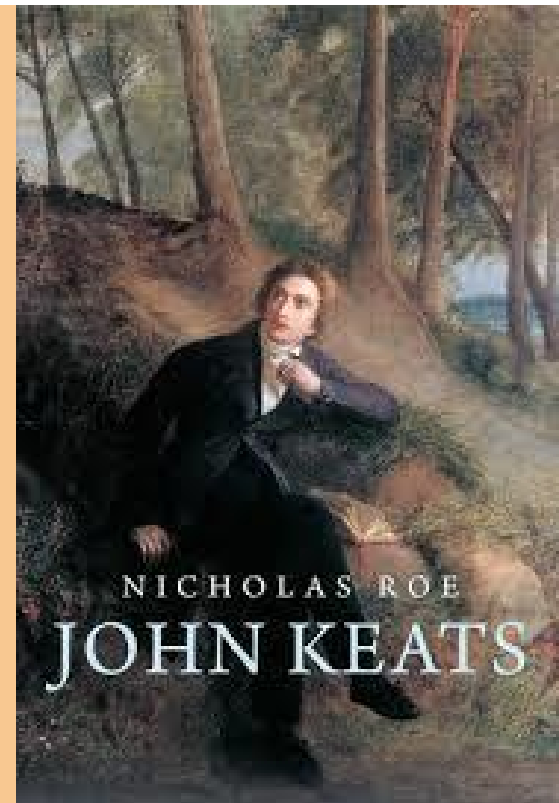


# John Keats: Poet-Physician

Professor Heidi Thomson  
Victoria University of Wellington

# John Keats (1795-1821)



## Suggested Reading:

Burch, Druin. *Digging up de Dead: Uncovering the Life and Times of an Extraordinary Surgeon*. Vintage, 2008.

De Almeida, Hermione. *Romantic Medicine and John Keats*. New York and Oxford: OUP, 1991.

Kay, Adam. *This is Going to Hurt: Secret Diaries of a Junior Doctor*. London: Picador, 2017.

Keats, John. *John Keats: Complete Poems*. Ed. Jack Stillinger. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1982.

O'Neill, Michael, ed. *John Keats in Context*. Cambridge: CUP, 2017.

