

# The Dynamism of Poetic Identity Through Keatsian (Un)gendered Negative Capability

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## Abstract

John Keats (1795-1821) introduces the concept of negative capability as an attribute for writers, referring to their capacity to remain in “uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason” (*Selected Letters* 60). He describes negatively capable writers as categorically without determined individuality, who could embrace the fluidity and dynamicity of their identities to improve their creative expression. Challenging fixed forms of identity and traditional norms of gender, negative capability provides a framework for embracing the complexity of gender identity by encouraging fluidity in the poet’s approach towards self and identity. This breaks the dualism, which assumes it is the feminine position being gendered, while the masculine position remains neutral. Keats tries to transcend the boundary between the dichotomy of male and female while identifying poetic creativity with feminine creativity, marked by passivity and receptivity, two qualities that Keats finds essential to characterise ideal poets.

In this paper, I employ gendered discourse analysis, with a special focus on Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity, to explore through imagery and themes how Keats’s engagement with negative capability in his 1819 odes reflects the dynamicity of gender identities and defies conventional notions of poetic identity. I also draw on the theory of intertextuality to identify intertextual references to Keats’s other poems and letters.

**Keywords:** Gender, Negative Capability, Dynamicity, Identity