

JOHN KEATS

LIFE (1795 - 1821)

Keats belongs to the second generation of Romantic poets, but unlike Shelley and Byron he was only slightly touched by the political events of the period in which he lived, and stood apart from the other two Romantic poets for his lack of social commitment.

He was born in London. His father died when he was eight and his mother died when he was fourteen. In 1817 Keats published his first collection of poetry and started work on a long narrative poem, *Endymion*. In 1818 his younger brother died and in the same year he fell in love with Fanny Brawne, but he was aware that his meager finances and failing health made marriage impossible. Nevertheless 1819 proved to be his *annus mirabilis* and he produced the poems for which he will always be remembered. After nine months of intense creative activity, Keats's health worsened. He died of tuberculosis in Rome in 1821.

ACHIVEMENT

Keats has left a varied body of work dealing with central Romantic themes. His first long work, *Endymion*, describes the love of the moon goddess Cynthia for Endymion.

The long poem *The Eve of St. Agnes* is an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Keat's *Ode on a Grecian Urn* and *Ode to Autumn* are among the best-known and loved poems in English. All these works deal with the central Romantic themes of the power of imagination and the search for beauty, the brevity and pain of human life contrasted with the beauty of nature and the permanence of art.

LA BELLE DAME SANS MERCI

La Belle Dame sans Merci was written at a painful moment's in Keat's life: his brother had died of tuberculosis the year before, he himself had had the first symptoms of the same disease. In addition Keats was torn between his love for a young woman, Fanny Brawne, and his devotion to poetry. The conflict between love and poetry, the sense of death are present in this poem. However Keats avoids the danger of egocentricity and achieves impersonality, especially by using the ballad form.

The title of the poem means "the beautiful lady without pity". The ballad begins *in medias res*, carries the narrative forward with questions and answers in direct speech. A questing knight encounters a fairy lady in a greenwood. Critics have interpreted the relationship between the human and the supernatural lovers in a variety of ways. The lady emerges as a *femme fatale*, leading men to destruction after the brief joy of loving her. She is also regarded as an embodiment of the poetic inspiration.

However there is always an implicit contrast between the "real world" and the world of the imagination, and the confusion between waking and sleeping, illusion and reality.