Biography of John Keats and “The Nightingale” by John Keats

John Keats is often considered one of the greatest British poets to live. His mother died of tuberculosis when he was fourteen; his brother died of the same disease when John was twenty-three. John himself succumbed to the disease at twenty-five years old.

“On the night of February 3, 1820, Keats returned to the home he shared with his friend Charles Brown in Hampstead, after having ridden home on the outside of the stagecoach without a coat. Keats came into the house and was [taken] immediately to bed. In his biography of Keats, Brown recalls the events of that night:

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 [carefully], he looked up in my face, with a calmness [in his face] 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.’"

Before he died of tuberculosis, Keats wrote “The Nightingale,” a poem that explores death.

...for many a time
I have been half in love with easeful Death,
Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme,
To take into the air my quiet breath;
Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
While thou [he is speaking to the Nightingale] art pouring forth thy soul abroad
In such an ecstasy!

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