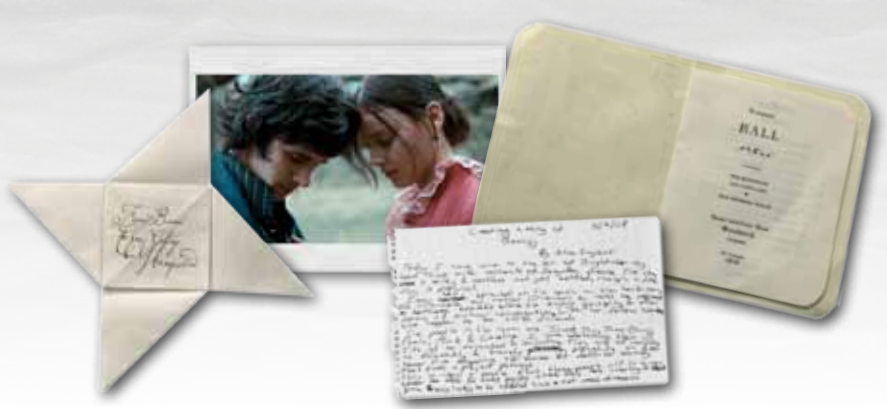


# Bright Star



## Student Task Sheet

### ROMANCE AND ROMANTICS

The modern interpretation of the term romance, as packaged up on Valentine's day, commonly constitutes flowers, chocolates and starry skies. To be romantic might mean surprising a loved one with a special gift or treat, or sending a card with a poorly-penned poem. Whilst the concept of romantic love is age-old there are certain key ideas within Western literature that are important in approaching Keats's poetry and that will give you a broader insight as you watch the film *Bright Star*.

#### Romance

Romance as a modern concept has a very different meaning to the origins of the term in the European literature of the Middle Ages. The literary Romance (note the capital letter) might feature a quest narrative, taking inspiration from the mythology surrounding King Arthur (see *Le Morte d'Arthur*, Sir Thomas Malory, C15th) mingled with other Christian myths and pagan superstitions. The beautiful woman who enchants the knight-at-arms will usually be a member of the nobility – a queen, perhaps or a lady – and may be chaste thus denying his attentions, or an enchantress seeking to relieve the knight of his chastity. The concept of 'courtly love' as played out in the circles at court required secrecy, tests of fidelity, occasional cruelty and frequent unrequited affections.

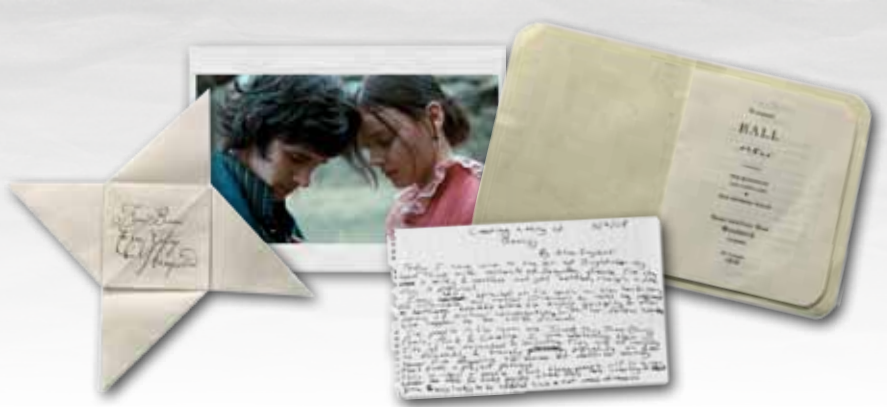
#### Romantics

Some concepts from Romance literature inspired the creative work produced by the Romantics – a broad term applied by critics and academics to the poets and artists working in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Romantic art and literature valued nature, imagination, spirituality and the supernatural, with individual liberty and the self also given prominence tying in with political ideals in the period immediately after the French Revolution. The key poets of the Romantic period are often, though by no means exclusively, grouped into two sets of three. The first generation includes Blake, Wordsworth and Coleridge with the later group comprising Byron, Keats and Shelley. For further information on these three see the separate worksheet on this site.

To gain a sense of how Keats's work fits into the literary canon, read and compare the following examples of his poetry and use your observations to answer the questions below:

1. Consider the narrative structure of *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* and *The Eve of St Agnes*. To what extent does each of the poems conform to, or deviate from the Medieval Romance? Are different interpretations possible?
2. To what extent do you think either of these poems be recognised as 'romantic' in the modern sense of the word?

