

# The Portrayal of Female Nurse in the Poetry of John Keats

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## Abstract:

In his works, John Keats describes female characters variously; they range from the evil seductress of the *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* and *Lamia* to the innocent pure Madeline of *The Eve of St. Agnes* and innocent Isabella of *The Pot of Basil*. This study continues the tradition of investigating female characters in Keats's poetry. It examines the depiction of the female nurse in selected poems of John Keats. The study provides interesting observation about the representation of this type of female figure. There is little research about the image of female nurse Romantic poetry. Therefore, this study attempts to see how female nurses are featured in Keats's poetry. Understanding the way in which nurses were depicted is very important for two reasons: first, it provides a glimpse into the public image of female nurse during Keats's time. Second, it allows seeing whether Keats had created the image of female nurse based on his daily observations of actual nurses in the medical school or he had created his own stereotype. The study would contribute to the existing literature of women characters in Keats's poetic works.

Key Words: Female nurse, John Keats, romantic poetry, medical humanities, female healers.

## 1. Introduction

This paper explores previously unexamined topic, the image of female nurse in Keats's poetry. The study falls within the realm of medical humanities that investigates the relationship between poetic imagination and the medical mind. Some of previous studies focused on female figures who are conventionally labeled as seductive, destructive and predatory such as *La Belle*, *Lamia* and *Circe* who represent "conventional gender stereotypes of seductresses-of sexual conscious women" (Banerjee, 2002, p. x). Other studies focused on the

portrayal of women as goddesses of divine power such as *Thea*, *Mnemosyne* (*Moneta*), *Cynthia* and *Venus* (Lau, 1984). Some other studies portray women as victims of patriarchal society such as *Madeline* and *Isabella* (Grixti, 2012). The current study introduces a positive image of female characters whose role is to heal and cure physical as well as spiritual maladies. They also have a supportive role for characters during hard times such as close attendance and a companion. This category of female figures can be seen in opposition to femme fatal and destructive female characters that play negative roles.

Keats seems to be so fond of the term nurse and its significant symbolic implications. A part from his letters, the term 'nurse' was referenced (22) times in his poems. Themes such as healing, curing and nursing are very recurrent in his poetry. They were also important for Keats as a person, especially when we consider his family history of illness. Keats belongs to a family that was condemned with a consumptive disease, his mother, uncle, brother and even he died of it. Such tragedies would make nursing a necessary and important practice. Keats had experienced the act of nursing twice in his short life. The first experience occurred in 1807 when his mother returned home after her second marriage. She felt ill and consumptive and remained in bed for several months and Keats was responsible of nursing her. The nursing responsibilities included monitoring her medicine, fixing her meals, reading to her and guarding her door as she slept (Wolfson, 2001, p. 113). The other experience took place in 1818 when he was nursing his dying brother Tom who had also contracted consumption and died of it. On the other hand, Keats was himself nursed by close friends and loved people. In 1820, Keats fell seriously ill and he was nursed by his fiancée, *Fanny Brawne*, and her mother at *Wentworth Place*. On his final journey to Italy, he was nursed by his

friend Joseph Severn until his death. Even his career as a physician is closely associated with nursing profession. As a poet, Keats has set himself a goal to heal human pains with his poetry. His concept of a poet is clearly expressed in *The Fall of Hyperion* where he says “poet is a sage, a humanist, a physician to all men” (Book1: 1.189–90).

There is a strong connection between Keats’s career as physician and that of a poet. His poetry is replete with medical images, metaphors and allusions. There were many studies that investigated the impact of his medical knowledge on his poetic imagination. For example, Donald Goellnicht argues that Keats’s “medical learning influenced his thought and formed a source material for his poetry” (Goellnicht, 1984: xi). On the other hand, M.H. Abrams claims that Keats’s “technical knowledge of pathology, medicine, anatomy, physiology, chemistry and botany” form rich resources that provided him with “unprecedented metaphors for poetry” (Abrams, 1998: 43). Another scholar, Jack Siler, thinks that Keats’s “medical knowledge has contributed to his poetic language with terms, idioms and phrases to describe physical and mental distress” inflicted by the poetic personas (Siler, 2008: 47). Another study has examined metaphors of fever across the poetry of John Keats. The study argues that the medical knowledge provided Keats with an insight to describe the suffering of his characters in a medical and metaphorical way (Al-Jumaili, 2020). This study continues the trend of investigating the link between his poetic and medical careers. It sheds light on the portrayal of female nurses and to what extent his medical knowledge has a role in depicting them.

