategically placed for the reader to connect, but if they are *not* connected, a different interpretive reading is made available. As Robert Kern notes, the narrator insists on the conventionality of scenes and props in romance, while simultaneously "pointing to their uncertain ontological status" (80). He adds that the narrator cannot be seen as supporting any single perspective on the world of the poem, but performs a "self-conscious play of conventions and perspectives" (81). That makes sense, because Keats's concern is less with the world than the discourse that created it. "St. Agnes" deliberately plays with language and the way it constructs meaning. The self-consciousness of the text creates a space for meaning that resists romantic discourse, but before I show how that is done, I wish to return to writing of the eighteenth century and examine some of the influences on Keats's writing that could possibly provide incentive or inspiration to resist this discourse of the male romantics. Where would Keats even conceive of this idea of the malleability of language and the notion of resisting convention?

I believe that women writers exerted a strong influence on Keats and that this may have found its way into his texts, not only through imitation of versification, but by adoption of women's dissident agendas. Marlon Ross's

studies show a marked difference, for example, between the environment in which Wordsworth wrote, and the one in which Keats was struggling to achieve recognition. In Keats's day, Ross notes, women were a significant group in the writing arena.

Women poets did influence Keats's choice of word. Ross and Weller demonstrate Keats's imitation of Tighe's poetry. Ann Radcliffe's voice echoes through his poetry, also. In his letters, he admits to an unsolicited influence from Mrs. Radcliffe. He tells his brother George, "I shall send you the Pot of Basil, St Agnes eve [sic], and if I should have finished it a little thing call'd the 'eve of St Mark' you see what fine mother Radcliff names I have--it is not my fault--I did not search for them" (Gittings Letters 214). There are points in "St. Agnes" where the influence of Mrs. Radcliffe appears very great. John Barnard notes that lines 294-7 are reminiscent of Radcliffe's The Mysteries of Udolpho (650). In fact, Beth Lau points out that critics have marked more imitation of Radcliffe in "St. Agnes" than in any other of Keats's works (44).

As Ross points out, women poets in the eighteenth century comprised a substantial literary movement that cannot be ignored by twentieth-century critics, and certainly was not overlooked by those in the eighteenth century (Contours 3). He tells us that "by the end of the

eighteenth century women poets [had] begun to view themselves as *feminine* poets with a voice and an agenda uniquely their own...[not] merely continuing the tradition of their fathers" (Contours 156). Ross argues that although the "proper" female poet was on a par with the effeminate male poet, and that both were situated below the masculine male poet, female poets had an arena, albeit regulated by masculine control, in which to experiment and express their desires (Contours 190). While Keats was writing, there was even more pressure than for those poets before him to align himself with the masculine tradition and not to "confuse" his writing, or "taint" it with the new feminine writing that was emerging.

While Ross notes Keats's desire to move above and beyond Tighe's influence, what Ross is alluding to is the aspiration on the part of Keats to be seen to mature as a poet. Keats's struggle is not so much against the feminine *per se*, as with its incompatibility with the image of the mature male poet. To mature at this point in time, then, means to become more masculine. If Keats rejects the influence of Tighe and other female poets, he can be perceived as having spurned the feminine, thus maturing, and moving closer to the masculine poetic ideal.

In comparing Keats with his contemporary, Mary Tighe, Ross takes into account the fact that the development

of the male poet was considered to be quite different from that of the female poet. Ross argues that Tighe's poetry, while submitting to the conventions expected of a mature woman poet, also contains a voice that "pulls towards the demands of originality, self-assertion, and pride" (Contours 158). He feels that Tighe's voice can complain or resist, while hidden beneath the conventions of a mature female's verse. He demonstrates the way in which Tighe's language incorporates double meanings in order to express her independent spirit while remaining within the socially acceptable boundaries for a woman poet. He also argues that Keats's sonnets exhibit the same sort of resistance (Contours 165).

Much of the work of Wolfson has shown that Keats was discouraged from trespassing on the territory of female poets.¹ Admittedly, this is because their work was still considered inferior by certain critics, but Keats was more than discouraged--he was publicly scorned. Reviewers attacked him by making reference to his effeminacy, his inferior social status, and even his sexual immaturity. Other poets immortalized the image of Keats as weak and

¹ See Susan J. Wolfson. "Feminizing Keats." She argues that Keats's writing reveals "a sensibility fascinated with the permeable boundary between masculine and feminine" and goes on to show that this tendency was seen as a negative example of the conduct expected of his gender (318).

delicate. Shelley's portrayal was inadvertent, while Byron's was deliberately cutting (Wolfson "Feminizing Keats" 322). All this was by way of saying that Keats might as well have been a female poet, writing the kind of poetry which he did. I believe that Keats's insistence on challenging masculine authority below the formality of his text is, in fact, an idea gleaned from resistant women poets. In the same way that Mary Tighe disguises her resistance, Keats obscures his challenge to masculine discourse.

Keats's anxiety towards the feminine and women is a result of the cultural ideology, or more specifically, the romantic ideology, which calls for an absolute separation between masculine and feminine writing, to which he seems to adhere, but which he undermines. It appears that Keats refuses "the violence of separation" Ross connects with eighteenth-century ideals of male poetic maturation, and clings to an "acceptance of...bonds" (Contours 159). To accept a close relationship between masculine and feminine writing it would seem acknowledges the difference between the sexes that Irigaray insists is ignored by masculine discourse. For Keats to continue to be influenced by, and to incorporate feminine writing in his work--a refusal to accept the separatist agenda--is to acknowledge and support the value and potential power of feminine writing. I

believe that Keats, like Tighe, "explores the limits of voice without ever actually violating the cultural dictates of...maturity" (Contours 165). Keats challenges the male romantic ideology by resisting the established meanings without actually rejecting the existing discourse. He deliberately manipulates his poetic language. For Keats, it would seem that his poetic greatness is inextricably bound up with his access to the feminine. Because this feminine influence was considered immature, "Keats felt the need to *appear* to advance beyond" the poetry of women like Tighe and Radcliffe (Contours 158 *my italics*).

Many critics have noticed Keats's positive view of the feminine, despite his apparent stress on masculine authority in his texts, but this argument is complicated by that which critics see as Keats's anxiety towards the feminine (Wolfson, Ross and Waldoff, to name a few). While Keats's mother does not figure, as such, in his poetry, Waldoff presents a convincing case for the influence of Frances Keats on Keats's poetry, in the themes of separation, loss, and anxiety over an irretrievable past (26-8).

The sense of loss of the bond Irigaray privileges--the mother-infant bond--could support Keats's willingness to value the feminine which Irigaray believes the masculine discourse refuses to do. While she believes men are all too

aware of that bond and therefore wish to eradicate it, Waldoff believes that Keats exhibits the opposite tendency.

Waldoff notices

repeated concern throughout [Keats's] poetry with scenes of separation from or encounter with mortal heroines, goddesses, or symbolic objects associated with loss, or with an irretrievable past, and his persistent efforts to deny, deal with, or evade the consequences of loss

(Keats and the Imagination 29)

While I hesitate to insist that Keats had his relationship with his mother in mind while writing, I would suggest that Waldoff is correct in linking Keats's anxiety towards the feminine and women with his severe losses, especially during childhood. I believe Keats is not willing to forsake the feminine as it has value for him and his texts. Even as he claims to have moved beyond feminine influence, the feminine continues to be a problematic issue in his later poems.

