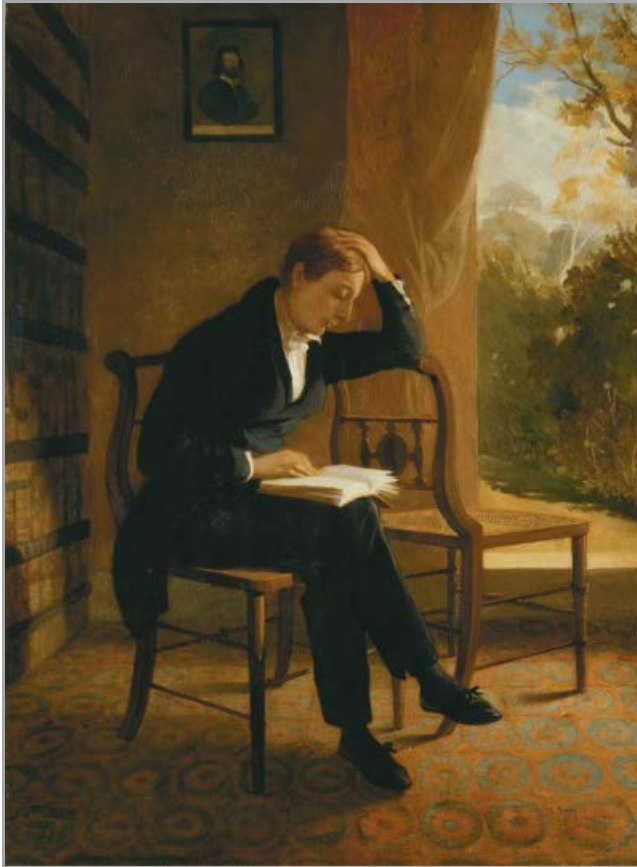


Module 6: Examining the World to Discover Truth

Topic 2 Content: "When I Have Fears That I May Cease to Be"

Introduction



"When I Have Fears That I May Cease to Be" by John Keats

When I have fears that I may cease to be
Before my pen has glean'd my teeming brain,
Before high-piléd books, in charactry,
Hold like rich garners the full ripen'd grain;

When I behold, upon the night's starr'd face,
Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance,
And think that I may never live to trace
Their shadows, with the magic hand of chance;

And when I feel, fair creature of an hour,
That I shall never look upon thee more,
Never have relish in the faery power
Of unreflecting love;-then on the shore

Of the wide world I stand alone, and think
Till love and fame to nothingness do sink.

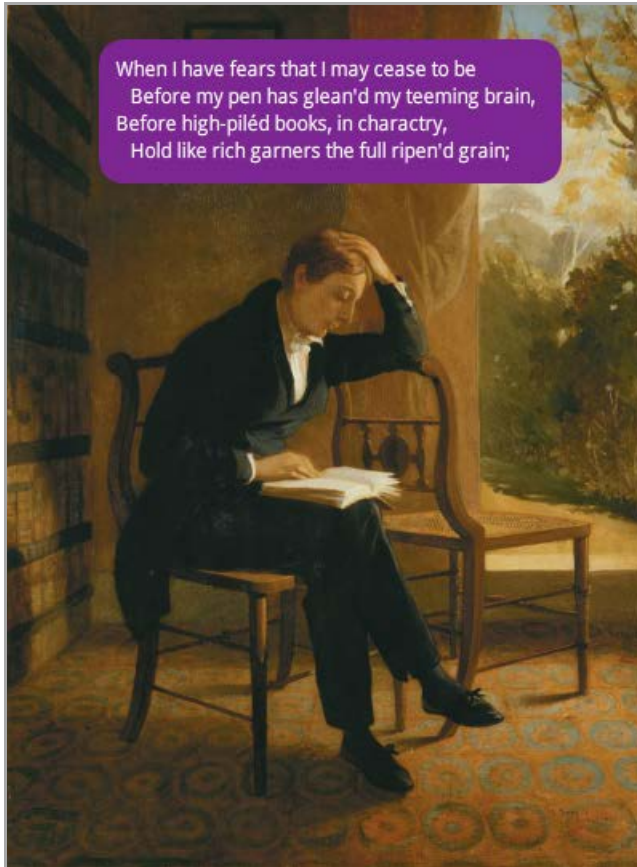
Click each part of the poem to
view a summary and analysis.