## 2. Methodology

The study is thematic that uses a descriptive content analysis method. Content analysis is a research tool used to locate and determine the presence of certain words or linguistic expressions, themes and concepts within a given text. It consists of two types: the first one is called latent content and the second is named the manifest or communication content. Latent content refers to the information contained in the text or the messages intended by the author, while communication content refers to the content which is manifested throughout the text (Drisko and Maschi, (2016). This method is widely used in analyzing literary texts. It allows the

researcher to be involved in the analytical process. In this type of analysis, the researcher focuses on examining themes or patterns of meaning within data then interprets them. The role of the researcher is to discover the implied meaning in a particular context. This type of analysis explores explicit and implicit meanings within the data; it maintains a systematic analysis process aligned with a targeted analysis objective (Guest, MacQueen, and Namey, 2012). According to this method, extracts from selected poems by John Keats are examined and discussed in relation to the depiction of the female nurse. The researchers consider the language used in the description such as the choice of terminology and expressions. This is very important especially with a poet like Keats who had a professional medical education. This would allow seeing to what extent Keats had used his medical experiences in forging such descriptions. Contextual meaning is also important in this type of analysis; it allows broader understanding of the text. It is a kind of close reading to consider other aspect of text processing.

## 3. Analysis and Discussion

Apart from the seductive, siren and temptress women, Keats’s poetry also features positive female characters whose roles are healing persons in dire situations. Such female characters will be referred to as female nurse. Keats’s poems contain some examples of the female nurses who play significant roles in healing inflicted characters. The first example of female nurse occurs in *Endymion*. Keats started working of *Endymion* in 1817, by that time; Keats has already quitted his medical career. However, his medical information was still fresh. In this long narrative poem, Keats has employed too much of his medical knowledge in describing the physical and mental suffering of his characters in a medical way (Al-Jumaili, 2018, p. 208). As far as the term ‘nurse’ is concerned, the term appears six times (as a noun and verb).

In book one; we meet the first female nurse (Peona) who acts as a professional nurse for her “brain-sick” brother (Endymion). Peona’s name is very suggestive and is always associated with healing functions. The name is derived from the Greek god of medicine (Paieon or Paeon) who healed the wounds of the gods in the Trojan wars (Lemprière,

1833, p. 1093). In Homer, Paeon was depicted as a physician healer who healed the wounds of Mars and Pluto (Ibid). The name Paeon was also mentioned by Ovid who introduced him as a healer for Hippolytus. De Selincourt argues that the healing function of Peona was suggested to Keats through the 'wise Paeon' who is mentioned in Spenser's *Fairy Queen* (Evert, 2015, p.168). In Keats's *Endymion*, the healing functions of Peona start early in the poem. Endymion who attended the festival for Pan felt unwell and the signs of melancholy were spotted by the crowd who attended the ceremony:

But there were some who feelingly could scan  
A lurking trouble in his nether lip,  
And see that oftentimes the reins would slip  
Through his forgotten hands: then would they sigh,  
And think of yellow leaves, of owlets cry,  
Of logs piled solemnly. - Ah, well- a -day,  
Why should our young Endymion pine away!  
(*Endymion* I, ll.178-184)

In the festival, everyone was happy and having good time except Endymion who is inflicted with a state of trance in which he saw a melancholy dream. He is depicted as having physical and mental conditions:

Thus all out-told  
Their fond imaginations,-saving him  
Whose eyelids curtain'd up their jewels dim,  
Endymion: yet hourly had he striven  
To hide the cankering venom, that had riven  
His fainting recollections. Now indeed  
His senses had swoon'd off: he did not heed  
The sudden silence, or the whispers low,  
Or the old eyes dissolving at his woe,  
Or anxious calls, or close of trembling  
palms,  
Or maiden's sigh, that grief itself embalms:  
But in the self-same fixed trance he kept,  
Like one who on the earth had never slept.  
Aye, even as dead-still as a marble man,  
Frozen in that old tale Arabian.

(*Endymion* I, ll. 392-406)

The extract above contains many medical terms such as 'cankering venom', 'fainting', 'swoon'd off', 'trembling palms', and 'trance'. Even the phrases 'eyelids curtain'd', 'whispers low', and 'eyes

dissolving' suggest a pathological condition or physical weakness. Endymion's condition displays some symptoms of what is known at nineteenth century as 'Nervous Fever' which is "an illness sharing many of the symptoms of melancholy and also induced by emotional stress" (Goellnicht, 1981, p. 257). Keats must have known about these symptoms during the course (Practice of Medicine) that was taught by William Babington and James Curry at the medical school. Babington and Curry explain the symptoms of Nervous Fever, it includes:

General languor and lassitude; -- ... dulness and confusion of thought; -- sadness of mind and dejection of countenance; -- respiration short, with frequent sighing; -- disturbed or unrefreshing sleep: -- ... dull pain in the head, especially the occiput; -- giddiness ... sense of anxiety and oppression ... and excessive faintness, especially in the erect posture (Babington and Curry, 1802, p. 58).

