**Keats**

**Keats writes sensual poetry with intensely imagined dreamscapes and evocative portrayals. His style is steeped in myth and legend with a timeless quality. Keats uses dialectic poetry with an interplay of irreconcilable contradictory ideas. His poems are allegorical, latent meanings are revealed through antithesis. For Keats the imagination is a creative power which can invent pleasures and provide an escape from this world and can conceive of a transcendent beauty, immortal and ideal. In addition, he thinks it can restore the wonder, enrich and celebrate the experiences of this world. Finally, for Keats it can explore the contradictions and frustrations of experience and create a vision of a more complex beauty**

***Belle Dame Sans Merci***

**Keats chose to write Belle Dame in a hybrid ballad form, a mix of traditional ballad and literary ballad. This form allows him to link his narrative to those of traditional ballads, romance and tragedy. Keats employs four line stanzas (quatrains) with an ABCB rhyme scheme as is traditional but he makes an adjustment. Keats shortens the last line, this abrupt cut off gives a sense of something unfinished. Repetition “cold hillside”, alliteration “roots of relish” and assonance “long/song”, all typical of ballad form are employed to give an apparent soft and lilting tone. The poem’s structure is that of a dialogue, the narrator speaks to the knight and then the knight answers. La Belle Dame sans Merci depicts a knight-at-arms who has been seduced and abandoned by a capricious fairy. The poem resists reductionism of meaning but the message is clear whatever the reading, however self-destructive intense love may be, the lover has little choice in the matter. Further, the more one entertains feelings of beauty and love, the more desolate and more painful the world becomes. This is a poem full of tristesse.**

***Lamia***

**Keats employs heroic couplets in rhymed pairs (“hue/blue”). The choice of heroic couplets gives the poem a buoyant feeling that then allows the more cynical juxtaposition of Apollonius to be contrasted in the reader’s mind. The language is full of sensual description with a heavy emphasis on the visual “eyed like a peacock”. The elevated diction dominates early on as Keats describes mythical creatures and metamorphic transformations “Gordian shape”. Lamia is revealed at the end of the poem as a fraud and her palace is a façade. The relationship between Lycius and Lamia is destroyed when the sage** [**Apollonius**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apollonius_of_Tyana) **reveals Lamia's true identity at their wedding feast, whereupon she seemingly disappears and Lycius dies of grief. The theme of deception is at the heart of the tragedy.**

***Eve of St Agnes***

Keats employs a Spenserian stanza form using 8 lines, this suits the narrative and descriptive nature of the poem. Keats’ use of pictorial and musical effects ‘for slept among the ashes cold” is embellished with hyphenated phrasing. The language is richly sensuous. The feast which Porphyro prepares is full of exotic fruits. Keats’ description of Madeline going to bed is multi-sensory. Her bodice is ‘fragrant’; her rich attire ‘creeps rustling’ to her knees.She sees – not the god of her dreams - but merely a mortal man ‘pallid, chill, and drear’, the language starkly capturing her disappointment and the vast gap between fantasy and reality.

**Isabella**

Keats employs a verse form, ottava rima, from Italy for this most Italian of poems, ‘so left Florence’. In its eight line stanzas Keats creates highly stylised mood full of antithesis and repetition. **Keats' world is far more Mediterranean than English. Keats is fond of the exotic, sub-tropical kind of flora, even the ‘basil pot’. The climate of his poems is generally warm and genial, the atmosphere being of spring or summer. Moistened by Isabella’s tears, the plant flourishes – but Isabella herself wastes away, consumed by grief. The brothers’ suspicions are aroused and they steal the pot. Their examination of its contents leads to the discovery of Lorenzo’s rotting head. Horrified, they flee from Florence. Now deprived both of her lover and the pot of basil, Isabella goes mad and dies.**

All four of these poems feature Keats’ **negative capability**. It is the **ability to contemplate world without the desire to try and ‘reconcile contradictory aspects or fit it into closed and rational systems.' Keats was accused of mental masturbation by Byron but his poetry reduces such reductionism.**

**Aspects of tragedy - Keats**

At the core of Keats’ poetry is a tragic hero or heroine who is flawed in some way, who suffers and causes suffering to others and in all texts there is an interplay between what might be seen as villains and victims.

