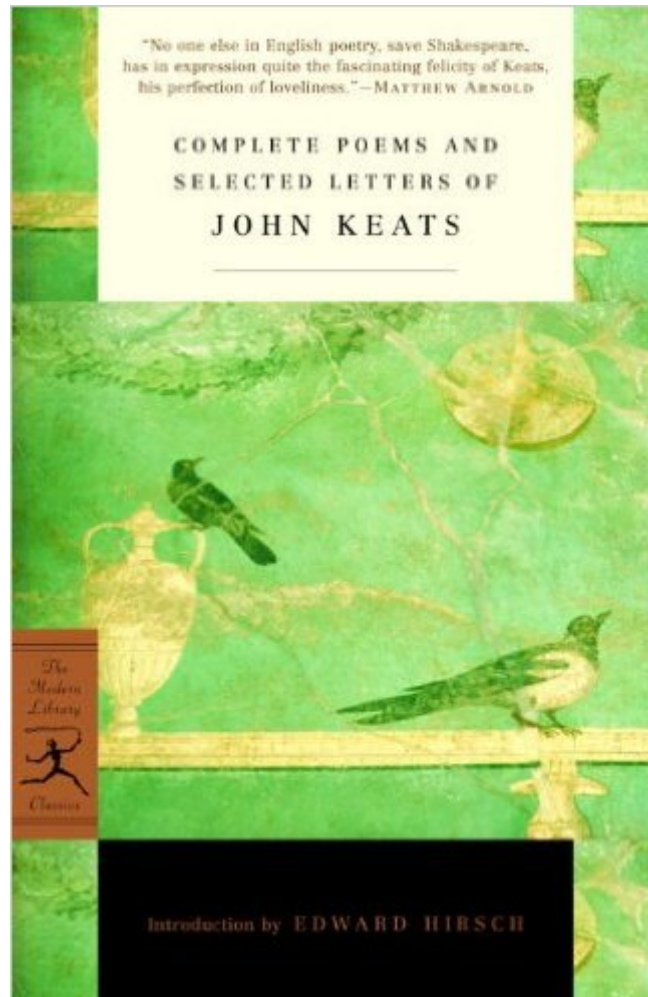


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Complete Poems And Selected Letters Of John Keats (Modern Library Classics)



Synopsis

'I think I shall be among the English Poets after my death,' John Keats soberly prophesied in 1818 as he started writing the blankverse epic *Hyperion*. Today he endures as the archetypal Romantic genius who explored the limits of the imagination and celebrated the pleasures of the senses but suffered a tragic early death. Edmund Wilson counted him as 'one of the half dozen greatest English writers,' and T. S. Eliot has paid tribute to the Shakespearean quality of Keats's greatness. Indeed, his work has survived better than that of any of his contemporaries the devaluation of Romantic poetry that began early in this century. This Modern Library edition contains all of Keats's magnificent verse: 'Lamia,' 'Isabella,' and 'The Eve of St. Agnes'; his sonnets and odes; the allegorical romance *Endymion*; and the five-act poetic tragedy *Otho the Great*. Presented as well are the famous posthumous and fugitive poems, including the fragmentary 'The Eve of Saint Mark' and the great 'La Belle Dame sans Merci,' perhaps the most distinguished literary ballad in the language. 'No one else in English poetry, save Shakespeare, has in expression quite the fascinating felicity of Keats, his perception of loveliness,' said Matthew Arnold. 'In the faculty of naturalistic interpretation, in what we call natural magic, he ranks with Shakespeare.'

Book Information

Series: Modern Library Classics

Paperback: 640 pages

Publisher: Modern Library; Modern Library Classics edition (February 13, 2001)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0375756698

ISBN-13: 978-0375756696

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 1.3 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars Â Â See all reviewsÂ (19 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #135,435 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #151 inÂ Books > Literature & Fiction > British & Irish > Poetry #327 inÂ Books > Literature & Fiction > Poetry > Regional & Cultural > European #451 inÂ Books > Literature & Fiction > Poetry > Themes & Styles

Customer Reviews

In his short life John Keats created some of the finest poetry in the English language. I have read his shorter poems and odes many times, not for study, but simply for enjoyment. I am not a Keats expert, but I can now easily recognize quotations from Keat's odes, sonnets, and other poems. I

especially like "The Eve of St. Agnes", a story of romance and danger in a medieval setting that illustrates Keats' remarkable command of language. Keats is not difficult, but footnotes help with archaic words and references to more obscure Greek mythology. I prefer to read Keats unaided, then read the footnotes (best if tucked away in an appendix), and then return and read the poem again. For longer poems I jump to footnotes more quickly. Initially, the inexpensive Dover edition "Lyric Poems", was exactly what I needed. Later, as I tackled longer poetry like "Endymion", I migrated to more complete collections with commentary and footnotes. Keats' works are widely available in hardcover and paperback. Which collection is best for college study or independent reading? I have two favorites, one by Penguin Classics and the other by Modern Library. Both are available in softcovers. The first is "The Complete Poems" by Penguin Classics, edited by John Barnard and a standard choice for college classes. I have the second edition, 1977. Barnard's extensive footnotes and commentary are quite good and offset his somewhat brief introduction. Additionally, the appendix discusses textual variations in Keats' manuscripts and has a useful guide to Greek mythology names. The third edition, 1988, adds 20 pages of selected letters, Keats' notes on Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and his notes on a Shakespearean actor.

Pertaining to Keats himself, I could scarcely lavish enough praise upon his poetry. I must confess an extreme partiality to the High Romantics (Blake, Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley, Coleridge, etc.), and, among them, Keats vies with Wordsworth for the best verse. Many of his poems are quite famous--if you have studied only a little poetry, you likely have passing familiarity with his great odes (especially the sublime "To Autumn," "To a Nightingale," and the wonderful, deep "On a Grecian Urn") or with his strangely dark "La Belle Dame sans Merci." If you have studied poetry and none of these poems even rings a bell, well... you have been missing out! Take this brief snippet of a stanza from his "Ode on a Grecian Urn": "...Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral! When old age shall this generation waste, Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty, --that is all Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.'" The odes are not his only great poems, of course; I daresay almost every poem in this volume is invaluable. They are, however, his most famous lyrics, and for good reason! Some, critic/poet T.S. Eliot, for example, detest the Romantics**. Eliotian criticism for the first half of last century dismissed them frequently, and tried to deny their lyrical power and the influence of Romanticism on all poetry thereafter. I will admit that among the Romantics, there are some who are often weak: Lord Byron, for example, ranges from marvelous to quite tawdry, and I can't say I'm an overly enthusiastic fan of Shelley.

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