The passage above contains medical account that provides a description of the physical symptoms of fever that match the description of Endymion's case. To compare Keats's description with that of Babington and Curry, we may notice that Keats has used his medical knowledge to describe his characters' situations. Going back to Endymion's state, the crowd was tearful and anxious about the condition experienced by the young prince. They tried to wake him up but he continued in his faint. He was lost in melancholy dreams (Lowry, 1940, p.55). Then Peona appears; she acts like a nurse who cures his physical and mental sufferings. Peona is featured as a "midnight spirit nurse" who is capable to alleviate the symptoms of his disease and restore his health. Seeing her sick brother in a critical situation, Peona began to treat Endymion in a professional way. She took him "Into a shady, fresh, and ripply cove" where she lulls him to sleep. She offers healing comfort for his melancholic mind (Goellnicht, 1984, p.178). As we can see in the following extract, Peona knows more about nursery than anyone in the crowd:

Who whispers him so  
pantingly and close?  
Peona, his sweet sister: of all  
those,

His friends, the dearest.  
 Hushing signs she made,  
 And breath'd a sister's sorrow  
 to persuade  
 A yielding up, a cradling on  
 her care.  
 Her eloquence did breathe  
 away the curse:  
 She led him, like some  
 midnight spirit nurse  
 Of happy changes in  
 emphatic dreams,  
 Along a path between two  
 little streams,—  
 Guarding his forehead, with  
 her round elbow,  
 From low-grown branches,  
 and his footsteps slow  
 From stumbling over stumps  
 and hillocks small;  
 Until they came to where  
 these streamlets fall,  
 With mingled bubblings and  
 a gentle rush,  
 Into a river, clear, brimful,  
 and flush  
 Peona guiding, through the  
 water straight,  
 Towards a bowery island  
 opposite;  
 Which gaining presently, she  
 steered light  
 Into a shady, fresh, and ripply  
 cove,  
 Where nested was an arbour,  
 overwove  
 By many a summer's silent  
 fingering;  
 To whose cool bosom she  
 was used to bring  
 Her playmates, with their  
 needle broidery,  
 And minstrel memories of  
 times gone by.

(*Endymion* I, ll. 407-435)

Peona's skill in mitigating Endymion's pain is so evident and effective. When she sees him pale and not feeling well, she brings him away from the

celebration noise. Knowing that he needs rest, she puts him to sleep. She cradles her ill brother and "guarding his forehead with her round elbow" (l. 416). As Hrileena Ghosh states, Peona "exerts herself in the care of her patient and tries to enter sympathetically into his distress. Determining that the best course of action is to let her brothe rest" (Ghosh, 2020, p.231). In the original draft of the poem, Keats has assigned Peona more professional skills in nursing Endymion. The procedures she follows in dealing with Endymion's case sound more medical. She checks his temperature, through "putting her trembling hand against his cheek". Feeling his high fever, Peona immediately leaves to bring "cold water" from "dark wells". She also brings a "snowy napkin" and "squeeze" it to "cherish her poor brother's face", "forehead", "eyes" and "lips". As we can see from the original manuscript, her procedures are medically accurate:

She tied a little bucket to a  
 Crook,  
 Ran some swift paces to a  
 dark wells side,  
 And in a sighing time  
 return'd, supplied  
 With spar cold water; in  
 which she did squeeze  
 A snowy napkin, and upon  
 her Knees  
 Began to cherish her poor  
 Brother's face;  
 Damping refreshfully his  
 forehead's space,  
 His eyes, his Lips: then in a  
 cupped shell  
 She brought him ruby wine;  
 then let him smell,  
 Time after time, a precious  
 amulet,  
 Which seldom took she from  
 its cabinet.

(From  
original manuscript)

The extract might be inspired by Keats's medical knowledge, specifically of fever. Keats uses two important substances which are used in healing fever, namely cold water and wine. Peona, as an

experienced nurse, knows about the effect of cold water to reduce the body temperature. She also brings “ruby wine” to Endymion and asks him to “smell”. Again, this procedure might be known to Keats through his medical studies. Keats seems to be familiar with ‘oenotherapy’ (the use of wine for therapeutic purposes). Wine has been used as a medicine long time ago and it is continuously prescribed for medical purposes. According to Philip Norrie, in Eighteenth century England, hospitals regularly used wine as a medicine. He also states that the famous English physicians like William Heberden (1710-1801) advocated the use of wine to benefit health (Norrie, 2018, p.17). In nineteenth century, “Thomson’s London Dispensatory contained a chapter on wines, listing ten formulas for medicinal wine” (Ibid). Thus, it is safe to argue that during his days at the Guy’s Hospital, Keats learned about the importance of both cold water and wine in stimulating ill health and restoring physical power. In his medical notebook, there are references on treating fever and high body temperature. Keats wrote “if a Man have a pulse have [an] quick unhealthy irritable pulse, the cold bath will sooth the pulse lowering it with respect to quickness, and increasing its diameter. Wine although stimulant gives to the body great additional strength” (JKMN, P.9).

Peona’s skills of ministering Endymion are not restricted to medical stuff only; she uses other skills such as music to provide healing hands. She sings a lullaby to calm him down. Some critics see Peona’s song as full of and rendered “with Delphic emphasis” (Evert, 2015, p. 168):

Hereat Peona, in their silver  
source,  
Shut her pure sorrow drops  
with glad exclaim,  
And took a lute, from which  
there pulsing came  
A lively prelude, fashioning  
the way  
In which her voice should  
wander. 'Twas a lay  
More subtle cadenced, more  
forest wild  
Than Dryope's lone lulling of  
her child;  
And nothing since has floated

in the air  
So mournful strange. Surely  
some influence rare  
Went, spiritual, through the  
damsel's hand;  
For still, with Delphic  
emphasis, she spann'd  
The quick invisible strings,  
even though she saw  
Endymion's spirit melt away  
and thaw  
Before the deep intoxication.