# Bright Star



## On the Eve of St Agnes (extract)

VII.

Full of this whim was thoughtful Madeline: 55  
The music, yearning like a God in pain,  
She scarcely heard: her maiden eyes divine,  
Fix'd on the floor, saw many a sweeping train  
Pass by—she heeded not at all: in vain  
Came many a tiptoe, amorous cavalier, 60  
And back retir'd; not cool'd by high disdain,  
But she saw not: her heart was elsewhere:  
She sigh'd for Agnes' dreams, the sweetest of the year.

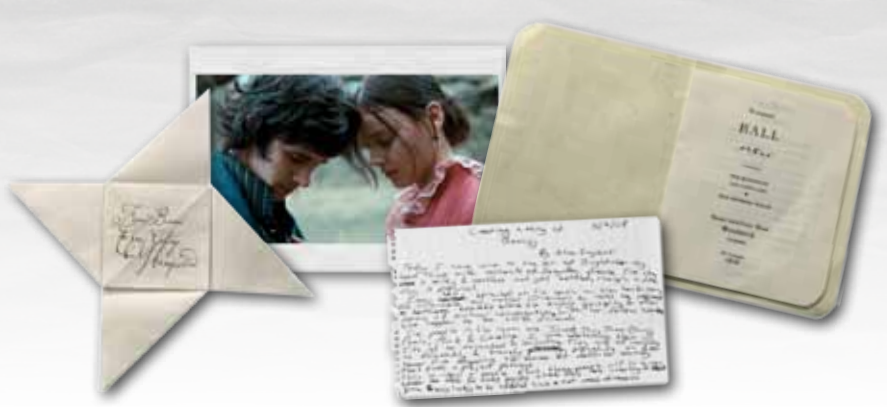
VIII.

She danc'd along with vague, regardless eyes,  
Anxious her lips, her breathing quick and short: 65  
The hallow'd hour was near at hand: she sighs  
Amid the timbrels, and the throng'd resort  
Of whisperers in anger, or in sport;  
'Mid looks of love, defiance, hate, and scorn,  
Hoodwink'd with faery fancy; all amort, 70  
Save to St. Agnes and her lambs unshorn,  
And all the bliss to be before to-morrow morn.

IX.

So, purposing each moment to retire,  
She linger'd still. Meantime, across the moors,  
Had come young Porphyro, with heart on fire 75  
For Madeline. Beside the portal doors,  
Buttress'd from moonlight, stands he, and implores  
All saints to give him sight of Madeline,  
But for one moment in the tedious hours,  
That he might gaze and worship all unseen; 80  
Perchance speak, kneel, touch, kiss—in sooth such things have been.

# Bright Star



## La Belle Dame Sans Merci

Oh what can ail thee Knight at arms  
Alone and palely loitering?  
The sedge has withered from the Lake  
And no birds sing.

Oh what can ail thee Knight at arms  
So haggard, and so woe begone?  
The Squirrel's granary is full  
And the harvest's done.

I see a lily on thy brow  
With anguish moist and fever dew,  
And on thy cheeks a fading rose  
Fast withereth too.

I met a Lady in the Meads  
Full beautiful, a faery's child,  
Her hair was long, her foot was light  
And her eyes were wild.

I made a garland for her head,  
And bracelets too, and fragrant zone,  
She look'd at me as she did love  
And made sweet moan.

I set her on my pacing steed,  
And nothing else saw all day long,  
For sidelong would she bend and sing  
A Faery's song.

She found me roots of relish sweet,  
And honey wild and manna dew,  
And sure in language strange she said  
I love thee true.

She took me to her elfin grot,  
And there she wept and sigh'd full sore,  
And there I shut her wild, wild eyes  
With kisses four.

And there she lulled me asleep,  
And there I dream'd, Ah! Woe betide!  
The latest dream I ever dreamt  
On the cold hill side.

I saw pale Kings, and Princes too,  
Pale warriors, death pale were they all;  
They cried, La belle dame sans merci,  
Thee hath in thrall.

I saw their starv'd lips in the gloam  
With horrid warning gaped wide,  
And I awoke, and found me here  
On the cold hill's side.

And this is why I sojourn here  
Alone and palely loitering;  
Though the sedge is withered from the Lake  
And no birds sing. . .