

**UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DO RIO GRANDE DO SUL  
INSTITUTO DE LETRAS**

**JÚLIA CORRÊA MITIDIERI**

**“CURB YOUR MAGNANIMITY, AND BE MORE OF AN ARTIST”: KEATS’S  
LETTER TO SHELLEY ON AUGUST 16<sup>th</sup>, 1820**

**PORTO ALEGRE**

**2020/2**

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Trabalho de Conclusão de Curso  
apresentado ao Instituto de Letras da  
Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul  
como requisito parcial para a obtenção do  
título de Bacharel em Letras.

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PORTO ALEGRE

Maio de 2021

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### CIP - Catalogação na Publicação

Corrêa Mitidieri, Júlia  
"CURB YOUR MAGNANIMITY, AND BE MORE OF AN ARTIST":  
KEATS'S LETTER TO SHELLEY ON AUGUST 16th, 1820 / Júlia  
Corrêa Mitidieri. -- 2021.

62 f.

Orientadora: Sandra Sirangelo Maggio.

Coorientadora: Lis Yana De Lima Martinez.

Trabalho de conclusão de curso (Graduação) --  
Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Instituto  
de Letras, Bacharelado em Letras: Tradutor Português e  
Inglês, Porto Alegre, BR-RS, 2021.

1. Literatura Inglesa. 2. Romantismo Inglês. 3.  
John Keats. 4. Percy Shelley. I. Sirangelo Maggio,  
Sandra, orient. II. De Lima Martinez, Lis Yana,  
coorient. III. Título.

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de Bacharel em Letras pela Universidade Federal  
do Rio Grande do Sul.

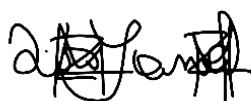
Porto Alegre, 27 de maio de 2021.

Resultado: Aprovada com conceito B

**BANCA EXAMINADORA:**



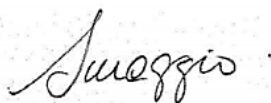
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## AGRADECIMENTOS

Agradeço aos meus pais, Claudine e Ricardo, aos meus avós, Rosemary, Daldo, Selma e Humberto, que foram, são, e sempre serão a minha base e o que eu tenho de mais valioso na vida. Pai, obrigada por todos os puxões de orelha seguidos de apoio e amor incondicional. Mãe, obrigada por seres a minha maior inspiração como mulher e como mãe; eu, finalmente, tenho orgulho da mulher que me tornei, e devo tudo isso a ti. Agradeço ao meu irmãozinho Rafael apenas por existir, porque isso já é o suficiente para me fazer sorrir e continuar, todos os dias.

Agradeço à minha orientadora, Profa. Sandra Sirangelo Maggio, e à minha coorientadora, Profa. Lis Yana de Lima Martinez, por todo o apoio, carinho e paciência. Quando eu não acreditava em mim, vocês acreditaram, e eu não poderia ser mais grata por isso.

Agradeço aos Professores Fabian Quevedo da Rocha e Marcela Zaccaro Chisté por aceitarem participar de minha banca de avaliação.

Agradeço, também, aos meus amigos e ao meu namorado, que estiveram ao meu lado durante toda a graduação, segurando a minha mão e me incentivando a seguir adiante. Amanda, Thomaz, Caroline e Anderson, este trabalho tem muito de vocês. Nós conseguimos! João, obrigada por todo o amor que tu me dás todos os dias, por todas as noites em claro ao meu lado, e por todos os “Nossa, eu jamais conseguiria fazer essa faculdade que tu fazes. É muita leitura!” O apoio e o amor de vocês foram essenciais.

Por fim, agradeço ao Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico (CNPq) pela concessão da Bolsa de Iniciação Científica que possibilitou a realização deste estudo, e à Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, por ter me dado a oportunidade de conhecer esse mundo literário, que foi onde me encontrei.

*Rid of the world's injustice, and his pain,  
He rests at last beneath God's veil of blue:  
Taken from life when life and love were new  
[...]*

*Thy name was writ in water—it shall stand:  
And tears like mine will keep thy memory green,  
As Isabella did her Basil-tree.*

Oscar Wilde, "The Grave of Keats"

## RESUMO

John Keats é o mais jovem entre os poetas românticos ingleses. Mesmo sendo conhecido predominantemente por sua poesia, as cartas que escreveu ao longo da vida são lembradas como parte importante de seu legado literário. Keats se correspondeu com amigos, familiares, editores e escritores; entre eles está o poeta Percy Bysshe Shelley. O relacionamento dos dois poetas consistiu em alguns encontros em Londres e uma única troca de cartas. Quando Shelley soube que Keats estava tuberculoso, escreveu convidando-o para passar o inverno na Itália, país de clima mais ameno. Na mesma carta, menciona questões crítico-literárias relativas às obras de ambos. Quase dois meses depois, Keats respondeu com o que parece ser uma carta milimetricamente pensada e levemente afrontosa. Assim, o objetivo da presente monografia é analisar esta carta escrita por Keats, prestando especial atenção em três traços nela encontrados: o tom de melancolia, a ironia e as impressões sobre literatura. O trabalho se estrutura em duas partes. A primeira, para contextualizar a análise dessa correspondência única, apresenta os seguintes pontos: (a) a função das cartas como meio de comunicação e sua importância no Período Regencial (1811 – 1820); (b) uma breve biografia de John Keats, incluindo o seu relacionamento com o destinatário da carta analisada, Percy Shelley, e (c) comentários sobre a correspondência de John Keats em geral. A segunda parte contém a análise da carta principal e daquela que a motiva, seguida de uma breve exposição sobre a vida dos dois poetas após a correspondência: a quase imediata morte de Keats; a homenagem poética *Adonais: An Elegy on the Death of John Keats, Author of Endymion, Hyperion, etc.* e a especial circunstância da morte de Shelley. A análise do material epistolar se apoia em Foucault (2000). A parte biográfica sobre Keats, Shelley e seu relacionamento, assim como a discussão sobre sua correspondência se embasa em Barnard (2001), Wolfson (2021), Kikuchi (1962) e Roe (2012). Com este trabalho, pretendo apontar a importância e a função das cartas nas trocas sociais e como gênero textual, explorando a contribuição da pesquisa de sua correspondência para o estudo da obra de um autor como Keats, cuja carreira foi tão breve e que morreu sem imaginar o alcance que seu nome e sua obra alcançariam.

**Palavras-chave:** Poesia inglesa. John Keats. Estudo de cartas. Percy Bysshe Shelley. Romantismo.



## ABSTRACT

John Keats is the youngest English Romantic poet. Although he is predominantly remembered for his poetry, Keats's letters are recognized as an important part of his literary legacy, consisting of exchanges with friends, relatives, editors, and authors; among them, the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley. The relationship of these two poets consisted of some meetings in London, and one single letter exchanged. When Shelley knew about Keats's tuberculosis, he wrote inviting Keats to go to Italy in winter, because the weather is milder there. In the letter, Shelley also comments on some literary criticism directed to their works. Almost two months afterwards, Keats sends his answer, in what seems to be a millimetrically planned, and slightly belligerent letter. Thus, the aim of the present monograph is to analyse this letter written by Keats, paying special attention to three elements there contained: the melancholy tone, the irony, and his impressions concerning literature. The work is structured in two parts. The first opens the way to the analysis of the letter, providing background information about (a) the role of letters as a means of communication during the Regency Period (1811-1820); (b) some biographical data about John Keats, including his association with Percy Shelley, the addressee; and (c) comments about Keats's body of correspondence. The second part of the work analyses the main letter, accessing also the one that motivates it, and posing a brief comment on the lives of both afterwards: the almost immediate death of Keats; the poetical tribute *Adonais: An Elegy on the Death of John Keats, Author of Endymion, Hyperion, etc.*, and the special circumstance of the death of Shelley. As theoretical support to epistolary studies I rely on Foucault (2000). Respecting the lives of Keats and Shelley, their connection, and letter exchange, I resort to Barnard (2001), Wolfson (2021), Kikuchi (1962), and Roe (2012). I hope this research may prove useful in the study of letters as elements of social exchange, and as a textual genre, exploiting the role of this correspondence in the study of the work of a poet like Keats, whose career was so short as to cause him to die without imagining how great his name and his work would be deemed in the future.

**Keywords:** English poetry. John Keats. Letters. Percy Bysshe Shelley. Romanticism.

**APOIO DE FINANCIAMENTO: CNPq**

O presente trabalho foi realizado com apoio parcial do Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico (PIBIC CNPq). / This study was financed in part by the *Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico* (PIBIC CNPq).

**APOIO DE FINANCIAMENTO: UFRGS**

O presente trabalho foi realizado com apoio parcial da Pró-reitoria de Ensino da Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul. / This study was financed in part by the *Pró-reitoria de Ensino da Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul*.

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## INTRODUCTION

My first contact with the work of John Keats happened, as for most people, through his poems. When I read “La Belle Dame Sans Merci” for the first time, I got emotional at the end of the poem, which remained in my mind for more than a week. I am not sure why, but the poem made me feel as if I was there, feeling what they felt, I even dreamt about that poem. Keats and I were getting acquainted, but we did not have such a special relationship, at least not yet.

At the beginning of 2020, I had the extraordinary opportunity to go to London to study English Literature. During one of the Poetry classes, Professor Thomas Baynes gave a lecture on the second generation of the Romantics, in which Keats is included. The Professor’s excitement on talking about the author was contagious, he recited the poetry with an intensity worthy of a fan. As we commented on the author’s life and work, Professor Thomas mentioned Keats’ letters and told us they are considered an important part of his work. This was new information to me because, until then, I only knew Keats for his poetry. Knowing he had a big collection of letters about his life and his work was good news to me, since I have always been interested in the personal lives of the authors I like. I believe that the study of many works can be enriched when we know some facts about the one who wrote them. I thought that if I read some letters, I could learn more about Keats, and the best part was that Keats himself was the one who would tell me everything. I left that class and immediately went after a book with his letters.

I went to the British Library, got my card to access the study rooms, and looked for some books with Keats’s letters. I was eager to learn what he was like as a person, how he addressed his family, friends, girlfriends. Was he kind? Boring? Funny? Are there letters about some big arguments that changed his life? How much could I get from his story through these letters? I came across more than 240 letters that tell the story of a poor poet who shows his anxieties, his joys, his disappointments, his good relationship with his family and friends, his warm discussions about literature, and his sad journey to death.

The first letters are from 1816. Until 1817, Keats kept them short and straight to the point. In these first letters, we see Keats as an ordinary citizen from the Regency Era, using the most important contemporary form of communication of his time to set

up meetings, comment on his daily life, gossip, and send drafts of some poems. From 1818, the volume of letters increases, as does the number of recipients. In November 1820, shortly before his death, Keats writes his last letter, to his friend Charles Brown. In this last letter, sent from Rome, Keats reports great difficulty in writing and even in opening a book. He shows he knows that tuberculosis, the disease that hit him at the beginning of 1820, is now finishing its course and that, like his brother, his destiny is to die young. About two months later, in February 1821, Keats died in *Piazza di Spagna*, Rome.

From 1816 to 1821 John Keats was a poet, friend, brother, and great lover. His life was troubled from the beginning: he lost his parents as a child and, at the age of fourteen, had to leave school to work and support his family (ROE, 2012). Unlike the other Romantic poets from the second generation, Keats did not belong to a wealthy family, and this detail possibly prevented him from becoming more visible as a great poet on the period's literary scene. His publications in his short life have never had good financial results, but even so Keats managed to meet and to keep close relationships with famous poets of the time, especially Leigh Hunt and his circle. The friendship between Keats and Hunt was long-lasting. The poet even lived in Hunt's family home while he was ill (WOLFSON, 2021). Keats's family consisted of his brothers, and their relation remained remarkably close to the end of his life. His brothers were always sending news and visiting him whenever possible (ROE, 2012). Finally, through the letters, we can meet Keats's greatest love: Fanny Brawne, the woman who starts as his neighbour and becomes the reason for his existence. The couple never married because of Keats's precarious financial situation, but they lived an intense love story, became engaged in secret and, after Keats's death, Fanny continued to wear the engagement ring until the day of her death.

Although Keats was not openly recognized as a great poet in life, he was highly admired and widely supported by great artists of the time, such as the aforementioned Leigh Hunt, the painter Benjamin Haydon, and two poets, John Hamilton Reynolds and Percy Bysshe Shelley. Hunt introduced Keats to his readers in 1816 in *The Examiner* magazine, along with Shelley, in an article called "The Young Poets" (WOLFSON, 2021). After that, Keats and Shelley met personally, and grew closer to each other. I doubt whether their relationship could be called a friendship, but the two Romantic poets exchanged ideas about poetry. They met only a few times, but both Keats and

Shelley often talked about each other to third parties in letters and conversations. There is only a part of their relationship that is documented: an exchange of letters between the two, which took place between July and August 1820.

This letter exchange occurred after Shelley learned, through mutual friends, that Keats was extremely ill. Rumours about his tuberculous appearance circulated among those who knew him, and the information arrived in Pisa, in Italy, where the Shelley's were living at the time (WOLFSON, 2021). Shelley quickly wrote to Keats, sorrowful about his condition, and inviting him to spend the winter in Pisa, as the weather there would be better for his health. In this letter, Shelley also commented on Keats's and his poetry.

Keats responded a month later, flattered to have received this letter, thanking Shelley for the invitation, and answering every line. This conversation by letter between them is the focus of my research, where Keats's letter is examined. To do that, I also discuss some elements found in Shelley's letter, and I address the relationship of the two writers, as well as their respective backgrounds, and the possible results of this relationship between John Keats and Percy Bysshe Shelley.