(*Endymion* I, ll.489-502)

Some critics commented on the virtue of her singing, they argue that the act of singing can also be considered as part of the healing process. According to Goellnicht, Peona’s Delphic song had helped Endymion restore his physical health and mental tranquility (Goellnicht, 1981, 256):

Thus, in the bower,  
Endymion was calm'd to life  
again.  
Opening his eyelids with a  
healthier brain

(*Endymion* I, ll.463-465)

Thanks to Peona that Endymion’s physical, mental as well as psychological ailments have been healed. Her healing procedures were medically specific and probably Keats had them featured in the poem based on the medical knowledge he acquired during his days at Guy’s hospital.

In book two of *Endymion*, Keats presented another female nurse, Venus the goddess of beauty. As Endymion was taken into a chamber of light, he saw a young mortal boy sleeps peacefully and surrounded by cupids. He was told that the sleeping youth is Adonis who died of a boar attack. According to the mythology, Venus was accidently pierced by an arrow slipped from cupid’s quiver. By the time she was shot, she glimpsed the beautiful mortal Adonis and from that moment she was thoroughly captivated and fell in love with him. Venus decided to abandon all her previous lovers and chose Adonis and followed him to the wood

where he lives (Salem and Salem, 2000, p. 123). Venus knew about Adonis' love for hunting, she warned him from the wild beast of the forest. Adonis did not listen to her and one day he chased a wild boar that attacked Adonis and caused him fatal wound that ended his life. Since mortal Adonis was madly loved by Venus, she pleaded to Jove (the king of gods) to restore his life. Jove accepted her plea and allowed Adonis to rise once in a year every summer to unite with Venus and then returns to his slumber all winter.

Keats has used this story to introduce Venus as a female nurse who "healed up" Adonis' mortal "wound" and "medicined" his death:

For when our love - sick  
queen did weep  
Over his waned corse, the  
tremulous shower  
Heal'd up the wound, and,  
with a balmy power,  
Medicined death to a  
lengthened drowsiness:  
The which she fills with  
visions, and doth dress  
In all this quiet luxury; and  
hath set  
Us young immortals, without  
any let,  
To watch his slumber  
through. 'Tis well nigh pass'd  
,  
Even to a moment's filling  
up, and fast  
She scuds with summer  
breezes, to pant through  
The first long kiss, warm  
firstling, to renew  
Embower'd sports in  
Cytherea's isle.

(*Endymion* II, 1.481-492)

The above extract contains medical terms such as: 'love-sick', 'waned corse', 'wound', 'drowsiness', 'healed', 'balmy', and 'medicined' to describe Adonis' condition after the boar attack. Venus had played the role of sympathetic female healer. She bathed Adonis' "waned corse" with her "tremulous" tears and "healed up" his "wound" with "a balmy power". The healing functions of Venus had a

magical curative power, they not only healed his physical ailment, they 'medicined' his death too. With her magical touch, Adonis was resurrected to life again. When Endymion arrives, it was the start of summer and the two lovers were together and passionately embrace each other. The story of Venus and Adonis is very connected to the story of Peona and Endymion. In the two stories, there is a "significant healing episode" practiced by female figure acting like a nurse (Van Ghent, 1954, p. 8). Both of them show a young man depends on a female healer to restore health and vitality.

In book four, Keats presents another female nurse, Cynthia who is the goddess of the moon whom Endymion spends his journey trying to find. Cynthia comes in a long line of female characters who act as a healer. The opening scene of book four features Endymion in a state of struggle between his affection for his former heavenly love (Cynthia) and the yearning for his earthly love (Indian Maid) (Lowry, 1940, p. 135). He is depicted in a diseased state of a 'tortured brain' which begins to 'craze'. Endymion's tortured brain is not a sign of physical illness; it is more of an emotional nature (Al-Jumaili, 2018, p.233). The use of terms such as 'loving', 'hated', 'misery', 'weal', 'passion slew me', 'tortured brain', 'craze' can be seen as linguistic cues which suggest that Endymion's case is emotional, not physiological. His emotional dilemma weighed upon his soul heavily. His ailment stems from a psychological discontentment; he is slain by his passion. According to Goellnicht, Endymion is "thrown back into melancholy madness and self-pity; and once more a female character, acting as a nurse, ministers to him" (Goellnicht, 1984, p.185). Endymion pleads for Cynthia to be his 'nurse' to cure his emotional ailment:

Dear maid, sith  
Thou art my executioner, and  
I feel  
Loving and hatred, misery  
and weal,  
Will in a few short hours be  
nothing to me,  
And all my story that much  
passion slew me;  
Do smile upon the evening of  
my days:

And, for my tortur'd brain  
begins to craze,  
Be thou my nurse; and let me  
understand  
How dying I shall kiss that  
lily hand.–  
Dost weep for me? Then  
should I be content.

