



Medicine for Managers

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John Keats

John Keats was born on October 31st 1795 and died on February 23rd 1821 at the age of 25. He was born on Moorgate in London, the son of a livery stable manager. He would grow to produce a magnificent body of poetry which would assure his position as one of the greatest of all English romantic lyric poets who devoted his short life to writing with vivid imagery and great sensuous appeal.



Keats' father died in 1804 and his mother remarried almost immediately. For the young John, his early life was fortified by the close emotional attachments he had with his sister Fanny, and his two brothers George and Tom.

His mother's second marriage broke down and the four children went to live with their widowed grandmother in Edmonton Middlesex. She died soon afterwards in 1810 from tuberculosis.

John went to school in Enfield, some two miles away from his home. The school was run by John Clarke, whose son Charles recognised

Keats' literary skill and encouraged the development of those aspirations. After the death of Keats' mother, the grandmother put the children's affairs in the hands of a guardian named Richard Abbey.

Abbey arranged for John to be apprenticed to a family doctor, Thomas Hammond in 1811. He showed a natural aptitude for medicine. He broke off his apprenticeship in 1814 and moved to London

and registered as a **surgeon-apothecary dresser** (the term used at that time for what is now a junior house

surgeon) at **Guy's Hospital**. A bronze statue of Keats can be seen at Guy's Hospital. Created by Stuart Williamson, it was unveiled by Andrew Motion in 2007.



Despite his interest in medical care, he was also dedicated to his writing. He obtained his

apothecary licence in 1816 and, shortly afterwards in 1817, he gave up medicine to concentrate on poetry.

From then until his untimely death, his whole life integrally involved his poetry.

His medicine and his poetry were intertwined in what seemed to be a preoccupation with death.

A famous ode composed in the early part of 1819 displayed an unsettling preoccupation with the feel of cemetery soil and the merger of himself with cremated remains.

Reviewers of Keats' work have suggested that his fascination went beyond awareness of personal mortality.

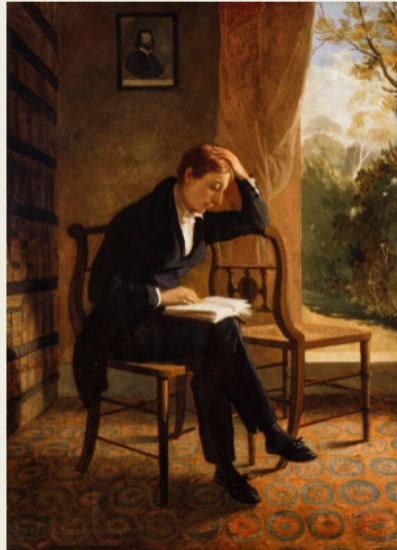
Indeed he has been regarded as infatuated with death as a soulful state towards which his spirit travelled, with his poetry invoking death as an object of that enchantment.

In his ***Ode to a Nightingale*** that ***"for many a time"*** he has been ***"half in love with easeful death"*** to whom he sweetly whispers ***"soft names in many a mused rhyme"***. ***"Now more than ever"*** Keats concludes ***"seems it rich to die, to cease upon the midnight with no pain"***.

Keats' life was tragically short. He wrote prolifically throughout the few years that remained to him.

Endymion, verse about the Greek legend of the love of the moon goddess, and influenced by Milton's 'Paradise Lost', was written in 1817.

The following year he went on a walking tour in the Lake District. He displayed the first symptoms of ***tuberculosis***, thought to be the result of overexertion. His brother died that same year, also of TB.



John Keats, painting by Joseph Severn (National Portrait Gallery London).

In 1819, arguably the year of his greatest poetry, he wrote ***Ode to a Nightingale, On Indolence, Ode to a Grecian Urn, On Melancholy*** and ***Ode to Autumn*** amongst many other works. ***Hyperion***, his poetic epic, which had been started in 1818, was finished in April 1819.

In 1818 he fell hopelessly in love with ***Fanny Brawne***, a near neighbour in Hampstead.

His failing health constrained a normal relationship. He moved house in April 1819, with Brawne and her mother becoming his

next-door neighbours. Keats and Brawne became engaged in about October 1819.

During 1819, he became increasingly unwell and by 1820, the evidence of his tuberculosis was clear.

He was nursed and supported by friends and, when ordered south for the winter, he travelled to Rome accompanied by his friend Joseph Severn. He suffered a relapse in December 1820, dying two months later.

It is impossible to know how much has been lost by Keats' early death.

Keats himself did not recognise the full extent of his talent. His gravestone, erected in 1823 at Cemitero Acattolico in Italy, bears his self-composed epitaph, expressing his true belief that his poetry would fall into oblivion and be forgotten.



It states:

***“Here lies One whose
Name was Writ in
Water”***



John Keats listening to a Nightingale on Hampstead Heath, painting by Joseph Severn 1845.

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