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| **Writer’s Intent** | **The Poems/Tragic Characters/Key Themes** | | | | | |
| Keats once wrote in a letter, **"Oh, for a life of sensations rather than of thought!"** He believed imagination, passion, and experience could reveal truth better than cold reasoning could.  Keats’ poems also reflect his belief that pain, suffering and loss were essential to experience**:‘ Do you not see how necessary a World of Pains is to school an intelligence and make it a soul? A place where the heart must feel and suffer in a thousand diverse ways?’**  Excerpts from Keats’s letter give us glimpses of his thoughts abut poetry, and of the concerns that occupied him in 1817 and 1818, the years before he would write some of his best-known work. In the letters he writes about beauty, the imagination and the concept of ‘negative Capability’:  **The concept of Negative Capability**  In a letter to his brothers in 1817, Keats claimed that a true literary genius must possess a quality he referred to as ‘Negative Capability’, which he defined as **the ability to be ‘in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason’.** According to Keats, a great thinker is someone who is capable of being in a state of uncertainty about the meaning of life, and who glories in its mysteries and paradoxes rather than trying to solve them through intellectual reasoning. • In his view, the mere act of trying to work everything out and come up with some clever overarching philosophy presents a barrier to the perception and enjoyment of all the beauty that exists in the world because truth is multi-faceted and cannot be reduced to a single perspective. | **Isabella or The Pot of Basil** | The story is set in Florence. Isabella falls in love with Lorenzo, a young man employed by her family. Her proud brothers are concerned only about family honour, wanting her to marry a rich noble, so they murder Lorenzo and bury his body in the forest. Lorenzo appears to Isabella in a vision and tells her the story of what has happened to him. Guided by the ghost, Isabella discovers the body, digs it up and cuts off the head, burying it in a pot which she plants with basil.  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. | | **Isabella:** the beautiful tragic heroine who is driven mad by loss.  **Lorenzo**: the devoted romantic suitor doomed to death.  **The Brothers:**  ruthless capitalists :They are in love with 'red-lined accounts' and are the epitome of pride. | | The contrast of cold hatred and concern for family honour with the warmth and passion of young love.  Sadness, suffering, loss and trauma |
| **Lamia** | *Lamia*is the last of the four metrical romances written by Keats. Its source is a short anecdote in Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*that Keats appended at the end of the poem. It was published in 1820. The poem's overarching theme is Greek mythology. The titular character, Lamia, is the central figure of the poem. Hermes, who is looking for a beautiful nymph, finds Lamia in the form of a serpent. When Lamia reveals the invisible nymph,Hermes returns the favour to Lamia by transforming her back to her human form. When Lamia returns to her lover, Lycius, all seems well again. However, when Apollonius reveals Lamia's true nature, she disappears, and Lycius dies grieving her loss. | | **Lamia:** She is a serpent with a woman's head who is given the body of a woman. She is sometimes seen as representing poetry.  **Lycius:** He is the young Corinthian philosopher who Lamia loves.He is sometimes seen as representing the dreamer.  **Apollonius:** He is Lycius's tutor. He is sometimes seen as representing reality or reason, which can destroy the illusions woven by poetry.  **Hermes:** the son of Zeus, messenger of the Gods, and muse of poetry meets Lamia, at this point a serpent, in the forest as he pursues a nymph who Lamia has made invisible. She strikes a bargain with Hermes and agrees to make the nymph visible if he will bring back her human form. He does, setting the plot in motion. | | The central conflict in Lamia may be taken to be either between responsibility and wanton hedonism on the one hand or between ethereal beauty and murderous rationality on the other.  Loss of Identity  Dream Vs Reality  Sadness, suffering, loss and trauma |
| **The Eve of St. Agnes** | The poem was composed in January 1819. St Agnes is the patron saint of virgins. According to legend, if a sexually pure young woman performed the proper ritual, then she would dream of her future husband on the evening before St Agnes’ Day (January 21).  Keats takes the legend and mixes in a theme familiar from Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet: young love at odds with feuding families. | | **Madeleine**: a young, pious woman hoping to dream of her future spouse.  **Porphyro:** a young man who steals into the virginal Madeline's room to force her to be his bride.  **Angela**: an old servant in Madeline's home, who leads Porphyro to the young woman's bedchamber in secret.  **Beadsman**: a man who is paid to pray for others. As the poem opens, he is praying in a cold, deserted church. | | The religious concern with sin and death verses the power of life giving passion.  Dream vs Reality  Inevitability |
| **Writer’s Methods: See AQA key words for A02 poetry.** |