(*Endymion* IV, ll. 112-121)

In the extract above, Endymion appears to be so desperate and pleads to Cynthia as the only hope for him to recover. Endymion invokes Cynthia the beloved not the goddess to “smile upon the evenings of [his] days”. The use of the term ‘nurse’ is suggestive; it suggests that Endymion is requesting the lady’s compassion not the deity’s bless to cherish him from a weak condition. Cynthia is the second female character that plays an important role in Endymion’s life. Although she does not offer a medical care as we have seen in the previous examples above, Cynthia was requested by Endymion to be the ‘nurse’ who can save him from the bewildering state and put an end to his suffering. In other words, his emotional distress can only be settled by Cynthia’s grace. Once again, Endymion appears to depend on a female figure that mitigates his ailment. Cynthia has shown sympathy for the suffering of Endymion; she spreads her beams over the ocean floor, where Endymion “felt the charm to breathlessness, and suddenly a warm of his heart’s blood”:

On gold sand impearl'd  
With lily shells, and pebbles  
milky white,  
Poor Cynthia greeted him,  
and sooth'd her light  
Against his pallid face: he  
felt the charm  
To breathlessness, and  
suddenly a warm  
Of his heart's blood:

(*Endymion*

III, ll.103-108)

By the virtue of Cynthia’s pity, Endymion was healed and his emotional struggle is calmed down. His emotional ease can be seen through his physical

appearance, his “blood no longer cold/ Gave mighty pulses” (ll.305-306). According to some critics, Keats draws upon his medical knowledge to comment on Endymion’s condition. As Goellnicht states, “Keats chooses a physiological change to represent spiritual healing, a strong pulse being a common measure of health” (Goellnicht, 1984, p. 184).

In *Hyperion* (1819), Keats offers another example of female nurse. Thea, the Greek goddess of sight and vision, is represented as a female nurse for Saturn who had lost his kingdom to Jupiter. In writing *Hyperion*, Keats has used a lot of medical knowledge to describe the dilemma of the Titans and their falling state. Keats was also nursing his dying brother (Tom) by the time he was writing the poem. This may explain some of the medical allusions contained in the text and may also explain the importance of the role of nurse exercised by Thea. The poem starts with a description of Saturn as a defeated god who suffers physical and emotional pain:

Deep in the shady sadness of  
a vale  
Far sunken from the healthy  
breath of morn,  
Far from the fiery noon, and  
eve’s one star,  
Sat gray-hair’d Saturn, quiet  
as a stone,  
Still as the silence round  
about his lair;  
Forest on forest hung about  
his head  
Like cloud on cloud. No stir  
of air was there,  
Not so much life as on a  
summer’s day  
Robs not one light seed from  
the feather’d grass,  
But where the dead leaf fell,  
there did it rest.  
A stream went voiceless by,  
still deadened more  
By reason of his fallen  
divinity

(*Hyperion* I, ll.1-12)

The opening scene features Saturn in a state of physical collapse which is caused by a mental breakdown. He sits by himself lamenting the loss of his kingdom and power. He appears as a weak and dethroned god in a banished and diminished state. As far as Saturn is concerned, the 'gray-hair'd' god is depicted in a diseased state. For example "His old right hand lay nerveless, listless, dead" (I, 18), and when he attempts to make an utterance, it is "As with a palsied tongue, and while his beard /Shook horrid with such aspen-malady" (I, 93-94). These images are "external manifestations, reflections, of his spiritual state of sterility" (Goellnicht, 1981, p. 293).

Saturn's situation reminds us of Endymion's; as Endymion relied on Peona, Saturn turns to Thea, Hyperion's wife, for comfort and mitigation. Thea is another variation of Keats's female nurses. In the following extract, she is presented as the only person who can help Saturn and gets him out of his depressed state:

It seem'd no force could wake  
him from his place;  
But there came one, who with  
a kindred hand  
Touch'd his wide shoulders,  
after bending low  
With reverence, though to  
one who knew it not.  
She was a Goddess of the  
infant world;

(*Hyperion* I, ll. 22-26)

As described by Keats, she is the "Goddess of the infant world"; she must have super healing power. For some critics, she may stand for "a ministration of unexpected gentleness" (Bari, 2012, p.118). Thea's role is very important in this poem; she acts as a female nurse to provide Saturn with medical and spiritual support, "she touched his wide shoulders" with her "kindred hand". The way Thea approaches Saturn suggests she knows more about the art of healing. She bends towards the stooped Saturn as a nurse bends toward a patient. The body language may explain the intimacy between the acting nurse (Thea) and the desperate patient (Saturn). Gökhan Albayrak claims that the adjacency of their bodies "suggest the soothing and healing closeness" (Albayrak, 2019, p.163). As

Thea kneels towards Saturn, the professional nurse examines his face closely. She sees that his plight is caused by a cluster of psychological and emotional states. Some scholars point out that Saturn's diseased state is a "result of mental and emotional strain rather than of physical causes (Goellnicht, 1981, p. 297):

And sidelong fix'd her eye on  
Saturn's face:  
There saw she direst strife;  
the supreme God  
At war with all the frailty of  
grief,  
Of rage, of fear, anxiety,  
revenge,  
Remorse, spleen, hope, but  
most of all despair.

