John Keats (1795-1821)

- Born in London, first child of a hostler (stable keeper)
- Lived happily for the first seven years of his life
- Keats was little—not athletic or really masculine (testosterone-wise)
- As a kid, he spend a lot of time indoors reading—became self-educated
- Had an early liking for poetry and classics
- 1803 – encouraged in school and introduced to Spenser, other poets, theater
- 1804 – father thrown from horse, died of injuries (fractured skull)
- Caused serious financial problems for the family
- 1805 – grandfather died, leaving no male protector for mother and children
- Mother remarried but soon left her new husband
- 1810 – mother died of TB, Keats went to live with grandmother
- Mother’s death apparently leads to an early interest in medicine
- 1811 – Keats apprenticed to apothecary-surgeon (the equivalent of a pharmacist/herbalist)
- 1813 – began to write poetry
- 1814 – grandmother, who had provided home, died—family dispersed
- 1815 – became medical student; passed exams (but never practiced medicine)
- As a student at Guy’s Hospital in London Keats spent more time studying literature than medicine
- Wrote “On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer”
- Introduced into Leigh Hunt’s literary circle
- 1818 – took walking tour of Lake Country
- Nursed brother Tom with TB, which spread to Keats; Tom died at age 19
- Keats soon developed symptoms of TB (he was a carrier for a long time and could have contracted it either from his mother or his brother)—coughs up blood
- Fanny Browne was literally the “girl next door”
- Before he met her, Keats made fun of friends and people who fell in love
- Falls in love with Fanny
- 1819 – became more prolific and productive (best poems came when he was sick), wrote many of his most famous poems about this time
- Became engaged to Fanny Browne: she wanted to marry him but he said no because he was a dying man and didn’t want her to be obligated to care for him in his condition—or be left a widow
- Poetry getting good reviews but did not receive major attention until much later
- Not well known in his own time (the poem “Ode to Melancholy” illustrates this)
- Friends convinced him to go to Italy to ease the symptoms of TB (warmer climate was supposed to help breathing)
- Went to Italy as last resort for TB
- 5 months later died in Rome
- His friends have a death mask made of him
- At his request, on his tombstone: “Here lies one whose name was writ in water” (wrote it himself)
His name was not to appear on the stone. Despite these requests, however, Severn and Brown also added the epitaph: “This Grave contains all that was mortal, of a YOUNG ENGLISH POET, who on his Death Bed, in the Bitterness of his heart, at the Malicious Power of his enemies, desired these words to be Engraven on his Tomb Stone”

- Shelley blamed Keats’ death on a harsh review of Keats’ poem “Endymion”
- Death of Keats inspired Shelley’s “Adonais”
- Byron refers to Keats with the phrase “snuffed out by an article”
- Was a major influence on Poets like Tennyson
- Wrote several odes and is known for elaborate word choice and sensual imagery