



Bright Star: Love Letters and Poems of John Keats to Fanny Brawne

By John Keats

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The epic romance of one of the most celebrated poets in the English language

Coming to theatres in September 2009 is the tragic love story of nineteenth-century poet John Keats and the love of his life, Fanny Brawne. Keats died at the young age of twenty-five, leaving behind some of the most exquisite and moving verse and letters ever written, inspired by his deep love for Fanny. *Bright Star* is a collection of Keats' romantic poems and correspondence in the heat of his passion, and is a dazzling display of a talent cut cruelly short.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

John Keats was born in October 1795, son of the manager of a livery stable in Moorfields. His father died in 1804 and his mother, of tuberculosis, in 1810. By then he had received a good education at John Clarke's Enfield private school. In 1811 he was apprenticed to a surgeon, completing his professional training at Guy's Hospital in 1816. His decision to commit himself to poetry rather than a medical career was a courageous one, based more on a challenge to himself than any actual achievement.

His genius was recognized and encouraged by early Mends like Charles Cowden Clarke and J. H. Reynolds, and in October 1816 he met Leigh Hunt, whose *Examiner* had already published Keats's first poem. Only seven months later *Poems* (1817) appeared. Despite the high hopes of the Hunt circle, it was a failure. By the time *Endymion* was published in 1818 Keats's name had been identified with Hunt's 'Cockney School', and the Tory **Blackwood's Magazine** delivered a violent attack on Keats as a lower-class vulgarian, with no right to aspire to 'poetry'.

But for Keats fame lay not in contemporary literary politics but with posterity. Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, and Wordsworth were his inspiration and challenge. The extraordinary speed with which Keats matured is evident from his letters. In 1818 he had worked on the powerful epic fragment *Hyperion*, and in 1819 he wrote 'The Eve of St Agnes', 'La Belle Dame sans Merci', the major odes, *Lamia*, and the deeply exploratory Fall of *Hyperion*. Keats was already unwell when preparing the 1820 volume for the press; by the time it appeared in July he was desperately ill. He died in Rome in 1821. Keats's final volume did receive some contemporary critical recognition, but it was not until the latter part of the nineteenth century that his place in English Romanticism began to be recognized, and not until this century that it became fully recognized.

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Bright star, would I were steadfast as thou art--
Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night
And watching, with eternal lids apart,
Like nature's patient, sleepless Eremit,
The moving waters at their priestlike task
Of pure ablution round earth's human shores,
Or gazing on the new soft-fallen mask
Of snow upon the mountains and the moors--
No--yet still stedfast, still unchangeable,
Pillow'd upon my fair love's ripening breast,
To feel for ever its soft fall and swell,
Awake for ever in a sweet unrest,
Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,
And so live ever--or else swoon to death.

La Belle Dame Sans Merci

Ah, what can ail thee, wretched wight,
Alone and palely loitering;
The sedge is wither'd from the lake,
And no birds sing.

Ah, what can ail thee, wretched wight,
So haggard and so woe-begone?
The squirrel's granary is full,
And the harvest's done.

I see a lily on thy brow,
With anguish moist and fever dew;
And on thy cheek a fading rose
Fast withereth too.

I met a lady in the meads
Full beautiful, a faery's child;
Her hair was long, her foot was light,
And her eyes were wild.

I set her on my pacing steed,
And nothing else saw all day long;
For sideways would she lean, and sing
A faery's song.

I made a garland for her head,
And bracelets too, and fragrant zone;
She look'd at me as she did love,
And made sweet moan.

She found me roots of relish sweet,
And honey wild, and manna dew;
And sure in language strange she said,
I love thee true.

She took me to her elfin grot,
And there she gaz'd and sighed deep,
And there I shut her wild sad eyes--
So kiss'd to sleep.

And there we slumber'd on the moss,
And there I dream'd, ah woe betide,
The latest dream I ever dream'd
On the cold hill side.

I saw pale kings, and princes too,
Pale warriors, death-pale were they all;
Who cry'd--"La belle Dame sans merci
Hath thee in thrall!"

I saw their starv'd lips in the gloam

With horrid warning gaped wide,
And I awoke, and found me here
On the cold hill side.

And this is why I sojourn here
Alone and palely loitering,
Though the sedge is wither'd from the lake,
And no birds sing.

Users Review

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Linda Yohe:

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