



English Booklet:

John Keats and Jane Campion (Module A)

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TS Eliot, The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism(1933):

*There is hardly one statement of Keats about poetry, which. . . .
will not be found to be true; and what is more, true for greater
and more mature poetry than anything that Keats ever wrote*

Overview:

In Module A, you are required to compare and contrast two text by analyzing the contemporary re-imagining of the original work. Jane Campion's biographical film, *Bright Star*, reframes our understanding of John Keats' life and poetic corpus. In this study, we need to examine the themes and creative choices emphasised by the director, as she extricates specific ideas latent within Keats' work. The syllabus requires that we use the following terminology when completing our study of Module A:

- resonances and dissonances between and within texts.
- Students consider the ways that a reimagining or reframing of an aspect of a text might mirror, align or collide with the details of another text.
- In their textual studies, they also explore common or disparate issues, values, assumptions or perspectives and how these are depicted.
- By comparing two texts students understand how composers (authors, poets, playwrights, directors, designers and so on) are influenced by other texts, contexts and values, and how this shapes meaning.
- Students identify, interpret, analyse and evaluate the textual features, conventions, contexts, values and purpose of two prescribed texts. As students engage with the texts they consider how their understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of both texts has been enhanced through the comparative study

Context:

"In spite of difference of soil and climate, of language and manners, of laws and customs, in spite of things silently gone out of mind and things violently destroyed, the Poet binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth, and over all

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time. The objects of the Poet's thoughts are everywhere; though the eyes and senses of man are, it is true, his favorite guides, yet he will follow wheresoever he can find an atmosphere of sensation in which to move his wings. Poetry is the first and last of all knowledge—it is as immortal as the heart of man."

—[William Wordsworth](#), "Preface to Lyrical Ballads"

Keats Context:

Keats' work epitomises the romantic period of literature, and the tropes evident within this literary historical period which spanned from c.1800-1850. Romanticism required the poet to create parallels between emotional experiences and the natural world, inviting readers to lionize creativity and relinquish the need for logic and reason. Idealism and individualism form the primary precepts which underlie the thematic concerns of romantic poetry. A desire to explore the supernatural is often seen in this period, as evidence in writers such as Goethe. The imperative nature of freedom is emphasized by Keats, as most other romantic poets, such as Wordsworth and Byron.

Keats had originally studied to be a surgeon, however fell deeply in love with literature beneath the guidance of John Clarke. His contemporaries, namely Byron, were heralded during their lifetime, whereas Keats died in relative obscurity, with his gravestone reciting, "Here lies one whose name was writ in water". At the end of his life, doctors were unable to comprehend how he had lived for the final 2 months, as his lungs were completely destroyed. Campion's decision to focus on the love between Fanny Brawne, and Keats, allows her to romanticise his purpose in life, as it was not only poetry by love itself which gave purpose to his life. Keats' relation with Fanny Brawne was highly controversial, due to the social class structure which divided the two lovers.

Keats had moved into his friend's home, Charles Brown, at Wentworth Place. Brown had built this house with Charles Dilke, and thus the home was split in half. Brown rented his half of the house to a widow, Mrs. Frances Brawne and her three children, of whom the eldest was Fanny Brawne. Fanny and Keats were engaged in October 1819, however this engagement was broken off as he felt he could not provide for Fanny financially, nor could he match her social status. Keats burnt all of his letters except for his later ones sent to Fanny, of which he buried with him.

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There is little evidence revealing Fanny's feelings towards him, and therefore Campion takes artistic licence in her film as she imagines Fanny's reactions.

Campion Context:

Campion's film was made with a contextual shift in gender relations, as third-wave feminism emerged in the 90's, led by a group called Generation Xers. Although they believed that the first and second-wave feminists left unfinished work, they highly benefited from the legal rights and protections that the previous waves acquired.

