RANDOM HOUSE eBOOKS

Bright Star

John Keats

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About the Book

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY DIRECTOR JANE CAMPION

John Keats died in penury and relative obscurity in 1821, aged only 25. He is now seen as one of the greatest English poets and a genius of the Romantic age. This collection, which contains all his most memorable works and a selection of his letters, is a feast for the senses, displaying Keats’ gift for gorgeous imagery and sensuous language, his passionate devotion to beauty, as well as some of the most moving love poetry ever written.

About the Author

John Keats was born in London in 1795. He trained as a surgeon and apothecary but quickly abandoned this profession for poetry. His first volume of poetry was published in 1817, soon after he had begun an influential friendship with the Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley. His first collection and the subsequent long poem *Endymion* received mixed reviews, and sales were poor. In late 1818 he moved to Hampstead where he met and fell deeply in love with his neighbour Fanny Brawne. During the following year Keats wrote some of his most famous works, including ‘The Eve of St. Agnes’, ‘Ode to a Nightingale’ and ‘La Belle Dame sans Merci’. He was however increasingly plagued by ill-health and financial troubles, which led him to break off his engagement to Fanny. Soon after the publication of *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St Agnes and Other Poems* in 1820, Keats left England for Italy in the hope that the climate would improve his health. By this time he was suffering from advanced tuberculosis, and he died on 23 February 1821. On his request, Keats’s tombstone reads only ‘Here lies one whose name was writ in water’.

JOHN KEATS

‘Bright Star’: The Complete Poems and Selected Letters

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
Jane Campion

VINTAGE BOOKS
London

INTRODUCTION

My John Keats

I would not have read Keats's poems if I had not been avoiding adapting a book for the screen where the protagonist was a creative writing teacher. The thought was that before proceeding with my script I should enlarge my knowledge of English poetry and literature. It was on this account that I bought a biography on Keats by Andrew Motion and set about reading it. It was a very big book and I really could not escape learning quite a bit about John Keats and his poems. I worked studiously through the first half of the biography, amazed at Keats's insights and emerging philosophy and reading and rereading Motion's analysis of his early poems. Nothing prepared me for the last third. Here Motion outlined a love affair unparalleled for its touchingly detailed and weepingly tragic proportions. Almost all evidence of the love affair came from one primary source: Keats's own letters to the girl he loved. These were no ordinary letters but the staggeringly honest outpourings from one of the youngest and greatest of the English romantic poets. I still today remember finishing the biography in the blue attic room I then used as a study. I remember reading as the afternoon turned into evening, then night, sobbing pitifully as I came to the sorrowful end of Keats's life and his love affair.

For me it is a story more romantic and sad than *Romeo and Juliet* for being true. She eighteen years old, 'unformed, frisky and quick tongued' a diligent student of fashion, and he a twenty-three-year-old orphaned poet.

Many things were in their favour; depth of feeling, joined hearts, steadfastness and a shared house, while much else conspired against them; Keats's lack of financial success and his bad health. The engaged Fanny and Keats were finally separated as Keats took his last chance for a cure in Rome. This last hope was unrealised and Keats, at twenty-five, died of consumption in his young friend Severn's arms.

Intrigued, I bought and began to read Keats's poems and his collected letters. I drifted into wondering if I could somehow tell his story on film, only to shake myself. Nobody really reads poetry anymore, but the cruellest blow to my hope was simply that while I was reading the poems I didn't completely understand them, or, in the case of the long poems *Endymion* or *Hyperion*, I didn't know the classical references. How could I make a film about Keats if I didn't understand poetry?