Keats is not striving for an androgynous ideal, sacrificing his masculinity for an asexual model. He is not appropriating the feminine either, for it awards him no high status from the masculine community. The feminine represents to Keats the maternal, and his own creative and unbounded ego.² I believe Keats also accepts a feminine

² Citing Adrienne Rich and Barbara Gelpi, Anne Mellor argues that Keats's theory of "negative capability" is founded on an "anti-masculine conception of identity" (Romanticism and Gender 174).

language by acknowledging the body's unconscious "voice," that is not accounted for by the masculine discourse.

Keats's ambivalent attitude towards the feminine situated him at odds with eighteenth-century attitudes concerning gender. Keats had to justify himself to the public and, I believe, he compromised to some extent--giving the public what they wanted, while refusing to subscribe wholly to the dominant ideology. The pseudo-feminine in "St. Agnes" is undermined by the very stress that is placed upon it. Marjorie Levinson argues that Keats deliberately uses the romance to mock itself--that the romance form allows him to distance himself from its accepted meanings:

The heavy-handed symmetries of the poem--a structural allusion to romance binaries--exhibit Keats's possession of romantic narrative and its governing norms...We see that he has acquired the romance form rather than inherited it. The romance, a sign of possession, is also *and for that reason* a sign of profound dis-possession, and as such, a defense against canonical absorption.

(Keats's Life 115)

Levinson suggests that one of the ways in which Keats undermines meanings is by comic hyperbole and other humour. Keats, she suggests, is distanced from the conventions of romance. She claims that one element of his verse that remains "largely unmarked is the jokiness of the writing...a linguistic denseness, materiality, and reflexiveness that is largely responsible for the smartness of the authorial projection and the farcical aspects of the

characterization" (111). Perhaps this inability to see the humour in the text is due to a decrease in oral presentation of poetry. Literature studied as the written word lets slip some of the richness of heard poetry. Reading "St. Agnes" aloud, one cannot help but notice the irony, as well as the exaggeration of Madeline and Porphyro. They represent the pseudo-feminine and the masculine, respectively, to a ridiculous extreme. Levinson notes that a "stylized, representational dimension" to Madeline and Porphyro is exposed by their "comic conventionality" (113-4).

To a certain extent, then, Keats's exaggeration goes unnoticed. By manipulating the romantic discourse, Keats challenges its assumptions without altering its language. He applies the language in such a way that the word and its meaning are no longer simply synonymous, although the expected association between discourse and meaning remains. As Levinson argues, "Keats examines the ways in which language constructs meanings" (112). I would suggest further that he examines how discourse constructs meaning, which is different from Levinson's point since language can signify several meanings while discourse operates on the assumption of fixed meaning. Keats begins to challenge established meaning in discourse by revealing alternate meanings. He does this by playing with language and structure. Not only are words open to different meanings,

but Keats writes in such a way that the structures he employs are equally vulnerable to alternative readings.

There are instances in the text of "St. Agnes" where the words on first reading, or even after several readings, are seemingly innocent, but where an alternative meaning is ever so subtly suggested. Keats foregrounds the meaning established by romantic discourse. He describes Madeline in the way that Irigaray argues is the only expression acceptable to masculine discourse. Her body, in pseudo-feminine terms, is the "site of inscription" (Butler, Engaging 151) for the masculine. She is a virgin, a "charmed maid" kind enough to take gentle care of Angela: "She turned, and down the aged gossip led/ To a safe level matting" with "pious care" (ll. 194-6).³ Her sexual purity is written onto her body. Just as there is in the window a "shielded scutcheon blushed with blood of queens and kings" (l.216), so too, Madeline's body is inscribed with colours of romance and images of religious purity.⁴ Porphyro idealizes Madeline; he makes her what she is by the discourse he uses (Contours 179). He wants her to be

³ All line numbers in this chapter will refer to "The Eve of St. Agnes."

⁴ Levinson notes Madeline's position as a blank slate, similar to the "shielded scutcheon." See Keats's Life of Allegory, p. 119.

someone he can "worship all unseen," to be "so pure a thing, so free from mortal taint" (l. 225).

Keats, by reference to Madeline's *body language*, shows us that she is not necessarily what Porphyro and his discourse make her out to be. Alternative language and its meaning affect the interpretation of the poem as a whole in a significant way. Early in the poem, just after we have been introduced to Madeline and her position vis à vis the legend of St. Agnes, something occurs in stanza IX that clashes with the pseudo-feminine Madeline we have met: "So, purposing each moment to retire,/ She lingered still" (ll. 73-4). Let us bring to this statement our knowledge of Madeline thus far. She has surrendered herself to the conditions of St. Agnes's legend, and has allowed her actions to be dictated for her. She has participated in the revelry, but "her heart was elsewhere." Madeline has given up her autonomy in order to achieve her "whim." Immediately following this quotation is the information that Porphyro is arriving. In the context I have outlined, we may read the clause "She lingered still" as insignificant. It can be read as a literary pause, making space for the information concerning Porphyro before Madeline goes to her chamber. It is possible to receive the impression that Madeline wishes to see Porphyro, but that is doubtful, since she is blind to everything around her "or all the charm is fled."

This pause of Madeline's, however, has a fascinating tenor of resistance, albeit fleeting and ultimately overridden. Although the hesitation seems linguistically and stylistically appropriate, Keats plays with meaning in such a way that Madeline's passive characterization is disturbed. Although Madeline is characterized as the kind of young woman whose head is turned "by too much romance reading and who can no longer distinguish the land of fiction from reality" (Lau 30), this hesitation suggests that Madeline may not be as blind to reality as the narrative implies.

"St. Agnes" includes other instances of the same sort of unsettling language, also cunningly situated. Another example is found when "perplexed she lay" in a "wakeful swoon." Why should Madeline be puzzled? Is she afraid? Again, the surrounding words suggest one meaning, in this case that Madeline is confused because she is in between sleep and wakefulness, but this explanation does not hide the powerful suggestion that there is a part of Madeline that is struggling against this situation. The text indicates that Madeline's motivation is imminent pleasure, but we are reminded that she is shielded "both from joy and pain," and we have no reason, in terms of the legend, to expect any negative outcome from Madeline's dream.

Keats carefully chooses his structure and language to give emphasis to the meaning that privileges masculine desire, and yet he strategically places alternative meanings that, once noticed, grasp the reader's attention and subtly alter the interpretation of the poem and of Madeline herself. The figure of Madeline as a passive, male-serving romantic heroine, is thwarted. Beneath the passivity lies an independent streak.

There are more examples of the same type as those above. Although it does not indicate a bodily response, the line "Its little smoke, in pallid moonshine, died" (l. 200) literally refers to the candle Madeline holds in her hand, but carries a tone of regret and irreversibility. The flame is out, and even the smoke has disappeared. The words suggest Madeline's last chance to reclaim her self. Immediately following this line, she closes the door and her last chance to leave is extinguished like the flame.

In Madeline's chamber, although she cannot speak, she "panted" and "to her heart, her heart was voluble." In the only chamber that Porphyro cannot reach there is a voice that speaks loudly. The idea of the language of Madeline's body is significant because it resists the conventional description of Madeline as the heroine of a romance. Lau claims that romantic heroes and heroines "convey their passionate feelings in the most subtle, chivalrous language

and gestures" (39), but I believe that Lau is referring to communication between lovers, and in "St. Agnes" Madeline's subtle behaviour hides resistance to, rather than desire for, Porphyro. Barnard indicates that "Madeline's heart is beating with expectant excitement" (648), but in this anticipation she feels pain.

