# Keats' secret of a healthy liver

30 Jan 2012 by Jancis Robinson

*I am indebted to John Barnard, retired Professor of English at Leeds University, who is currently working on a new edition of Keats's Letters for Penguin. He drew the following charming observations on claret to the attention of a mutual wine-loving friend, who passed them on to me. The picture is of the headstone of Keats's grave in Rome, on which he is described simply as a Young English Poet who wished to have engraved on his tombstone 'Here lies One Whose Name was writ in Water'.*

**John Keats to [his brother] George and Georgiana Keats, 19 February 1819 (in journal letter 14 February-3 May 1819, Rollins, II, 62)**

'I never drink now above three glasses of wine-and never have any spirits and water. Though by the bye the other day-Woodhouse took me to his coffee house-and ordered a Bottle of Claret-now I like Claret whenever I can have Claret I must drink it.-'t is the only palate affair that I am at all sensual in-Would it not be a good Speck to send you some vine roots-could I [for it] be done? I'll enquire-If you could make some wine like Claret to d[r]ink on summer evenings in an arbour! For really 't is so fine-it fills the mouth one's mouth with a gushing freshness-then goes down cool and feverless-then you do not feel it quarrelling with your liver-no it is rather a Peace maker and lies as quiet as it did in the grape-then it is as fragrant as the Queen Bee; and the more ethereal Part of it mounts into the brain, not assaulting the cerebral apartments like a bully in a bad house looking for his trul and hurrying from door to door bouncing against the waistcoat [for wainscot]; but rather walks like Aladin about his own enchanted palace so gently that you do not feel his step-Other wines of a heavy and spirituous nature transform a Man to a Silenus; this makes him a Hermes-and gives a Woman the soul and imortality of Ariadne for whom Bacchus always kept a good cellar of claret-and even of that he could never persuade her to take above two cups-'