I didn't give up but nor did my ambitions harden. Two years later, when I took a four-year sabbatical break from film-making, I found myself daydreaming in a soft and wafty way of Keats and Fanny. I would sit in a paddock by the Colo River with a rag-tag collection of horses while I made coffee on a little burner. The sun's warmth felt like a kiss. Life slowed down: a breeze coming across the paddock arrived as an event. As I sat across a log sipping my coffee, the horses gathered around. One day a pregnant mare stayed after the others drifted off and finally with all the tenderness a hoof could afford, she carefully widened the opening of my bag and peered inside. I sat next to the mare, and started to read Keats's poems to myself. I read 'Ode to Psyche' with its vivid description of the open poetic mind, also 'Ode on Indolence', where Keats championed and wrote of the dreamy drifty state I was enjoying:

> Ripe was the drowsy hour;
> The blissful cloud of summer-indolence
> Benumb'd my eyes; my pulse grew less and less

Sometimes I read a poem and felt I had taken in the meaning, only to realise I had not understood it and had in fact mistaken the meaning, and would then feel quite a fool. Fool or not, actual meaning or not, the seduction by words, rhythm, atmosphere and intimacy had begun. I was loving that these words, sounds and drifts of meaning could be joined like daisy chains, like streams to rivers, like whispers that could in Keats's hands, describe me to myself and all the while have a sensuous and delicious presence that played on my sensations.

As I read Keats's letters (who spells badly like me), I came across his theory of negative capability: an endorsement of mystery, of developing your capacity to accept mystery without 'irritable searching after fact and reason'. I began to realise that perhaps poetry is not so much in need of understanding as loving, or being enchanted, seduced, intrigued or awed. Like eating something delicious, you don't need to know how it was made; all you need to do is enjoy it.

My journey with Keats has been longer, deeper more intimate and more sustained over the last few years than my relationships with even my best friends. I have read his life story, I have read his poems, I have read his letters amongst which are the thirty-two surviving letters and notes he wrote to his beloved Fanny Brawne. I have read her letters. I have lain around on couches and beds, at a beach house, a river house and a mountain hut, dreaming about the two and a half years of Fanny and Keats's brief but intense time together. Then I wrote the screenplay, *Bright Star*, based on their love affair. I know as much about those two and a half years of his life as almost anyone can. I have lent myself to imagining how things might have happened, how Keats might have first met Fanny. By thinking about all the practical aspects of their relationship and their lives I realised it was possible that Fanny may have actually slept in what was to become

Keats's bed while he and his best friend Brown were away in Scotland. Also when Fanny's family moved in to share the house with Brown and Keats, Fanny and Keats may have slept only a wall apart. I have been to Keats's house, Wentworth Place in Hampstead, I've walked the Heath and the streets of Hampstead where Keats would have walked and also several times visited the room where he died in the house (now a museum for Keats, Shelley and Byron) next to the Spanish Steps in Rome. I've looked up at the ceiling of his deathbed and seen the painted daisies he joked about to Severn, already growing over him.

I got more confident with his poems, declaring 'Ode to a Nightingale' my favourite poem in the world. It has the best of Keats's immediacy, written in one sitting under a plum tree. It is a sustained brilliant meditation on an actual nightingale in a spring garden. As natural as thought, it describes thought but it is laced with links and soft rhymes of immense grace, delight and depth. It is full of his desire for happiness and his grief for its fleeting nature:

> Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
> To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
> While thou art pouring forth they soul abroad
> In such an ecstasy!

Five years later, *Bright Star*, based on Keats and Fanny's love affair, has now been made into a film and I have heard almost a hundred little girls auditioning for the role of Fanny's sister Margaret, reciting by heart the opening lines of *Endymion*:

> A thing of beauty is a joy for ever:
> Its loveliness increases; it will never
> Pass into nothingness; but still will keep
> A bower quiet for us, and a sleep

Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing.

I was afraid of how the girls would manage the poetry. I imagined that they would perhaps be intimidated by the meaning and the unfamiliar words and that they would speak too quickly or garble the quotes. But as each girl spoke the poem, they became transformed, the words seeming to have found gravity and force, a shape and clarity within each of them. When later they spoke of their pets, their brothers and sisters, the glow dimmed to good behaviour and cliché. It was similar when auditioning for Fanny and Keats, all the actors were mesmerising when reciting the poems – something I wasn't expecting.

A friend of mine told me that her mother, now in her nineties and diminished by dementia, quoted, 'O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms, Alone and palely loitering?' and then asked repetitively, 'What is it I am saying? Where is it from?' The poem is lodged inside her happy as a bee continuing to hum despite her confusion.