A less subtle indication that Madeline may not be what she appears is found in the following lines: "She comes again, like ring-dove frayed and fled." There is something instinctual and intuitive suggested about this fear. Why does the impending fulfillment of desire fill Madeline's heart with anxiety? "She *seemed* a splendid angel" (l. 223 *my italics*). Despite Madeline's participation in the ritual of St. Agnes, there are feelings within her body that run counter to her aspect.

These lines, surrounded on all sides by language and structure that connote a romantic meaning, forcefully indicate a side to Madeline that we can only glimpse if we come to the text with a different interpretive key than romantic discourse. Madeline has put herself in this situation, but Keats implies it is much against her instincts. There is no feminine represented in the masculine discourse, neither is there pretence that it is. Madeline's construction as pseudo-feminine is stressed throughout. Her instincts do not give rise to a resistant

voice. Any potential autonomy of Madeline's is hinted at below the surface reading of the text, literally in between the fabrication of her passivity. So much is made of the constructed nature of legends that an alternative reading of Madeline is acknowledged by implication. We know that there is possibility for autonomy by the evidence that Keats leaves for us, indicating Madeline's desire for resistance.

Madeline's independence is represented by her body language. Waldoff insists on Porphyro's good intentions and his status as hero in the poem (69), but where does that leave Madeline? To applaud the fact that Porphyro does not force himself on Madeline once he is in the chamber is beside the point. Madeline says to him, "Oh leave me not in this eternal woe,/ For if thou diest, my Love, I know not where to go" (ll. 314-5), but as with the discourse of the legends, Madeline's speech echoes masculine desire. Keats may, as Waldoff argues, use "visionary imagination either to restore a lost world of myth and romance or to create a better existence" (63), but "St. Agnes" points to the lack of imaginary power given to Madeline. Her imagination is given less weight than Porphyro's (63), but this is because she is bound by masculine discourse and cannot linguistically conceive another position for herself. She relies, it seems, on the masculine voice. She asks, "Give me that voice again, my Porphyro" (l.312). Her body,

however, undermines her speech. Her anxiety and fear come from within, and express what cannot be spoken--a resistance to the masculine representation of her selflessness.

The body language of Angela and Madeline is communicated to the reader through masculine discourse, despite the fact that Irigaray insists this is impossible. A feminine language exists in the text by the deliberate foregrounding of its absence, and yet female body language points to a resistance to the discourse that determines their speech and actions. The unexplained perplexities and silences of the women in the text point towards the presence of a uniquely feminine mode of language, albeit non-verbal. Irigaray believes that all discourse is masculine, but Keats challenges the masculine discourse by using it to describe, to verbalize the non-verbal body language of the feminine. Keats exerts a certain amount of control over the discourse rather than allowing discourse to direct his writing absolutely. Even if we are only directed towards the possibility of a feminine discourse by reference to the non-verbal language, the poetic language acknowledges that which Irigaray insists must be absent in order for masculine discourse to maintain itself.

The feminine bodily responses frustrate the pseudo-feminine in Keats's text. While employing the masculine discourse of the romantic poet, Keats reveals that it is not

the only way of using words. He does not provide an alternative discourse, as Irigaray insists must be done, but he does disrupt the premises on which the romantic discourse is maintained. In her essay "Bodies That Matter," Judith Butler warns that "to include, to speak as, to bring in every marginal and excluded position within a given discourse is to claim that a singular discourse meets its limits nowhere, that it can and will domesticate all signs of difference" (Engaging 165). I believe that Keats reveals the limits of masculine discourse. He does include the feminine, but in its own language--a language of the body. Also, he shows that the masculine discourse, while it may presume to speak as the feminine (or speak *for* the feminine), is undermined by the non-verbal feminine responses in the text. For Keats to include the presence of the body language of the feminine is to reveal the limits of masculine romantic discourse.

What I am attempting to do is distinguish between discourse and language, and so, I think, is Keats. Because he sets up masculine discourse so conventionally, the non-verbal expression or symbolic code is excluded from masculine discourse. Keats is manifesting a language that is threatening to the romantic discourse, while manipulating romantic discourse such that it expresses that threat. Rehearsing Irigaray's observation that the feminine has been

positioned as the "outside" of masculine discourse, Butler adds, "A constitutive or relative outside is, of course, composed of a set of exclusions that are nevertheless *internal* to that system as its own nonthematizable necessity. It emerges within the system as incoherence, disruption, a threat to its own systematicity" (Engaging 152). Once a threat is acknowledged, it is controllable, but Keats does not express Madeline's resistance as such. Its obscurity is what makes it a threat that eludes the control of masculine discourse; its position has not been accounted for. The non-verbal language that exists in "St. Agnes" disrupts the dominant discourse. It makes its own contribution and can be taken seriously precisely because of its resistance to the pseudo-feminine position in masculine discourse.

Since one of the major criticisms of Keats's work by his contemporaries is that his heroes are too feminine, let us look at both of Keats's male figures in "St. Agnes" in light of that reproach. While Irigaray insists that the feminine is only written in relation to the masculine, we see something different in "St. Agnes," where the masculine is described in feminine terms, but not, as I hope to prove, for purposes of appropriation.

The Beadsman is paralleled with Madeline, but here, it can be argued, is another situation where the apparent

disguises the alternative. Ross sees the Beadsman as a figure, like Madeline, for repressed desire, although he argues that the Beadsman "is the masculine principle of actively repressed desire" (Contours 177). The Beadsman is tempted by the revelry, "But no--already had his deathbell rung" (l.22). The temptation to push beyond the boundaries is something, Ross argues, with which Tighe had to grapple, but Ross fails to explain the difference between Tighe's resignation and the Beadsman's. The temptation exists, but it is to be passed by. Both forgo temptation, but the manner in which they do so is distinguished by gendered language. The Beadsman's efforts to repress desire are "controlled acts of wise resignation" (Contours 178), while Mary Tighe uses "cautious self-discipline" and is "*disciplined by the poetic experience*" (158-9 my italics). Here the Beadsman, although he has chosen this part for himself, struggles with the same urge to cross into forbidden territory and enacts the same resignation to his future. In view of his final scene, which is anything but heroic ("The Beadsman, after thousand aves told,/For aye unsought for slept among his ashes cold" ll.377-8), I would argue that the Beadsman's repression is not necessarily masculine.

The Beadsman is similar to Angela and Madeline. Is it because of his association with transcendence that this

does not matter? No, because that is a discourse which constructs him like the discourse of romance constructs Madeline. Like Angela, he has a "weak spirit." He is passive, "patient" and longsuffering. We have been introduced to a man who is resigned to his fate, passive and accepting, only to be introduced to a young woman who is the same. Both, as Ross points out, suffer now, for the expectation of desire fulfilled at a later time (Contours 178). Like Madeline, he surrenders his self. The Beadsman's similarity to Madeline does nothing to enhance him as a figure of power.

The figure of the Beadsman and his association with Madeline allows us to see Madeline's passivity as a farce, as unnatural in terms of desire. It links masculine and feminine together, rather than discounting the Beadsman as "effeminate." The repression of desire, by male or female, is tantamount to the repression of the self. The Beadsman's religious aspirations lead him to deny his fleshly self, subjecting his frame--"meagre, barefoot, wan"--to the cold. Madeline's farcical passivity is supported by her contrary body language which indicates that she has repressed her natural desires (we have no indication of what they are) in exchange for masculine desire.

