



JOSEPH SPECE

# Apothecary Days

*Of humble social status, the son of a London livery-stable manager, John Keats became enamored of Greek mythology and other studies but, orphaned, was compelled to apprentice himself to a surgeon at the age of 15.<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> S. Appelbaum.

Keats had the verse-matter massed like a clutch of coils, apt, directed from the first. He felt its intent vaguely those nights at Enfield,<sup>2</sup> lunches with Hunt,<sup>3</sup> fumbling with mint teastuffs & Abbey's<sup>4</sup> own Dar-jeeling.

<sup>2</sup> "Di doman non c'è certezza," &c.

<sup>3</sup> One of several associates in the act of making Humanities.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

*Commencement Day!* he might've thought. A livery-stable. Artemis beside a stag. It's supposed that Keats was poor at lunches. He was in the infirmary foyer betimes.

<sup>5</sup> Stressedunstressedunstressed.

How the dactyls<sup>5</sup> peeled like small paper from his mouth's warm pink, borne on laboratory airs to buoy in bowls of talc.

John Keats didn't rue his lot, I think. On

Commencement Day, unswayed.

<sup>6</sup> Conjecture.

A scrap of his private papers came  
through:<sup>6</sup> he told himself

*The soul alone  
makes wax a master's candle.*

<sup>7</sup> Incidental rhyme nearby, incidental poetic feeling,  
please.

Next, unswayed, dozens of herbs in their  
unmarked jars, he wished the room a  
kind of loom.<sup>7</sup> He found amongst these  
chicory root & fennel, apparently, to si  
bloods from the chaff;

*(b.)* primrose and wintergreen into  
the steaming pot;  
*(c.)* sage and silver mullein got his  
breathing right.

It's apparent some orderly were aware. A  
resident mused the man was responsible,  
therefore, for what came after.

In the room, Keats: pestle high, a stone in  
his white fingers—a fragment like

*Nor suffer thy pale fore-head to be kiss'd  
By nightshade*

slipped. He drove it back.

A young boy testifies:

<sup>8</sup> Whether stitch or whether balm is applied—?

—I stumbled in with cuts to mend.<sup>8</sup>

/// //

The circles that Mr. Keats grew into  
were —beyond his purview. What a pal-  
try thing, social style! In any case: Percy Shel-  
ley, Hazlitt, some talk of terms and  
jam. Indeed, Hunt couldn't keep him  
for the lime custards;<sup>9</sup> he headed back to  
Guy's,<sup>10</sup> loosed a cry like

<sup>9</sup> & further sweets of that afternoon.

<sup>10</sup> The infirmary in question.

*A lab alone, that's it,*

set the nurses aside, locked the door  
tight, bathed the thistle in lavender gums,  
juni- per, tonics. A chamomile purgative  
next, a fresh lancet, a fragment like

*Make not your rosary of yew-berries,  
Nor let the beetle, nor the death-moth be  
Your mournful Psyche*

—the talcs!—like

*Turning to poison while the bee-mouth sips*

Those vapors—Again—

(Part of my thesis is who would put a poet in the bounds of an office will find a jar upset here and there, and also find red ap- petite stirring in the mineral.)

Now with Keats. Now with the lancet & fleam & this room he ought at find a lover to aid, be unswayed, recover! A man of Romeo's sort to make meaning, for whom he'd fashion a hemlock nectar,<sup>11</sup> a flask undercover. From a nurse with ear at the door,<sup>12</sup> Keats:

<sup>11</sup> Whose taste profile is chinotto; and forensics have not got further.

<sup>12</sup> Conjecture from source. Conjecture.

—Balthazar beside he'd find me here,  
du- cats for a dram of bane to drink off if

<sup>13</sup> A failure of nerve for the nurse, who might've  
burst in right after:  
—*If* truth be dire, sir?

truth be dire.<sup>13</sup>

Keats, taking the Shakespeare further:

*Or was Juliet right  
to fall on a dagger*

//// /

<sup>14</sup> A body of water.

After which J.K. requested a short sab-  
bat- ical. We find him long swaying on  
the Wye<sup>14</sup> and feeling fey, mist-lost for  
each day he'd passed in that mortar.

He moored a matte green boat in the  
lakeside sludge, marked.

The noon was lone and morning he'd re-  
turn to Southwark, coat in hand. He let a  
fragment fly like

*Among the river shallows, borne aloft*

—it found no home, is.

Conjurers I polled say a magicked circle  
may've been drawn. Another says Keats  
simply came to conclusions.

<sup>15</sup> For whom Darjeeling had been put out by J.K.

<sup>16</sup> A paper magazine.

<sup>17</sup> *q.v.*

Abbey<sup>15</sup> was undone, for his part. The  
doctors, too, struggling & red, wondered  
on *The Examiner*<sup>16</sup> and “Keats’ unlucky  
head.”<sup>17</sup>

Fidgeting in his slicker, he stood.

*Then felt I like some watcher of the skies  
When a new planet swims into his ken*

They cried,

—What of wife? What of your station?

To which Keats lent reply again:

—Marriage? Station? My men, too much  
fact in these, too little occupation.