My film journey with Keats ended the day we finished filming in Italy in June 2008. We re-enacted a version of Keats's coffin being carried from his lodgings, across the Spanish Steps and into the waiting funeral carriage before clattering along the empty morning streets, along Via Giulia, on its way to the Protestant cemetery.

After we had celebrated the end of our shoot, a few of us made the journey to the cemetery and finally after all this time – a century or two for Keats and six years for me – I was standing as near to Keats's mortal remains as I ever could be. Cats of all kinds strolled amongst the graves or along walls. An old tomcat curled his tail around Keats's gravestone, rubbing his battered head back and forth. Someone had left a tiny souvenir bear with a red t-shirt on the grave and our designer scooped it up, explaining to the bear (and to Keats) that she would take it to her daughter

in Australia. Behind the headstone was a bunch of cellophane-wrapped rotting flowers. I knelt and kissed the grave. I felt the sun on my back, the cool of the stone; I remember the bright waxy new foliage in shadow and speckled sun and all my many complicated human feelings and thoughts were all together there with me at Keats's grave.

Keats's poems were my portals into poetry and his life and letters staged for me a revived creative relationship with myself as well as faith in the divine; there is no other explanation for his best poetry. The beautiful human Keats opened himself, he was 'a bright torch, and a casement ope at night, to let the warm love in!' Perhaps I will be ninety-three and mumbling,

> Darkling I listen; and for many a time
> I have been half in love with easeful Death,
> Call'd him soft names in many a musèd rhyme

And if so, I hope I will savour it in my mouth and ear, I hope I will continue to enjoy this pathway Keats has opened into my senses, my soul and my imagination, a portal to the human heart.

Jane Campion, May 2009

POEMS

1817

*W*hat more felicity can fall to creature,
han to enjoy delight with liberty.’

—SPENSER, *Fate of the Butterfly*

DEDICATION

To Leigh Hunt, Esq.

GLORY and loveliness have pass’d away;
For if we wander out in early morn,
No wreathed incense do we see upborne
nto the east, to meet the smiling day:
o crowd of nymphs soft-voiced and young and gay,
In woven baskets bringing ears of corn,
Roses, and pinks, and violets, to adorn
he shrine of Flora in her early May.
ut there are left delights as high as these.
And I shall ever bless my destiny,
hat in a time when under pleasant trees
Pan is no longer sought, I feel a free,
leafy luxury, seeing I could please,
With these poor offerings, a man like thee.

‘I stood tip-toe upon a little hill’

‘Places of nestling green for poets made.’
—Story of Rimini

STOOD tip-toe upon a little hill,
he air was cooling, and so very still,
hat the sweet buds which with a modest pride
ull droopingly, in slanting curve aside,
heir scantly leaved, and finely tapering stems,
[ad not yet lost their starry diadems
aught from the early sobbing of the morn.
he clouds were pure and white as flocks new shorn,
nd fresh from the clear brook; sweetly they slept
n the blue fields of heaven, and then there crept
little noiseless noise among the leaves,
orn of the very sigh that silence heaves:
or not the faintest motion could be seen
f all the shades that slanted o’er the green.
here was wide wand’ring for the greediest eye,
o peer about upon variety;
ar round the horizon’s crystal air to skim,
nd trace the dwindled edgings of its brim;
o picture out the quaint, and curious bending
f the fresh woodland alley never ending;
r by the bowery clefts, and leafy shelves,
uess where the jaunty streams refresh themselves.
gazed awhile, and felt as light and free
s though the fanning wings of Mercury
[ad play’d upon my heels: I was light-hearted,
nd many pleasures to my vision started;
o I straightway began to pluck a posey

)f luxuries bright, milky, soft, and rosy.

. bush of May-flowers with the bees about them;
h, sure no tasteful nook would be without them;
nd let a lush laburnum oversweep them,
nd let long grass grow round the roots to keep them
loist, cool, and green; and shade the violets,
hat they may bind the moss in leafy nets.
. filbert hedge with wild briar overtwined,
nd clumps of woodbine taking the soft wind
pon their summer thrones; there too should be
he frequent chequer of a youngling tree,
hat with a score of light green brethren shoots
rom the quaint mossiness of aged roots:
ound which is heard a spring-head of clear waters,
abbling so wildly of its lovely daughters,
he spreading blue-bells: it may haply mourn
hat such fair clusters should be rudely torn
rom their fresh beds, and scatter’d thoughtlessly
y infant hands, left on the path to die.

