

*Keats' Letters: A Critical Reading***Dr. Anasuya Bhar**

The letters of John Keats (1795 – 1821) offer interesting insights into his thought patterns, both as a man and as a poet. His letters have had a very eventful journey being for the first time collated by Richard Monckton Milnes, also known as Lord Houghton, in 1848. Till then his letters were not published for reasons of dishonouring his privacy. Even in this edition of Lord Houghton's *Life and Letters*, Keats' letters to his beloved Fanny Brawne were not printed. A more elaborate edition of the letters was published by Harry Buxton Forman (1878), in where some of these latter letters also made way. There were other editions as well; among the most popular ones is the edition of selected letters John Keats' Letters by Robert Gittings. Gittings' edition of the letters treat the poet from a uniquely human perspective and also showcase the journey of him gradually evolving into a poet, cautiously underscoring Keats' desire to live and lead a fulfilling life, a luxury that was almost unavailable to him due to his consumptive tuberculosis. Keats' letters are a journey leading the reader from one idea to another and helping him to understand the poet's works in a manner that is unprecedented. They offer sensitive inroads into the psyche of one of the greatest poets of the English language.

To the letters of John Keats we owe several phrases of literary axioms, for instance, 'the holiness of the Heart's affections', 'what the Imagination seizes as Beauty must be Truth', 'Pleasure Thermometer', 'Negative Capability', 'egotistical sublime' and many others. Some of Keats' poetry also got drafted for the first time in a letter. Keats had several correspondents, namely, his friends, his fellow poets, artists, his publishers, his rivals, his family consisting of his brothers and younger sister Fanny, apart from the more intense correspondences with Fanny Brawne, his beloved. The letters to his younger sister Fanny were not only touching, but were sensitive illustrations of life and its many lessons from an elder brother who was extremely caring and protective about his sister. Reading them is an exercise in education. Keats lived on this earth for a brief period, between 1795 and 1821, and within these twenty five years was subject to many political, social and economical truths which made an everlasting impression on the poet. This was the time when Britain and France were almost constantly at war. The fate of the French revolution of 1789 being negative, saw resurgent radicalism among some of Keats' contemporaries, himself not excepted, and along with Shelley, Leigh Hunt and several others; some of them were also loosely criticised as belonging to the Cockney school of poetry. Keats had a turn for the classics – his poetry almost naturally veered towards classical mythology, and legends with their pagan interests. *Lempriere's Classical Dictionary* was among his favourite books. He was also a keen admirer of Shakespeare, both as a playwright and a poet. His letters are also an account of Keats' literary and aesthetic relationship with the various arts down the ages.

The letters under study for this present course are four in number and cover around only a year in the poet's eventful and short career. They are, respectively,