In the first part of this monograph, I contextualize the analysis, starting with a discussion on epistolary studies, then addressing the use of letters in the Regency Period, and commenting on their importance in literary criticism. In the second section, I analyse the letter that John Keats sent to Percy Shelley in August 1820, using Shelley's preceding letter to Keats as a counterpoint. Among the several subjects raised, I am especially interested in three issues: melancholy, irony, and literary criticism. This choice of traits refers to the importance they have in Keats's life. Melancholy is a constant feature when he writes the letter because of his illness. Irony is a rhetorical resource widely used in the letter, which draws attention, as we, readers, tend to think that Keats idolized Shelley. Literary criticism is an indispensable feature to be analysed in any letter by Keats, as it is very striking. Following the analysis of these three topics, I address the post-letter: the life of Keats and Shelley after the letters, as well as the result of these exchanges, especially the elegy *Adonais*, one of Shelley's most famous poems, written after the death of Keats.

The theoretical support to the research goes in two directions. For the epistolary study, I resort to Michel Foucault's impressions about letter writing, presented in the text "Self Writing" (2000). Concerning the biographical part, I work mainly with

Nicholas Roe (2012), and Wataru Kikuchi (2004). The information about the relationship of John Keats and Percy Shelley comes from letters exchanged between the two poets and Hunt, as commented by Susan Wolfson (2021), and Shepherd Lynn (2014). Lastly, for the study of Keats's letters, I use John Barnard (2001) and *The Critical Heritage of John Keats* (1925).

With this research, I intend to contribute to the study of John Keats, who is more referred to than actually read in Brazil, I suspect, as the writer is not widely studied, or translated into Portuguese either. I also aim to highlight the relevance of letters as materials to be used in the study of literature. So, I hope to be able to show the importance of this great writer, so that, in the future, Keats can have more space in Brazil, whether in academic studies or in translations accessible to everyone.

## **1. CONTEXTUALIZING THE ANALYSIS**

The current section is divided into two parts: the first is a brief study of letters, their origins, and how the sender owns his own story. In addition, still in the letters section, I present a section on the importance of letters at the time when John Keats lived and, consequently, produced his letters: the Regency Period. Finally, I comment on Keats's letters, their characteristics, main recipients, and times of greatest recurrence. In the second part, for the final analysis of the letter to be better understood, the biography of John Keats is presented, as well as his relationship with Percy Shelley. The biographical section is important so that when analysing Keats's complete letter to Shelley, we can see the motivations for some passages, especially the traces of melancholy, which may be related to the complicated life that Keats has led since he was born.

### **1.1 On Letter-Writing**

This section aims to discuss the epistolary study and this is done in three parts: the first is a brief presentation of the origin of the letters, their writing process – and how the writer manages to manipulate the reader; the second part of the chapter deals with the importance of this type of correspondence during the Regency Period when Keats lived and wrote all his letters; the third and final part is dedicated to the letters of John Keats, in which it is explicated what his main subjects were, with whom he corresponded most and how his letter production increased over the course of his life.

#### **1.1.1 What is in a letter?**

The letter is one of the oldest forms of communication between people and, therefore, a large part of the history of mankind is recorded in them and, for this reason alone, it can be told. To contain historical facts, the letter does not need to be written for this purpose because, when a person writes about things that are happening in their life at a certain time, they bring details of the time in which they lived, either with their customs, opinions about a certain subject, walks, ways of relating, writing, speaking, among others. Therefore, many letters can be seen as historical documents.

The history of the letters begins with papyrus, a plant that was transformed into the physical medium used for writing in Ancient Egypt. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C., parchment appears for the first time, paper made with the skin of sheep and calves, manufactured in



the city of Pergamos. The paper we know today was only created in 105 BC, by the Chinese T'sai Lun, who crushed vegetable fibres, sifted, and dried in the sun, creating a thin sheet of paper. Another important part of the letter's history is how they were delivered, which were also diverse: carrier pigeons, ships, horses, and the post office, used until today. In England, the country in which the object of study for this research was written and sent by mail, the creation of the Post Office was in 1660, by Charles II. The industry grew a lot there, mainly in the seventeenth century, and soon became an important part of everyday life for the English. But, after all, what is a letter? What sets up a letter? How is it built and what is its function?

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, a letter is a “written message from one person to another, usually put in an envelope and sent by post”. Of course, because it is a dictionary, there is a simple and direct definition, but other characteristics make a letter to be a letter. The textual genre “letter” describes a text – handwritten or printed – intended to establish written communication between people, to transmit different messages. Thus, the letter as a textual genre is divided into three types: the official letter, the document used in public institutions; the business letter, which is written for the professional environment and, therefore, needs a more formal language; and the personal letter, which is a communication between people who maintain a relationship, be it family, friendship, etc. The personal letter is the one that interests me in this research, because I comment exclusively of the letter as a form of communication between known people and that, therefore, are more likely to bring subjectivities, opinions, autobiographical passages, among other traits that make the reader interested the content of the letter.

This interest of many readers in letters written by authors is genuine. In general, the letters bring much of the intimacy of the writer, whether from everyday situations, gossip, life stories, or opinions. Reading a letter is often entering very deeply into the life or mind of the writer, and it is this type of text that quenches human curiosity. In addition, the letter is a way of overcoming the spatial distance that exists between sender and recipient, since the letter – especially today, but in Keats's day this was already possible – can be written and sent from practically anywhere in the world, and it will arrive almost anywhere in the world, too. The best known and most used function of it is, without a doubt, remote communication.

What many people who read letters may not realize is the fact that the writer manipulates absolutely everything in the text and, therefore, manipulates the reader as well.

As much as the letter seems like an open book of the sender's life and mind, it is often not. When writing a letter, we can define exactly what information we want to share and how we want to do it; when we write, we have time to think, write, read, and reread, erase and redo, unlike what we do during a personal conversation. That way, whoever writes speaks with himself and with the recipient while writing a letter.

According to Foucault (2000), the letter is “something more than a training of oneself by means of writing, through the advice and opinions one gives to the other: it also constitutes a certain way of manifesting oneself to oneself and to others.” (FOUCAULT, 2000, n. p.) The philosopher adds, saying that:

the letter makes the writer “present” to the one to whom he addresses it. And present not simply through the information he gives concerning his life, his activities, his successes and failures, his good luck, or misfortunes; rather, present with a kind of immediate, almost physical presence. (FOUCAULT, 2000, n. p.)

Thus, letters are more than just an old habit of chatting at distance, but rather a form of self-knowledge and presentation of the sender. The letter brings the writer closer to the reader because, in addition to the personal information that usually constitutes a letter, it also contains the sender's handwriting, and it is also folded, enveloped, and sent by him. This handcrafting way that the letter is produced, from the way the letter is thought, to how it is enveloped, is what brings the sender close to the recipient at the time of reading. Therefore, “to write is [...] to “show oneself”, to project oneself into view, to make one's own face appear in the other's presence.” (FOUCAULT, 2000, n. p.). At the same time, the letter is a look from the sender to himself and a look from the sender to the recipient, which is manipulated by the sender through what he decides to say about himself.

Therefore, whoever writes the letters is a writer of *I* because they decide how he will be seen by the people for whom he writes. The writer is the protagonist of his own story and, consequently, decides which direction their story will take. It is in this choice that the author shows how they want to be seen by society, or just the way they see *I*. In doing so, the author controls his image before society and does not expose details or thoughts that may be harmful to them in that context. In addition, considering that the letter will be delivered to someone, the author also delimits the subjects they want to debate, controversy, and what they expect from the recipient's response. Thus, it is possible to say

that the sender strives to build what they are or want to be, but it is almost impossible to know when this image is merely constructed by the writer or when they are sincere in their words.

### **1.1.2 The importance of letters in the Regency Era**

Letter writing was the most common means of communication in the Regency period and, in addition to the use of the letter to talk to friends and family, the way the letter was written dictated the character and personality of the writer, as well as their social class. Letters were so important at the time that guides existed to teach people how to write them – especially those from the lower classes. Therefore, how a letter was written was important in creating a good image in late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century England.

Writing letters and talking about the ones you wrote and received was essential behaviour during the Regency period, especially for women, who had letter writing as part of their duties as women. Schools or housekeepers taught calligraphy, grammar, and spelling, so that correspondence was written in the most correct and standard way possible. In addition, many famous people of the time published their letters, and that was one more reason why letter writing was so important. Anyway, it was not just a good education that made a good letter writer, because the art of writing a letter was not limited to just knowing how to put words on paper and write beautiful and cohesive sentences, as there were some specific materials to write.

Paper, for example, was expensive at the time, it was not something simple and cheap as we are used to seeing today. For this reason, those who wrote needed to use the maximum space available on paper and, with that, came the cross-written letters, texts that were written in a crossed way on the paper. Reading and writing this type of letter required practice and time. The paper could be bought by sheets – the most expensive ones were sold just like that – or in a ream, which had 480 sheets.

Among the other important materials for letter-writing at the time, there are quill pens, ink, pencils, and sealing wax. Quill pens were usually made of raven or goose feathers. The swan's feathers produced thicker and more precise lines, while the raven's feathers had their tips thin and flexible, being the favourite among artists and women who, in general, had more delicate and smaller letters. The ink was essential for writing a letter at the time, as a quill pen without ink would have virtually no effect. Thus, the most common ink used in the Regency Era for letter writing was made from oak galls, iron sulphate, and acacia gum. This ink, when applied to the paper, turned a little grey, not black, as it should,

but after a little contact with the air, the ink dried and, thus, was very dark and permanent. Coloured inks were also a reality, it was possible to find red, blue, yellow, and green inks, all produced in a remarkably similar way to black. Some stationers would formulate their own ink.

Pencils, as simple and accessible they seem to us today, at the time, were the first portable writing instrument, as it needed nothing more than itself, unlike the Quill pen, which always needed ink. Pencils were no different than they are today, they were also made with graphite, but, at first, the graphite was sold rolled up on paper. However, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, wooden and even metal pencils began to appear. In the beginning, this production of wooden and metal pencils was done by hand and, therefore, were expensive products. Gradually the industry started to appear and the manufacture of this type of product became more and more accessible until it became what we know today. Finally, sealing wax was widely used, especially before 1840, when the use of envelopes began to become more and more common. To keep their letters closed and private, letter writers from the Regency period closed their correspondence with sealing wax, which, despite the name, contained little wax in their composition. Therefore, the Regency period was very marked by correspondence and, with the variety of manuals and materials for letter writing – from the most expensive to the cheapest, a large part of the population could send letters and communicate with people from all over the world. (Cf. MULLANY, 2021)

## **1.2 John Keats: The Youngest Romantic Poet**

John Keats was born in Moorgate, London, on October 31, 1795, and died in Rome, on February 21, 1821, at twenty-five. He was the first of the five children of Thomas Keates and Frances Jennings and, when he was 14, he became an orphan by both mother and father. He belongs to the second generation of Romanticism, alongside names like Lord Byron and Percy Shelley, even though he had a quite different background from the two. In his lifetime, Keats published fifty-four poems in three books and a few magazines, but he was not recognized as a great poet by any of his publications in life. The harsh criticism from people like John Gibson Lockhart and John Wilson Croker came without mercy. After his death, he started to have recognition through some of his contemporaries, such as Tennyson, who admitted to being influenced by Keats. Then, his work came to light again, and now getting the deserved value and importance.

The subsequent sections present the life of John Keats, emphasizing his childhood and the beginning of his literary career, moments that I consider most important for the writer's formation. Keats had a very troubled childhood, full of sad losses and sadness. It can be said that he did not have a proper childhood, because a moment that should be healthy and happy, for him was full of grief and suffering. In addition, the beginning of John Keats's literary career is what differentiates him most from other poets of the time: because he had to work from an early age and came from a humble family, Keats did not have the same opportunities as most of the renowned poets of the time had. His social class and the time he had to dedicate himself to poetry were enemies of him at the beginning.

### **1.2.1 His life, death & legacy**

Since his birth, John Keats had to deal with complicated situations. According to Roe (2012), Keats was born premature, of 7 months, and one of the reasons for this would have been the alcoholism of his mother, Frances, who drank compulsively while she was pregnant. Some physiognomic characteristics of Keats can "prove" this: "the small head and projecting upper lip – suggest symptoms of what we would call foetal alcohol syndrome which may have rendered him susceptible to disease" (ROE, 2012, p. 75) and, also Keats never grew any taller than a couple of inches above 5ft tall. However, according to Livesley (2012), Keats's physiognomy is not related to the mother's alcoholism, but

suggests strongly that he had congenital cardiovascular disease and, in particular, aortic coarctation. (...) It is an uncommon condition that can be unrecognized during life. Keats was born within one of the seasonal periods for its increased incidence, suggesting that aortic coarctation is not simply related to genetic factors. (LIVESLEY, 2012, p. 1)

The exact place Keats was born is uncertain, but "in autumn 1795 Frances and Thomas were most likely at the Swan and Hoop or lodgings nearby" (ROE, 2012, p. 75). In 1797, George, the couple's second child, was born. At the end of the same year, Frances and Thomas, together with their two children, John and George, moved to 12, Craven Street, London, where Tom and Edward Keats, brothers of John and George, were born. The house they lived in had a small garden and was close to a vinegar factory, and Keats's first published poem "To Solitude" shows this scenario, in which Keats locates himself there, "contemplating the vinegar factory and the city 'jumbled heap', then scanning north to view 'the steep', dell and river beyond." (ROE, 2012, p. 77).

In 1804, at the age of 8, Keats lost his father. Thomas Keates, after an ordinary and even happy day, in which he talked with his children in Enfield and had lunch with his friends, “galloped down the long scythe of the City Road back into London. In the dark and drizzle nobody saw Thomas plunge to the pavement beside Bunhill Fields, smashing his skull and bleeding heavily. [...] Before sunrise, he was dead.” (ROE, 2012, p. 72). This loss was extremely painful for Keats and “after the first shock he almost certainly felt a sense of childish guilt – if his father hadn’t visited, he would be alive now.” (ROE, 2012, p. 83). Because he has seen his father earlier on the same day, Keats probably felt that all of this could have been avoided, if Thomas had not visited him and his brother. The funeral took place on the same day that Shakespeare’s birthday is celebrated, April 23, and, together with his brothers, his mother, and his maternal grandparents, Keats accompanied his father’s coffin until it was buried. In June of the same year, two months after the death of Thomas Keates, Frances remarried, hidden from her family, and, shortly afterward, her children were in the care of her maternal grandmother, Alice Jennings. The Keats brothers’ mother quickly regretted the marriage, abandoning her husband and being left with nothing because, after being married, everything she had now belonged to her husband.