Madeline's will is obscured by the imagery of romance, which determines a site for Madeline as heroine.

Is it not significant that after our introduction to the Beadsman, we are given symbols--the plume and tiara--of romance and desire? We move from the almost asexual Beadsman to the distinct masculine and pseudo-feminine that are created by the discourse of romance. The Beadsman and Madeline have just been linked, not so much by their femininity as by their repression and the construction of that repression. What follows is a return to the subversion of the feminine, or the economy of the Same, which positions Madeline as passive desirer, with a will that is predetermined by the romance myth.

In keeping with the romance tradition, each character has a role to play. No less than Madeline, Porphyro has a character mapped out for him. Leon Waldoff insists that Porphyro is "an almost conventional hero of poetic romance" (70) who is "modeled on the hero of the quest romance" (64). Marjorie Levinson reminds us, too, that Romeo is the accepted model for Porphyro as a romantic hero (110). Porphyro's character, however, has also been pushed beyond the limits of conventional romance. Porphyro is endowed with supernatural qualities and has Angela convinced that he is "liege-lord of all the Elves and Fays." Within the narrative, the masculinity of Porphyro reverberates with assertions of the power of the phallus. Although it barely makes it into the text, Porphyro's "lofty

plume" speaks volumes about his purpose and place in the tale. Then again, the significance of his feather is so obvious that the visual representation is comic. While Madeline keeps her eyes fixed ahead of her, Porphyro, with his larger than life characterization, fills the space he is in, his raised feather brushing the ceiling above him. The visual characterization linked with Porphyro's protestations of innocent intent make him as unrealistic as Madeline. I believe that the figure of romantic hero is exaggerated to hyperbolic proportions, as does Levinson.

Part of the reader's interpretive process is determined by these roles. Symbols and their meanings have been established through the romance tradition, and are a part of the discourse available to Keats. Keats undermines these roles, but he achieves this subversion on the sly, as it were, stressing the conventionality of his romance while slowly chipping away at its discourse. It is as though different interpretive keys will unlock different meanings and Keats has made provision for a resistant reading.

Madeline, and Angela, it is implicated, subscribe to the theory of the legend, which is that the greatest desire of a young woman is to receive "soft adorings from" her love. Both women see themselves in relation to male desire, even at the cost of their independence. Everything about Madeline is determined, even fated, by her expectation of

"visions of delight." Madeline essentially chooses to put herself in this position, blind and deaf to all that goes on around her. Angela, too, is passive, allowing herself to be persuaded by Porphyro's language. Not only is she led to be an accomplice to Porphyro's scheme; she also puts her security on the line, carrying out his plan "betide her weal or woe." Although Leon Waldoff argues that Angela's feelings towards Porphyro are maternal (65), and indeed, the narrator tells us that she is Porphyro's only ally, Angela's body, like Madeline's, registers anxiety. This is not merely concern for Porphyro, that he escape the wrath of his enemies, but anxiety for her own position.

Both Angela and Madeline are uncomfortable with their situation, although they do not change it. They hurry with fear at Porphyro's words. In Angela's case, "So saying, she hobbled off with busy fear" (l.181), and in Madeline's, "She hurried at his words, beset with fears" (l.352). The women grant authority to the male figure. Porphyro openly appropriates Angela's services for his own ends as he takes advantage of Madeline's passive condition. Both women surrender autonomy and their instincts for the sake of the male figure.

Meaning, in "St. Agnes," is structured to a great extent on binary oppositions. It would appear that interpretive options are limited within the framework of the

discourse employed. Meaning, however, is subverted by the very structures that insist upon its conventionality. Keats makes use of the understanding of masculine and feminine as binary opposites to challenge the masculine discourse that, as Irigaray claims, only pays lip service to the feminine. Alternative meanings reveal themselves in resistance to those established by romantic discourse. Any meaning foreign to the conventional structure stands apart by its adherence to genuine oppositions. While masculine discourse masquerades as one that acknowledges the difference between the sexes, Keats incorporates a feminine language and subverts the economy of the Same.

For the most part, Madeline is a romantic heroine. She is the threat of which Butler speaks, in that her submission realizes her possible defiance. Romantic discourse has acknowledged and accounted for Madeline as a threat by positioning her in a submissive stance. In this sense, romantic discourse presumes to have no limits, to include and control all signs of difference. Whatever Madeline is or does, the possibility of its opposite is implied. If Madeline is silent, the threat of her speech is implied. But what happens if the formula is tampered with, and Madeline speaks *and* is silently resistant? This is exactly what happens. Madeline speaks in the language of masculine discourse and silently resists through her non-

verbal language. Her resistance is no longer controlled as a possibility, but is present.

The pseudo-feminine is frustrated by Madeline's behaviour because behind the mirror of masculine desire is a face of feminine frustration. Irigaray believes that masculine discourse mirrors male narcissism. I believe that it at least serves male interest. The mirror's function to reflect this interest is challenged by the distinct presence of that which is supposed to be (knowingly) absent. Romantic discourse renders Madeline no self, but Madeline possesses an acute awareness of her desires and feelings. Her non-verbal expression indicates an intuitive response that Porphyro cannot elicit or control.

Keats is not a writer of *l'Ecriture feminine*. I would argue that as a male writer Keats cannot write *woman*, nor female sexual desire. What he can and does do, is demonstrate that masculine discourse can be repressive for a male, and that it nevertheless does have limitations. In writing of Madeline using two different modes of language, Keats makes Madeline both absent and present, a positioning that is not accounted for by masculine discourse.

CHAPTER THREE

The limitations of a masculine discourse are revealed in "The Eve of St. Agnes" by the inclusion of a non-verbal feminine language that undermines the pseudo-feminine. "La Belle Dame sans Merci" and "Lamia" continue to explore both the limitations of masculine discourse and the limits this discourse attempts to impose on the feminine. "St. Agnes" challenges masculine discourse and its presumptions regarding the feminine in introducing the feminine bodily expression as a palpable threat to masculine discourse. "La Belle Dame" and "Lamia" address the correlation between masculine discourse and masculine identity. Discourse determines identity such that a challenge to the discourse is sufficient to confuse the identity. The challenge comes, as it does in "St. Agnes," in the form of a female figure who undermines her representation as an ideal figure of masculine desire or negative Other by disrupting the "'proper' [masculine] code of symbolic representation" (Zhang 186).

In "La Belle Dame," the knight's identity is held in question because he fails to read the lady "correctly." In "Lamia," Lycius, too, misreads his object of desire. What

distinguishes the two poems is the revelation that the misreading in the latter is, in fact, a reading from the perspective of masculine discourse. The knight, then, is penalised for his failure to *misread*. These two poems explore the impact of patriarchal discourse, not only on the feminine, but on the male identities for whom it is supposedly written.

PART ONE:

"LA BELLE DAME SANS MERCI"

Karla Alwes argues correctly that "La Belle Dame" is about masculine identity (103). What I believe she has failed to notice is that the "loss of masculine identity that is frighteningly complete in only forty-eight lines" (104) has occurred as a result of the all-male community in the poem, to which Karen Swann refers in her essay "Harassing the Muse" (90). While the poem may appear to centre on a "female who destroys by emasculation" (Alwes 104), there is more at stake than that interpretation implies. I suggest that this poem foregrounds masculine discourse (as expressed by the questioner and the male community) as the very reason for the knight's ambivalence towards the lady.