1. **The settings** for the tragedy, both places and times.
2. The **protagonists’ flaws**, pride and folly, their blindness and insight, their discovery and learning, their being a mix of good and evil
3. The role of the **tragic villain** or opponent, who directly affects the fortune of the hero, who engages in a contest of power and is partly responsible for the hero’s demise
4. The presence of **fate**, how the hero’s end is inevitable
5. How the **behaviour of the hero** affects the world around him, creating chaos and affecting the lives of others
6. The **significance of violence and revenge**, humour and moments of happiness
7. The **structural pattern** of the text as it moves through complication to catastrophe, from order to disorder, through climax to resolution, from the prosperity and happiness of the hero to the tragic end
8. The use of **plots and sub-plots**
9. The way that **language** is used to heighten the tragedy
10. Ultimately how the tragedy **affects the audience**, acting as a commentary on the real world, moving the audience through pity and fear to an understanding of the human condition

**Name of poem**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Aspect** | **Comment** | **Quote** |
| 1 settings |  |  |
| 2 tragic flaws |  |  |
| 3 villain |  |  |
| 4 fate |  |  |
| 5 hero behaviour |  |  |
| 6 violence |  |  |
| 7 structure |  |  |
| 8 plot sub-plot |  |  |
| 9 language |  |  |
| 10 affect on reader |  |  |

**Keats - Form and Structure**

* **Dialectic poetry - interplay of irreconcilable contradictory ideas**
* **Anaphora – repeated opening phrase**
* **Allegorical – hidden meaning**
* **Antithesis - opposing ideas (love and death in *Isabella*)**
* **Self-conscious narrator - K’s intrusive digression on love in *Isabella***

***Belle Dame Sans Merci***

* Ballad form (mix of traditional ballad and literary ballad)
* Four line stanzas (quatrains)
* ABCB rhyme scheme
* But with adjustment - Keats shortens the last line (abrupt/cut off/sense of unfinished)
* Repetition
* Alliteration
* Assonance

|  |
| --- |
| 1. *I set her on my pacing steed,* |
| 1. *And nothing else saw all day* ***long****,* |
| 1. *For sidelong would she bend, and sing* |
| 1. *A faery’s* ***song****.* |

***Lamia***

* Heroic couplets
* Iambic pentameter
* Rhymed pairs
* Some couplets closed units
* Some overrun into next lines
* Creates pace
* Avoids sense of closure

*She was a gordian shape of dazzling* ***hue****,*

*Vermilion-spotted, golden, green, and* ***blue****;*

*Striped like a zebra, freckled like a pard,*

***Eyed like*** *a pea****cock****,* ***and*** *all crim****son******barr'd****;*

*And full of silver moons, that, as she breathed,*

*Dissolv'd, or brighter shone, or interwreathed*

*Their lustres with the gloomier tapestries—*

*So rainbow-sided, touch'd with miseries*

***Eve of St Agnes***

* Spenserian stanza
* Eight line iambic pentameter + final line alexandrine (iambic hexameter)
* Narrative poem
* Descriptive
* Pictorial and musical effects

|  |
| --- |
| 1. And they are gone: ay, ages long ago |
| 1. These lovers fled away into the storm. |
| 1. That night the Baron dreamt of many a woe, |
| 1. And all his warrior-guests, with shade and form |
| 1. Of witch, and demon, and large coffin-worm, |
| 1. **Were long** be-night**mar’d**. **An**gela **the old** |
| 1. Died palsy-twitch’d, with meagre face deform; |
| 1. The Beadsman, after thousand aves told, |
| 1. **For aye** unsought **for slept** among **his ash**es cold. |

**Isabella**

* Ottava rima
* Eight line stanzas
* Iambic pentameter
* abababcc
* alternate rhyme
* concluding couplet but K leaves open
* rejects the smooth elegance of eighteenth century
* uses rougher more primitive
* creates highly stylised mood
* full of antithesis and repetition

|  |
| --- |
| 1. Yet they contriv’d to steal the Basil-**pot,** |
| 1. And to examine it in secret place: |
| 1. The thing was vile with green and livid **spot**, |
| 1. And yet they knew it was Lorenzo’s face: |
| 1. The guerdon of their murder they had got, |
| 1. And so left Florence in a moment’s space, |
| 1. Never to turn again.—Away they **went**, |
| 1. With blood upon their heads, to banish**ment**. |
|  |

**Critics on Keats:**

**J.W. Croker (1818)**

Cockney poetry- incongruous ideas in the most uncouth language

**Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889)**

Reflected the world of experiment, division and uncertainty.

**Matthew Arnold (1822-1888)**

Not a passion of the sensuous or [sentimental](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/sentimental) It is an intellectual and spiritual passion.

