

Lori Jackson
English 332
Sister Willburn
14 February, 2011

Bright Star

It was during John Keats final years that there was an obvious burst of creativity while he experienced his one great romance with Fanny Brawne. *Bright Star*, the film, was inspired by the exceptional love letters and eventual poem that Keats wrote about his beloved Fanny. Directed by Jane Campion, the movie allows the viewer to vividly experience the social constraints on grand passion and romantic fulfillment in England during this time period. Filmed from Fanny perspective rather than Keats, whom the story revolves around, their relationship remains the central focus.

Filmed with a careful awareness to the sights and sounds of this little middle-class part of British society, the movie accentuates the sensual qualities that inspired and captivated Keats. The opening scenes express the act of sewing with a sort of obsessed intimacy, while the performance by the male choir offers an unusually moving energy, and other scenes clearly convey pastimes that border on sublimation. Pastimes that included dancing, butterfly-collecting, lying atop a blossoming tree and sauntering through fields of fragrant flowers, all channeled the unacceptable impulses toward the socially correct.

Charles Armitage Brown, Keats's friend, is a character that contrasts that which is socially correct. His aversion toward Fanny fringe on invasive. He teases and lectures her because, for Brown, she is an annoying distraction from whom he must protect his frail friend. The banter and sarcastic tone that plays out between Brown and Fanny has an interesting energy of its own, as at one point Keats accuses his friend of having feelings for Fanny. Again the unacceptable has a subtle undertone as the plot progresses.

Although Keats makes a point of expressing his puzzled views about women, he is clearly mesmerized by Fanny, with brown hair pulled tightly back and a plain simplicity that emphasizes her importance to Keats. She is set apart by virtue of her direct way in deals with society and situations, clearly unconcerned with what others may think or say about her. Even so, she can barely shake the control of family expectations and social norms, just as Keats feels unable and even unworthy, because of his poverty and lack potential livelihood, to commit to a proper courtship with Fanny.

The plot is scarcely blind to the social hypocrisy that surrounds them. Fanny can't marry Keats because of his poverty, but Brown casually crosses class lines when he finds that he has fathered the maid's child. The film uses the social restraints of the time period to create the tension of unacceptable love. The grand passion in the relationship between Keats and Fanny breathes life into their story and allowed their feelings to grow into a sustaining and tormenting love. While their love may have had a tragic ending, it was in contrast to the social norms of the Romantic period, where social class and propriety took precedence over romantic fulfillment.