In the meantime, John and George Keats were already studying at a boy’s school, and one of the best at the time: Clarke’s Academy, in Enfield, a village which was from London at that time. Keats first went to this school when he was seven – 1803 – and he “had enrolled at the most extraordinary school in the country. At Clarke’s Academy, he would be taught reading and writing, and how England owed its freedoms to the great dissenting tradition, with John Milton at its head” (ROE, 2012, p. 81). At school, Keats was involved in physical activities, he liked to play cricket, swim in the lake, and was even one of the boys who fought the most with other students in the schoolyard, which made him get some blackeyes during that time. He remained in this school for seven years and, therefore, did not spend much time with his family, which prevented him from being so affected by the problems that were around him; but, sadly, the sadness in young Keats’s life was not over yet.

In 1808, his uncle, Midgley John Jennings, his mother’s brother, died of tuberculosis, leaving a widow and three children. John Keats had a good relationship with his uncle and “with the death of his uncle in November, Keats lost the hero he might have followed into a military career” (ROE, 2012, p. 90). However, the void of loss was quickly filled by his mother, Frances, who, probably shaken by her brother’s death, reappeared after

five years. In 1809, she made peace with Alice Jennings and moved in with her – now in Edmonton. “Ailing with ‘ha rheumatism’, she was dosing herself with brandy and opium, but the simple fact of her return encouraged Keats to rise to a challenge unlike anything he had ever faced in the playground. He discovered the school library.” (ROE, 2012, p. 90).

John Keats wanted to impress his mother after waiting so long for her return and, in the spring of 1809, he decided that he would win an award at school. For this, Keats studied hard, during all hours of the day. Roe comments that

just as he had formerly got up early to venture into summer fields, he was now at his books before the morning’s first class. While his schoolmates wrangled in the yard, he wrestled with Latin and French. In the evening he ate his supper with a book in front of him. And so, on the next day, and the next, until he had to be driven out of the schoolroom to take exercise. (ROE, 2012, p. 91).

His efforts paid off and Keats won the award, the *C.H. Kauffman’s Dictionary of Merchandize and Nomenclature in All Languages*.

If this was an obvious award for a boy destined for a life in trade it also proved an invaluable resource for a budding poet. Inside the book’s unpromising grey boards was a treasure house of language and imagery – homely, exotic, glowingly vivid and Romantically strange. Page after page disgorged cargoes for realms of gold – alabaster, aloe, amber, cassia, cinnamon, coral, diamond, ebony, frankincense, honey, iron, manna, marble, porphyry, silk, silver, slate and vermilion. Keats would raid this book again and again for the rich, material textures of its language, and it was Kauffman that he had in mind when he advised Shelley to ‘load every rift’. While Keats idealised poetry that was ‘great & unobtrusive’, without ‘palpable design’, Kauffman and the successes of Byron and Scott had alerted him to its commercial value as a commodity that would, he calculated, enable him to gain a living. (ROE, 2012, p. 91)

This award was an event in Keats’s life because, with the book, the young student who before had shown little interest in the intellectual – he was in sports and fights – now knew a new world. A world in which he would be immersed in a few years.

During the years that his mother was ill, John took care of her as much as he could while he was not at school. During the Christmas holiday, Keats made a point of administering his mother’s medicines and preparing her meals. He also read novels to her. However, “Frances’s health did not improve. Lassitude and pallor were accompanied by loss of weight, chills, and sweats, and a persistent cough that told them the family disease had her in its grip.” (ROE, 2012, p 91). The changes in Frances’ appearance and health were impressive for Keats because, during the school year, there were few times he saw his



mother. In January 1810, Keats had to go back to school, and the only thing he could think about was his mother's full recovery. In March 1810, Frances Jennings passed away, another victim of tuberculosis – the same disease that had killed her brother about a year earlier.

When Keats heard of his mother's death he withdrew into a nook under the master's desk, hiding from the sympathy of his fellows. In his misery at her loss it must have seemed that all of his efforts to win her back by reading and studying had availed as little as his care for her. (...) Between the ages of seven and fourteen he had lived through the deaths of his little brother Edward, his great-uncle Charles, his father Thomas, his Jennings grandfather, and his uncle Midgley John. (ROE, 2012, p. 92)

The loss of his mother greatly affected young John Keats, who, even at a young age, had already experienced many losses of important figures for his life so far. Now, John Keats, about fourteen years old, was the oldest man in his family and, after his mother's death, felt responsible for his brothers and protected them as he could until the end of his life.

At Clarke's Academy, the school where he studied, Keats was getting closer to John Clarke, the headmaster, and his son, Cowden Clarke, an assistant professor. Keats was one of Clarke's favourite students, always enthusiastic and studying hard for the contests in which he participated. This more intense interest in the study came after his mother's death and was leveraged by the school itself, which always encouraged students to visit its libraries. As Cowden's suggestion, Keats began translating Aeneid to distract himself and better deal with his grief. Thus, Keats became more and more interested in literature. However, in 1811, Keats left Enfield and the Clarke's Academy to pursue a career as a surgeon and began to be the apprentice of a famous surgeon at the time, Thomas Hammond. From 1811 to 1814 there is not much information about Keats's life, only that he was studying and preparing for some years later, work as a surgeon.

His interest in literature continued to grow while Keats was an apprentice to Hammond, and this moment of discovery has two sides: his desire to be a surgeon and do some good for the world, but which brought a dark and painful scenario, in which he would have to deal with blood, wounds and suffering daily since anaesthesia was only used for the first time in 1840 and, in Keats's time, surgeries were done without it. And it was in this world that he was in; and literature, something that is still very new to him, but even so, it touches him in an intense and almost desperate way, judging by the pace and need for reading that he seemed to demonstrate at that time.



A surgeon, licensed by examination, was a general practitioner, setting bones, dressing wounds, giving vaccinations. Keats always maintained he was “ambitious of doing the world some good.” It is likely that he began his career with enthusiasm, but living in the small rooms over the surgery, Keats grew restless and lonely; he began to wander the woods and walk the four miles to Enfield to see the Clarkes. He completed his translation of the *Aeneid*, and, according to Cowden Clarke, he “devoured rather than read” books he borrowed: Ovid’s *Metamorphosis*, John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, Virgil’s *Eclogues*, and dozens of others. But the book that decisively awakened his love of poetry, indeed shocked him suddenly into self-awareness of his own powers of imagination, was Edmund Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*. (FOUNDATION, online)

It is sometime in 1814 that John Keats writes his first poem: “Imitation of Spenser”. And it is still at that time that he has his first contact with a person who will be especially important during his career as a poet: the poet, essayist, and literary critic Leigh Hunt who, while Keats was still leaving school, was already publishing and was politically persecuted. It is through Cowden Clarke that John Keats met Leigh Hunt. In 1813, Hunt was arrested for slandering the Regent Prince and, during that time, “Cowden Clarke arrived at the prison with baskets of eggs, vegetables, fruit and flowers from the Enfield school garden, and Hunt soon regarded him as an old acquaintance.” (ROE, 2012, p. 98). John Keats heard about Hunt in this way, even though he still did not know him in person. In February 1815, Leigh Hunt was released, and, in honour of that moment, Keats wrote a sonnet, called “Written on the Day That Mr. Leigh Hunt Left Prison” and, through Cowen, sent to Hunt. Later, in 1817, Keats published a book containing this poem, and this was probably seen as an affront by the most conservative critics, who did not like Hunt at all.

On October 1<sup>st</sup>, 1815, at the age of 19, John Keats moved to London, and upon arriving went to Guy’s Hospital – in the neighbourhood of the Borough, to sign up for a surgeon/apothecary course. In July 1816 he completed the course, passed the exams, and became a licensed surgeon/apothecary. Keats chose not to start working immediately and, after the exams were over, went out to spend time in Margate, a remote place that would allow him to rest from the crowded and busy London of the beginning of the century. At the end of September, the now surgeon/apothecary returned to London and started working at Guy’s Hospital, as a dresser<sup>1</sup>, until he was old enough – 21 years old – to be officially a surgeon. Also in 1816, Keats had his first access to George Chapman’s translation of

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<sup>1</sup> Reference to a kind of surgical assistant who helps in the bandaging and dressing of wounds. (Cf. *Farlex Partner Medical Dictionary*.)

Homer, through Cowden Clarke, a book that introduced him to Greek mythology, one of his greatest inspirations in poetry. That same year, in October, was when, finally, Keats and Hunt met in person, at Hunt's house. About the first time he saw John Keats, Leigh Hunt comments:

He was under the middle height; and his lower limbs were small in comparison with the upper, but neat and well-turned. His shoulders were very broad for his size... If there was any faulty expression, it was in the mouth, which was not without something of a character of pugnacity. The face was rather long than otherwise; the upper lip projected a little over the under; the chin was bold, the cheeks sunken; ... His hair, of a brown colour, was fine, and hung in natural ringlets. The head was ... remarkably small in the skull; ... Mr. Keats was sensible of the disproportion above noticed, between his upper and lower extremities; and he would look at his hand, which was faded, and swollen in the veins, and say it was the hand of a man of fifty (LIVESLEY, 2012, p. 1)

Roe, in his 2012 biography, also provides more details on Hunt's speech, adding that "he had a face in which energy and sensibility were remarkably mixed up, an eager power checked and made patient by ill health. Every feature was at once strongly cut, and delicately alive." (ROE, 2012 p. 129) Years before Keats became ill, "it is notable that Hunt apparently detected ill-health in Keats almost from their first meeting." (ROE, 2012, p.129). The details about his physiognomy, especially his height and disproportionate limbs, were things that bothered him, and it is possible to notice that from some passages of letters he sent to his brother George, as in

Mr. Lewis went a few mornings ago to town with Mrs. Brawne. They talked about me, and I heard that Mr. L said a thing I am not at all contented with; Says he, 'O, he is quite the little Poet.' Now this is abominable; you might as well say Buonaparte is quite the little Soldier. You see what it is to be under six foot and not a lord.' (KEATS, 2021, n. p.)

The relationship between John Keats and Leigh Hunt became a great friendship and opened many doors for the young poet. While he worked at Guy's Hospital, he devoted his free time to writing poems. And on May 5<sup>th</sup>, 1816, he published his first poem "Ode to Solitude" in Hunt's *The Examiner* magazine, signing as J.K. 1816 is a remarkable year in Keats's life, as it is from it that his life as a poet starts. Being more and more friends with Leigh Hunt, Keats met other names that would be especially important for his career and for his life, such as John Hamilton Reynolds and Benjamin Haydon, who would be his supporters and friends until the end of his life and, a few weeks later, he would meet Charles Ollier – Shelley's publisher at the time, who would publish Keats's first book.

Along with all the changes that occurred in 1816, in November, Keats and his brothers moved together to an apartment and, “while Guy’s still determined the pattern of his weeks, his life was now also shaped by a different calendar in which sociable occasions and anniversaries made up part of his life as a poet.” (ROE, 2012, p. 137). Even without major publications in his name, Keats was already part of Hunt’s circle and had relationships with several poets and artists of the time, at the age of 19. It is at this time that Keats meets Percy Shelley, through Leigh Hunt, and their relationship is discussed in the next topic of this research. On December 1, 1816, Leigh Hunt presented Shelley, Keats, and John Henry Reynolds, in his article *Young Poets*, in his magazine *The Examiner*. In the article, Hunt introduces the three poets to his readers and publishes, along with the article, the poem “On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer” by Keats, in full. “For Keats, the ‘*Young Poets*’ piece was decisive. As Henry Stephens recalled, ‘it sealed his fate from him and he gave himself up more completely than before to Poetry’” (ROE, 2012, p. 139). With that, Keats was filled with hope and decided to leave his medical career to dedicate himself to poetry.

After having two more of his sonnets published in *The Examiner*, his first book of poems was officially published on March 3, 1817, by the publisher C. and J. Ollier. The publication was made exclusively in search of financial return and Keats admits this more than once in his letters, including the letter that is the object of study of this research. Now living only as a poet, Keats was in financial trouble, as he had to use almost all of his grandmother’s inheritance to pay for his studies at Guy’s Hospital. Thus, he now lived to write and discuss his poems with his poet friends. So, he could achieve his goal: to work as a poet and earn money with his art. Still in 1817, in May, Keats meets Charles Brown, who will be his faithful friend until the end of his life – living and travelling together – and in December, through the painter Benjamin Haydon, he meets William Wordsworth in person. A year before that, Haydon had already sent a letter to Wordsworth, with the lengths of Keats and his book, *Poems*, but it was in December 1817, after learning that Wordsworth was in town, that Haydon sent this message to Thomas Monkhouse, Wordsworth’s wife’s cousin:

Dear Sir,  
Will Mr. Wordsworth be at home to-morrow morning at Lambeth as Keats is down and very anxious to see him—or will he do you think be so occupied with business as not to be able for a few minutes to see us? —Yours most truly,

B.R. Haydon.<sup>2</sup>

After the message, they met. It is not known for sure when the meeting took place, but it is said to have taken place in late December 1817. Nicholas Roe, in his biography, details the meeting with a speech by Haydon.