Masculine discourse is controlling of the feminine. It portrays the lady as a space onto which the masculine can write its pleasure. Her speech and actions are interpreted

from a male perspective, and her pleasure is determined by his pleasure. Although control suggests the possibility of defiance or unmanageability, the knight's experience with the lady is benign until he dreams of the "pale kings and princes" who name her "La belle dame sans merci" (l. 39).¹ It is their language that determines the negative image of la belle dame, but the knight is confused about his masculine identity because his perception of the belle dame does not agree with that of the male community. He tries to see her as an object to be controlled, but that is not his only reading.

In order to maintain one's masculine identity, according to the discourse of the male community, one must see the feminine as ideal love-object or as negative--a figure that must either be controlled or rejected in favour of the community. Karen Swann has insightfully expressed the sense of masculine community in this poem, and she suggests that the knight is using the female figure "to be interrupted, in order, finally, to become one of the gang" (90). She is correct in assuming the importance of the masculine identification with community, but he never does join "the gang."

¹ All line numbers in Part One of this chapter will refer to "La Belle Dame sans Merci."

I believe that the knight's ambivalence occurs because his view of the lady resists the view held by the community to which he aspires. He describes the lady with the masculine discourse of his community, but his language reflects an ambiguity that the "warriors" do not possess. While the knight expresses control over the lady, he expresses her controlling gestures without describing her in a negative way. Wolfson recognizes the belle dame as

a figure defined by men's branding as 'feminine'
 whatever urges their withdrawal from the duties coded
 in the poem's other important name: 'knight-at-arms'
 (327)

The knight is not disputing the lady's position as feminine, but it is not clear that he sees her foreign nature as negative. He does not subscribe to the community's perception of the lady, even though he describes her using their language of "quest, battle, conquest, and government" and "the indulgences the Knight associates with her, namely a zone of erotic luxury, sensuality, and near infantile pleasure" (Wolfson 327). The manner in which the knight uses discourse sets him apart from the community. He will not reject that which the kings and princes have repulsed.

The discourse of the questioner, whom I presume to be male, attempts to control the knight, and it appears that the knight attempts to control the lady in the same way.

The questioner creates the knight's experience by focusing on his own perception:

I see a lily on thy brow,
 With anguish moist and fever-dew,
 And on thy cheeks a fading rose
 Fast withereth too.

(ll. 9-12)

He determines the knight's appearance and also presumes to interpret that appearance by assuming that the knight is ailing: "O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,/ So haggard and so woe-begone?" (ll. 5-6). The framing of the poem focuses attention on the knight's solitary wandering. Because the narrative is situated after the dream has occurred, any reflections on the lady are susceptible to the influence of the dream. He wakes from the dream to wander alone and, as other critics suggest, we and the knight cannot be sure if the lady is real or imagined.² He is "Alone and palely loitering" (ll. 2 & 46), because that is how the community discourse portrays him, and we do not know if or when his circumstances will change.

The knight describes his experience with the lady in the same discourse as that used by the questioner. Alwes notes that the knight "attempts to restrict the lady's movements, to keep her in his purview and thus dispel her

² See Leon Waldoff, Keats and the Silent Work of Imagination, p. 86, and Karen Swann, "Harassing the Muse," p. 82.

mystery" (106). The knight also presumes to interpret the lady's words: "And sure in language strange she said/ 'I love thee true'-" (ll. 27-8). Both the questioner and the knight shape experience by means of a masculine discourse that is ordered and controlling.

The discourse has such a strong hold on the knight that he appears to accept the community's interpretation of the lady. Mellor argues that the knight believes "the worst possible interpretation of the lady's behaviour" (English Romantic Irony 94). The lady represents a threat to the masculine community, and Mellor believes that the knight sees her as such. The knight's ambiguous reading of the lady, however, is harmful to his position in the patriarchy, and this variance with the community voice is the cause of his anxiety. If the knight did believe the worst interpretation of the lady, he would be a part of the male community. Instead, he wanders in solitude.

Despite the use of masculine discourse, the knight undermines his own programme. The knight never acknowledges that he is ailing, and uses the word "sojourn" to describe his solitary activity, implying a temporary, rather than a permanent experience. Paul Edwards points out the change Keats made in a revision of the poem, using "sojourn" in place of "wither" (200). The new word does not coincide with the questioner's view of the knight, although the

knight echoes the opening words of the questioner in the last three lines of the poem (ll. 46-8). By confirming the circumstances established by the questioner--that the knight is "Alone and palely loitering,/ Though the sedge is withered from the lake,/ And no birds sing" (ll. 46-8)--he implies agreement and reinforces the discourse of the questioner, but, in fact, his tale contradicts that echo. The knight's subtle change from the questioner's "ailing" to the word "sojourn" is similar to Madeline's resistance in "The Eve of St. Agnes" and the knight, like Madeline, undermines masculine discourse while he appears to be controlled and determined by it. Although he appears to exert control over the lady, the contradictions in the poem make the reader aware of the limitations of the masculine discourse.

The loss of masculine identity that Alwes perceives is less a result of the belle dame herself than a consequence of the knight's inability to see her as a negative seductress. His indecision is the cause of his loss of masculine identity. He is caught between his perceived experience and the experience dictated to him by masculine discourse. The questioner asks him a straightforward question--why is he ailing?--and the knight's answer is to relate his experience. Instead of a straightforward answer, he gives both his perspective and

that of the kings and princes. The knight's interpretation of events is positive, whether misguided or not. The lady is "beautiful - a faery's child" (l. 14), and the knight believes that she loves him: "And sure in language strange she said -/ 'I love thee true'" (ll. 27-8). The community's interpretation, on the other hand, is that she has ensnared him.

The dream changes the optimistic tone completely. In fact, the structure of the line "And there I dreamed - Ah! woe betide! -" (l. 34), with the exclamation situated immediately after the word "dreamed," suggests that it could be the dream itself that has altered the knight's experience for the worse. The dream conveys the point of view of the kings and princes, which is that the knight's experience has been a negative one: "La belle dame sans merci/ Thee hath in thrall" (ll.39-40). The knight wakes to find himself on the hill with a new perspective on his situation: "And I awoke and found me here/ On the cold hill's side" (ll. 43-4). He goes on to say "And this is why I sojourn here/ Alone and palely loitering" (ll. 45-6), but does he sojourn because he wakes alone on the hill or because of his disturbing dream? If it is because he wakes on the hill, then he, like the kings and princes, sees the lady as an enchantress, who has loved and left him. If, on the other hand, he sojourns because of the voices in his dream, I suggest he is

oppressed by the male community and is marginalized by his challenge of the discourse. The dream rewrites his experience such that he is left caught between his view and that of the male community. He has not gained access to this community, as Swann suggests (90), because he is still alone. The knight's refusal to accept wholeheartedly the interpretation of the kings and princes means he is ambiguous towards the masculine discourse, and consequently, his masculine identity is indeterminate.

I believe that the knight does not accept the community's interpretation of the belle dame. Just as the knight refuses to speak of himself as ailing, so too, he expresses his lack of control of the lady. Besides the fact that his activity is matched by hers, he does not describe her as having trapped or entangled him in her snare. She represents something foreign to the knight and he reveals that. Edwards points out that the poem

stresses the freedom of the lady's lifestyle with her long unencumbered hair and unshod feet, a freedom that has long been interpreted as madness or irresponsibility, an accusation levelled against those who discard orthodoxies in favour of the instinctive life.

