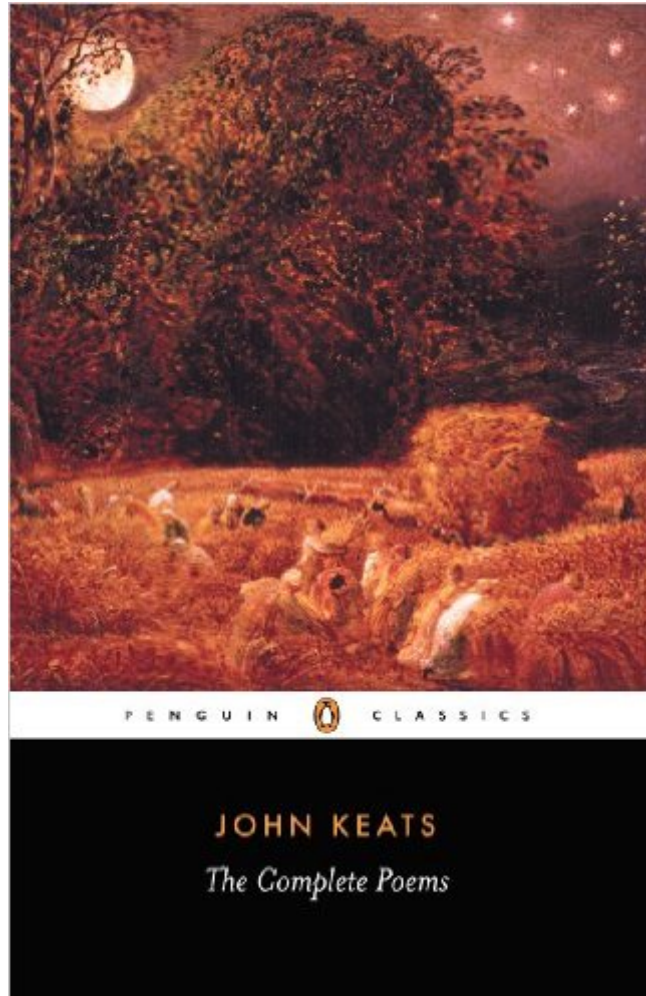


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John Keats: The Complete Poems (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

The complete poems of an English masterKeats's first volume of poems, published in 1817, demonstrated both his belief in the consummate power of poetry and his liberal views. While he was criticized by many for his politics, his immediate circle of friends and family immediately recognized his genius. In his short life he proved to be one of the greatest and most original thinkers of the second generation of Romantic poets, with such poems as 'Ode to a Nightingale', 'On First Looking into Chapman's Homer' and 'La Belle Dame sans Merci'. While his writing is illuminated by his exaltation of the imagination and abounds with sensuous descriptions of nature's beauty, it also explores profound philosophical questions. John Barnard's acclaimed volume contains all the poems known to have been written by Keats, arranged by date of composition. The texts are lightly modernized and are complemented by extensive notes, a comprehensive introduction, an index of classical names, selected extracts from Keats's letters and a number of pieces not widely available, including his annotations to Milton's Paradise Lost. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

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Customer Reviews

I was surprised to read the highly favourable reviews by other customers, until I realised that they

were all commenting on the paperback text. Beware the temptation to assume that "Kindleization" will not significantly affect your pleasure in reading poetry. Unless the font is punishingly small, Kindle does not adjust the margin to reflect the lineation. Keats's metrics are complex, subtle, and he worked hard at developing stanzas designed to enrich his communication. Kindle's sabotaging of this achievement is a disgrace. One gets a slightly better picture by rotating the screen; but the pages were then unwilling to turn: and trying to keep track by looking for notes and bookmarks generated a farce of frustration. This edition stands out among Kindle's generally shoddy presentation of classical poetry by not even having a "Go to" table of contents.

No personal library can be complete without at least a sampling of Keats, and this is the book that everyone should get. All the poems -- even the fragments -- are here, with line numbers included. The several appendices and letter excerpts make the collection even more valuable. If you are trying to decide which Keats collection to get, you have found the best.

If you're sitting on a ledge overlooking a lush green valley on a gorgeous spring day, and you're reading *Endymion*, or *Ode to a Nightingale*, or *The Eve of St Agnes*, you could very well be so overwhelmed by the magnificence of creation that, without giving it a moment's thought, you would consign yourself to the breathtaking blue, to try to be one with it all, and because you've reached the absolute pinnacle of existence. How could you possibly top that? *ahem* This edition isn't annotated as well as it might be, but who cares? The poems are all there, and they're as heartbreakingly beautiful as ever. How can you--in all honesty--claim to have lived without having read Keats?