|  | **La Belle Dame Sans Merci** | An unidentified speaker asks a knight what afflicts him. The knight is pale, haggard, and obviously dying. "And on thy cheeks a fading rose / Fast withereth too — ." The knight answers that he met a beautiful lady, "a faery's child" who had looked at him as if she loved him. When he set her on his horse, she led him to her cave. There she had sung him to sleep. In his sleep he had nightmarish dreams. Pale kings, princes, and warriors told him that he had been enslaved by a beautiful but cruel lady. When he awoke, the lady was gone and he was lying on a cold hillside. | | **La Belle Dame:** The beautiful lady without pity is a popular character in folk tales, classical literature, Renaissance poetry and medieval ballads. She is a femme fatale, a siren, a Circe-like figure who attracts lovers only to destroy them with her supernatural powers. These are figures without pity whose function is to entrap.  **The Knight at Arms:** The male lover in this poem is alone on horseback, driven to wander by Sadness, and robbed of feeling by Death. | | Loss of Identity  Dream vs Reality  Sadness, suffering, loss and trauma |  |
|  | **Aspects of Tragedy**  At the core of all the set texts 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** The absence of an ‘aspect’ can be as significant as its presence. There can be no exhaustive list of the ‘aspects’ of tragedy but areas that can usefully be explored include:   * **the type of the tragic text itself, whether it is classical and about public figures, or domestic and about representations of ordinary people,** * **the settings for the tragedy, both places and times** * **the journey towards death of the protagonists, their flaws, pride and folly, their blindness and insight, their discovery and learning, their being a mix of good and evil** * **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** * **the presence of fate, how the hero’s end is inevitable** * **how the behaviour of the hero affects the world around him, creating chaos and affecting the lives of others** * **the significance of violence and revenge, humour and moments of happiness** * **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** * **the use of plots and sub-plots** * **the way that language is used to heighten the tragedy** * **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.** | | | | | |
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| **Key Context** | | **Key Context** | | | |
| **John Keats and Fanny Brawne/ Attitudes to women:**  Keats had two main love interests during his lifetime: Isabella Jones and Fanny Brawne. While Keats and Jones were never in a serious relationship, Keats wrote that he ‘frequented her rooms’ and in his letters to George said that he ‘warmed with her’ and ‘kissed her’. Towards the end of 1818, Keats fell in love with the 18-year-old Fanny Brawne. Before the end of June 1819 they were informally engaged, but Keats’s financial difficulties and poor prospects made marriage impossible. In October 1819 he wrote to her: ‘I cannot exist without you – I am forgetful of every thing but seeing you again... Love is my religion – I could die for that – I could die for you.’ When Keats travelled to Italy in a last futile attempt to improve his condition, he was heartbroken at the thought that death would separate him from Fanny. In a letter written to his friend Charles Brown, he confessed: ‘I can bear to die – I cannot bear to leave her’.  • In his biography of Keats, Andrew Motion claims that the sense of abandonment arising from his relationship with his mother – the way he lost her when she abandoned the family after his father’s death, then recovered her when she came to live with his grandmother, and finally lost her again to tuberculosis – runs all through his poetry, and is exposed most fully in ‘La Belle Dame Sans Merci’. Keats recognized that his feelings towards women were complex, admitting in a letter to his friend Benjamin Bailey in 1818 that he did not have ‘a right feeling towards Women’, and tended to characterize them as either perfect or corrupt  . | | **John Keats and Family** | | Keats’s bereavements made him acutely aware of the frailty of human life. His father died in a riding accident when Keats was eight, and at 14 he lost his mother to tuberculosis. He and his sister and two brothers were taken in and raised by his maternal grandmother. His brother Tom also died of tuberculosis in December 1818. Keats nursed his mother and his brother in the final months of their illnesses.  Keats himself also died prematurely, at the age of 25. By early 1820 it was apparent that he was suffering the symptoms of tuberculosis, and his medical training left him under no illusion about his chances of survival. When he coughed up blood one day in February 1820, he told his friend Charles Armitage Brown: ‘I know the colour of that blood! It is arterial blood. […] That drop of blood is my death warrant. I must die.’ In September 1820 he travelled to Rome in the hope that the warmer weather would help him to recover, but he died in February 1821. | |
|  | **Romanticism** | | Keats was one of the most important figures of early nineteenth-century Romanticism, a movement that espoused the sanctity of emotion and imagination, and privileged the beauty of the natural world. Many of the ideas and themes evident in Keats’s are quintessentially Romantic concerns: the beauty of nature, the relation between imagination and creativity, the response of the passions to beauty and suffering, and the transience of human life in time. His sumptuous sensory language, the idealistic concern for beauty and truth, and their expressive agony in the face of death are all Romantic preoccupation. | |
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