The second-wave feminists caused a growth in economic and professional power and status, allowing room for the third wave to emerge. This resulted in the expansion of opportunities for the distribution of ideas developed in the 20th century information revolution. This also resulted in the emergence and enhancement of Generation X scholars and activists. The Third Wave Foundation, organised in 1992, was devoted to assisting "groups and individuals working towards gender, racial, economic, and social justice". This organisation was founded by the daughter of a second-waver Alice Walker. The authors of *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future*, were raised by women who belonged to feminists groups and were part of the second-wave. These feminists raised questions regarding the sexual division of labour in their households. These women who raised their daughters to be empowered, articulate, high achieving and self-aware grew up with the realisation of the barriers presented by sexism, classism, and racism. They chose to fight the patriarchy with irony and told stories of survival to overcome violence. Third-wave feminists, influenced by the postmodernist movement, also questioned the words and ideas that have been communicated by the media of gender, beauty, femininity and masculinity. A notion was decided indicating a changed perception of gender, stating that some characteristics are strictly male or female, forming into the concept of gender continuum. Through this changed perspective, traits such as possession, expression, and suppression that used to be associated with one gender were now universal. A major goal for third-wave feminists was to expand the idea of sexual liberation first becoming conscious of how one's sexuality and identity have been molded by the public and then allowing themselves to be free to convey their genuine gender identity.

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The institutional power created by second-wavers was inherited by the third-wavers, however outlets such as Ms. magazines and academic journals grew less important in the third-wave culture. Sexist images and symbols were subverted and co-opted by third-wave feminists as they expressed their concerns. This can be recognised through the irony and double entendres of the slang used by people in their self-presentations and this use of adopted language became proud and defiant labels. The play's investigated women's attitude towards sexuality as well as topics including birth and rape, and the playfulness and seriousness of a group of women called the Guerrilla Girls who donned gorilla masks with the intent to uncover female stereotypes and fight discrimination against female artists.

As third-wave feminists found their ability to vocalize their opinions, many writers opposed this movement, arguing that it was no longer useful and some declared that the wave was broken. Questions also arose concerning sexualised behaviour and whether acts like revealing clothing, heels, and pole dancing depicted true gender equality and sexual liberation. Similar to other political movements, there were disagreements amongst each wave of feminism. The third-wave party consisted of a wider range of ethnicity, class, identities, interests, and experiences than that of the first and second-waves. Although a lot of criticism arose during this time, third-wave feminists stated that an age of unified agenda such as The Third Wave Foundation noted that "groups and individuals working towards gender, racial, economic, and social justice" was the objective that was not only unrealistic but undesirable.

Keats

'La Belle Dame sans Merci'

This compact ballad follows the protagonist, a medieval knight, through his journey towards a realisation of mortality. The poem is a prime example of negative capability, one of the unique contributions Keats made to literary theory. In a letter to his brothers, Keats explains this technique;

I mean Negative Capability, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason. ([Letter XXIV](#)—December 21, 1817)

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The two figures in this poem, a knight and a belle dame (beautiful woman), enables the reader to think about the importance of creativity and imagination, as well as the consequent subordination of reason. He does this through both form and theme. With respect to form, the traditional balladic stanza is altered by Keats, the quatrain stanzas act as the primary form, and he alternates tetrameters with trimeters. This quickens the poetic rhythm of the text, creating tension within the story's progression, as we draw nearer and nearer to mortality. The theme of the poem, personified by the Belle Dame, is that of mortality, fantasy and love. Juxtaposing qualities embodied by the young woman are therefore realised by the young knight as he hears the phrase, "I love thee, true". The dream sequence includes elements of fantasy, along with the woman's "elfen grot". She is described as a "fairy", and thereupon is characterised as otherworldly, bringing into the poem an ethereal image of beauty and love. This romance is juxtaposed by the realisation of death in the final stanzas. There is no reasoning behind the love of knight and dame, and yet it is their imagination, their time spent dreaming, that binds their fantastic experiences to reality, "And there I dreamed—Ah! woe betide!— /The latest dream I ever dreamt/ On the cold hill side."