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Module 6: Examining the World to Discover Truth

Topic 2 Content: "When I Have Fears That I May Cease to Be"

First Quatrain



"When I Have Fears That I May Cease to Be" by John Keats

In the first quatrain, the speaker fears that his life will end before he has reached his creative potential as a writer. His brain is "teeming" with so many ideas that he could write piles of books, enough to fill a grain silo as if they were his rich harvest. He worries that his pen may not "glean" his thoughts before his time comes.

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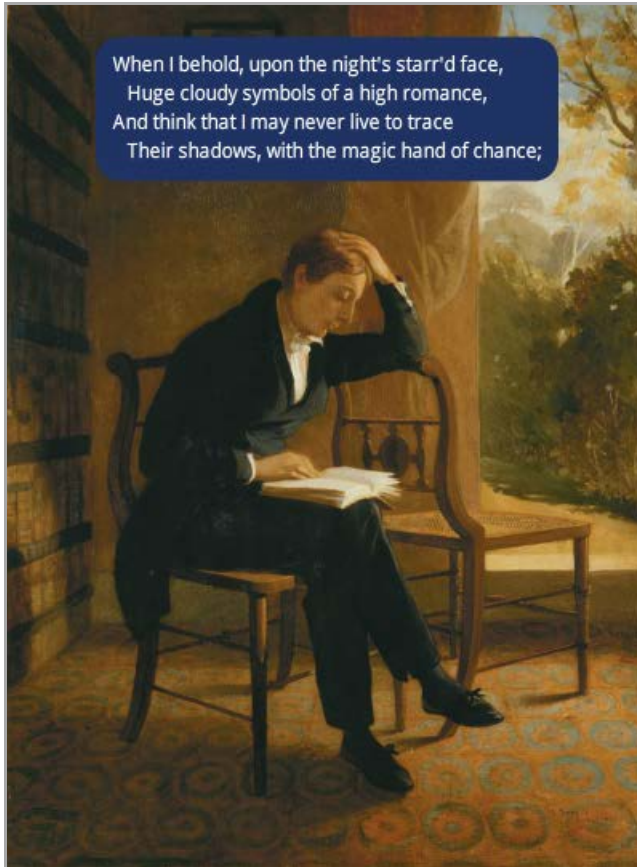
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Module 6: Examining the World to Discover Truth

Topic 2 Content: "When I Have Fears That I May Cease to Be"

Second Quatrain



"When I Have Fears That I May Cease to Be" by John Keats

In the second quatrain, the speaker is inspired by the nature around him, such as the starry night sky and huge clouds. When the speaker beholds this beauty, he sees "symbols of a high romance," or inspiration for a lofty poetic verse. He fears that he will never get the chance to "trace / Their shadows," or to translate his ideas into poetry on the page.

[RETURN](#)