(200)

She speaks in her own language that is "strange." Although the knight speaks of his own control--not only through his actions, but also by his interpretations--for "no apparent reason, the girl 'sighed and wept full sore' [sic]" (Edwards

200). The knight reveals that his discourse of control is limited--that he cannot repress the feminine figure. If she does not share the knight's language, she nevertheless expresses herself through her body. Although he tries to interpret that which is unintelligible to him, the knight does acknowledge the lady's expression. The knight specifically describes the lady without using the terms usually applied to a seductress or a cruel enchanter.

After he meets the beautiful woman, the knight does things for her: he decorates her with hand-made jewelry of a sort ("I made a garland for her head,/ And bracelets too, and fragrant zone" ll. 17-18) and sets her to ride on his "pacing steed" (l. 21). She returns the gestures, throwing loving looks his way ("She look'd at me as she did love/ And made sweet moan" ll. 19-20), singing to him ("For sidelong would she bend and sing/ A faery's song-" ll. 23-4), and feeding him "roots of relish sweet/ And honey wild and manna dew" (ll. 25-6). She also takes him to her "elfin grot" where he sleeps. Although I have alluded to the controlling aspect of the knight's actions, and other critics notice the binding of the lady by the knight,³ up to this point he does not describe a situation in which he is ailing. As Wolfson points out, both the lady and the knight have designs on

³ See Swann, p. 88, Wolfson, "Feminizing Keats," p. 327, and Alwes, p. 105.

each other ("Feminizing Keats" 327). Because the controlling is reciprocal, its negative effects are cancelled.

Despite the knight's use of masculine discourse he neither wishes to control the lady, nor be controlled. When she cries in her cave, he tries one last time to make it seem as though he controls her, "And there I shut her wild wild eyes/ With kisses four" (ll. 31-32). It seems as though he turns her into the controller, "And there she lulled me asleep" (l. 33), but the tenor of the word "lulled" is sufficiently ambiguous to suspend a negative interpretation of the belle dame. It is at the point that the knight cannot mask the feminine language that the interpretation becomes seriously negative, according to the male community. The dream introduces the lady as an enchantress. The interpretation, however, is no longer the knight's, but that of the patriarchal community.

As long as the pseudo-feminine can be maintained the lady poses no threat to the masculine community. If the knight has control over her, masculine discourse remains undisturbed. When the masculine discourse does not completely disguise the feminine, the feminine is seen as disturbing. Nothing appears to be a problem as long as the knight can interpret the lady the way the community wishes, or as long as he can control her wildness. The problem

arises when the knight does not describe the lady in pseudo-feminine terms. He writes about the lady using masculine discourse, but reveals her "foreign" nature, her true femininity. The consequence of this is the knight's forfeiture of his membership in the all-male community.

PART TWO:

"LAMIA"

A standard interpretation of "Lamia" is that it expresses a conflict between reality and the imagination.⁴ While I agree that "Lamia" destroys illusion by replacing it with reality, what this interpretation fails to include is the source of the illusion. It is not dreaming, as Stillinger and David Perkins would have us believe (53 and 273); it is not imagination per se. As Yu Zhang appreciates, the source of illusion is masculine. Reality, on the other hand, is Lamia's divergence from patriarchal assumptions. Lamia slips from the grasp of masculine discourse and, ultimately, from Lycius's possession. Zhang argues that Lamia "represents (i.e. exposes by enacting) the illusory nature of woman's imaginary existence constituted

⁴ Karla Alwes and Jack Stillinger, for example, believe that imagination is replaced by a recognition of reality (155, 54). George Gross suggests that Keats rejects "the possibility of lasting happiness in a mortal's love for an immortal... [which] reinforces the modern consensus that Keats is being very realistic in his exploration of illusion and reality in 'Lamia'" (165).

by the male imagination" (197 my emphasis). In his discussion of "Lamia" Zhang argues that the character of Lamia disrupts patriarchal discourse by her position as its negation (233). Because she exists in the text as that which she should not be, she is a threat to the credibility of masculine representation. What "Lamia" exposes is the misconception upon which patriarchal discourse is based, namely that the feminine is able to be controlled and designated.

The discourse of feminine control appears in two images. The female may be represented as the idealised love-object. She is the innocent damsel-in-distress, if you will, who needs and desires masculine authority and dominance. She is the object of the quester's desire, to fulfill his own narcissistic tendencies. She is a "Madeline," setting herself up to be "rescued" and seduced, even as she is described as a saint. If the female is not the mirror of masculine desire, if she is not submissive, she is designated negative Other, or "disturbing power" (Zhang 40). This female is the feminine presence that threatens to emasculate and to rob men of their power--la belle dame sans merci. Patriarchal discourse operates on these two constructions of the feminine. It has been explained that Irigaray believes patriarchal discourse

maintains itself on these very assumptions, but "Lamia" disrupts the masculine security of naming.

Lamia's role in the episode with Hermes and the nymph has caused Stillinger, like Gross, to classify her as an immortal, and to attribute the failure of Lycius's and Lamia's union to the impossibility of an alliance between humans and non-humans (52). Lamia's immortality, however, is a masculine inscription and, as such, her position in the Hermes episode is a misplacement. Instead of a mortal feminine figure, Lamia epitomises the pseudo-feminine. Her position as a god-like figure, rather than glorifying her, obscures her true feminine nature.

As pseudo-feminine, Lamia represents masculine desire. She is the female Muse-principle and serves masculine interest. According to Zhang, Hermes turns to Lamia "as a potent agent of the pleasure principle, whose business is to gratify Hermes's possessive desire" to see the nymph (189). Her desire is to please Hermes: "Thou shalt behold her, Hermes, thou alone, / If thou wilt, as thou swearest, grant my boon" (I:110-111).⁵ Her desire is also for a male: "'I love a youth of Corinth - O the bliss!'" (I:119). Madeline and Lamia, as love-objects of the male

⁵ All line numbers in Part Two of this chapter will refer to "Lamia."

quester, and as figures of masculine discourse, desire to be sought. Lamia is also an enchantress,

without any show
 Of sorrow for her tender favourite's woe,
 But rather, if her eyes could brighter be,
 With brighter eyes and slow amenity,
 Put her new lips to his, and gave afresh
 The life she had so tangled in her mesh
(I:290-295)

Like Madeline, Lamia's words and actions are determined by masculine discourse.

The misconception of patriarchal discourse is that Lamia can represent the immortal, but the assumption is debunked by Hermes's response to the manifestation of the nymph. That masculine discourse is founded upon the absence of the feminine, is illustrated at this point. Hermes depends on Lamia to receive a vision of the nymph, but the nymph's physical presence is immediately removed from the scene (Zhang 192). Hermes and the nymph escape from sight to the "green-recessed woods." The vanishing of the nymph and Hermes, Zhang postulates, shows that the idyllic episode has a repressive feature, and that aspect, he claims further, is underscored by Lamia's romance with Lycius. Lamia and Lycius's union is a "deconstructive re-vision" of the union between the nymph and Hermes (192).

Warren Stevenson claims that Lycius is only a dreamer, while Hermes is a true poet (247), but Zhang observes the irony in the idea of Hermes as a quester-poet.