Most likely it occurred between Monday the 22<sup>nd</sup> and Saturday the 27<sup>th</sup> at Monkhouse's Queen Anne Street home. Haydon witnessed what happened: Wordsworth received him kindly, & after a few minutes, Wordsworth asked him what he had been lately doing, I said he has just finished an exquisite ode to Pan—and as he had not a copy I begged Keats to repeat it—which he did in his usual half chant, (most touching) walking up & down the room—when he had done I felt really, as if I had heard a young Apollo—Wordsworth drily said 'a Very pretty piece of Paganism'— This was unfeeling, & unworthy of his high Genius to a young Worshipper like Keats—& Keats felt it deeply—so that if Keats has said any thing severe about our Friend; it was because he was wounded—and though he dined with Wordsworth after at my table—he never forgave him. (ROE, 2012, p. 183)

It is difficult to say whether Wordsworth's reaction to Keats's poem was positive or negative, but the young poet took it as a compliment "and in the weeks ahead would meet Wordsworth at least five times." (ROE, 2012, p. 183). One of the meetings of Haydon, Keats, and Wordsworth's was marked as "The Immortal Dinner". The dinner, which took place at Haydon's house, featured the distinguished attendees of Keats and Wordsworth, but also of Charles Lamb, Tom Monkhouse, Joseph Ritchie, and John Kingston. All were known artists at the time, except Kingston, who entered at Haydon's house as a friend of Wordsworth. The night was long and fun, with lots of drink, food, and discussions about literature. Charles Lamb was taken out of the room at one point because he was very drunk and, even though it was a stressful time for everyone, it also resulted in a good laugh. (Cf. STEVENSON, 2021)

Keats was part of the circle of well-known artists of the time, but he was not recognized as a great poet. After publishing his book of poems, which was unsuccessful in sales, Keats continued to write and publish in magazines. After the publication of the poem *Endymion*, between March and April 1818, Keats had a little more visibility and, with that, the harsh criticisms came. Two of them marked him the most, as well as for his

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<sup>2</sup> This was taken from Roe's biography on Keats. Here, I share the note he made in the book: "T.O. Mabbott, 'Haydon's Letter Arranging for Keats to Meet Wordsworth', Notes and Queries (10 May 1941), 328–9." (Kindle position 9945-9946).

acquaintances and admirers: the criticisms of John Gibson Lockhart and John Wilson Croker, both in the same year. The first came out in April 1818 and was signed by Croker, who was not gentle with the words.

It is not that Mr. Keats, (if that be his real name, for we almost doubt that any man in his senses would put his real name to such a rhapsody,) it is not, we say, that the author has not powers of language, rays of fancy, and gleams of genius — he has all these; but he is unhappily a disciple of the new school of what has been somewhere called Cockney<sup>3</sup> poetry; which may be defined to consist of the most incongruous ideas in the most uncouth language. [...] This author is a copyist of Mr. Hunt; but he is more unintelligible, almost as rugged, twice as diffuse, and ten times more tiresome and absurd than his prototype, who, though he impudently presumed to seat himself in the chair of criticism, and to measure his own poetry by his own standard, yet generally had a meaning. But Mr. Keats had advanced no dogmas which he was bound to support by examples; his nonsense therefore is quite gratuitous; he writes it for its own sake, and, being bitten by Mr. Leigh Hunt's insane criticism, more than rivals the insanity of his poetry. [...] It is an indispensable condition at this play, that the rhymes when filled up shall have a meaning; and our author, as we have already hinted, has no meaning. He seems to use to write a line at random, and then he follows not the thought excited by this line, but that suggested by the rhyme with which it concludes. (CROKER, 2021, n. p.)

Croker offends Keats from the beginning to the end of his article, especially his writing. He admits that Keats may have a “gift” for writing, but because he was involved with the Hunt circle, Keats was more concerned with copying Hunt than exploring his own writing style. In this article, as well as Lockhart's, it is possible to see Hunt's name several times and always as a bad influence. Therefore, it is possible to interpret that if Keats had not been involved with Hunt and his circle before publishing, perhaps he would not have been the target of attacks by these critics, who seem to have more problems with Hunt and whoever is with him, than with Keats himself.

The second striking criticism was published in August 1818 and was signed by Z. – later discovered to be Lockhart – is the fourth part of a series of articles attacking Hunt and his Cockney School of Poetry, which was triggered by the article that Hunt published on the *Young Poets* – Keats, Shelley, and Reynolds. The attacks on Hunt's circle were published in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* and the fourth part of this series of articles is dedicated to Keats and his poem “Endymion”.

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<sup>3</sup> "Cockney" is a term used to describe the East London working class. In this case, used in a derogatory way, by Lockhart and Croker, to insult the poets of the Hunt circle.

The phrenzy of the “Poems” was bad enough in its way, but it did not alarm us half so seriously as the calm, settled, imperturbable drivelling idiocy of “Endymion.” [...] From his prototype Hunt, John Keats has acquired a sort of vague idea, that the Greeks were a most tasteful people, and that no mythology can be so finely adapted for the purposes of poetry as theirs. It is amusing to see what a hand the two Cockneys make of this mythology; the one confesses that he never read the Greek Tragedians, and the other knows Homer only from Chapman; and both of them write about Apollo, Pan, Nymphs, Muses, and Mysteries, as might be expected from persons of their education. [...] As for Mr Keats’s “Endymion,” it has just as much to do with Greece as it has with “old Tartary the fierce;” no man whose mind has ever been imbued with the smallest knowledge or feeling of classical poetry or classical history, could have stooped to profane and vulgarise every association in the manner which has been adopted by this “son of promise.” [...] Mr Hunt is a small poet, but he is a clever man. Mr Keats is a still smaller poet, and he is only a boy of pretty abilities, which he has done every thing in his power to spoil. (LOCKHART, 2021, p 522)

What bothers Lockhart the most seems to be the fact that Keats and the Hunt circle write about Greek mythology, a topic that should not be discussed by those who read the stories through a translation – specifically Keats, in this case. He claims that Keats does not know Greek mythology and, therefore, describes it poorly and incoherently. Furthermore, Lockhart also has problems with Hunt, as he cites him all the time as a “bad influence” for Keats. According to critics, Keats was wrong in choosing his companies and, if it were not for that, he might have a chance.

In that same year of 1818, Keats’s brother Tom died of tuberculosis. The two brothers were remarkably close, especially after George and his wife migrated to the USA, and John was always very present in the life of his younger brother. When Tom’s condition became serious, Keats devoted his days and nights to taking care of his brother.

As soon as he saw Tom’s emaciated face he must have known it was all over. Memories of their mother’s death and ‘family disease’ surged back, [...] Pulmonary tuberculosis, the disease that had afflicted Tom for nearly a year, was in its final stages and from now on Keats would be confined almost continuously to rooms where he would nurse his dying brother. By day he would have to be vigilant, for the slightest agitation made Tom haemorrhage blood. At night he would lie awake listening to Tom restless and feverish with night sweats, until laudanum – tincture of opium in alcohol – helped both of them to sleep (ROE, 2012, p. 224)

Tom died on December 1<sup>st</sup>, 1818, and Keats spent that entire night writing for his sister – Fanny – and close family members who wrote asking about Tom’s condition, preparing them for his death, which he already knew would arrive that day. Keats witnessed, again, everything up close: the suffering and the slow and painful death of a

tuberculous person, and not just any person, but a person he loved. Before with his mother, now with his brother.

Brown was still in bed, so Keats woke him and gave him the news. They both remained silent for a while, and then Brown spoke: 'Have nothing more to do with those lodgings, —and alone too. Had you not better live with me?' Keats pressed his hands and replied: "I think it would be better". (ROE, 2012, p. 234)

Thus, deciding for this new life with Brown, a new phase would start for Keats, but the year 1819 would not, again, be one of the happiest of his life. John Keats and Charles Brown now shared the same house, in Wentworth Place, Hampstead – where today is the Keats House and Museum – and, shortly after Keats joined Brown in the house, they got new neighbours: the widow Mrs. Frances Brawne and their three children. The eldest daughter was Fanny Brawne, and Keats quickly fell head over heels in love with her. This house is Keats's last "real" home in England. His relationship with Fanny was intense<sup>4</sup> but short and painful. In the winter of 1818, they declared their love for each other, but Keats did not want to marry Fanny while he was facing financial problems and was hoping to leverage his career as a poet so that he could ask for her hand. Between May and April 1819, John became unofficially engaged to Fanny Brawne, and in October, they finally became officially engaged. While all this was going on, Keats continued to write poems and some of his most famous were written that year, such as *The Eve the St. Agnes*, *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, *Lamia*, and *To Autumn*. It is also this year that Keats begins and abandons *The Fall of Hyperion*. As much as he continued to write, less and less he saw poetry as a work. Keats was desperate and depressed, in financial trouble, and worst of all, it was impossible for him and Fanny to get married in that setting.

The beginning of 1820 was very remarkable: Keats arrived at his house at eleven o'clock on the evening of Thursday, 3 February, Keats came into Wentworth Place in a fever. Brown recorded what happened next:

I asked hurriedly, 'What is the matter,—you are fevered?' 'Yes, yes,' he answered, 'I was on the outside of the stage this bitter day till I was severely

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<sup>4</sup> The word "intense", in this context, means "passionate and mutual", but nothing sexual. This is because they probably did not have a sexual relationship, due to the time and context of the two: an uncertain couple. Even so, Keats's love for Fanny is undoubted, since he even dedicated his most passionate love poem to her - Bright Star.



chilled,—but now I don't feel it. Fevered!—of course, a little'. He mildly and instantly yielded ... to my request that he should go to bed. I followed with the best immediate remedy in my power. I entered his chamber as he leapt into bed. On entering the cold sheets, before his head was on the pillow, he slightly coughed, and I heard him say,—'That is blood from my mouth'. I went towards him; he was examining a single drop of blood upon the sheet. 'Bring me the candle, Brown; and let me see this blood'. After regarding it steadfastly, he looked up in my face, with a calmness of countenance that I can never forget, and said,—'I know the colour of that blood;—it is arterial blood;—I cannot be deceived in that colour;—that drop of blood is my death warrant;—I must die.'" (ROE, 2012, p. 285)

Keats, having worked in the medical field, knew the type of blood he was coughing and, mainly because he lived and personally nursed two people with tuberculosis, he knew what was coming. Thus, the young poet was overcome, once again, by melancholy and depression. All the worst that he had ever gone through – the loss of his mother and brother – was back in his mind, this time much more urgent. He knew he would die in the same way, slow and painful, as his beloved family members. It was also at this time that Charles began to learn about what he would need to do to try to save his friend's life, and the first and most confident idea was to send him to Italy, as he – and most people at the time – believed that the Italian weather could improve Keats's lung health. John did not want to go because he could not think of what his life would be like being so far away from Fanny, but at the same time, he knew he could not argue much with Charles, who was taking care of everything while he got sicker and sicker. It is at this time when Keats starts to get sick, that he starts writing more letters, mainly for his brothers – Fanny and George, friends, and Fanny Brawne. Keats lived to see his new book get published in early July 1820, and was called *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St. Agnes, and Other Poems*. Incredibly, the criticisms were not so harsh, and some were even positive. His odes caught the eye and were republished in literary magazines, but Keats was too ill to be encouraged by the positive reaction.

Keats travelled to Rome in November 1820, together with Joseph Severn, a young painter who took care of Keats and everything that concerned him until the day of his death. The two stayed in *Piazza di Spagna*, until the day Keats died. Their trip to Italy was very painful and probably contributed to Keats's deteriorating health. After travelling by ship from London to Rome, they had to remain in quarantine for 14 days on the ship they travelled on, in unsanitary conditions not suitable for a sick person with special care like Keats. His last weeks were very painful and he, who used to read the letters he received



from Fanny every day, was now unable to look at them, as they reminded him that he would never see the great love of his life again. The last known letter that Keats wrote was to his friend Charles Brown, asking him to write to his brothers and saying goodbye:

Write to George as soon as you receive this, and tell him how I am, as far as you can guess; – and also a note to my sister—who walks about my imagination like a ghost—she is so like Tom. I can scarcely bid you good bye even in a letter. I always made an awkward bow.  
God bless you!  
John Keats . (KEATS, 2001, p. 513)

Knowing that there was no way out, Keats was practically prepared to face death. He could no longer bear to feel the unbearable pain and that he felt and live with his mind so disturbed. Severn says that Keats, in his last days, was delusional and had tantrums. Even so, “out of concern for Severn, who had never seen anyone die, he somehow managed to recover his old manner at Guy’s and told him to be firm for it would not last long and he did not think he should be convulse.” (ROE, 2012, p. 304) Later, Keats left, peacefully, in Severn’s arms. About the moment, the friend comments:

He is gone—he died with the most perfect ease—he seemd to go to sleep—on the 23<sup>rd</sup> (Friday) at 1/2 past 4 the approaches of death came on—‘Severn—S—lift me up for I am dying—I shall die easy—I be frightened—thank God it has come’—I lifted him up in my arms—and the phlegm seemd boiling in his throat—this increased until 11 at night when he gradually sunk into death—so quiet that I still thought he slept. (ROE, 2012, p. 305)

Keats tried to make his death as peaceful as possible for him, but especially for his friend Joseph Severn, who had never been in a situation like this before. He was buried in a Protestant cemetery on February 26, 1820, and, even though he asked that, on his tombstone, it only read “Here Lies one whose name was writ in water”, his friends Charles Brown and Joseph Severn added a few more sayings, as a tribute. The complete sentence, which is still on the tombstone, is: “This Grave contains all that was Mortal of a YOUNG ENGLISH POET Who on his Death Bed, in the Malicious Power of his Enemies, Desired these Words to be engraved on his Tomb Stone ‘Here lies One Whose Name was writ in Water’”. Keats died with the idea that he would be forgotten as a poet and as a person, but his friends made a point of showing that he would, yes, be remembered. Fanny Brawne, after hearing the sad news, seemed to be well, but in the following weeks, she fell ill. After her recovery, she began to wear a widow’s robes. An autopsy performed before the body

was buried showed that Keats's lungs were fully destroyed and having lived with the disease for almost a year, it was considered practically a miracle.