'To Autumn'

The association between his poetic verse and an ode in "To Autumn" is evidenced in the use of formal rhetoric. Autumn is personified into a harvester who needs to rest "his laden head", for "Who hath not seen me oft amid my store/Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find

Thee sitting careless on a granary floor". The laborious duties brought to a harvester, or to nature, during the spring have ended, and autumn brings a sense of beauty that is different, yet of equal importance to the brighter, happier seasons which are so often discussed in poetry, "Where are the songs of spring? Ay, Where are they?/Think not of them, thou hast thy music too,—". By using a rhetorical question, the reader is invited to compare spring with autumn, the prosperity of harvests with the quiet resting of a colder season, "barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day, And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue". We learn that nature's promise of growth will inevitably result in decay, just as decay will lead to eventual growth. Life and beauty surrender to their fate: mortality. Yet we must find hope in such natural progression, as it is the cyclical nature of the seasons which brings perpetual expectation of a better time, where "The red-breast whistles from a garden-croft; And gathering swallows twitter in the skies".

John Keats and Jane Campion (Module A)**‘Bright star! would I were steadfast as thou art’**

Keats wrote this sonnet, perhaps his most famous, in 1819 and revised the text one year later. The young poet knew he was dying of tuberculosis, and therefore we must look at this poem with the knowledge that the persona is aware he will experience mortality at a young age (25 years old). Keats questions a star, wondering why he is not “as steadfast as thou art”. He does not wish upon himself the solitude which the star endures, but the everlasting and ever present nature, as it remains immune to the cycles of nature and consequently, the inevitable fate of all things on earth: decay. The persona wishes to immortal, “pillowed upon my fair love’s ripening breast”. In the final rhyming couplet, he claims that if the star can not provide him with such a reality, he would rather die. While there are many sonnet forms, (e.g petrarchan), Keats uses a Shakespearean sonnet structure (ABABCDCEFEFGG) and iambic pentameter. However, it can be argued that there are two voltas (the ninth line and the final line). The formal elements of this sonnet introduce elements of romanticism.

‘Ode to a Nightingale’

An ode can be defined as a lyric poem, usually one in the form of an address to a particular subject. The meter is irregular and thus creates a song-like quality to the poem. The persona begins with his own sense of depression, as he feels numb to external stimuli. In his address to a particular subject, a nightingale, we learn that his heartache comes from being “too happy” in sharing the nightingale’s song. The unseen area of green trees from which the nightingale sings is alluded to, implying the persona has not seen but heard the beauties of this place. In the second stanza, the persona explains that he would like to escape into “the forest dim” with the nightingale. There are problems in this world, pains and trepidations, which the nightingale “has never known”, and thus Keats wishes to abandon mortality. In the fourth stanza, a classical allusion to bacchus suggests that alcohol no longer should be a conduit which leads to a realisation of beauty. It is the “flightless wings of poesy” which catalyse a connection with the divine. In this way, the persona foreshadows the conclusion of the ode, whereby the bird becomes immortal, as “no hungry generations tread thee down”. Once the nightingale’s song leaves, the persona can not recall whether he was awake or asleep.

John Keats and Jane Campion (Module A)**‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’**

The persona addresses an inanimate object, a grecian urn, and in turn makes it the subject of the ode. The meter is, more or less, in iambic pentameter however shifts on occasion. The persona engages with the urn in three different ways, three different times, in an attempt to realise its beauty and truth. The persona comes to the realisation that this piece of art has transcended time itself, as it has been passed down generations of people. The urn is personified, “foster-child of silence and slow time”, a figure of time who can recount the course of history it has observed over the many centuries. The persona, in the second stanza, turns to the figure of a pipe-player, who lies with his love beneath a tree. While he can never kiss this woman, the persona describes the pipe-player as eternally happy, as the ladies beauty remains eternal. The persona compares this beauty to “human passion”, which is subject to time’s eternal process of decay. The final stanza concerns the movement of village people. He imagines the town from which they came, and the fact that this town will eternally remain uninhabited, and the villagers remain in the moment of travel, eternally.

‘When I have fears that I may cease to be’

The sonnet reflects two primary ideas: a fear of mortality and an overcoming of this fear by relinquishing the need for fame and love. The first quatrain deals with his fear of death, emphasising his imaginative capabilities and the resultant incapacity of these realising such abilities due to mortality, “When I have fears that I may cease to be/ Before my pen has gleaned my teeming brain, / Before high-pilèd books, in charactery”. In the second quatrain, he observes the natural world, and all the objects he could discuss within his poetic work. He explores the deeper, more important issues which are signified by these objects. In the third quatrain, he examines love, with all its beauty and its faults. He looks at love in relation to time, and asks the responder to question whether love is more important, or less important, than the passage of time.