He reminds us that Hermes, aside from being a phallic deity, is also the god of theft and commerce (187). Hermione De Almeida reminds us, too, that Hermes is characterised by eloquence and deceit (183). Lycius and Hermes are linked by this treachery. Hermes is a model for Lycius, who, like Hermes, seeks to win "a peerless bride" ("The Eve of St. Agnes" l.167). Hermes may not be a model poet, but he is the possessor of masculine discourse and successfully acquires the nymph as his property. The only reason Hermes succeeds where Lycius fails, however, is his immortality: "Real are the dreams of Gods, and smoothly pass/ Their pleasures in a long immortal dream" (I:127-8). Hermes is a constructor of the pseudo-feminine and his position underscores the fallacy of patriarchal discourse in the mortal world. Hermes is the illusion which fails Lycius. Zhang postulates that "Hermes's purgatory power seems to have a twofold function: the construction of Lamia's 'proper' womanhood (by the male imagination) as a 'thing of beauty,' and the suppression of her potential power as a serpent (or 'reptilian other/it')" (214). I do not imagine Stevenson meant his observation in quite this way, but Hermes can be seen as representative of the true "masculine" poet.

William Stevenson argues that throughout the poem "Lamia is whatever Lycius wishes her to be" (60), but Lamia

avoids categorization and this accounts for much of the frustration of the poem. As Zhang argues, Lamia's ambiguous description "reflects the poet's lack of control over what seems to be his own creation" (198). On the one hand, Lamia seems to be limited by the masculine view (she is either ideal or sinister), but on the other, she "has no fixed identity, and evades any black-white characterization associated with the conventional romance" (198). She is more foreign than la belle dame:

She was a gordian shape of dazzling hue,
 Vermilion-spotted, golden, green, and blue;
 Striped like a zebra, freckled like a pard,
 Eyed like a peacock, and all crimson barred;
 And full of silver moons, that, as she breathed,
 Dissolved, or brighter shone, or interwreathed
 Their lustres with the gloomier tapestries -
(I:47-53)

The narrator sees Lamia as an enchantress, just as the pale princes see "la belle dame" that way, but Lamia will not conform to his expectations.

Lamia disrupts the meaning of masculine symbolic codes. Extracting the meaning of the serpent symbol deconstructs its presumptions. Lamia's serpentine form is demonic, according to Warren Stevenson (243). Edwards challenges this view by quoting an essay of Percy Shelley's to illustrate that Keats would be aware of the ambiguous nature of the serpent as a symbol. Shelley explains that the serpent was a symbol of benevolence and good fortune for

the Greeks and the Egyptians (Edwards 201). A universal reading of the serpent is not guaranteed. That the patriarchal use of the serpent is meant to be negative is clear from Appollonius's use of the symbol when he exclaims to Lycius, "'And shall I see thee made a serpent's prey?'" (II:298), but Lamia sees her serpentine shape as a "wreathed tomb." These two interpretations refer to the same repression of the feminine by masculine discourse. Appollonius' use of the serpent image is meant to refer to Lamia's transgression, but Lamia's reference betrays the patriarchal construct of the feminine as evil. She verbalizes her oppression as she says to Hermes, "'I was a woman, let me have once more/ A woman's shape'" (I:117-118). Her serpentine form can be seen as a disguise of her true nature (Zhang 202). That there is a true nature, we know because Lamia expresses patriarchal repression.

Warren Stevenson argues that "the typical male and female roles of the quest romance are reversed" in "Lamia" (243). It is true that Lamia seeks Lycius and waits for him to walk by. Lycius, however, is quick to take on the role of "rescuer" once he hears Lamia's plea: "'And will you leave me on the hills alone?/ Lycius, look back! and be some pity shown'" (I:246). Lycius is familiar with the language he hears and looks back at Lamia,

not with cold wonder fearingly,
 But Orpheus-like at an Eurydice -
 For so delicious were the words she sung,
 It seemed he had loved them a whole summer long
 (I:247-50)

Whatever Lamia's true nature is, Lycius can only see her as a goddess and idealises her accordingly:

For pity do not this sad heart belie -
 Even as thou vanished so I shall die.
 Stay! though a Naiad of the rivers, stay!
 (I:259-261)

As the feminine, Lamia has power and draws Lycius, but once he limits her to the pseudo-feminine, she poses no threat to him.

Lamia's image as a goddess is no different from her "playing woman's part" as far as the masculine imagination is concerned. Both images are controllable by the masculine and are representations of the "presence" of the feminine that do not threaten male identity. Even the fantasy that Lamia is both virgin and whore can be accommodated. Lamia is a "virgin purest lipped, yet in the lore/ Of love deep learned to the red heart's core" (I:189-90). Lamia, as Lycius's fantasy, appears to submit willingly to him.

Alwes claims that "the woman as symbol is created in order to be the index by which the male measures his identity" (1). It is clear from Lycius's response to Lamia's submissive stance that there exists a direct correlation between the way Lamia appears and the way Lycius

reacts. Lycius gently tells Lamia of his wish to "entangle, trammel up and snare" her soul in his. When she balks at the idea of the wedding, "he [takes] delight/ Luxurious in her sorrows" (II:73-4). She seems to change her mind and "[love] the tyranny." Lamia's declaration that she has no family serves not only to make her more mysterious but, more significantly, to make her less real.

Lamia may be seen as a positive feminine figure because of her heightened sensibility. Certainly, as Madeline, la belle dame, and the nymph weep, so does Lamia. She weeps that her eyes "were born so fair" and she weeps and trembles at Lycius's "purpose." Greg Kucich argues that, in "Lamia," Keats incorporates an "expression of the relational sympathy...central to much of the poetry of female Romantic writers. For Keats to import that core of sympathy into *Lamia* was thus to embrace one of the most prominent features of a feminine Romantic poetics" (36). Kucich is alluding to Lamia's "compassion" and "pity" and her "frail-strung heart" more so than her tears. This distinction between her tears and her tender sentiment is important. Kucich is concerned with Lamia's sympathy for others and as Zhang reminds us, the women who weep have experienced alienation (200). The sensibility Kucich notices in Lamia is not to be confused with her physical expression of resistance.

If the empathetic response with which Keats endows Lamia is truly a "feminine poetics" in terms of eighteenth-century poetic practice, then this is precisely the style of poetry that is devalued by the male poetic community. Kucich observes that Keats reverses the gender dynamics from those in Mary Tighe's "Psyche" so that the female is not independent or powerful. If Lamia is sympathetic and not strong, however, she is a pseudo-feminine figure. Rather than Lamia's sublimation being evidence of Keats's "anxious effort to repress the kind of female empowerment that Lamia shares, at times, with the heroines of Tighe's 'Psyche'" (Kucich 38), I see it as further evidence of the patriarchal reading of the feminine--especially because it differs from Tighe.

As Lamia's reality diminishes, Lycius's identity should be strengthened. Unlike the knight-at-arms, Lycius has adopted the discourse of his masculine community. Granted, Lycius is alone when he meets Lamia, but he has left both his ship and the community of which he is a part, and it is by "freakful chance" that he has wandered from his companions. The narrator does not specify if Lycius's friends are all male or not, but the impression of community foreshadows Lycius's desire to exhibit Lamia to his peers. The masculine community as upholders of the false image of

the feminine is reminiscent of the community of voices in "La Belle Dame sans Merci."