Shortly after his death, Keats began to be more recognized as a poet, mainly because of his friends – especially Hunt and Brown – who continued to collect materials – unfinished poems, letters – and to publish memoirs. But the most important thing for putting Keats on the map of recognized poets was his biography, written by Richard Monckton Milnes in 1848. The name of the biography is *Life, Letters, and Literary Remains, of John Keats* and Brown, Severn, Clarke, Reynolds, and other friends of Keats participated in its creation. As soon as it was released, the biography was widely read and well respected. In Victorian times, Alfred Tennyson said he was influenced by Keats, mainly by how he mastered the art of visual details. In 1857, an entry on Keats was added to the eighth edition of *Encyclopædia Britannica*, by Alexander Smith. But one of the most important tributes, and which has been most marked by his readers to date, was that of his friend Percy Bysshe Shelley, who published *Adonais: An Elegy on the Death of John Keats, Author of Endymion, Hyperion, etc.* after learning of the death of John Keats. In the next section, I explore the relationship of the two poets and, thus, analyse how and with what intensity each marked the life of the other.

### 1.2.2 Keats-Shelley relationship

Keats and Shelley's relationship is not something new in 1820 – the year the two letters studied are exchanged. The first time the two were together, but not in person, was in 1816, in the essay “Young Poets”, published in *The Examiner Magazine*, by Leigh Hunt. Shelley, at that time, was already a recognized poet and lived exclusively for his art, unlike Keats, who dreamed of being able to keep himself financially working as a poet. While Shelley was already famous for some of his publications – such as *Queen Mab*, *Alastor*, as well as his political pamphlets – Keats had only one publication: the sonnet “O Solitude”, in *The Examiner* itself. His second publication would come with Hunt's essay and would be his poem “On first looking into Chapman's Homer”. In addition to the financial issue, the two were hugely different from each other. Shelley was an idealist who was interested in politics and philosophy, while Keats lived for art and showed no interest in politics.

The two poets met in person at Hunt's home in Hampstead on December 11 – eleven days after the publication of “Young Poets”. When Keats arrived at Hunt's home, Shelley was already there. They had dinner together, and Shelley stayed three more days at

Hunt's house. Regarding the meeting and the relationship that the two maintained, Leigh Hunt comments, in his autobiography,

I had not known the young poet long, when Shelley and he became acquainted under my roof. Keats did not take to Shelley as kindly as Shelley did to him. Shelley's only thoughts of his new acquaintance, were such as regarded his bad health, with which he sympathized, and his poetry, of which he has left, such a monument of his admiration in *Adonais*. Keats, being a little too sensitive on the score of his origin, felt inclined to see in every man of birth a sort of natural enemy. (HUNT, 1850, p. 28)

In Hunt's speech there is the first clue of what the relationship between the two poets was like, which many may think were of friendship, just as Hunt was a friend of Keats. In fact, Hunt says that Shelley treated Keats much more gently than Keats treated him back. This sounds curious, as Keats was an unknown poet who wanted to achieve fame, while Shelley had already achieved the success that Keats was aiming for. Hunt also comments that, due to his humble upbringing, Keats saw anyone as a natural enemy. However, after the first meeting of the two poets, "Keats often held back in company and probably felt side-lined as Hunt devoted time to Shelley. For two months he had seen Hunt frequently, sometimes staying overnight at the Vale of Health. A less intense period now ensued" (ROE, 2012, p. 140).

After the first meeting, others happened and, because the two were close to Hunt at that time, they would talk and walk together. In one of these conversations, even before Keats published his first book of poems in 1817, Shelley advised him not to publish anything before his work was more solid so that he could publish the first volume. Since the book exists, I know that Keats ignored Shelley's advice and published it, nonetheless. However, this advice is remembered by Keats in the letter he sent to Shelley in August 1820, the main object of study in this research.

Still in 1817, "Keats would encounter Hunt, Shelley and Mary Shelley frequently between January and March" (ROE, 2012, p. 149) and, in the same year, "there may have been talk of a plan, encouraged by Hunt, that Keats should compete with Shelley to write a long poem in six months. Hunt had been invited to visit Shelley at Marlow, and perhaps Keats was too" (ROE, 2012, p. 159). Possibly, *Endymion* started to be written because of this competition with Shelley, but no source confirms whether that was the poem in question or another. Wolfson comments that, during the writing competition,

“Keats began right away; but by October he wanted to keep Shelley at a distance, not from any stigma, but from likely supervision (however well-meaning). He was protective of “my own unfettered scope” –a metaphysics that Shelley might be prone to Alastorize, along with the “vexation” of “corrections and amputations”. (WOLFSON, 2021, online)

At that time, Keats shows a certain reluctance to be close to Shelley, especially when it comes to writing poetry. Keats seems to want more freedom to write, and Shelley tries to go against it, advising him in a way that standardizes and displeases him.

Shelley was always criticized for his political views, and he made his point of exposing in articles he wrote or even in his poems. Keats was quite the opposite of that and seemed to shy away from discussions that addressed politics and religion, two subjects that Shelley was always willing to discuss. Nicholas Roe (2012) brings a note about an event that took place on March 20, 1817, at Horace Smith’s (Shelley’s friend) home in Knightsbridge. On that day, Keats, Shelley, Haydon, and the Hunt family gathered at Smith’s house for dinner.

It was an irritable gathering. Hostilities opened with Shelley’s casual remark that Christianity was ‘detestable’ and, when the servant was gone, Haydon ‘resolved to gore without mercy’. When Shelley affirmed Shakespeare no Christian, Haydon and Hunt joined the fray with quotations from Hamlet. On religion’s ‘outburnt lamp’ Keats sided with Shelley and Hunt, but he also admired and respected Haydon. All of them were enthusiastic readers of Shakespeare and as their contest raced back and forth between Shelley’s atheism, Hunt’s deism and Haydon’s Christianity, Keats said nothing. On religion he was disinclined to think himself ‘more in the right than other people’. (ROE, 2012, p. 150)

Keats was divided at that dinner, as he was with people he admired as much as artists as well as friends. Shelley spares no words to discuss and shows his views, even if his moment ends up ruining the night of people, he considers his friends. Shelley’s behaviour may also have contributed to making Keats feel less and less comfortable in his company. On February 4, 1818, it is the last time Shelley and Keats met in person, according to Roe’s biography (2012). In the same year, Shelley moves to Italy and remains there until the end of his life.

Until 1820 there was no record of a new conversation or meeting between them. It was in that year that Keats became ill, as has already been presented in the biography section, and for this reason, Shelley talks to him again through a letter – which is analysed in chapter two of this work. On the day that Keats coughed up blood for the first time, it was the day that, in the afternoon, he met Shelley’s couple of friends, the Gisbornes, who

were “visiting from Italy, but [Keats] was little inclined to conversation and soon went home. That night he suffered a second massive haemorrhage, sufficient to negate all his doctors’ warm words about recovery.” (ROE, 2012, p. 289). This couple is essential in the correspondence I analyse, since they are the ones who take the information that Keats is ill for Shelley, and that are mentioned in the first letter sent. Had it not been for this meeting, at Hunt’s house and on that specific day, Shelley might not have known about Keats’s illness and thus the correspondence to be analysed in this work would not have existed. So, this letter, which only happened because Keats met the Gisborne couple at Hunt’s house, was the last time Percy Shelley spoke to John Keats.

After Keats’s death, Shelley wrote the elegy *Adonais* – which I explain more about later – and with that, he contacted Keats’ friend Joseph Severn, who held his hand until his death, by letter. To end this chapter, I would like to bring some excerpts from that letter in order to present how Shelley seemed to like Keats and that, for him, the loss of the poet was a big one. Furthermore, the fact that Shelley’s – and Keats’s other friends, such as Severn himself, Charles Brown, and Leigh Hunt – continued to spread Keats’ name to his friends may have been decisive for Keats to be recognized as a poet, even though only after death.

I send you the elegy on poor Keats, and I wish it were better worth your acceptance. [...] I have ventured to express, as I felt, the respect and admiration which your conduct towards him demands. In spite of his transcendent genius, Keats never was, nor ever will be, a popular poet; and the total neglect and obscurity in which the astonishing remnants of his mind still lie, was hardly to be dissipated by a writer who, however he may differ from Keats in more important qualities, at least resembles him in that accidental one, a want of popularity. [...] it had been my intention to have collected the remnants of his compositions, and to have published them with a life and criticism. Has he left any poems or writings of whatsoever kind, and in whose possession are they? [...] when I last saw Keats at my friend Leigh Hunt’s, that I should survive him. (SHELLEY, 2021, p. 187-188)

Shelley begins by talking to Severn about his elegy, as he mentions Severn in the preface to the poem. Soon after, Shelley idolizes Keats, treating him like a great artist who will never be replaced, something that few saw in him. The most interesting part, in my view, is the passage from Shelley asking where Keats’s poems are, as he wants to stay with them to make a publication with the poems and criticisms, along with a biography. Finally, in the passage, Shelley confirms that it was at Hunt’s house that she last saw Keats, but the year is unknown. The question is, did Joseph Severn answer that letter? And if he did, did

he give Keats's poems to Shelley? Unfortunately, it was not possible to find a letter from Severn addressed to Shelley, but that does not mean that this meeting or conversation did not take place between them.

Keats' and Shelley's relationship seems to be much deeper on Shelley's side than on Keats's, as Hunt comments. During the life of the two, Keats seems annoyed at times, as Shelley tries to standardize and convince him to write the way he thinks best. At the same time, Shelley does not seem to do it out of harm or arrogance, but to help a person, he likes to sell poems and thus be able to live off his art. The letter Shelley sends to Severn, in my view, shows that as hard as he was and insistent on Keats at times during 1817-1818, all he did was out of admiration and support for the poet. Shelley's sadness seems genuine, and his willingness to have Keats' writings and poems for publication shows that he did want Keats to have the recognition he thought he deserved.

## 2 ON “TO PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY, AUGUST 16<sup>th</sup>, 1820”

In this section, I analyse the letter by John Keats in response to Percy Shelley, and this is done in parts: first, I refer to the body of Keats’s letters, to then concentrate on the letter written in August 1820. Then, I analyse what triggered it: Shelley’s letter; and then, I move to Keats’s reply, paying attention to the three selected recurring traces in the letter – the tone of melancholy, the irony, and the impressions about literature that the two exchange. Finally, there is what happens in the life of each poet after this exchange of letters – the tragic death of Keats, the elegy written by Shelley, and, finally, the death of Shelley, in which Keats, even though already dead, played a particular role.

### 2.1 Keats’s Letters

In literature, letters are often an important part of a writer’s work. In the case of John Keats, T. S. Eliot comments that his letters are “certainly the most notable and the most important ever written by any English poet” (ELIOT, 1933, p. 100). Indeed, there is a large body of letters written by Keats, which are considered an important part of his work as a writer. In this section, I briefly comment about his letters, drawing attention to the general issues, the preferred recipients, and the number of letters he wrote during the few years he was alive.

The first letters that John Keats wrote date from 1815 and, since then, until 1820, most of his letters are personal, about his life – even before he became ill, Keats wrote about his day, his tasks, work, and he gave opinions on everything, especially on literature. There are many drafts of excerpts from his poems, both unfinished and finished, in the letters. He often wrote to his editors and poet friends, who helped him with aesthetics and discussed poetry with him. For Barnard (2001), Keats’ letters mainly interest two types of audience, but for different reasons:

For critics, the letters are an invaluable supplement to the poetry, providing variant drafts, comments on the origins and development of certain poems, and eloquent “speculations” (Keats’s term) on the nature of poetry or the achievements of predecessors and contemporaries. For biographers, the letters give insight into Keats’s mind at work and play, and a record of his experiences, often on a daily basis. (BARNARD, 2001, p. 177)

Along with Barnard’s two categories, it is possible to include Keats’s readers, who in a general sense are usually interested in seeing the letters in different ways. As already

mentioned, and proven by Barnard, Keats' letters contain several supplements for poetry, as it is possible to find drafts, comments, criticisms, and ideas being created, all in the name of poetry that, for him, was the most important thing. For biographers, as Barnard cites, it is inevitable to feel the urge to read all Keats's letters in the first reading, since they are a perfect chronology of his life and, especially, of his last months. Keats describes everything that is happening to his friends, family, publishers, and, from 1819 to Fanny Brawne, mainly after becoming ill and, consequently, more distant from the people he knew. The fact that Keats writes mainly to close people makes it possible for the writing style to be more casual and intimate. In addition, due to the closeness he has with these people, Keats often told jokes and made funny puns.

Keats' letters were published for the first time in the mid-nineteenth century and since then – or earlier, as many of Keats' friends and family kept the letters they received from him because they thought they were valuable and very beautifully written – they are read by a lot of people all over the world, but, unfortunately, there is still lack translations for different languages, as Keats' reach is still quite centred on the European continent. Even so, without many translations, John Keats is widely read. “The letters give a remarkably full narrative of Keats's major creative periods, of his swift self-making, and of the development of the intellectual life and mind of a quintessential “Romantic poet” (BARNARD, 2001, p. 178). Furthermore, it is T. S. Elliot who says that his letters from him are “certainly the most notable and the most important ever written by any English poet” (ELLIOT, 1933, p. 100). As such, Keats is widely recognized for his letters, much more than other poets who also wrote and had their letters published, such as Percy Shelley himself. We know, as readers, Shelley as a poet, and few talks about the letters he wrote. For Percy, as well as for many others, the letters are an extension of his work as writers. For Keats, it seems that the Keats poet and the Keats letter writer walk together and, often, the letters stand out.