)pen afresh your round of starry folds,
e ardent marigolds!
)ry up the moisture from your golden lids,
or great Apollo bids
hat in these days your praises should be sung
)n many harps, which he has lately strung;
nd when again your dewiness he kisses,
ell him, I have you in my world of blisses:
o haply when I rove in some far vale,
his mighty voice may come upon the gale.

ere are sweet peas, on tip-toe for a flight
Vith wings of gentle flush o’er delicate white,
nd taper fingers catching at all things,
o bind them all about with tiny rings.

inger awhile upon some bending planks
hat lean against a streamlet’s rushy banks,
nd watch intently Nature’s gentle doings:
hey will be found softer than ring-dove’s cooings.
[ow silent comes the water round that bend!
[ot the minutest whisper does it send
o the o’erhanging sallows: blades of grass
lowly across the chequer’d shadows pass.
Why, you might read two sonnets, ere they reach
o where the hurrying freshnesses aye preach
. natural sermon o’er their pebbly beds;
Where swarms of minnows show their little heads,
taying their wavy bodies ’gainst the streams,
o taste the luxury of sunny beams
emper’d with coolness. How they ever wrestle
With their own sweet delight, and ever nestle
heir silver bellies on the pebbly sand!
[you but scantily hold out the hand,
hat very instant not one will remain;
ut turn your eye, and they are there again.
he ripples seem right glad to reach those cresses,
nd cool themselves among the em’rald tresses;
he while they cool themselves, they freshness give,
nd moisture, that the bowery green may live:
o keeping up an interchange of favours,
ike good men in the truth of their behaviours.
ometimes goldfinches one by one will drop
rom low-hung branches: little space they stop.
ut sip, and twitter, and their feathers sleek;
hen off at once, as in a wanton freak:
r perhaps, to show their black and golden wings,
ausing upon their yellow flutterings.
Were I in such a place, I sure should pray
hat nought less sweet might call my thoughts away,
han the soft rustle of a maiden’s gown
anning away the dandelion’s down;

han the light music of her nimble toes
atting against the sorrel as she goes.
[ow she would start, and blush, thus to be caught
laying in all her innocence of thought!
) let me lead her gently o’er the brook,
Watch her half-smiling lips and downward look;
) let me for one moment touch her wrist;
et me one moment to her breathing list;
nd as she leaves me, may she often turn
[er fair eyes looking through her locks auburne.
What next? A tuft of evening primroses,
)’er which the mind may hover till it dozes;
)’er which it well might take a pleasant sleep,
ut that ’tis ever startled by the leap
)f buds into ripe flowers; or by the flitting
)f divers moths, that aye their rest are quitting;
)r by the moon lifting her silver rim
bove a cloud, and with a gradual swim
oming into the blue with all her light.
) Maker of sweet poets! dear delight
)f this fair world and all its gentle livers;
pangler of clouds, halo of crystal rivers,
fingler with leaves, and dew and tumbling streams,
loser of lovely eyes to lovely dreams,
over of loneliness, and wandering,
)f upcast eye, and tender pondering!
hee must I praise above all other glories
hat smile us on to tell delightful stories.
or what has made the sage or poet write
ut the fair paradise of Nature’s light?
n the calm grandeur of a sober line,
We see the waving of the mountain pine;
nd when a tale is beautifully staid,
We feel the safety of a hawthorn glade:
When it is moving on luxurious wings,
he soul is lost in pleasant smotherings:

