

# POEM ANALYSIS

---

Student's Name

Institution of Learning



# POEM ANALYSIS



## Introduction

John Keats is one of the most famous early English poets. He is famous for his undying passion for literature and art. His poetry is a reflection of his understanding of both loss and suffering, and how he found grandeur and beauty in his pain through poetry. Although he did not receive any major recognition when he was still alive, today his poetry is highly ranked in the world of literature. Some of his outstanding works include *On Solitude*, *Endymion*, *the Eve of St Agnes*, *Lamia*, *La Belle Dame sans Merci* and many others including the famous letters he wrote to his family. This paper is an analysis of John Keats famous poem *When I Have Fears*. The analysis is on the theme, styles used and the context in which the poem was written.



## Biography of the Poet: John Keats

Born in October 1745, to the family of Thomas and Frances Keats, he was the eldest among his four siblings. John Keats grew up to become one of the greatest English romantic poets of the second generation. He lived a short life that was dedicated to writing poetry to perfection. He attended school at a tender age, where he met the school's head teacher who later in life mentored him on his literature career. Both John's parents died when he was still young and their children were left at the care of their grandmother. The death of Keats' parents had an enormous effect on him but also in an abstract sense, this sparked his greater understanding of humanity and his passion to express his feelings through poetry.

His greatest fear was of death and immortality, so he took comfort and solace in art and literature. His poetry career, however, was unsuccessful

when he was alive. His works received hostile criticisms and reviews. Nevertheless, after his premature death, his works have received worldwide recognition as among the best English romantic poetry. Sadly, John Keats died at the young age of 25, in 1821 due to complications caused by tuberculosis and was buried in Rome. (Keats & Gittings, 1995).

## Poem Analysis

### *When I Have Fears*

When John Keats was experiencing feelings of fear of death and immortality, he wrote the poem *When I Have Fears*. It is a personal confession that reveals Keats's anxieties of death and limitations in life to achieve the things he wants before death takes him away. The context of this poem is the fear of death and the uncertainties in life. The poet here is a character obsessed with death especially after his entire family is plagued by disease and die. It is important to note that through these death experiences, Keats has an opportunity to his artistic abilities and create a death-entered reading that capture the conscious subject of immortality and death as related in the extract text below;

*"When I have fears that I may cease to be  
Before my pen has gleaned my teeming brain,  
Before high-piled books, in charactery,  
Hold like rich garners the full-ripened grain ;"* (Keats, 2001)

From the first line, the audience gets the sense that the speaker's greatest fear is death. The speaker further denotes that it is not just the cliché' fear of death that everybody experiences, it is the fear that he might die without achieving his fully blown potentials in life (*full ripened grain*) when death suddenly comes knocking at his door (*high-piled books*)

The poet's anxieties are also seen in the second line of the first stanza (*Before my pen has gleaned my teeming brain*) where he laments that his life might abruptly end even before his creativity is exhausted. The sentiments of the poet can be shared by the audience especially by people who feel dissatisfied with their achievements in life despite the countless ideas they have.

On the second and third stanza, the poet expresses his fears of never succeeding as an artist and becoming famous as a poet. Through the two stanzas, one can also establish his fear of romantic involvements, and this shows the poet's fear of failure in the realms of love. He expresses his deep sadness of a possibility that he may never see the woman and lover of his life as quoted by the text below;

*"When these fears occur, however, then the speaker goes to the shore—a limitation, a boundary:  
Of the wide world I stand alone, and think  
Till Love and Fame to nothingness do sink"* (Keats, 2001)

There is close comparison between John Keats's rhyming scheme and sonnets pattern to that of the Shakespearean sonnet. The similarity is on the title clause *When I Have Fears* where the three quatrains are subordinate to the word "when", similar to the Shakespearean sonnet *On First Looking into Chapman's Homer*. However, Keats adds his favorite theme of love, giving the poem a melodious and distinctive style that sets him aside as a unique poet.

The rich use of archaic words e.g. "*character*", borrowed from the Elizabethan poets is evident through out the poem. The language used by the poet is quite remote but in a more artistic sense, it gives the poem a more mature feeling (Keats & Gittings, 1995). In addition, the title of the

poem is compelling and persuasive to the audience to read the poem. The description and imagery used by Keats, captures the mind of the reader, intriguing the urge to read the entire poem.

## Conclusion

In a time when many poets and literature writers portrayed death as an evil monster, John Keats found a vast where he could acknowledge the existence of death and express his fears of dying one day. *When I Have Fears* is a poem that presents death not only as the end of mortality but also as a limitation man's ability to achieve his goals within a limited time. Moreover, the poem does not merely address the fear of dying but it also stresses on the point that since death is inevitable, man should try to achieve so much success, fame or love, since death is the end of all this earthly things. The poet's perspective renders life meaningless and the speaker is left to wonder, the true purpose of life and death.