(*Hyperion* II, ll. 91-95)

According to Al-Jumaili, the extract contains lexical clues such as: 'strife', 'frailty', 'grief', 'rage', 'fear', 'anxiety', 'revenge', 'remorse', 'spleen', and 'despair'. The abundance of such emotional states proves that Saturn's problem is not of a physical nature, it is psychological (Al-Jumaili, 2018, p. 217). These terms may have been adapted from Keats's medical studies. As Henry Pettit argues, Keats developed his knowledge of psychology "through his training in surgery" (Pettit, 1943, p. 561). On social and personal level, Keats knows more about such psychological states as he himself suffered from them during his short life. Some critics describe his life as being stormed by negative mental states such as: melancholy, violent swings of mood, despair, depression, anxiety, indolence, and self-dissatisfaction which were the reasons for growing despondency (Ward, 1963; Bate, 1963, Gittings, 1968; Sperry: 1973; Walsh, 1981). According to the extract above, Saturn is suffering from mental confusion and bewilderment, and the presence of Thea marks a turning point. She helps Saturn get rid of his negative mood and restore confidence.

As the poem progresses, the image of the female nurse becomes more evident. Thea, in the following passage, appears to practice her nursing profession to the old sick Saturn:

One hand she pressed upon  
that aching spot



Where beats the human heart,  
 as if just there,  
 Though an immortal, she felt  
 cruel pain;  
 The other upon Saturn's  
 bended neck  
 She laid, and to the level of  
 his ear  
 Leaning with parted lips  
 some words she spake

(*Hyperion* I, ll. 42-7)

The act of pressing is very suggestive; it could be medically adapted from Keats's observations of patients examined by physicians at Guy's hospital. The detailed description above provides a clear image of Thea's procedures of motivating Saturn to come out of the depressed state. Thea is depicted as the "softest natured" deity with a physical might. She possesses an effective recuperative power with which she attends Saturn's distress. The merciful goddess inclines towards him with her healing hands to touch the 'aching spot' where the 'cruel pain' is seated. Her other hand is pressed upon Saturn's 'bended neck'. Thea's inclining body and Saturn's bended body suggest an intimacy between a dependent patient and a careful nurse. Thea's touching hands had balmy effects; they seek "to rouse Saturn from his self-anaesthetization" (Bari, 2012, 126). With her touches, she cured his "weary griefs" and "melancholy eyes".

Thea's therapeutic acts are not restricted to physical healing; her eloquent speech had also important effect on Saturn spirit. She speaks "some mourning words" in a "solemn tenour and deep organ tone" to motivate the anguished Saturn. Her words come like a bell to bring him back to reality:

"O wherefore sleepest thou?"  
 For heaven is parted from  
 thee, and the earth  
 Knows thee not, thus  
 afflicted, for a God;  
 And ocean too, with all its  
 solemn noise,  
 Has from thy sceptre pass'd;  
 and all the air  
 Is emptied of thine hoary  
 majesty."

(*Hyperion* I, ll. 54-59)

.....

Thea was startled up,  
 And in her bearing was a sort  
 of hope,  
 As thus she quick-voic'd  
 spake, yet full of awe.  
 "This cheers our fallen house:  
 come to our friends,  
 O Saturn! come away, and  
 give them heart;  
 I know the covert, from  
 thence came I hither."

(*Hyperion* I, ll. 147-152)

Thea's speech with its empathetic sentiment broke Saturn's silence and awakened him from his disposition. Her words have curative effect; they comfort and soothe the dethroned Saturn and made him realize "the monstrous truth" which he refused to accept. Her words revived him; she convinced him to come to terms with reality. The "Unseptr'd" god shook off all the "the silence around" and rose as a true king; he is no longer the "feeble shape" who sat "quiet as a stone". With her soothing care, Thea offers Saturn a solace; she listened to him, touched his aching body and spoke into his ears. In other words, "her care was entirely palliative" (Thomson, 2018, p.148). The passion of Thea's speech has restored his lost self:

This passion lifted him upon  
 his feet,  
 And made his hands to  
 struggle in the air,  
 His Druid locks to shake and  
 ooze with sweat,  
 His eyes to fever out, his  
 voice to cease.

(*Hyperion* I, ll. 135-138)

With Thea's curative acts, Saturn has restored his confidence and began to reclaim the throne he lost to Jupiter. This is another example of the role of female nurse who heals physical, psychological and even mental aches.