...and he rivals Shakespeare as the most perfect lyrical poet, the most exquisite shaper of words. Passages in the Odes (*Melancholy* is my favorite) are about as good as this language can expect to get, at least from a descriptive and sensual standpoint. Keats doesn't achieve the meditative transcendence of Wordsworth, but he has his own meditations -- usually more modest in scope, but made noble by the perfection of their expression.

A review by Dr. Joseph Suglia
Composed on April 21, 1819, in a single afternoon or early evening, *La Belle Dame sans Merci* has haunted the minds of readers for almost two centuries now. In twelve stanzas, Keats says more than whole worships of writers say in their entire existence. The poem is so sleekly, treacily, and elegantly composed, without a single false word, that it is imperishable. Indeed, it is one of the few perfect English poems. I will analyze the ballad

stanza by stanza. O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
Alone and palely loitering?
The sedge has wither'd from the lake,
And no birds sing.
The question is the narrator's "whoever the narrator might be" to the honey-starved knight. For the published edition, Keats foolishly substituted the words "wretched wight" for "knight at arms." "Wight" recalls the Isle of Wight, where Keats would write lust letters to Fanny Brawne, the lust of his brief consumptive life, which makes the published text of the poem faintly ludicrous. "Knight-at-arms" is a much better choice of words, since it invokes strength, which contrasts nicely with the knight's ailment, which is clearly love-psychosis. It also sounds and reads better, infinitely better, than "wretched wight." The narrator is asking an epidemiological question (when one compares the first stanza with the twelfth): What is the source of your illness? Even though the autumnal landscape is withered and songless, the knight is loitering around like a beggar. The flora are desiccated, much like the knight; there are no fauna, it seems, in the expanse. Nature has dried and shriveled up. The birds that are not there are perhaps nightingales. If this is the case, then the supernatural has withdrawn from the deathscape. A nice instance of parechesis appears in the first stanza "a repetition of the grapheme LON in the words "alone" and "loitering." "O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
So haggard and so woe-begone?
The squirrel's granary is full,
And the harvest's done.
The granaries and the harvest have yielded a superabundance of food -- food that is suitable for human consumption -- but the knight will never eat it. He will never eat the food because he cannot eat the food. The knight is famished, starving for food that no human mouth can eat: It is the food that only his beloved faery princess can feed him. I see a lily on thy brow,
With anguish moist and fever-dew,
And on thy cheeks a fading rose
Fast withereth too.
The syntax here is confusing: The lily that is embroidered on the knight's brow is moist with anguish and moist with fever-dew. The anguish-moist lily and the fading rose embroidered on the knight's face-flesh: these are symptoms of his love-starvation. 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.
This is where the knight's answer begins "an answer to the question, "What ails thee?" Already, the reader is getting subliminal cues from the poem that the knight should run like hell away from the faery princess. For one, she is the daughter of a faery and therefore any romance between the knight and the princess would be an interspecies romance. Secondly, the wildness of her eyes might very well be the wildness of craziness. I made a garland for her head,
And bracelets too, and fragrant zone;
She looked at me as she did love,
And made sweet moan.
The number three is important in the poem: The faery princess's physical attributes