air dewy roses brush against our faces,
nd flowering laurels spring from diamond vases;
)’erhead we see the jasmine and sweet briar,
nd bloomy grapes laughing from green attire,
While at our feet, the voice of crystal bubbles
harms us at once away from all our troubles:
o that we feel uplifted from the world,
Walking upon the white clouds wreath’d and curl’d.
o felt he, who first told how Psyche went
)n the smooth wind to realms of wonderment;
What Psyche felt, and Love, when their full lips
irst touch’d; what amorous and fondling nips
hey gave each other’s cheeks; with all their sighs,
nd how they kist each other’s tremulous eyes:
he silver lamp, – the ravishment – the wonder –
he darkness – loneliness – the fearful thunder;
heir woes gone by, and both to heaven upflown,
o bow for gratitude before Jove’s throne.
o did he feel, who pull’d the boughs aside,
hat we might look into a forest wide,
o catch a glimpse of Fauns, and Dryades
oming with softest rustle through the trees;
nd garlands woven of flowers wild, and sweet,
pheld on ivory wrists, or sporting feet:
elling us how fair, trembling Syrinx fled
rcadian Pan, with such a fearful dread.
oor nymph, – poor Pan, – how he did weep to find
ought but a lovely sighing of the wind
long the reedy stream; a half-heard strain,
ull of sweet desolation – balmy pain.

What first inspir’d a bard of old to sing
arcissus pining o’er the untainted spring
n some delicious ramble, he had found
little space, with boughs all woven round;
nd in the midst of all, a clearer pool

han e’er reflected in its pleasant cool
he blue sky, here and there serenely peeping,
hrough tendril wreaths fantastically creeping.
nd on the bank a lonely flower he spied,
. meek and forlorn flower, with nought of pride,
rooping its beauty o’er the watery clearness,
o woo its own sad image into nearness:
eaf to light Zephyrus, it would not move;
ut still would seem to droop, to pine, to love.
o while the Poet stood in this sweet spot,
ome fainter gleamings o’er his fancy shot;
or was it long ere he had told the tale
f young Narcissus, and sad Echo’s bale.

Where had he been, from whose warm head outflew
hat sweetest of all songs, that ever new,
hat aye refreshing, pure deliciousness,
oming ever to bless
he wanderer by moonlight? to him bringing
hapes from the invisible world, unearthly singing
rom out the middle air, from flowery nests,
nd from the pillowy silkiness that rests
ull in the speculation of the stars.
h! surely he had burst our mortal bars:
nto some wond’rous region he had gone,
o search for thee, divine Endymion!

e was a Poet, sure a lover too,
Who stood on Latmus’ top, what time there blew
oft breezes from the myrtle vale below:
nd brought, in faintness solemn, sweet and slow,
. hymn from Dian’s temple; while upswelling,
he incense went to her own starry dwelling.
ut though her face was clear as infant’s eyes,
hough she stood smiling o’er the sacrifice,
he Poet wept at her so piteous fate,

Wept that such beauty should be desolate:
So in fine wrath some golden sounds he won,
And gave meek Cynthia her Endymion.

Queen of the wide air; thou most lovely queen
Of all the brightness that mine eyes have seen!
As thou exceedest all things in thy shine,
So every tale does this sweet tale of thine.
O for three words of honey, that I might
Tell but one wonder of thy bridal night!

Where distant ships do seem to show their keels,
Phœbus awhile delay'd his mighty wheels,
And turn'd to smile upon thy bashful eyes,
Ere he his unseen pomp would solemnise.
The evening weather was so bright, and clear,
That men of health were of unusual cheer;
Stepping like Homer at the trumpet's call,
Or young Apollo on the pedestal:
And lovely women were as fair and warm
As Venus looking sideways in alarm.
The breezes were ethereal, and pure,
And crept through half-closed lattices to cure
The languid sick; it cool'd their fever'd sleep,
And soothed them into slumbers full and deep.
Soon they awoke clear eyed: nor burnt with thirsting,
Nor with hot fingers, nor with temples bursting:
And springing up, they met the wond'ring sight
Of their dear friends, nigh foolish with delight;
Who feel their arms, and breasts, and kiss, and stare,
And on their placid foreheads part the hair.
Young men and maidens at each other gazed,
With hands held back, and motionless, amazed
To see the brightness in each other's eyes;
And so they stood, fill'd with a sweet surprise,
Until their tongues were loosed in poesy.

herefore no lover did of anguish die:
ut the soft numbers, in that moment spoken,
Iade silken ties, that never may be broken.
ynthia! I cannot tell the greater blisses
hat follow’d thine, and thy dear shepherd’s kisses:
Vas there a Poet born? – but now no more –
Iy wand’ring spirit must no farther soar.