Roe, Nicholas. *John Keats: A New Life*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2012

Roe, Nicholas, ed. *John Keats and the Medical Imagination*. Palgrave, 2017.

## Interesting websites:

<http://museumofthemind.org.uk/>

<http://oldoperatingtheatre.com/>

<https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/john-keats-poet-physician>

<https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/things-to-do/keats-house/Pages/default.aspx>

<https://keatsfoundation.com/>

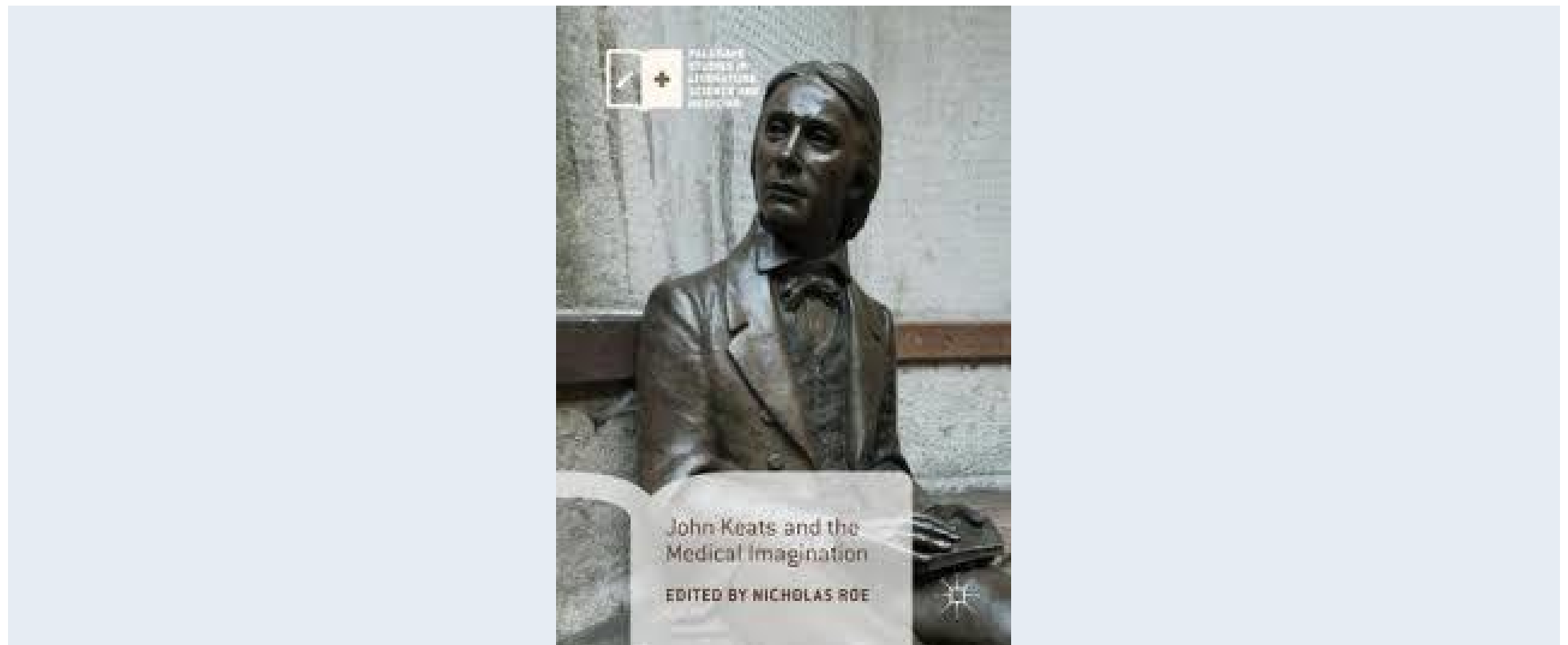
<https://wellcomelibrary.org/collections/about-the-collections/history-of-medicine-collection/>