‘The Eve of St Agnes, XXIII’

Keats sets this poem in the medieval period, January 20th on the eve of the feast of St Agnes. The plot is one akin to many medieval tales, and thus Keats uses a poetic form similar to those used by the medieval poets: narrative verse. The iambic nine-line Spenserian stanza form is completed by the concluding iambic hexameter, allowing for the rhythm to draw attention to

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certain ideas in the text. This poem creates archetypal figures, a valiant knight and a subservient woman, in order to explore the concept of romantic love. The supernatural themes in the text fall within the common tropes explored by most romantic, contemporary poets such as Byron and Shelley. The description in each stanza is laden with imagery, and thus it is important, when you read each description, to analyse its effect. The plot is as follows. The knight, Porphyro, is in love with Madeline and this daughter of the Lord's castle requites his affection. She believes in the supernatural suspicion that, if a woman performs certain ceremonies on the eve of St Agnes, she will retain a vision of her ideal love. Once she is in bed and has completed these rituals, Porphyro sneaks into the court. While her family despise the Knight, he is able to find his way to her room due to the festivities in the hall. He is greeted by her nurse, Angela, who tells him of Madeline's beliefs. He then conspires with the nurse and plans to enter her room during the vision so as to convince Madeline that he is her true love.

Madeline is awoken from her vision of eternal love by his lute playing, only to be shocked by his humanity, his capacity for death and decay. She is shocked to the point that she believes he is dying before her. She thus asks for her visionary Porphyro to return, and upon such a request, Porphyro and Madeline are wedded in her dream, "beyond a mortal man impassion'd far". The two wake and consequently leave the castle together. Once they leave, the nurse Angela dies, and so too the old Beadsmen.

Campion

Campion's 2009 film, *Bright Star*, artistically recounts the life of Keats from his meeting with Fanny Brawne, 1818, till his death, 1821. By 1818, Keats had made a noteworthy contribution to English poetry, and was known within society as a poet. However, he was not seen as a successful writer, particularly in respect to his epic poem, *Endymion*. His finances were thus such that he was unable to marry Fanny Brawne. Campion shifts Keats' subject from a dominantly male persona to the voice and perspective of Fanny, allowing for a feminist reimagining of the poetry and of the relationship between Keats and Fanny; a relationship which sparked controversy while simultaneously inspiring great literary works. This is seen in Campion's choice to recite a large amount of poetry through the feminine voice. For example, in the introduction of the film, *Endymion* is spoken Fanny's younger sister reads the poem, "A thing of beauty is a joy forever". While poems such as *Bright Star* were also dedicated to other women throughout his life, such as Isabella, Campion imagines the Fanny is one of the sole inspirers of his great works. She is, in fact, the bright star who remains steadfast, yet isolated.

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This sense of isolation, between poet and star, reflects Keats and Fanny's forced distance, as society would not approve of their marriage.

Campion characterises Fanny as a woman of artistic temperament. She creates her own art by making dresses (see images below). These scenes are then paralleled with Keats writing his poetry. When Keats and Fanny meet, Keats explains that "She sunk her fangs into my poor poem and ripped it apart", thereby indicating that Fanny's agency and autonomy remains intact despite the patriarchal context in which she lived. Keats challenges Fanny's conception of 'good' poetry, "You favour wit?...Things that make you start without make you feel". This indicates that Fanny and Keats, the discussion between these two artists of their own beliefs, reflect a discussion of art and its purpose during the romantic period. This discussion continues into the present and thus connects with modern views. Society's perception of Keats' poetry is argued against by Fanny in a later scene, "no man could vulgarise" the english language so much. Fanny's response, "Did they not admire the opening? Even I could know that" suggests that Keats has shifted her perception on the purpose of art. The Inclusion of Bach's cello suite in voice form, serves as a musical motif throughout the film. The cross cutting between fanny and keats allow for this song to be associated with the romance of their connection and discussion.