Lycius's identity is determined by his membership in the masculine community and his ability to be controlling. When Lamia first sees Lycius, he is "foremost in the envious race," a "young Jove with calm uneager face" (I:217-218). This picture of public competition and glory fades when Lycius meets Lamia, but returns the moment he hears the trumpets sound. Once Lycius is reminded of the world outside their "purple-lined palace of sweet sin" he is "stung,/ Perverse, with stronger fancy to reclaim/ Her wild and timid nature to his aim" (II:69-71). Lycius is reminded of the need to make a public claim to his private possession, Lamia. He must valorise his "prize" through a public show (Zhang 226). The same sense of rivalry that informs the chariot race causes Lycius to ask Lamia:

'What mortal hath a prize, that other men
 May be confounded and abashed withal,
 But lets it sometimes pace abroad majestic,
 And triumph, as in thee I should rejoice
 Amid the hoarse alarm of Corinth's voice.
 Let my foes choke, and my friends shout afar,
 While through the thronged streets your bridal car
 Wheels round its dazzling spokes.'

(II:57-64)

Like the knight in "La Belle Dame," Lycius cares about the voice of the community--the public sphere. During the wedding banquet, Lycius gestures towards the masculine community:

checking his love trance, a cup he took
 Full brimmed, and opposite sent forth a look
 'Cross the broad table, to beseech a glance
 From his old teacher's wrinkled countenance,
 And pledge him.

(II:241-5)

Lycius has, in effect, certain obligations to fulfill as a male. He must prove his authority and control.

In order to prove his power, Lycius must come into his own authority. He must see through his own eyes, rather than those of his "sage" and "trustworthy guide." In patriarchal terms that means he must be "blind" to the misconceptions of Appollonius' teaching and hide his face, "greeting friends in fear." Lycius can imagine that he is rescuing Lamia from alienation, but his project is doomed (Zhang 222).

Appollonius has to seem "the ghost of folly haunting [Lycius's] sweet dreams" (I:377) or the folly of his imagination will be apparent. Appollonius represents that discourse and its way of seeing and naming the feminine (Zhang 218-9). Appollonius *belongs* at the wedding feast and Lycius knows this. Hence his sheepish blush when Appollonius pardons himself: "'yet must I do this wrong, / And you forgive me'" (II:168-9). Lycius must cling to his imaginative vision of Lamia.

By naming Lamia "serpent," Appollonius uncovers the fallacy of his own reading. Zhang argues that Appollonius' "identification of Lamia as 'serpent' is a function of [his]

serpentine gaze" (219). When Appollonius "reads" Lamia, "[b]row-beating her fair form," Lycius becomes aware of his own misreading. The male assumptions that the feminine is either ideal or a "horrid presence" are brought about by the same violation or domestication. Appollonius' reading is essentially Lycius's reading. Alwes argues that "illusion must succumb in this poem to the wisdom of Appollonius' reality" (155). It is not Appollonius' reality, but Lamia's that is exposed by the attempt on the part of masculine discourse to imaginatively re-figure her. Appollonius discloses the truth that "Woman is always 'other' than she is supposed to be" (Zhang 233).

Instead of naming Lamia as Lycius's possession, Appollonius undoes the charm. Appollonius reveals that Lamia is not and cannot be Lycius's property. Alwes argues that the tragedy in "'Lamia' stems from the knowledge that the realms of reason and illusion cannot be fused" (153). The real tragedy, however, is that Lycius succumbs to the masculine discourse, represented by Appollonius and philosophic discourse. Lycius correctly turns to Appollonius to lay blame, although it is Lycius's submission to all that Appollonius represents that causes the destruction of his imagination. Lamia is not the cause of Lycius's death, just as the belle dame is not the enchantress the warriors say she is. Neither is Appollonius

the cause. Appollonius "in fact merely deals the death blow for a fall that has already been completed" (William Stevenson 61).

To say that "Lamia" is merely about the fatality of investing in the dream world or the "dangers of dreaming" (Stillinger 53), is to ignore the travesty on which that "dream" is founded. Lamia does not disappear because she is not real, but because she *is* real. Lycius, in his enslavement to the patriarchal way of reading the feminine, cannot see the real Lamia.

CONCLUSION

Feminist deconstruction is valuable in uncovering systems of repression and, as Irigaray suggests, can possibly reveal why such systems have been maintained. The repression of the feminine is Irigaray's primary concern and has been addressed in this study. Irigaray's belief in the power of patriarchal discourse to eradicate the feminine has been used as a way of reading these three poems of Keats's. Her assumptions are verified in one sense. The construction of a pseudo-feminine who plays the role of the romantic heroine or the female Muse-principle is a devaluation of the feminine as well as a means of reflecting masculine desire back upon itself.

Studying Keats's use of the romantic discourse that represses the feminine yields more than Irigaray has recovered from her re-reading of patriarchal systems. Irigaray deplores the hierarchical structure between the masculine and the feminine, but in relation to eighteenth-century poetic politics, this hierarchy has enormous negative impacts, not only on females, but on men. The impression that one is given from Irigaray's theories is of the power imbued to men through masculine discourse. In

view of Keats's poems, however, this is simply not the case. While patriarchal discourse operates on the privileging of the masculine at the expense of the feminine, further inquiry reveals that as this discourse is founded on the control of the feminine, it is founded on equally strict expectations of the masculine.

The question of what is the masculine is particularly sensitive in the eighteenth century. Masculine becomes the index of maleness, and the same holds true for the feminine. In terms of poetic practice, then, masculine and feminine poetry are discrete arenas. In light of the hierarchical structure, masculine poetry is privileged. For Keats to achieve success as a poet, he must write 'proper' masculine poetry.

Keats does write 'proper' masculine poetry, although he deconstructs it at the same time. Patriarchal discourse situates Keats in a bind because his poetic practice does not privilege masculine writing over feminine writing. Many critics have been grappling to categorise Keats as a feminist or a misogynist, but I believe there is a more fruitful way of exploring Keats ambiguities regarding gender. The inequalities between gender impact on Keats's professional aspirations, so he uses gender to explore and critique masculine discourse. The repression of women is

achieved by the same discourse that represses his poetic practice.

Keats has to be very careful in challenging the romantic discourse, because 'successful' poetry is 'masculine' poetry, and for whatever reason (possibly that they have publishing power), Keats writes his poetry for a male audience. He nevertheless subtly exposes the value of a feminine language in its resistance of the pseudo-feminine construction. The same language of the body that Irigaray and other French feminist theorists espouse is a resistant expression in these three poems. I am aware that this expression does not change the situation of the female characters, but it is of value in its presence as an alternate meaning in the text--an alternate reading of the female figures.

Keats changes his focus from the repression of females to the repression of males by the body of patriarchal discourse--the male community. He addresses the limitations of this discourse by delineating the limits it imposes on readings of the feminine. Constructing the pseudo-feminine involves a construction of the reading (and writing) process. The reading process, in turn, is part of a constructed masculine identity. To repeat, the repressive aspects of patriarchal discourse are not limited to the feminine.

To express the discoveries of this thesis in terms of their implications, it is important to recognise that patriarchal discourse has potentially negative effects for both sexes. Rather than trying to shift focus from the very real and very serious struggle of women to achieve discursive recognition, I have attempted a more complete act of deconstruction of masculine discourse. If we ask how this system of representation has continued to survive, I suggest that at least part of the answer lies in the fact that the masculine does not necessarily possess the power to alter the system. Certainly, I believe Keats attempted to challenge the system, but he could only go so far, since his professional validation was dependent on that structure.

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