**Oscar Wilde (1882)**

'It is in Keats that one observes the beginning of the artistic renaissance of England. [Byron](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/Byron) was a rebel and [Shelley](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/Shelley) a dreamer but Keats was a pure artist

**Cleanth Brooks (1906-1994)**

"A Keats’ poem should not mean / But be."

**Robert Gittings (1968)**

He could, and did, transmute almost any experience into poetry.

**Alan Bold (1982)**

'At his best Keats was an original though he had an extraordinary [mimetic](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/mimetic) gift’

**Brian Silver (1998)**

Mortality is often just under the surface, as it was with Keats

We are [mortal](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/mortal), but with no [divine](http://crossref-it.info/repository/atoz/divine) shoulder to lean on.

**KEATS**

1. ***Lamia, Isabella or The Pot of Basil, La Belle Dame sans Merci*, and *The Eve of St.*** ***Agnes*** – **John Keats**

Explore the view that poets writing in the tragic tradition always convey a deep sense  
of sadness.  
You must refer to **‘Isabella** ’ and **at least two** other poems.  
In your answer you need to analyse closely the poets’ authorial methods and include  
comment on the extract below.

|  |
| --- |
| Isabella LXIII.  And so she pined, and so she died forlorn, |
| Imploring for her Basil to the last. |
| No heart was there in Florence but did mourn |
| In pity of her love, so overcast. |
| And a sad ditty of this story born |
| From mouth to mouth through all the country pass’d: |
| Still is the burthen sung—“O cruelty, |
| “To steal my Basil-pot away from me!” |

1. ***Lamia, Isabella or The Pot of Basil, La Belle Dame sans Merci*, and *The Eve of St.Agnes*** – **John Keats**

Explore the view that, in Keats’ poems, it is men who are the victims.  
You must refer to ‘**Belle Dame** ’ and **at least two** other poems.  
In your answer you need to analyse closely Keats’ authorial methods and include  
comment on the extract below

|  |
| --- |
| Belle Dame X.  I saw pale kings and princes too, |
| Pale warriors, death-pale were they all; |
| They cried—“La Belle Dame sans Merci |
| Hath thee in thrall!” |
|  |
| XI.  I saw their starved lips in the gloam, |
| With horrid warning gaped wide, |
| And I awoke and found me here, |
| On the cold hill’s side. |

1. ***Lamia, Isabella or The Pot of Basil, La Belle Dame sans Merci*, and *The Eve of St.Agnes*** – **John Keats**

Explore the view that, in Keats’ poems, that loving relationships are dangerous and tragic. You must refer to at least **three** poems.   
In your answer you need to analyse closely Keats’ authorial methods and include  
comment on the extract below.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Eve of St Agnes XLII.    And they are gone: ay, ages long ago |  |
| These lovers fled away into the storm. |  |
| That night the Baron dreamt of many a woe, |  |
| And all his warrior-guests, with shade and form |  |
| Of witch, and demon, and large coffin-worm, |  |
| Were long be-nightmar’d. Angela the old | *375* |
| Died palsy-twitch’d, with meagre face deform; |  |
| The Beadsman, after thousand aves told, |  |
| For aye unsought for slept among his ashes cold. |  |

1. ***Lamia, Isabella or The Pot of Basil, La Belle Dame sans Merci*, and *The Eve of St.Agnes*** – **John Keats**

Explore the view that, in Keats’ poems, the boundaries between the reality and fantasy are  
continually blurred. You must refer to **four poems**.   
In your answer you need to analyse closely Keats’ authorial methods and include  
comment on the extract below from Lamia

*The day appear'd, and all the gossip rout.*

*O senseless Lycius! Madman! wherefore flout*

*The silent-blessing fate, warm cloister'd hours,*

*And show to common eyes these secret bowers?*

*The herd approach'd; each guest, with busy brain,*

*Arriving at the portal, gaz'd amain,*

*And enter'd marveling: for they knew the street,*

*Remember'd it from childhood all complete*

*Without a gap, yet ne'er before had seen*

*That royal porch, that high-built fair demesne;*

*So in they hurried all, maz'd, curious and keen:*

*Save one, who look'd thereon with eye severe,*

*And with calm-planted steps walk'd in austere;*

*'Twas Apollonius: something too he laugh'd,*

*As though some knotty problem, that had daft*

*His patient thought, had now begun to thaw,*

*And solve and melt—'twas just as he foresaw*