But why do Keats's letters get so much attention from their readers? What is interesting about them? Cedric Watts suggests that the correspondence of Keats's final year can be read as a “collective masterpiece, an epistolary novel consisting of his own letters and those of his friends and acquaintances.” (Watts in BARNARD, 2001, p. 178). In this excerpt, it is possible to see that what draws the most attention in the letters is exactly the way in which they are written. Keats gives us a very complete and engaging autobiography, especially in the last year of his life – 1820 – when he was sick and, because he could no



longer see people as he used to, he wrote many more letters than in all previous years. Still, on why the letters get so much attention, Barnard (2001, p. 178) argues that “one of the most striking things about the letters, as opposed to the poetry, is their ability to include the language of everyday life and sociability in Regency London and England, recorded in a variety of linguistic and tonal registers”. Thus, there is another “function” for Keats’s letters, in addition to the autobiography and the supplement for his poetry: the historical function. In his letters, it is possible to see a lot from the period, the customs of the people – and of Keats himself -, as well as the language and details that he tells of his day when he ends up describing Regency London, citing locations, such as neighbourhoods, streets, and squares. The historical function of the letter has already been discussed in the section on the importance of the letter in the Regency period, but here we can see that Keats also contributed to this.

When writing to his family and close friends, Keats “found a space in which to relax, experiment, entertain, memorialize, speculate, pun, and joke, and do so in what is very close to a speaking voice.” (BARNARD, 2001, p. 179). John Keats was not liked by the poetry readers of that time, much less by the critics, who dictated what was considered good or bad literature. So, while writing his letters, Keats probably felt free and at the same time worth reading, because those people he wrote to – his family, friends, Fanny – were interested in what he wrote. These people would read, understand, sometimes read more than once, and respond, making the experience of being “lovable” much more intense than that of being a famous poet of the time. His audience of letters supported him and was interested in what he had to say, unlike the rest of the critics at the time, which even excluded and humiliated him with not very constructive criticisms. Thus, “if Keats’s published poems sometimes experiment uneasily with the conventions and decorum of the genre at hand, as a letter-writer he almost always controls the possibilities of this apparently open literary form.” (BARNARD, 2001, p. 179).

The biggest sign that Keats’s letters were valuable in some way is the fact that more than 300 of them survived. The recipients kept the letters for years, and when the author came out, they began to appear. An interesting fact is that, even though he already knew how to write and could communicate by letters even without being a writer, his “correspondence is virtually coincident with his life as a poet” (BARNARD, 2001, p. 179). The first letter that Keats wrote dates from November 1815 and was sent to G. F. Matthew “a would-be poet and, briefly, a friend” (BARNARD, 2001, p. 179); the latter was written

for his great friend Charles Brown, who was the one who lived with him for a while and who had the idea of sending Keats to Italy as soon as he became ill. That last letter was written three months before his death.

To talk about the number of pages that Keats wrote I bring, once again, Barnard (2001), who says that Keats' letters, within the total written 36 per cent were for his closest relatives – brothers, mainly, because he was the one whom he had in the world; but the number increases to 44 per cent if count Fanny Brawne, his great love of life, as a member of his family. In addition, 9 per cent were sent to Reynolds, and “the rest are mainly, but not exclusively, to men, including long letters to Haydon, Woodhouse, Taylor, Brown, and Bailey.” (BARNARD, p. 180). Finally, in the twentieth century, most of Keats's known letters had been found, and in 1958, H. E. Rollins organized them all into one edition. Rollins' publication includes 320 letters – most from Keats to other people, but some from other people to him. “The letters contain about seventy drafts of poems or excerpts of work in progress. Many of these were sent to Reynolds, whose relationship with Keats from April 1817 to May 1818 helped him work free of Hunt's influence.” (BARNARD, 2001, p. 180).

After this first publication, Keats' letters were known and increasingly read and studied and, therefore, the poet was also known for his letters, which became an important part of English literature. Today, John Keats's largest collection of manuscripts is in the Houghton Library, Harvard's library of rare books. And the collection continues to grow today. “Recent additions include the last leaf of Keats's 60-page journal letter to George and Georgiana Keats, a gift from Stellita Crilley in 1995, and an album of drawings by Charles Brown, Keats's housemate, purchased in 2009 with the Amy Lowell Trust fund.” (HARVARD, 2021) So, it is possible to understand that contrary to what Keats thought when he died, his work remains very much alive in our current society and, I believe, that it will continue to be well preserved for a long time.

## **2.2 The Prequel: Shelley's Letter to Keats**

Shelley's letter was sent from Livorno, on July 27<sup>th</sup>, 1820, to London. Shelley used a good quality 8cm x 10cm wove paper, due to his good financial condition. After he wrote, he submitted to *The Examiner* magazine “to the care of Leigh Hunt, Esq.”. As Hunt knew

what it was about, he soon took the letter into Keats's hands. Here, I separate the letter into four parts and, thus, analyse and draw attention to some more important points.

My dear Keats,

I hear with great pain the dangerous accident that you have undergone, and Mr. Gisborne who gives me the account of it, adds, that you continue to wear a consumptive appearance. This consumption is a disease particularly fond of people who write such good verse as you have done, and with the assistance of an English winter it can often indulge its selection; I do not think that young and amiable poets are at all bound to gratify its taste; they have entered into no bond with the Muses to that effect. (SHELLEY, 1882, p. 142)

The beginning of the letter marks the moment that Keats was going through – he was already sick, and his frightening appearance called the attention of acquaintances, who commented with other acquaintances – in this case, Percy Shelley. His tone is of genuine concern, but it is important to read the second sentence carefully: Shelley comments that Keats is only ill because he writes very well and, those who do not write as well as he does, do not satisfy the illness that hit him. Thus, Shelley places Keats on the same level as the great English poets – and who writes so well that even fatal diseases are interested in them. In addition, Shelley comments on the severe English winter that, by then, would certainly kill Keats, who was already fragile because of the disease that was consuming him. Next, Shelley seems to realize that his mood was not appropriate for the moment, and then follows, explaining himself and quickly changing the subject,

But seriously (for I am joking on what I am very anxious about) I think you would: do well to pass the winter after so tremendous an accident in Italy, and (if you think it as necessary as I do) so long as you could find Pisa or its neighbourhood agreeable to you, Mrs. Shelley unites with myself in urging the request, that you would take up your residence with us. You might come by sea to Leghorn, (France is not worth seeing, and the sea air is particularly good for weak lungs) which is within a few miles of us. You ought at all events to see Italy, and your health which I suggest as a motive, might be an excuse to you. I spare declamation about statues and paintings and the ruins – and what is a greater piece of forbearance – about the mountains the streams. And the fields, the colours of the sky, and the sky itself. (SHELLEY, 1882, p. 142-143)

Shelley is sincere and generous, even though he made a bad joke before. He sees the mistake he made and brings a more friendly narrative, showing concern again and, this time, offering to help more concretely: inviting Keats to spend time with him and Mary Shelley, in Italy. At this point, Keats, and his friends – Charles Brown and Joseph Severn – were already planning the trip that Keats would make to Italy, but which would not be to

Shelley's house. Regarding Shelley's generosity, Kikuchi (1962, p.2) comments that "it is common knowledge that of the later Romantics, Shelley is said to be most generous and to be always ready to hold out a supporting hand to any poetic friends, if need be.". So, we have one more reason to think that, even though he sounds disagreeable in some passages, Shelley was being sincere about his concern and care for John Keats. In the same excerpt, Shelley wants to show his intellectuality. He comments that he is keeping his lectures on the statues, paintings, ruins, and other elements that Keats would find in Italy, for when he arrives. Shelley is not at all modest when he proudly shows that he understands everything and a little more and that he is looking forward to Keats listening to him talking about everything. Finally, "it may be not going too far to say in addition that the last sentence tells the strong sense of beauty, artistic as well as natural, which the two most Romantic poets [Keats and Shelley] have in common." (KIKUCHI, 1962, p. 2). In the next passage, Shelley brings to the discussion one of Keats's most criticized works,

I have lately read your Endymion again and ever with a new sense of the treasures of poetry it contains, though treasures poured forth with indistinct profusion. This, people in general will not endure, and that is the cause of the comparatively few copies which have been sold. I feel persuaded that you are capable of the greatest things, so you but will. (SHELLEY, 1882, p. 143)

For us to begin to understand this passage, we must go back in time and go to May 1818, when Endymion was published. The poem was attacked with many negative criticisms, including the terrible ones from Croker and Lockhart, which I detailed in the section of Keats's biography. In the passage from Shelley's letter, "he wonders if the low sales were due to a lack of discipline – forgetting, weirdly, that the same reviews that had targeted him for political views, had also taken similar aim at Keats (Hunt's proxy)" (WOLFSON, 2021, online). Even if Shelley's criticism is sincere, he leaves aside problems that he faces. About another Shelley comment on Endymion, Kikuchi (1962) says

on May 14<sup>th</sup>, 1820, thinking again of Endymion, he summarizes his opinion about the genius of the younger poet by writing that "Keats, I hope, is going to show himself of a great poet: like the sun, to burst through the clouds, which, though dyed in the finest colors of the air, obscured his rising. (KIKUCHI, 1962, p. 3)

Thus, it is possible to see that, even though Shelley criticized Keats's poems, he seems to have good intentions, with no will of humiliating him or showing himself superior

even though, for the critics, he was superior. This line Kikuchi (1962) brings goes well with the last sentence of the passage: Shelley trusts Keats, he sees potential and cheers for him. And not only does he cheer, but he is also sure that Keats, one day, will be “capable of the greatest things.” (SHELLEY, 1882, p. 143) Now, let us look at the last excerpt from Shelley’s letter:

I always tell Ollier to send you Copies of my books “Prometheus Unbound” I imagine you will receive nearly at the same time with this letter. The *Cenci* I hope you have already received – it was studiously composed in a different style “below the good how far! But far above the great.” In poetry I have sought to avoid system and mannerism: I wish those who excel me in genius would pursue the same plan.

Whether you remain in England, or journey to Italy, believe that you carry with you my anxious wishes for your health happiness and success, wherever you are or whatever you undertake and that I am

Yours sincerely.

P. B. Shelley. (SHELLEY, 1882, p. 143-144)

Shelley, after showing to care for his dear friend, comments that he always asks Ollier – who published his work – to send his books to Keats, as a kind of example of how to write to sell. Regarding Shelley’s comment on *Cenci*, the system, and mannerism, Kikuchi (1962) says:

In *The Cenci*, Shelley confesses that he has attempted a poetic experiment ‘in a different style’, (...) What Shelley has made an attempt at in poetry is to make a poem in a different way from a traditional one, to avoid system and mannerism. It is true that the attempt to avoid system and mannerism is a constant object of any arts but what is most essential and hard to put into practice is how to avoid. Keats was, past doubt, one of the poets who had been most aware of the difficulty, and it needs hardly saying that he tried very hard to find out what is a new kind of art. To Keats, Shelley’s attempt at the avoidance might sound very empty. If I am allowed to hazard conjecture, it may be that Keats read these parts, smiling a complicated, though pitying, smile, which might have been otherwise thrown upon himself. (KIKUCHI, 1962, p. 4)

Shelley’s “different style” is nothing more than a poem written in a non-traditional way, and because this passage seems comical to those who read and know Shelley, Kikuchi (1962) risks saying that Keats must have thought the same thing. Unfortunately, how Keats acted on the spot is impossible to know because, at that time, he was already ill and had passed through a delicate situation involving his letters. Then, there are no reports of friends who saw Keats writing much or even reacting to the letters he received.

It is interesting to see how “when Shelley touches upon poetry, he becomes too full of confidence not to get beyond the limits of arrogance. But in the realms of other affairs, a

generous Shelley presents himself.” (KIKUCHI, 1962, p. 4). Shelley is attentive and a concerned friend, but when he starts talking about poetry, it all seems to disappear and what remains is just the great confident artist. From the beginning of the letter, Shelley has adopted a leading attitude, saying what Keats should do and acting as a superior writer, an example that Keats should follow. However, Shelley manages to fluctuate from one characteristic to another from one line to the next: when he speaks of literature, he is the great famous writer, when he speaks of Keats, he is the concerned and sincere friend. The last sentence of the last passage of Shelley’s letter also draws attention: is he including or excluding Keats in the circle of people who “excel him in genius”? Unfortunately, there is no exact answer and that ends up being due to the interpretation and imagination of the reader. Shelley ends his letter by being very cordial and wishing Keats all the best – health, joy, and success – even if he decides to decline his invitation. Now, let us review Keats’s response to Shelley’s letter.

### 2.3 “Load Every Rift With Ore”: Keats’s Response to Shelley

After experiencing a stressful situation involving his correspondence, Keats received Shelley’s letter on August 12<sup>th</sup>, 1820. The unpleasant situation occurred shortly before Shelley’s letter arrived. Roe informs:

Two days earlier, a note from Fanny had been delivered and Marianne Hunt<sup>5</sup> had asked a maid to take it up to Keats’s room. It did not immediately reach him, however. When it was eventually handed over on the Saturday, its seal broken, he could not bear to think that her words had been read by another and broke down and wept for several hours. Despite Hunt’s entreaties, he left that evening, struggling along the lanes to Wentworth Place, where Mrs Brawne, seeing his dreadful condition, took him in. Here, surrounded by Fanny, her brother Sam and sister Margaret (‘Tootts’), their dog, Carlo, and the cats, Keats found another temporary home and the happiest few days of his life – the only time, he later said, when his mind was at ease. (ROE, 2012, p. 293)

Keats did not seem to be an easy-going person. His despair crises for reasons that do not seem to be serious were not uncommon and this was just one more. It is possible to think that his difficult life from the beginning brought many traumas. In addition, his frustration at not being able to reach his goal, especially at that time, when he was already trying to leverage his career as a poet, may also have contributed to this somewhat unusual and desperate behaviour. At that time, Keats was living with Leigh Hunt and his family,

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<sup>5</sup> Leigh Hunt’s wife.

and the good thing about the problem they had, was that he was able to have a good time together with his beloved Fanny and her family. Most likely they did not have any more serious relationship, as has already been discussed in this work, but they were satisfied only with the presence of each other and, therefore, for them, that moment was enough. That is why Keats says those brief moments when he lived with Fanny and her family, were the only moments that “his mind was at ease”. (ROE, 2012, p. 293)

Returning to Shelley’s letter, Keats received it on the 12<sup>th</sup> but replied to it only about twenty days after. That is the only known letter from Keats to Shelley. This does not mean that there is no other, but it is only this that is known and disseminated. Keats and Shelley were very communicative and wrote a lot to friends and acquaintances, so it is possible that other letters existed. According to Kikuchi (1962):

Keats may be thought to reveal himself in the letter more distinctly than in any other. What is revealed there can help to approach his figure of him as both the poet and the man. In this sense, the letter must be always taken up as one of the most important letters and with renewed interest. (KIKUCHI, 1962, p. 5)

This letter shows a somewhat aggressive, ironic, but also melancholy Keats. Anyway, this letter is a little different from the others we are used to read, in which Keats is fun and casual with his friends and family.