John Keats and Jane Campion (Module A)**Textual Form and Romance/Beauty (sample essay paragraphs/intro/conclusion)**

The poetic form often hyperbolises the emotional and aesthetic pleasure derived from a romantic connection. The difficulties which ensue from romantic love become subservient to the deification of emotional intimacy. Film, as a medium, has the capacity to provide a representation of romantic relationships which evidences the realistic hardships and imagined musings of two lovers. John Keats' sonnet, "Bright star, would I were steadfast as thou art" describes the romantic love between the poet and his muse. This connection does not waiver, nor does it appear to be affected by a natural conception of time and mortality. Comparatively, Jane Campion's film, "Bright Star", we see the romantic connection between Keats and Fanny Brawne plagued by economic, physical hardship and death. The tension which lies between reality and its representation can be examined with respect to the choice in textual form. Campion's reimagining of mortality and romantic love is therefore understood with reference to her choices in textual form, decisions which create a dissonance between the poet and director's conception of mortality in the face of ever-lasting love.

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A sonnet, in its essence, is designed for the purpose of idealising and romanticising reality. Keats' choice of form resembles the aspect of reality he wishes to represent: a romantic love which is structured within a strict sense of a-temporal space. The Shakespearean sonnet form employs a formal rhyming scheme, iambic pentameter and consists of fourteen lines. The first twelve lines are sectioned into three quatrains, and the final two lines feature a rhyming couplet. Keats, in employing this formal structure, creates a sense of stability within the fictive world of the verse piece. This reflects the persona's wish to remain forever "Pillowe'd upon" his "fair loves ripening breast". The need to remain beyond an evolving world subject to decay is further seen in the volta, where the poet refuses to be affected by "the new soft fallen mask", by the perpetual change evident within the natural world. The poet simply exclaims, "No-yet still stedfast, still unchanging". The sestet continues to represent the sensual love between the persona and the muse as something which exists beyond time. For the persona and muse "live-ever" in this a-temporal space, they must hear each other's "tender-taken breath". The intimacy described within the first line of the rhyming couplet allows the reader to compare sensuality and romantic love with an immortal connection between two people. The poet completes the sonnet, claiming that a rejection of sensual connection within this world results in a person's mortal existence, as they will "swoon to death". In this way, the textual form of the sonnet allows Keats to represent a hyperbolised aspect of reality, sensual connection. Inadvertently, Keats subordinates other aspects of reality which are unavoidable.

Campion's film illustrates the tension between Keats' representation of deified love in the sonnet, and the reality of his economic and physical circumstances. Campion suggests that the tension lies in the poet's inability to reconcile the ecstatic connection felt towards his muse, and the reality of economic stability which structured the world around him. Moreover, Keats is himself subject to the decline of physical health, further illustrating the juxtaposition between ever-present love and the reality of death. The intimate close-up shot depicting a kiss between Keats and Brawne effectively reflect the sonnet's depiction of romantic connection. The frame of the camera cannot seem to capture the intense, idealised romance between the two characters. In this way, the viewer is led to believe that the setting of the character's, the economic and physical context of the two lovers is subservient to the will of their romantic ambition. In this way, the representation of the lover's connection mirrors Keats' sonnet. However, Campion contrasts this with dialogue in the following scene, "Fanny, I have no money...I am in debt". An over-the-shoulder-shot illustrates the distance between the two characters. This proximity between the two characters allows the viewer to compare the idealised sensual connection and the reality of Keats' economic instability. The reality of Keats' physical decline further emphasises the tension between the poet's suffering and the representation of his love in sonnet form. A voice over in the final scene plays over the establishing shot which depicts Keats' coffin

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being taken to the hearse. The letter read by Mr Browne is a recount of a woman observing Keats' death. We no longer have the poet's words, but two voices of another describing death. Campion shows that Keats' words and form pertained to the language of intimacy, connection beyond mortality. However, in his human form, was bound to experience the physical and economic issues which pervade one's life.

Therefore, Keats' poem represents an aspect of reality which can be idealised through the use of verse form. The verse form creates a sense of stability within an a-temporal space, a time beyond human consciousness. Campion uses film devices to illustrate the tension between an idealised representation of reality plagued by experiences of mortality, events beyond an individual's control. The dissonance between these two texts and their representation of reality is predicated on the shift in textual form.