## Interesting websites:

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44479/ode-to-a-nightingale>

<http://www.keats-shelley-house.org/>

*John Keats and the Medical Imagination,*  
ed. Nicholas Roe (Palgrave, 2017)



# Statue of John Keats @ Guy's Hospital (unveiled in 2007)

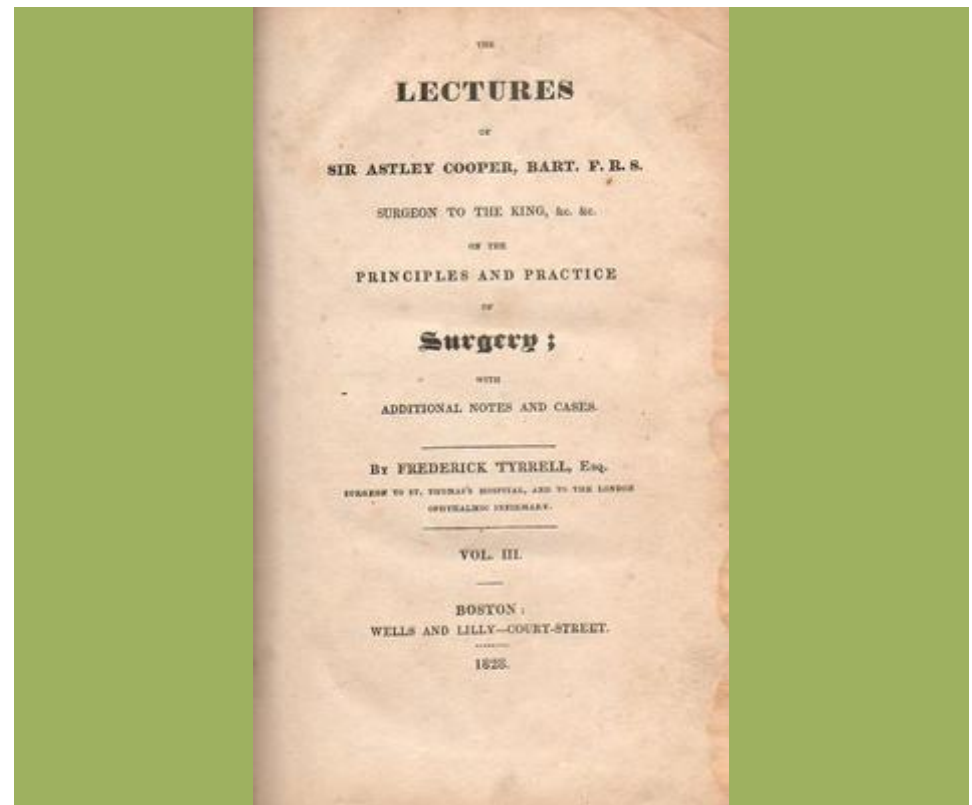
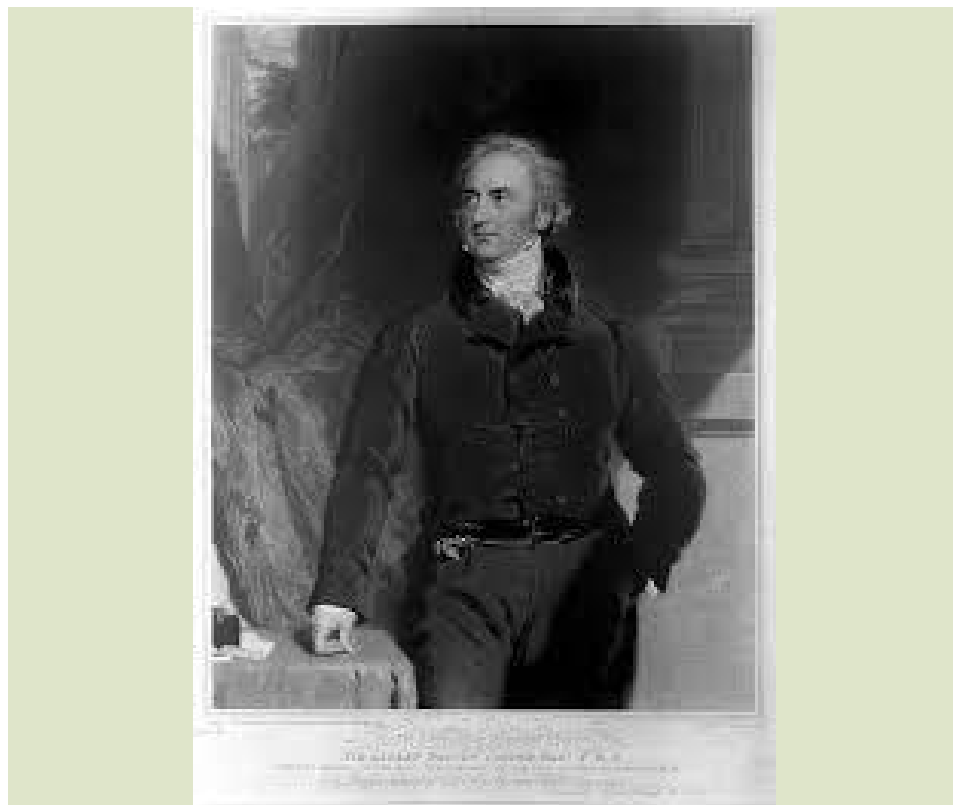