It is important to bring up, again, the information that Keats, naturally, felt condescended to Shelley, because he was a successful poet, well-known, rich, and who published a lot. The opposite of what Keats was, but close to what he wanted to be. So, it is important that, in his response to Shelley, Keats treats him as a social and intellectual equal. Therefore, the answer that Keats sends has a very well thought out script and is much more organized and beautiful than Shelley’s. This seemed to be a concern for Keats. According to Wolfson (2021), Keats could expect the letter to be shared with others, such as Mary Shelley or Leigh Hunt, and so he wanted to make sure that it corresponded to the care Shelley took in writing it. The letter that Keats sends is clean, without erasures or mistakes. Regarding the way the letter was used, Susan Wolfson (2021) comments:

Shelley wrote on two sides of one leaf. Keats used one leaf, too, and like Shelley folded his page in half, to use three sides, the fourth for the address. He was careful to secure its privacy, folding his already folded page twice more, from the top and the bottom, so as entirely to obscure the first page of writing, then folding twice more, from the left and the right, for sealing, so that the only writing that remained was P\_B\_Shelley Esqr.” (WOLFSON, 2021, online)



It is interesting to think that Keats made a point of folding the letter several times because he had just gone through that situation – for him, a desperate one – at Hunt’s house, with the letter from Fanny Brawne. Perhaps, if the situation had not happened so shortly before Shelley’s letter, Keats would have folded the letter differently. Wolfson (2021) comments, in her article on this letter, that she thinks Keats practised writing this letter before actually writing it. In this case, the researcher believes that this letter Keats wrote to Shelley does not appear to be an “ex tempore – no corrections or cancellations”. (WOLFSON, 2021, online)

### 2.3.1 Melancholy

My dear Shelley,

I am very much gratified that you, in a foreign country, and with a mind almost over-occupied, should write to me in the strain of the letter beside me. If I do not take advantage of your invitation, it will be prevented by a circumstance I have very much at heart to prophesy. There is no doubt that an English winter would put an end to me, and do so in a lingering hateful manner. Therefore, I must either voyage or journey to Italy, as a soldier marches up to a battery. My nerves at present are the worst part of me, yet they feel soothed that, come what extreme may, I shall not be destined to remain in one spot long enough to take a hatred of any four particular bedposts.” (KEATS, 2001, p. 508)

From the start, Keats is grateful for Shelley’s contact and affection with him. According to Kikuchi (1962), Leigh Hunt wrote to Shelley on 23 August, saying that Keats was very touched by his kindness. The phrase that follows “If I do not take advantage of your invitation, it will be prevented by a circumstance I have very much at heart to prophesy” (KEATS, 2001, p. 508) is quite painful to read because, in that situation in which he found himself, anything made him nervous and anxious. This is because, at that time, he had coughed up blood for the first time, and, therefore, he knew that he was suffering from tuberculosis and that he soon would die. That first bloody cough, which was a watershed in Keats’ life, happened in the same year as the exchange of letters, but many months earlier. So, by the time he talks to Shelley, Keats is in an advanced stage of the disease, seeing less and less chance of survival. The traces of melancholy have always been present in Keats’ life, especially at that time when he was facing this prospect of certain death. Keats had already dealt with infected people – this is probably how he himself contracted the disease – and he knew too well what to expect. Furthermore, Keats was



frustrated at not being able to be a recognized poet, and, seeing that there was little time left, that feeling of frustration and despair became more evident. Time was running out and he could not do anything to stop that.

Another interesting phrase in this passage is: “I must either voyage or journey to Italy, as a soldier marches up to a battery.” (KEATS, 2001, p. 509). That phrase would be ambiguous if Keats had not used it, earlier, using that same expression. Kikuchi (1962, p. 5-6), brings this information, from a letter that Keats wrote to John Taylor, on August 4, 1820: “This Journey to Italy wakes me at daylight every morning and haunts me horribly. I shall endeavour to go through it be with the sensation of marching up against a Battery.”. So, what could be seen as a positive thing, in the first letter – like, for example, a soldier going to look for weapons to defend himself and, thus, survive – in the second, it is explicitly the opposite: the trip terrifies him and takes him away. Sleeping, thinking about it is the reason for him to be overcome with despair and melancholy because, even though he is very afraid because he knows what can happen, he sees no other way out to try to save himself. The last part of the excerpt brings “relief” to Keats. As much as he is afraid of going to Italy – and especially of his destiny –, the fact that he does not have to stay in the same place for a long time already relieves him.

### 2.3.2 Criticism & irony

Shortly after at the next passage, Keats responds to Shelley saying that he had read, again, his *Endymion*, a poem that, in 1818, caused Keats to be brutally criticized and even humiliated by well-known critics of the time. So, Keats’s reaction to learning that Shelley had reread *Endymion* is a bit of a surprise. Let us see the excerpt:

I am glad you take any pleasure in my poor poem, which I would willingly take the trouble to unwrite, if possible, did I care so much as I have done about reputation. I received a copy of the *Cenci*, as from yourself, from Hunt. There is only one part of it I am judge of – the poetry and dramatic effect, which by many spirits nowadays is considered the Mammon. A modern work, it is said, must have a purpose, which may be the God. An artist must serve Mammon; he must have “self-concentration” – selfishness, perhaps.” (KEATS, 2001, p. 509)

When he says, “my poor poem”, Keats refers to *Endymion*, talking about how some of the critics referred to the poem right when it was published. John Keats is happy that Shelley is reading his poem that was so criticized, even by some members of his circle. When talking about *Cenci*, Keats ignores one of the strongest characteristics of Shelley’s works – the political bias. By saying that there is only one part that he can discuss and

judge, he shows Shelley that his interest is only in literature for art, nothing more than that. We saw earlier at this research that Shelley and Keats were once in a specific situation – a dinner – where Shelley was shouting politics and religion, while Keats was quiet, just watching. While Shelley fights for his political views from an early age – he was expelled from Oxford for publishing an article on the need for atheism in the college newspaper -, Keats seems to want to stay away from it, perhaps even so as not to be massacred by critics who, at the time, were very moved by their political views. Returning to *Cenci*, Keats does not assume politics or controversy in his analysis, but only poetry and dramatic effect, characteristics that he wants and knows how to talk about very well.

Following the section, I have a mention of Mammon, which can cause strangeness and confusion. In my analysis, based on the texts presented, Mammon is sin – idolizing something that is not God. Thus, Mammon, in this context, may be the poetry itself, which, when placed before God, becomes a sin. The artist who just wants to be an artist is serving Mammon, on the contrary to what they do – art to earn money or for some specific function other than art for art’s sake. Keats is a writer who lives for his writing and not for what is pleasing others at the moment. The evidence of this is that he decided to quit his career in the medical field – as much as the money was more guaranteed – to dedicate himself to writing. Furthermore, he never changed his way of writing poetry and that was even one of the reasons that made Keats want a little distance from Shelley. When he felt pressured to change and to stop being a disciple of art and poetry, he wanted to get away, because he is a selfish poet, that is, he does not want to use poetry, he wants to live it the purest way possible. Thus, the artist who should serve Mammon, as Keats comments, must be an artist for the sake of art alone, without using poetry as a way of profiting or exposing their political views – as Shelley does with almost all his works, and Keats seems to criticize that too. Wolfson comments that as an artist, “Keats is happy to serve Mammon, laying up his treasures, not in the transcendent heaven of magnanimous polemics, but the veins of poetry”. (WOLFSON, 2021, online)

Let us examine the next excerpt:

You I am sure will forgive me for sincerely remarking that you might curb your magnanimity and be more of an artist, and 'load every rift' of your subject with ore. The thought of such discipline must fall like cold chains upon you, who perhaps never sat with your wings furl'd for six months together. And is not this extraordinary talk for the writer of *Endymion!* whose mind was like a pack of scattered cards. I am pick'd up and sorted to a pip. My Imagination is a Monastery

and I am its Monk you must explain my metaphysics [for metaphysics] to yourself.  
(KEATS, 2001, p. 509)

In this reference to Spenser, Kikuchi (1962) explains this reference to Spenser:

One critic explains about the words 'to load every rift with ore' that they must be taken as 'making every phrase a concrete image.' Considered along the line, the explanatory comments which follow emerge as a natural result: Keats 'was undoubtedly thinking chiefly of sensuous imagery in poetry.' If we pass on further along the two lines, we will find ourselves driven in an unexpected direction. When the 'ore' is interpreted mainly as signifying 'image' or 'imagery', Keats begins to incline towards being a kind of imagist. (KIKUCHI, 1962, p. 11)

Keats is a poet devoted to imagery, and with the phrase he sends Shelley, it is likely that using Spenser's reference, he is saying that Shelley should fill “every line of poetry with richness and beauty” (KIKUCHI, 1962, p. 11). This makes sense when we think about what was discussed before when Keats says that Shelley needs to live more for the art of poetry, and less for money and controversies. Moving on, Keats continues to write with a confident tone and recognizes that Shelley would not have the discipline to follow his suggestion. Even with all the confidence, he shows by writing in this way for Shelley, Keats uses irony to answer his advice on investing his “poetic treasures” with more intelligence. With the passage “And is not this extraordinary talk for the writer of *Endymion!* whose mind was like a pack of scattered cards” (KEATS, 2001, p. 509), Keats ironizes Shelley's speech, after showing that he knows very well what he is doing and, also, after criticizing Shelley as an artist. Soon with his ironic tone, Keats shows that he has progressed: "I am pick'd up and sorted to a pip." The last part of the excerpt draws attention, because “My Imagination is a Monastery and I am its Monk”, has a revolutionary tone. Keats says that the poet should not dedicate himself to anything other than his imagination - without political thoughts, without thinking about money - and that thought could take the literary discussion to another level. Keats does not like subjects that involve politics or religion, which are common in Shelley's work, but he does not treat this as a preference, but as something that should be mandatory for all poets. Keats seems to say that should only be considered a poet people who surrender only to their imagination, not using external means to write. Finally, Keats closes the passage with self-assertion to Shelley: "you must explain my metaphysics to yourself", bringing the philosophy of nature to reality for discussion. Now, let us look at the last excerpt from Keats's letter to Shelley:

I am in expectation of Prometheus every day. Could I have my own wish for its interest effected you would have it still in manuscript – or be but now putting an end to the second act. I remember you advising me not to publish my first-blights, on Hampstead heath – I am returning advice on your hands. Most of the Poems in the volume I send you have been written above two years, and would never have been publish'd but from a hope of gain; so you see I am inclined enough to take your advice now. I must express once more my deep sense of your kindness, adding my sincere thanks and respects for Mrs. Shelley. In the hope of soon seeing you I remain  
 most sincerely yours,  
 John Keats (KEATS, 2001, p. 509)

In the last excerpt, Keats is only responding to the last passages Shelley wrote to him and saying goodbye, but a specific question regarding his biography is addressed. At the same time, in 1817, Shelley told Keats "not to publish [his] first-blights", Kikuchi (1962) comments that it was Shelley who "helped him print his volume after advising against it" (KIKUCHI, 1962, p. 13). Everything indicates that Shelley was the one who convinced Olliers to publish Keats' first book, so would Keats be ungrateful to Shelley? It is difficult to know, as we, readers, only know the history of the two through biographies and, therefore, it is possible that we do not have the complete information. The definitive answer to that question, then, remains open. Even so, Kikuchi (1962) presents his strong opinion on this passage, saying that Keats is, indeed, ungrateful, but, in the end, he also keeps the answer open,

Is his ingratitude due to the fact that he held a too strong Prejudice against Shelley, or to the fact that he knew actually nothing about the kindness? For the moment, we cannot think of any other means than to leave the question in suspense. (KIKUCHI, 1962, p. 14)

Keats says he is sending, together with the letter, his newest volume - from 1820 - which contains poems like "Lamia", "The Eve of St. Agnes", "Isabella or the Pot of Basil", and his best-known odes, "Ode to a Grecian Urn" and "Ode to a Nightingale". Along with this, Keats comments that this book would not have been published had it not been for the hope of gain, which resumes his unfavourable financial condition. Still, Keats returns to his ironic tone, but this time with regretful self-irony: "So you see I am inclined enough to take your advice now". Finally, Keats says goodbye to Shelley, thanking him, once again, for his concern for his health and the invitation. In addition, he sends greetings to Mary Shelley.

About the end of the letter, Susan Wolfson (2021) brings information from Charles Cowden Clarke, a writer who had been friends with Keats since school years, at Clarke's Academy, in Enfield: “Clarke recalls Keats saying that he really meant to decline Shelley's invitation, as he had in 1817, from the “sole motive” of feeling that he could not be “a free agent, even with such a circle as Shelley's”. It is the second time Keats averted an invitation from Shelley on this principle. He wanted to keep writing. His way.” (WOLFSON, 2021, p. 151). Thus, we have more evidence that Keats did not feel comfortable around Shelley and the biggest reason for that is exactly what Shelley does, too, in the letter he sent him: he tries to change his way of being an artist.

Keats is a born romantic, and this is visible throughout the letter. Romantics are known for expressing their emotions and feelings, and he shows his feelings in the letter. The presence of words like "gratified", "glad", "hateful" and "soothed" shows the need that Keats had to use heavy words to describe how he was feeling at the time. Furthermore, this choice of words conveys the passion and intensity with which Keats writes. This characteristic is present both in his letters and in his poems.