Besides professional nurses, there are other female nurses who can be grouped as aged nurses who offer other forms of care to the people they look after. Generally, old nurses play various roles such as guardian, mentor, caregiver, counselor, tutor, administrator, and other duties. In Keats's poems, the aged nurses not concerned with medical stuff; instead their duty was much to do with emotional support and sympathetic inclination. Keats's poetry contains some interesting examples of 'aged nurses' or 'old nurses' whose role is to accompany important personage to assist them in their daily matters.

The aged nurse in Keats's *Isabella* or *The Pot of the Basil* (1818) is one of the important characters in the poem. She has a significant role in Isabella's personal and emotional life; she is her personal servant, guardian and the only trusted person in the house to be made aware of the romance between Isabella and Lorenzo. She is not only a maid that does everyday house chores; she helps the young lady in her love-sickness. The aged nurse's relationship to Isabella is also one of the only female-female friendships we see in the poem and gives us a window onto Isabella's more conventional life as a woman. She was very close to Isabella, she "had been with her on other occasions and knew all about her" (Green, 2017, p. 6). The Nurse remains Isabella's ally to the end and the sole person that Isabella shares the details of her most lamentable story and her grief. Her devotion to Isabella, where she helped her finding Lorenzo's dead body, makes her the foremost confidante.

Seeing the body of her lost lover, Isabella is lost in a trance-like state. Her emotional and psychological struggle was so intense. Isabella had symptoms of profound melancholy resulted from the loss of love. Therefore, she went through a deep state of mourning that she becomes unaware of the surrounding. According to Charles William Hagelman, Isabella's mind is "forced beyond the limits of its endurance" (Hagelman, 1956: 263). Her intense emotion is described through physical illness of fever. The aged nurse observes Isabella's feverous reaction to the discovery of Lorenzo's body and goes into a state of wonder:

"What feverous hectic flame

"Burns in thee, child?—What  
good can thee betide,  
"That thou should'st smile  
again?"

(*Isabella*, ll.348-350)

The aged nurse demonstrates her affection and support to Isabella during the hard time. For example, when they found the corpse of Lorenzo, Isabella had a terrible experience. The aged nurse was emotionally supportive and tried to calm her down. The nurse's compassion and care for Isabella can be seen as an instance of selflessness, unlike the ruthlessness embedded by her selfish brothers (Green, 2017, p.6). With her "locks all hoar", the aged nurse "kneeled" and "put her lean hands" on Isabella:

That old nurse stood beside  
her wondering,  
Until her heart felt pity to the  
core.  
At sight of such a dismal  
labouring,  
And so she kneeled, with her  
locks all hoar,  
And put her lean hands to the  
horrid thing

(*Isabella*, ll.377-381)

In this context, the aged nurse seemed to be empathetic and engaged in Isabella's plight. She has an access to Isabella's moment of emotional vulnerability. She provides emotional and psychological support for Isabella's depressing state. She plays an essential role in the healing process of Isabella during her lamentation for the lost love. She observes what Isabella has endured and feels overwhelmed with pity and empathy. She becomes her only observer and attentive listener. She serves as a tool that makes the grieving and mourning process easier. Therefore, she is a clear example of a sympathetic aged nurse who assists Isabella with all her might (Thomson, 2018, p.139). In *The Eve of St Agnes*, Keats features another aged nurse (Angela), Madeline's servant. She is an old woman (dame) who serves as companion, attendant, adviser and caregiver. Angela has a similar role to Isabella's aged nurse; she performs domestic duties

rather than medical care. In the poem, Angela has a role equivalent to that of Madeline's mother and regards the young lady as her own daughter. She is the only person to know about the romance between Madeline and Prophyro. She appears to be a sympathetic agent to their plight and supports their love story and acts as a go-between. Her maternal instinct toward Madeline motivates her to help the young couple in marrying each other. The aged nurse "plays the part of the Magic helper of fairy tale" (Van Ghent, 2014, p.93), she made a promise to help the lovers achieve their union:

That Angela gives promise  
she will do  
Whatever he shall wish,  
betide her weal or woe.

(*The Eve of St. Agnes*, ll. 161-62)

By giving a promise, Angela "effectively becomes both Prophyro's and Madeline's guardian angel" (Atkins, 2016, p. 58). Angela is not strictly part of Madeline's house by blood but rather by employment, therefore, she is not part of the fight between the two families (Prophyro's and Madeline's families). Angela is the only person in the house who shows sympathy towards Prophyro:

Against his lineage: not one  
breast affords  
Him any mercy, in that  
mansion foul,  
Save one old beldame, weak  
in body and in soul.

(*The Eve of St. Agnes*, ll. 88-90)

As a nurse, Keats has given her a very important role; to protect and secure Madeline's purity and chastity. Angela is attentive to her godmotherly responsibilities; she cares about Madeline's reputation more than anything else. When Prophyro asked to see Madeline in her chamber, the old dame took from him an oath not to harm the young lady. She also reminds him of his moral obligation to marry Madeline once he has been with her in her bedroom. If he does not adhere to these codes, Angela may lose God's favour and will never go to heaven, she may be stuck in her grave "among the dead" for the rest of eternity:

"The while: Ah! thou must  
needs the lady wed,  
"Or may I never leave my  
grave among the dead."