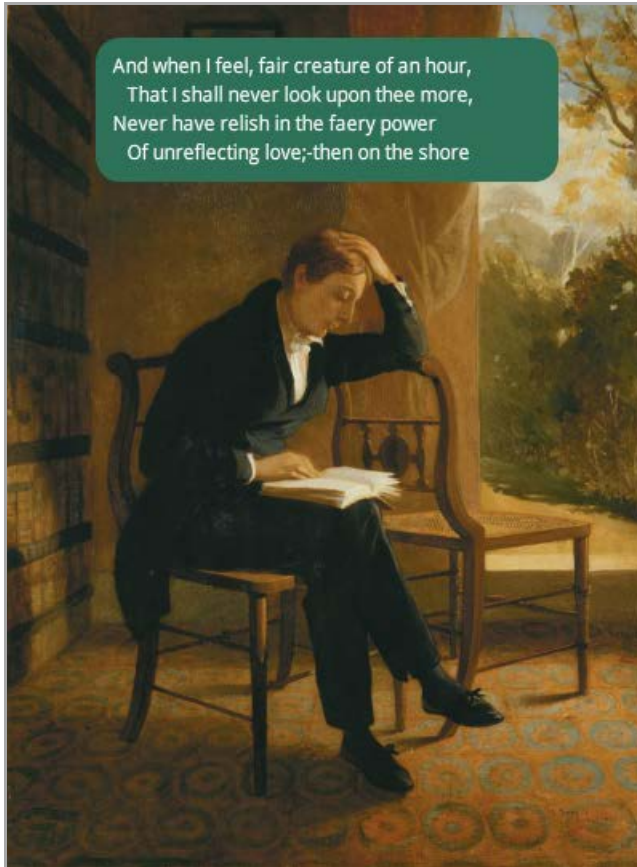
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Module 6: Examining the World to Discover Truth

Topic 2 Content: "When I Have Fears That I May Cease to Be"

Third Quatrain



"When I Have Fears That I May Cease to Be" by John Keats

In the third quatrain, the speaker reflects on the object of his affection, a "fair creature" whose life may be just as ephemeral, or short-lived, as the speaker's own. He feels that he may never enjoy the magical "faery power" of such a beautiful love, and then he brings the reader to "the shore." Unusual for a sonnet form, this last phrase that comes halfway through the last line of the third quatrain marks the beginning of the poem's shift.

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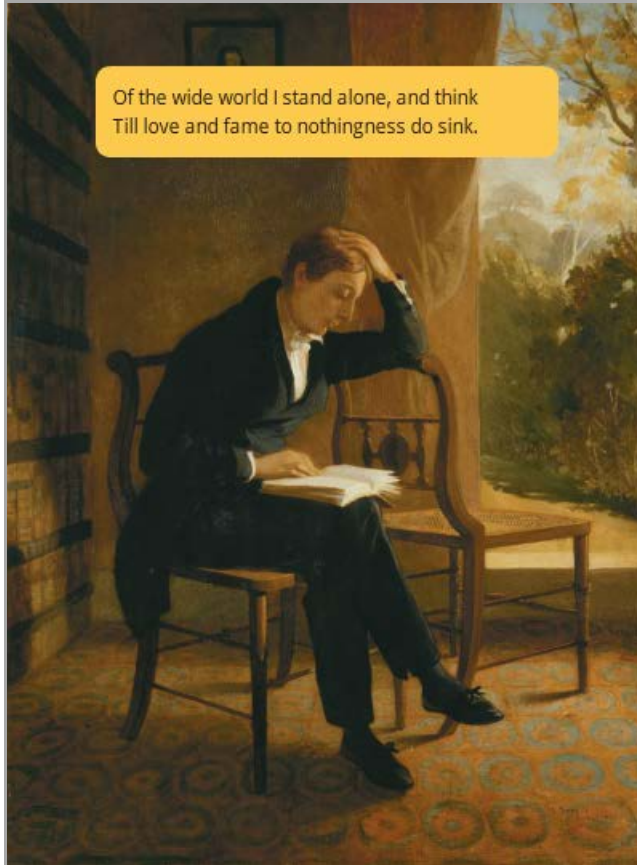
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Module 6: Examining the World to Discover Truth

Topic 2 Content: "When I Have Fears That I May Cease to Be"

Final Couplet



"When I Have Fears That I May Cease to Be" by John Keats

In the final couplet, the speaker reveals that the shore on which he stands is the cusp of the "wide world." It is here where the speaker stands alone and thinks. Perhaps by *thinking*, the poet means to say *reflecting*, or maybe *thinking* symbolizes the act of living and letting go of worries. Either way, the last line gives the reader the final resolution, that "love and fame" sink away into nothingness.

RETURN

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