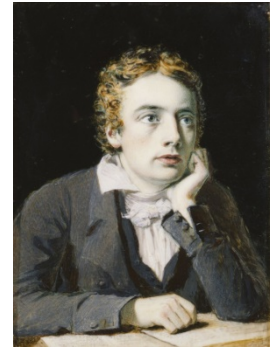


# John Keats

by Gleb Zavlanov

John Keats was one of the most brilliant and gifted poets in the history of the English language. His beautiful and passionate poetry, full of rich and dreamy details, encompassed the ideals of the Romantic Movement. Born in London, England, on October 31, 1795, John Keats only lived for 25 years but he spent the last 3 embroiled in a battle against fate and in a struggle to perfect poetry. He incorporated vivid imagery, sensuous details, and a constant allusion to the grandiose myths of the past. His inexhaustible and vigorous imagination gave his poetry its own unique splendor, unmatched by any other English poet.



John Keats' early life was marked with the loss of both his parents at a young age. When he was eight, his father died after being trampled by a horse and when he was fifteen, his mother passed away from tuberculosis. The deaths of both his parents held a ponderous effect on the young poet's thinking and poetry. It helped form his understanding of the world's grim side and all of the suffering and loss found abiding in it. It also opened him up to the true and pure shape of the human condition, and allowed him to draw from human experience when penning his verse. The deaths of his parents also led their legacy to be passed down to a merchant from London named Richard Abbey, who refrained from handing down the inheritance to its rightful owner. After several years of medical study, he became a licensed apothecary in 1816 but eventually abandoned this career and decided to settle down as a writer. His introduction to the acerbic and quick-witted poet Leigh Hunt had opened him up to politics and the competitive

world of publication. It also introduced him to the poets, William Wordsworth and Percy Bysshe Shelley.

In 1816, Keats published his first collection of poems titled “Poems,” and in 1818, he published his first major poetic work, a four thousand-line epic poem called *Endymion*, about the Greek myth of the same name. Both works received scathing reviews, which frustrated the poet, but he regained his strength and continued his career as a writer. In the summer of 1818, he went on a tour of Northern England and Scotland but had to return the following year in order to nurse his brother, who had fallen ill from tuberculosis. At this time, he also fell in love with Fanny Brawne whose beauty and intellect helped fuel his intense inner passions. He wrote one of his most famous poems, “When I have fears that I may cease to be,” around the end of 1818 and the beginning of 1819, a period of time many scholars consider his *Annus Mirabilis* or “Miraculous Year.” This fruitful time also saw the creations of his three epyllions, “Isabella,” “The Eve of St. Agnes,” and “Lamia,” his famous, flawless odes which teem with a poetic sensitivity, a cleansing, beautiful and almost narcotic stream of sensuality. His most ambitious work, however, was another epyllion called “Hyperion,” inspired by the Greek myth of the Titans’ crushing loss in their war against the Olympians. In addition to these poetic works, Keats philosophized about life and formulated a doctrine he came to call Negative Capability, which states that humans possess capabilities far greater than which the nature of man allows. John Keats died on February 3, 1821 at the age of 25 but he had managed to leave an enormous legacy behind him that will forever strike awe, admiration and the whole gamut of human emotions from his readers. He has indeed blessed mankind with his unique and profound poetic gifts.

1. Who was John Keats and why is he important to literature?

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2. What was John Keats' main philosophy and what does it encompass?

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3. What life events were most important to John Keats' development as a poet?

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4. List three words that best describe John Keats' poetry.

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