# Guy's Hospital (*from Wellcome Images*)





# Astley Paston Cooper (1768-1841)



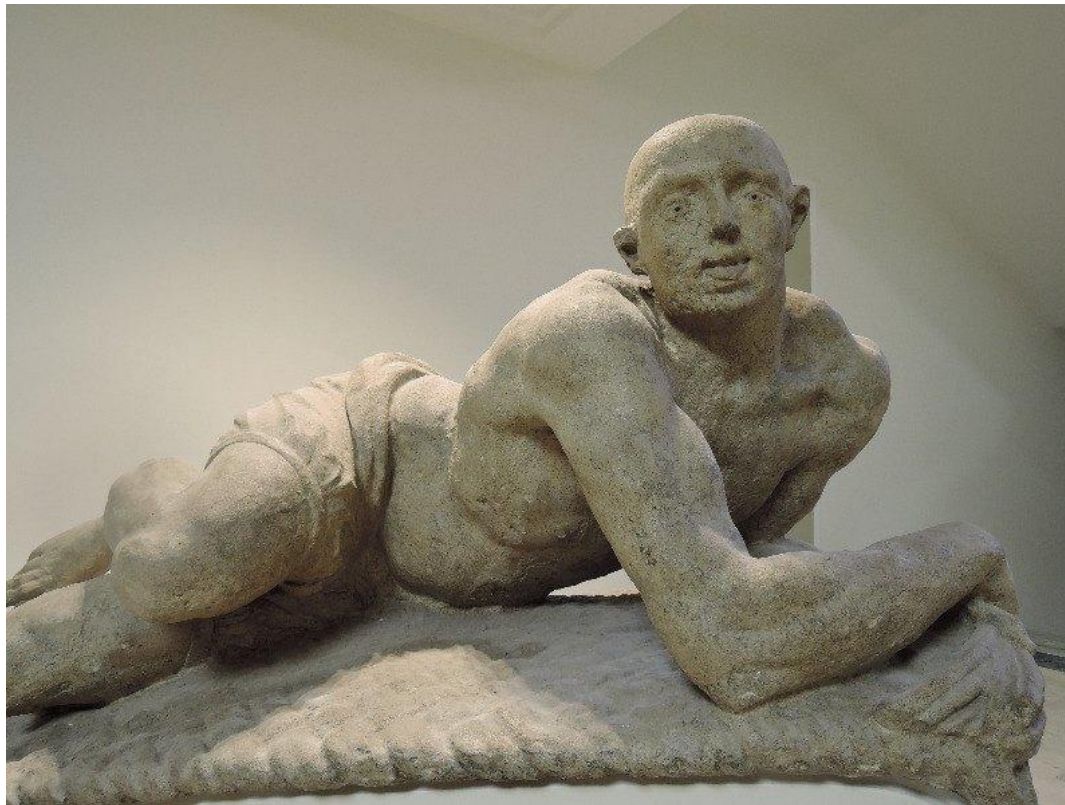
# Bethlem Hospital



# Caius Cibber, *Raving Madness*



Caius Cibber, *Melancholy Madness*



## The opening of *Hyperion: A Fragment*

Deep in the shady sadness of a vale  
Far sunken from the healthy breath of morn,  
Far from the fiery noon, and eve's one star,  
Sat gray-hair'd Saturn, quiet as a stone,  
Still as the silence round about his lair;  
Forest on forest hung above his head  
Like cloud on cloud. No stir of air was there,  
Not so much life as on a summer's day  
Robs not one light seed from the feather'd grass,  
But where the dead leaf fell, there did it rest.

(CP, p. 248)

from *Hyperion*

Along the margin-sand large foot-marks went,  
No further than to where his feet had stray'd,  
And slept there since. Upon the sodden ground  
His old right hand lay nerveless, listless, dead,  
Unceptred; and his realmless eyes were closed;  
While his bow'd head seem'd list'ning to the Earth,  
His ancient mother, for some comfort yet.

*Isabella; or, The Pot of Basil*  
(painting Joseph Severn)



# Painting by William Holman Hunt, 1868

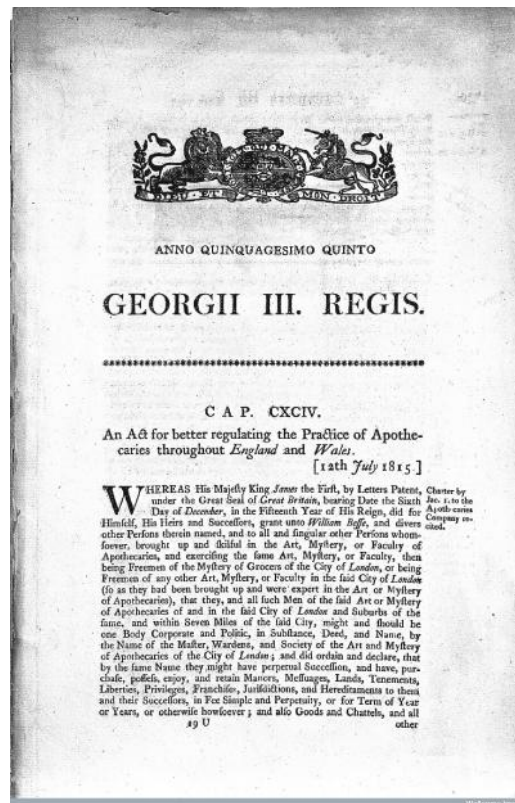




Adam Kay, *This is Going to Hurt* (Picador, 2017)