Specimen of an Induction to a Poem

o! I must tell a tale of chivalry;
or large white plumes are dancing in mine eye.
[ot like the formal crest of latter days,
ut bending in a thousand graceful ways;
o graceful, that it seems no mortal hand,
r e’en the touch of Archimago’s wand,
ould charm them into such an attitude.
/e must think rather, that in playful mood
ome mountain breeze had turn’d its chief delight
o show this wonder of its gentle might.
o! I must tell a tell of chivalry;
or while I muse, the lance points slantingly
thwart the morning air: some lady sweet,
/ho cannot feel for cold her tender feet,
rom the worn top of some old battlement
[ails it with tears, her stout defender sent;
nd from her own pure self no joy dissembling,
/raps round her ample robe with happy trembling.
ometimes, when the good knight his rest would take,
is reflected, clearly, in a lake,
/ith the young ashen boughs, ’gainst which it rests,
nd th’ half-seen mossiness of linnets’ nests.
h! shall I ever tell its cruelty,
/hen the fire flashes from a warrior’s eye,
nd his tremendous hand is grasping it,
nd his dark brow for very wrath is knit?
r when his spirit, with more calm intent,
eaps to the honours of a tournament,
nd makes the gazers round about the ring
tare at the grandeur of the balancing!

[o, no! this is far off: – then how shall I
evive the dying tones of minstrelsy,
Which linger yet about lone gothic arches,
n dark green ivy, and among wild larches?
[ow sing the splendour of the revelries,
When butts of wine are drunk off to the lees?
nd that bright lance, against the fretted wall,
eneath the shade of stately banneral,
s slung with shining cuirass, sword, and shield?
Where ye may see a spur in bloody field.
ight-footed damsels move with gentle paces
ound the wide hall, and show their happy faces;
r stand in courtly talk by fives and sevens:
ike those fair stars that twinkle in the heavens.
et must I tell a tale of chivalry:
r wherefore comes that steed so proudly by?
Wherefore more proudly does the gentle knight
ein in the swelling of his ample might?

penser! thy brows are archèd, open, kind,
nd come like a clear sunrise to my mind;
nd always does my heart with pleasure dance,
When I think on thy noble countenance:
Where never yet was aught more earthly seen
han the pure freshness of thy laurels green.
herefore, great bard, I not so fearfully
all on thy gentle spirit to hover nigh
Iy daring steps: or if thy tender care,
hus startled unaware,
e jealous that the foot of other wight
hould madly follow that bright path of light
raced by thy lov’d Libertas; he will speak,
nd tell thee that my prayer is very meek;
hat I will follow with due reverence,
nd start with awe at mine own strange pretence.
[im thou wilt hear; so I will rest in hope

o see wide plains, fair trees, and lawny slope;
he morn, the eve, the light, the shade, the flowers;
lear streams, smooth lakes, and overlooking towers.

Calidore

A Fragment

OUNG Calidore is paddling o’er the lake;
[is healthful spirit eager and awake
o feel the beauty of a silent eve,
Vhich seem’d full loth this happy world to leave,
he light dwelt o’er the scene so lingeringly.
[e bares his forehead to the cool blue sky,
nd smiles at the far clearness all around,
[ntil his heart is well-nigh overwound,
nd turns for calmness to the pleasant green
f easy slopes, and shadowy trees that lean
o elegantly o’er the waters’ brim
nd show their blossoms trim.
carce can his clear and nimble eyesight follow
he freaks and dartings of the black-wing’d swallow,
elighting much to see it, half at rest,
ip so refreshingly its wings and breast
Gainst the smooth surface, and to mark anon
he widening circles into nothing gone.

nd now the sharp keel of his little boat
omes up with ripple, and with easy float,
nd glides into a bed of water-lilies:
road-leaved are they, and their white canopies
re upward turn’d to catch the heavens’ dew
[ear to a little island’s point they grew;
Vhence Calidore might have the goodliest view
f this sweet spot of earth. The bowery shore
Vent off in gentle windings to the hoar