(*The Eve of St. Agnes*, ll. 179-180)

This is evidence that Angela is religious; she is a true Christian figure and a devoted person. Her name is biblical; it suggests religious devout and is associated with angels. Angela could also be linked to the "secret sisterhood" that Prophyro mentioned when he was talking to her. During the medieval period, the term 'sisterhood' was associated with nuns who dedicate themselves to serve the community in various roles such as teaching, health care and spiritual guidance. This might suggest that Angela is a nun who is responsible of mentoring Madeline's physical and spiritual development. She symbolizes the old order of religious and moral values. This was clearly shown when she asked Prophyro to pray and keep to the moral codes in dealing with Madeline. As argued by Jack Stillinger, "Angela asserts a kind of orthodox middle-class morality" (Stillinger, 1961, p. 540). She differs from the other "old dames" who tell fanciful tales, Angela is the only female responsible to teach and instruct Madeline on factual matters. As a nurse, Angela tries to steer Madeline's way "through the growing instincts of her body, and the incomplete, largely erroneous information in her mind" (Houssen, 2010, p. 123). Some critics state that Angela is a descendant of the old nurse (Glorizia) in Boccaccio's *Filocolo* (Colvin, 1917, p.398). Some other critics argued that Angela was modeled on Juliet's nurse in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*; both are featured as "experienced guardians of young women's chastity" (Leavy, 2015, p.223). They also collaborate with the lovers to win the hearts of their beloveds. Another study has linked Angela to Mercie in Spenser's *Fairy Queen* who guided The Red Cross knight to meet the Holy Man (Gilbreath, 1986, p. 48).

Another example of Aged nurse can be found in *Endymion*. In book 2, there is an allusion to Amalthea the famous old nurse of infant Jupiter (Zeus). According to Greek and Roman Mythology, when Jupiter was born, he was hidden away from his cruel father, Cronus. Jupiter's mother, Rhea, took the child to the island of Crete where he was

left for the care of Amalthea. Amalthea is a goat-tending nymph who brought Jupiter up on the milk of her goat. Keats, in the following extract makes a comparison between the food which was offered to Endymion by Cupid and the one offered to Jupiter by Amalthea:

Since Ariadne was a vintager,  
So cool a purple: taste these juicy pears,  
Sent me by sad Vertumnus, when his fears  
Were high about Pomona: here is cream,  
Deepening to richness from a snowy gleam;  
Sweeter than that nurse Amalthea skimm'd  
For the boy Jupiter  
(*Endymion* II, ll. 445-451)

The extract above features the old nurse Amalthea as foster mother who was responsible to look after Jupiter (Zeus) in his infancy. She provided him with a she-goat to act as a wet nurse in a cave on Mount Dikte in Crete. Besides adoptive mother, Amalthea was also a guardian and a caregiver for Jupiter (Zeus) who continued to rely on her even after he was an adult. She also helped him to fashion his thunder-shield known as the Aegis out of a goat skin in order to increase his strength and might. Although the poem does not say more about this myth, the idea of a female nurse is clearly emphasized. The allusion may also illustrate Keats's preoccupation with the female nurse figure. Keats's critics argue that old women were usually seen by Keats as a source of appreciation and respect. In creating the characters of aged nurses, Keats got inspired by real old women he acquainted with. For example, Heidi Thomson points out that "Keats's relationship with his grandmother [Alice Jennings] no doubt inspired the compassionate portrayal of various older women in his poetry" (Thomson, 2018, p. 139). There are other old women who might be a source of inspiration for Keats such as Mrs Wylie, the mother of his sister in law (Georgiana). Another aged woman who had a positive impact on Keats's life was Mrs Brawne, his prospective mother-in-law.

#### 4. Conclusion:

Keats's attitude toward women is, to certain extent, complicated; women do not appear as either inherently good or evil. There has been a long tradition among scholars to examine female characters in the poetry of John Keats. Some of his

female characters appear as seductive and victimizers; others are Muses or inspirational figures. On the other hand, some poems portray female figures as helpless victims. This article focused on the portrayal of female nurse in selected poems. The analysis of these texts shows that Keats was preoccupied with the idea of female nurse. Generally, there are two types of female nurses in Keats's poems. Some of them were featured as healers of physical and psychological pains such as Peona and Cynthia in *Endymion*; and Thea in *Hyperion*. The female figures of this type are commonly perceived as healers and practice nursing professionally. Some of their nursing procedures were medically correct. The others are featured as motherly figures who are serving as attendants, caregivers and mentors such as the aged nurse in *The Pot of Basil*, Angela in *The Eve of St. Agnes* and Amalthea in *Endymion*. The figures of this type are commonly seen as old and experienced dames; their duties were more concerned with looking after a protégé (mentee). The study has also examined the connection between Keats's medical career and the portrayal of female nurse. It was found that there is a strong link between the two careers and many of the functions applied by the nurses were medically valid.

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