# Fragment of the 1815 Apothecaries Act (*from Wellcome Images*)







# Bullet extractor (Wellcome collection)



from *The Fall of Hyperion* Canto 1, ll. 186-190

If it please,

Majestic shadow, tell me: sure not all  
Those melodies sung into the world's ear'  
Are useless: sure a poet is a sage;  
A humanist, physician to all men. (*CP* 365)

from *The Fall of Hyperion*

Art thou not of the dreamer tribe?  
The poet and the dreamer are distinct,  
Diverse, sheer opposite, antipodes.  
The one pours out a balm upon the world,  
The other vexes it. (*CP* 366)

from *The Fall of Hyperion*

Then saw I a wan face,  
Not pin'd by human sorrows, but bright blanch'd  
By an immortal sickness which kills not;  
It works a constant change, which happy death  
Can put no end to; deathwards progressing  
To no death was that visage; (*CP* 367)



from *The Fall of Hyperion*

So at the view of sad Moneta's brow,  
I ached to see what things the hollow brain  
Behind enwombed: what high tragedy  
In the dark secret chambers of her skull  
Was acting, that could give so dread a stress  
To her cold lips, and fill with such a light  
Her planetary eyes; and touch her voice  
With such a sorrow. (*CP* 367)

Bottle of opium tincture or laudanum (from Wellcome Images)



# Keats House, Hampstead, London



## *Ode to a Nightingale*

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains

    My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,  
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains

    One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:  
'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,

    But being too happy in thine happiness,—

        That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees

            In some melodious plot

Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,

    Singing of summer in full-throated ease.

# *Ode to a Nightingale*

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But being too happy in thine happiness,—

That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees

In some melodious plot

Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,

Singest of summer in full-throated ease.

## *Ode to a Nightingale* (2<sup>nd</sup> stanza)

O, for a draught of vintage! that hath been  
    Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth,  
Tasting of Flora and the country green,  
    Dance, and Provençal song, and sunburnt mirth!  
O for a beaker full of the warm South,  
    Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,  
    With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,  
    And purple-stained mouth;  
That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,  
    And with thee fade away into the forest dim:

## *Ode to a Nightingale* (2<sup>nd</sup> stanza)

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    Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth,  
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        And **purple-stained** mouth;  
That I might drink, and **leave the world** unseen,  
    And with thee **fade away** into the forest dim:

## *Ode to a Nightingale* (stanza 3)

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget

    What thou among the leaves hast never known,  
The weariness, the fever, and the fret

    Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;  
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,

    Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;

    Where but to think is to be full of sorrow

    And leaden-eyed despairs,

Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,

    Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.



## *Ode to a Nightingale* (stanza 3)

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget

    What thou among the leaves hast never known,  
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    Here, **where men sit and hear each other groan;**  
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    **Where but to think is to be full of sorrow**  
    **And leaden-eyed despairs,**

Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,  
    Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.

## *Ode to a Nightingale* (stanza 4)

Away! away! for I will fly to thee,  
    Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,  
But on the viewless wings of Poesy,  
    Though the dull brain perplexes and retards:  
Already with thee! tender is the night,  
    And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,  
        Cluster'd around by all her starry Fays;  
        But here there is no light,  
Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown  
    Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways.

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        But here **there is no light**,  
Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown  
    Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways.

## *Ode to a Nightingale* (stanza 5)

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,  
    Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,  
But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet  
    Wherewith the seasonable month endows  
The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;  
    White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;  
        Fast fading violets cover'd up in leaves;  
            And mid-May's eldest child,  
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,  
        The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.

## *Ode to a Nightingale* (stanza 5)

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,  
    Nor what **soft incense** hangs upon the boughs,  
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        And mid-May's eldest child,  
The coming musk-rose, full of **dewy wine**,  
    The **murmurous haunt of flies** on summer eves.

## *Ode to a Nightingale* (stanza 6)

Darkling I listen; and, 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 art pouring forth thy soul abroad  
In such an ecstasy!

Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—  
To thy high requiem become a sod.

## *Ode to a Nightingale* (stanza 6)

Darkling I listen; and, 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**,

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Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—

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# The Maria Crowther, by Joseph Severn



*The Maria Crowther, Sailing Brig, by Joseph Severn.*



# Spanish Steps, Rome, with Keats House to the right



# Keats, February 1821, by Joseph Severn



# Keats's grave, Protestant cemetery, Rome



## John Keats, *This Living Hand*

This living hand, now warm and capable  
Of earnest grasping, would, if it were cold  
And in the icy silence of the tomb,  
So haunt thy days and chill thy dreaming nights  
That thou would wish thine own heart dry of blood  
So in my veins red life might stream again,  
And thou be conscience-calm'd—see here it is—  
I hold it towards you.