come in threes (her long hair, her light foot, her wild eyes), the food that she feeds to the knight comes in threes (relish root, wild honey, manna-dew), and here we have a triumvirate of decorations for the Beautiful Lady to wear (garland, bracelets, perfumed belt). We might know three of her physical attributes and three things that she is wearing, but who is she, really, on the inside? I set her on my pacing steed, And nothing else saw all day long, For sidelong would she bend, and sing A faery's song. What kind of a knight is he, to let a woman he does not know ride his pacing steed? And how can someone set someone else on a steed that is pacing? Her sidelong look lets us know that she is unconcerned with him and that his love will be unreturned; sharp readers should question the integrity of her intentions. That he can see nothing else besides her radiance suggests that the knight has already plunged into total lunacy. She found me roots of relish sweet, And honey wild, and manna-dew, And sure in language strange she said "I love thee true." How, precisely, does the knight know that the faery princess has declared her love for him? The answer is: He does not. Her words are inaudible to him. She speaks in a language that he cannot understand, and the suggestion is that the knight has projected his desire-to-be-loved upon her incomprehensible dark words. The fact that communication between the knight and the faery princess is impossible intimates that contact between the knight and the faery princess is impossible. Honey is sensuous, but the manna-dew is ethereal, heavenly: bread that rains from heaven. Manna is customarily a noun, but here, it is used as an adjective and evokes, of course, The Book of Exodus. Manna-dew was not in Keats's original draft. The lines read, in the original version: "She found me roots of relish sweet / And honey wild and honey dew." Keats was very wise to modify the wording. The manna-dew that she feeds the knight reminds us that the faery princess is not a child of nature, but rather an otherworldly entity, one who comes from a transcendental province, much like the Grecian urn and the nightingale. She exists outside of time and is not bound by the laws of nature. The food that she feeds the knight is supernatural nutriment, and he will never be able to eat anything else. All other food has become inescapable to him, even though the granaries are full and the harvest is done. She took me to her elfin grot, And there she wept and sighed full sore, And there I shut her wild wild eyes With kisses four. She dwells in an elfin grotto, then. If there is still any question on the subject, at this point, the argument over whether she is human has been settled: She is a chthonic being. The fact that she dwells in an elfin grotto might imply that she is the Queen of Elphame, the elf queen who transported Thomas the Rhymer into the otherworld. Why is the elf-girl weeping and sighing? Is it because she knows that contact between her and her human lover is impossible? If she is weeping and sighing over the impossibility of interspecies romance, does this not militate

against the interpretation that she is wicked? "Wild wild": the use of anaphora (repetition) underlines her chaos, her untrammelled nature. In Stanza Four, her eyes were described as "wild." Her eyes appear even wilder now. And there she lulled me asleep, And there I dreamed "Ah! woe betide! "The latest dream I ever dreamt On the cold hill side. The faery princess anesthetizes the knight, drugging him with Ketamine. "The latest dream I ever dreamt": The knight will never dream again. Will he ever sleep again? I saw pale kings and princes too, Pale warriors, death-pale were they all; They cried "La Belle Dame sans Merci Hath thee in thrall! " Listen to the chorus of love-hungry kings, love-hospitalized princes, and love-hurt warriors. They tell you who they think the girl really is: The Beautiful Lady without Pity! They are the ones who call her "The Beautiful Lady without Pity." She never identifies herself, nor does the narrator, nor does the love-slaughtered knight at arms. Why, precisely, should you believe them? Why should you believe the chorus of pallid loverboys? The word "thrall" connotes enslavement. To be in thralldom is to be in bondage to a master or a mistress. In this case, the chorus of once-powerful men, of which the knight is now a member, is enslaved, enthralled, to the Beautiful Lady without Pity. I saw their starved lips in the gloam, With horrid warning gaped wide, And I awoke and found me here, On the cold hill's side. After the love-drug wears off, the knight awakens and finds himself in desolation and a place of natural destitution. The only things in the dream-men's mouths are warnings. Much like the knight, only the food of the faery girl can nourish them; no other food can sate them. And this is why I sojourn here, Alone and palely loitering, Though the sedge is withered from the lake, And no birds sing. The faery-intoxicated knight is doomed to walk along the withered shore of the lake in a perpetual autumn, sapped of his vitality and potency. He has been enervated by the psychosis-inflicting Beautiful Lady without Pity. The poem suggests that she is a witch, but she might as well be a lamia or a succubus. The women in the Keatsian poetic universe are all Belles Dames sans Merci. "Misogyny" is a label too easily applied these days, but how can we avoid calling this a misogynistic poem? Dr. Joseph Suglia

Keats not only rivals Shakespeare in the beauty of his verse and the enchanting pictures he conjures but he is a cut above Shakespeare in the value of his art. The two odes 'on a nightingale' and 'on a Grecian urn' surpasses any piece of English literature I have come across so far. In its conception and philosophy, in its expression of the ephemeral and impermanent nature of human life, its exposition of the permanence of ideal art and in its realization of the principle of the identity of truth and beauty it takes poetic thought to a plane that has never been approached, before or hence

in English literature.

The book came quickly and was in good condition. Like it says, these are the completed works of Keats. I believe the poems are listed in chronological order of when they were written, which makes it interesting to see how Keats developed as an author as he wrote. The book also features extensive notes in the back of the book which provide helpful information about the poems.

His poems are palpable, vivid, and uplifting. This beautiful book features Keats' poems, and a grand portion of his letters, and helpful annotations. Not only a great poet, but a great understand-er, Keats died tragically at the age of 26, but his poetry lives on.

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