

St Agnes is a Romantic Narrative Poem -

John Keats grew up in the atmosphere of Romanticism, dominated by Wordsworth and Coleridge. Romantic Poetry is marked by heightened sensibility, imagination, feelings, irate passion and love for beauty. Romantic poets worship nature and hanker after medieval adventures. Romantic art creates a beauty that is strange, mysterious and uncommon. Keats faithfully carries on the tradition of the Romantics and the Romantic qualities of the early 19th Century find their culmination in his Poetry. St Agnes is the master piece of Keats Romantic art of narration.

The 'Eve of St Agnes' is one of the best narrative poems ever composed. It is replete with all the minute peculiarities of Romanticism. In the true fashion of the Romantic movement, Keats moves in the Grecian world of classical beauty and the medieval world of Romantic mystery, vigour and energy. The present poem contains only one action that enables Keats for his sensual description and lyrical contemplation. There is no digression, no irrelevance and no intricate subplot. Like 'Endymion' or 'Lamia', it is also based on a medieval superstition.

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The story revolves round the belief that a maiden can find her future husband in a dream, if she performs certain ceremonies on the Eve of St. Agnes. Madeline, a rich medieval maiden, tries to test its truth. She leaves the company of the gay revellers and retires supperless to her bed. In the meantime, Porphyro, her passionate lover, crosses the moors and ventures in at the risk of his life. There is enmity between the families of the lovers. If Porphyro is discovered there, he will become a hapless victim to his enemies' wrath. But, Ingeba, an affectionate attendant of Madeline, meets him and brings him to the warm chamber.

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of her Lady in dream Madeline's desire is fulfilled and she sees her lover in dream. But, when she awakes, she finds her lover in flesh and blood, standing before her dreamy eyes. At last, they elope from the castle in the shade of rain and storm Keats' romantic treatment has made it a very interesting story.

So far as Keats' narrative technique is concerned it has its own peculiarity. It is connected with poetic beauty rather than narrative skill. He is an artist who dedicates himself to the exercise of imagination in the pursuit of beauty and truth. In this attempt he is the last one to be born and first one to die. See Keats' narrative art in the following lines.

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"At length burst in the argent revelry
With plume, tiara and all rich array
Numerous as shadows haunting fairy
The brain, new stuff'd, in youth, with triumphs gay
of old romance."

The poem begins with the striking description of cold and silent evening of St. Agnes. The sensual effect of the cold can be felt through the old bearded man whose breath is condensed by the cold air. -

"Knights, ladies praying in dumb oratories
He passeth by, and his weak spirit fails
To think how may ache in icy hoods and mails"

Then we are told about the chambers, full of light and colour, sound and warmth. -

"The level chambers, ready with their pride
were glowing to receive a thousand guests"

We are again brought to the quiet and calm room of Madeline.

"The maiden's chamber, belkew, bush'd and chested"
The whole of the poem is illuminated with the powerful sparks of Romantic elements. Keats' sensuousness and his

Love for beauty are treasured almost in each stanza. His flight of imagination and strong feelings and are at their full play from the beginning to the end of the poem. Really, Keats is at his best as a romantic narrative poet.

M.A. HAQUE

"Full on this casement shone the wintery moon

She knelt, so pure a thing, so free from mortal taint"
To conclude, here, Keats proceeds from point to point like a great story-teller. Every stanza unfolds a new situation showing further events and happenings. Suspense of the narrative art is also maintained through out the poem. Really, it is the most successful narrative poem of a romantic poet.