Keats is the politest he can, ever, even if he is about to strongly criticize Shelley. Before criticizing, he is already apologizing. The young poet says that Shelley, the great famous poet of the time, needs to stop being so generous and be more of an artist. In this sense, Keats comments on what was said earlier – the artist needs to be more artistic and less dependent on money or political ideas. The poet must be an artist and create his work for art, not for money or anything other than art. Keats wants Shelley to come down from where he is today – wealthy, and successful – so that he becomes an artist again – that is, that he returns to live for art and stop living for money. Completing the criticism of Shelley, Keats brings a direct reference to Spenser, a poet of whom Keats has always been a great admirer. The passage that Keats refers to is from *Faerie Queene*, by Edmund Spenser: “*Embost with massy gold of glorious gift,/ And with rich metal loaded every rift...*” (SPENSER, in KIKUCHI, 1962, p. 10)

## **2.4 The Sequel: Lives After the Letters**

Keats did not send his letter of reply to Shelley through the postal service, but through a couple of friends of the two: the Gisbornes. Along with the letter, Keats sent a copy of his book, which had been released that same year, in 1820. The letter left Keats'

hands for the Gisbornes. They departed “from Dover September 3, they arrived in Leghorn around October 10th and left Keats’s package with Mary Shelley’s sister, Claire Clairmont. Shelley collected it on 17 October –that is, two months on from its composition.” (WOLFSON, 2021, online). Because of this delay, the lives of the two poets were quite different: the cheerful and hopeful Keats who wrote the letter to Shelley, in August 1820, expecting to see him again, was not the same as on October 17, 1820, the day Shelley held Keats’s letter for the first time. Shelley was also not the same hopeful man in the letter and, he even says, in a letter to Claire Clermont that when he invites Keats to spend some time with him in Italy, he didn’t mean it with him, at his house, but rather, in the city of Pisa: “I have written to him to ask him to come to Pisa, without however inviting him to our own house,” he wrote to Claire; “We are not rich enough for that sort of thing. Poor fellow!” (WOLFSON, 2021, online). And John Keats? How had his life changed?

On the day that the letter arrived in Shelley’s hands, Keats was deteriorated, with no forces and, almost dying. His trip to Italy, as previously mentioned, was difficult and dangerous for a sick person like him. In addition to the bad conditions of the ship on which Keats and Severn sailed, they still had to stay another 14 days on that same ship, in the bay of Naples. Keats and Severn embarked on September 17th, 1820, to Italy and docked on October 31, 1820, “and reached Rome, quite the worse, on November 15.” (WOLFSON, 2021, online). A trip that was supposed to be for the best of him, ended up leaving him worse and weaker. Three months after his arrival in Rome, Keats died of tuberculosis, alongside Joseph Severn.

Going back in time a little bit, on October 18, 1820, just before Keats landed in Italy, Shelley began to read *Lamia and Hyperion*. He had not heard from Keats since he sent his letter to him on July 27 of the same year. Shelley liked *Hyperion* very much and came out talking about him to people in his circle. About this, Wolfson (2021) comments on what Shelley talked about Keats to people, after reading: “*Hyperion* promises for him that he is destined to become one of the first writers of the age,” he exclaimed to Marianne Hunt (LS 2: 239-40), sharing his praise with TL Peacock, Claire, and Byron (Reiman, 416-17).” (WOLFSON, 2021, online). Everything indicates that Shelley even wanted to send a letter to J. W. Croker, from *Quartely Review*, speaking well of *Hyperion*, but decided not to.

After Keats’ tragic and early death, Shelley wrote an elegy for his friend and wrote *Adonais: An Elegy on the Death of John Keats Author of Endymion, Hyperion, etc.* The

poem is a lyrical lament with 59 stanzas of nine verses, and Shelley practically turns Keats into a Greek God. In addition to the name *Adonais*, Shelley also puts “two Greek epigraphs, one on the title page from Plato’s Epigram on Aster, the other heading the Preface, from Moschus’s Bion” (WOLFSON, 2021, online). Thus, Shelley brings the whole atmosphere of Greece to his honour. Keats wrote about Greek mythology and one of his best-known odes is *Ode to a Grecian Urn*, so the theme makes sense and deserves Keats' work. I highlight here the final section of the elegy, which seems almost a prophecy:

The breath whose might I have invok'd in song  
 Descends on me; my spirit's bark is driven,  
 Far from the shore, far from the trembling throng  
 Whose sails were never to the tempest given;  
 The massy earth and sphered skies are riven!  
 I am borne darkly, fearfully, afar;  
 Whilst, burning through the inmost veil of Heaven,  
 The soul of Adonais, like a star,  
 Beacons from the abode where the Eternal are. (SHELLEY, 2021, LV)

Why does this seem like a prophecy? It turns out that Shelley, just before turning 30, in September 1822, drowned during a storm at sea while in his boat. A situation that is remarkably similar to the one he quotes in the last verse of the poem. Shelley's death also includes Keats, but unexpectedly and intensely. On July 1, 1822, Hunt and Shelley met again, in Livorno, Italy. Hunt, Byron, and Shelley were launching a magazine called *The Liberal*. After a week together, Hunt lent Shelley his only copy of Keats' latest published book. On July 8, Shelley and Edward Williams, a friend of his, took a boat out to Livorno. Many warned about the bad weather of the day, but Shelley wanted to get on anyway, even though he had no real reason to take a boat that day.

Shortly after, the boat was seen in the middle of a storm, many hours after leaving the port. The captain of another boat managed to get to Shelley and Williams, but when he offered help, Shelley refused and took Williams' arm, so that he too would not go to the other boat. Even though he knew they were lost in the rain, away from the sand, and without much chance of being saved, except with the help of the other boat, Shelley decided to stay on the boat. The boat was destroyed and the bodies of the two were only found ten days later. Shelley's body at this point was unrecognizable, but Edward

Trelawny<sup>6</sup> says, in the manuscript on Percy Shelley's death, written by Marianne Hunt, that in addition to recognizing Shelley's costumes and stature, it was clear that the body belonged to him when he found the Keats book in the corpse's coat pocket, which Hunt had loaned to Shelley a few days earlier. Of course, after days at sea, all that was left of the book was the leather cover, but that was enough to recognize the book and, more importantly, recognize Shelley's body. Shelley's remains were taken to Rome and buried in the Protestant cemetery, the same where Keats is buried.

The two poets had close endings, just over a year apart. Some biographers consider Shelley to have committed suicide, as he chose to stay on the boat even though he knew it was not at all safe. There is no way to find out, but it is something to think about, because there is no plausible explanation for a person to want to stay inside a boat, on the high seas, during a storm, other than with the intention of causing their own death. The fact that they recognized Shelley's body through a book by Keats is curious, to say the least, since their relationship did not seem to be such a deep friendship - at least not on Keats' part. Thus, life after the correspondence between them was not long: Keats died four months later and Shelley a year and a half later.

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<sup>6</sup> British biographer and novelist.



## CONCLUSION

Letters, in addition to having their communicative function, mainly for distance communication, also have the function of manipulating the reader. When writing a letter, the writer manipulates the information from a filter in which he or she selects the information they want to share and shapes the image they want the recipient to have about them. This manipulation of information is what differentiates a face-to-face conversation from letters. Generally, the conversation by letters is remarkably similar to the ones we have when we meet someone on the street. The main subjects of the letters, especially at the time of interest in this research, were personal matters – such as news about life and family, gossip about acquaintances, and personal conversations. Therefore, when we write a letter, it is much easier to select the subjects, think twice about a specific opinion, and, most importantly, there is the option to erase and start over. During a face-to-face conversation, it is almost impossible to select the information we want to share. We can choose how we want to be seen while writing a letter, but during a conversation, this becomes a challenge.

John Keats made use of this function of the letters positively: he did not have an audience for his poetry, but he wrote letters mainly to his friends, family, and Fanny Brawne, the great love of his life. In the letters he wrote, we can see that Keats is different from the poems. It is possible to find humour, dull puns, swears of love, but also much sadness and distress. It was in his letters that Keats felt free and calm while writing because, after great frustrations with his poet career, with critics humiliating him, and with incredibly low sales, it was in his audience of letters that he felt safe and loved. After all, those people had a genuine interest in what he had to say. So much so, most of the letters he wrote are preserved today, as many of the recipients have kept the letters for years, without even knowing that Keats would become the great artist he is today. The letters were an extension of his poetry, where we find, in addition to the features already mentioned, drafts of poems, ideas for future writings, and many reflections on literature, both his and that of other writers, his friends or not.

His life relationships were also of great importance for his growth as an artist and as a person. As early as 1817, Keats was already with Hunt's circle, which had important presences at the time, and it was through Leigh Hunt that Keats met Percy Bysshe Shelley. At the time, being involved with these people was not a positive thing. Some of the most important critics did not like Hunt and everything that came from him, especially the people from his circle. Perhaps, as discussed during the present study, Keats would not

have received as much negative criticism as he did if he had not been involved with Hunt and his circle. This is because, as I have shown, the two worst and most well-known criticisms of John Keats's first publications say Hunt's name several times, mainly as a bad influence. By it, I do not mean that Keats would be recognized as a great poet and that it would have been a sales success had he not been involved with Hunt, but, perhaps, he would not have been the target of heavy and even unnecessary criticism. After his death, these relationships with Hunt's circle were essential, as it was these people who organized Keats's writings and helped his first biography to be written, which was released 27 years after his death. If these people had not had a great affection for Keats, nothing that he produced or sent to the Hunt circle during his lifetime would have survived, and thus he would probably be a stranger today.

The fact that Keats failed to achieve his main goal – to be seen, in life, as a great poet – was his more intense pain and he carried it into his grave. One of the biggest pieces of evidence of his frustration is the phrase he asked to be placed on his gravestone: “Here lies one whose name was writ in water”. The words bring out the idea that Keats had about himself before society: he would be quickly forgotten by everyone. Keats was wrong when choosing the phrase because, shortly after his death, as already mentioned, his friends and family (mainly his brother George and his friends Leigh Hunt, Charles Brown and Joseph Severn), devoted a large part of their time to organizing Keats materials for publication. The greatest mark in Keats's career as a poet came after his death and was the biography *Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of John Keats*, written by Richard Monckton Milnes in 1848, with the help of the Hunt circle and others that were part of Keats's life, so that it was as complete as possible. Thus, Keats began to be widely known and, because of his history, more respected. With that, other artists, and people, in general, started to know the work of John Keats. However, one of the best-known works that are openly inspired by Keats is the elegy Percy Shelley wrote shortly after learning of the death of John Keats, called *Adonais: An Elegy on the Death of John Keats, Author of Endymion, Hyperion, etc.*

Shelley was shaken by Keats' death, which happened shortly after the last communication between them, and put it all down on paper. Their relationship, as much as Shelley showed a great deal of esteem for Keats, was not the easiest and most friendly. Keats and Shelley were two different poets, with completely different thoughts and ways of seeing the world, and this ended up causing some stressful situations between them, mainly on the part of Keats. Shelley tried to shape the way Keats wrote and, even though it does

not seem like something he does with the thought of being inconvenient, Keats had to stay away from Shelley and Leigh Hunt's circle for a while so that he would not be prevented from writing. In 1820, while Shelley was living in Italy, he learned that Keats was ill and then sent the letter which was analysed in this undergraduate dissertation.

Shelley's letter was simpler than Keats's: he shows sadness because of Keats's illness, invites him to spend time in Italy, and starts a discussion of literature – specifically about Keats's poem *Endymion*, which was widely criticized in the year it was published, 1817. Keats replied almost 20 days later, thanking Shelley for his concern, and going deeper into the discussion that Shelley proposes. Keats brings quotes from Spenser and Mammon as an anti-God, that is, the demon, the sin. With that, Keats says Shelley should "curb [his] magnanimity and be more of an artist". This phrase refers to the fact that Shelley, as he always did with Keats during their friendship, commented that Keats should write differently for his publications to sell. Shelley sent two of his books to Keats, as examples of how to write and successfully sell. Thus, Keats seems to get quite angry and says that the poet needs to be selfish and make poetry only for poetry, and not for money or to expose other thoughts, which are not purely for art. John Keats says that the artist must serve Mammon, that is, the artist must be a sinner – selfish with his art. In the letter, it is possible to find traces of melancholy, probably caused by the difficult life that Keats led since his childhood and amplified by the specific moment he was going through – tuberculosis. In addition, traces of irony and the discussion about literature are very present, as previously analysed.

After the correspondence, neither of them had an exceptionally long life: Keats died three months later and Shelley a year and a half later. Keats's death came as no surprise to anyone: he died of tuberculosis at twenty-five, in Italy. Shelley drowned after sailing during a storm. The interesting thing about this is that Keats was essential when they needed to recognize Shelley's body – which had been at sea for more than ten days. The poet was carrying a Keats book in his pocket, and after seeing the book, it was that Edward Trelawny said he was sure the body belonged to Percy Bysshe Shelley. Before he died, Shelley wrote an elegy in honour of John Keats that was well known, mainly because it was written by him, who was a respected poet at the time. *Adonais: An Elegy on the Death of John Keats* was published in 1821, the same year that Keats passed away.

Keats was wrong when he said he would be forgotten, as his figure is still very much alive today. He was an influence for many poets, such as Shelley himself, but also

Tennyson who, at the beginning of his career was inspired using imagery in the poetry of Keats, and Oscar Wilde, who published a poem called *The Grave of Keats*, in 1881. In addition, the library of rare books of Harvard is constantly increasing its collection of Keats, ranging from small notes to drawings, manuscripts of his poems, and letters. Even though it was 200 years since his death in 2021, Keats is still very much alive in the academies and on the shelves of many people around the world. Undoubtedly, the boy who lost his parents during childhood had to work from an early age to survive and who died frustrated by not being able to achieve his goal as a poet, would never have imagined that his life and work would be being deeply studied to this day. Keats did not have his name written in the water, quite the contrary, had his name written in stone, as he has never been and probably will never be forgotten.

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