

John Keats's "The Eve of St. Agnes."

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John Keats's "The Eve of St. Agnes" is a colourful narrative poem based on medieval legends. It was composed in Spenserian Stanza in 1819 and was published in 1820. The poem unfolds the mythical story of young charming girl Madeline who is assured to have a dream of her future husband at midnight if she keeps fast and performs some special rituals. So, she impatiently waits for midnight and decides to bed without supper as rituals.

On the same evening, Porphyro, the lover of Madeline comes to her castle without being noticed as there has been hostility between the two families. However, Porphyro succeeds in persuading Madeline's old nurse Angela to lead and hide him to Madeline's bedroom. He succeeds also in getting all informations regarding Madeline's plan of her fast and belief on rituals. He suddenly thinks of making Madeline's plan a reality by his presence in her bedroom at midnight. He also makes Angela sure not to do any harm to

Madeline. Then Angila leads Porphyro to Madeline's Chamber and hide him closet.

The story now moves on with the description of Madeline's beauty. Madeline, lost in thought of her future husband, comes so hurriedly to her bedroom that the taper in her hand goes out. This incident prepares the ground for the meeting of the lovers in the bedroom. Madeline is completely unaware of the presence of Porphyro in her bedroom, she redresses herself. Here, Keats gives an aesthetic description of her ravishing beauty. She prepares to retire and takes off her cloth one by one. It is at this point the dream of her future husband turns into reality.

"Into her dream, he melted as a rose
Blendeth its odour with the violet."

As expected, her fast and rituals bring positive result. Both the lovers confess their mutual love and decides to have marriage. However, both the lovers are apprehensive of being caught, so Porphyro persuades Madeline to escape away from the castle. And finally, both the lovers leave the castle in a violent magnetic stormy night. And thus the poem comes to its happy end.

This poem is descriptive in nature where every minute detail is vividly presented. The Plot of the poem

resembles the tragic story of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. Like Romeo and Juliet, the lovers of this poem belong to two hostile families.

Keats's ~~sensuous~~ approach becomes vivid in this poem when he gives colourful descriptions of the bed-chamber. This description compels one to feel the inborn quality of sensuousness of the poet. Though the poem entices all the senses but the sense of sight is dominant. The description of stained window glass in the bedroom of Madeline is the beautiful example of the power of sight.

"Innumerable of stains and splendid dyes"
Madeline is transformed into a splendid angle by the stained glass as the moonlight shines through it.

Keats, deliberately uses 'contrast' as a dominant artistic device, for example, the chilled cold of January is contrasted with the warm love of the both lovers. The love of Madeline and Porphyro is foregrounded against the hatred of Madeline's family to Porphyro. Every detail gives special contribution to praise the romantic love in the poem. Some critics assume this romantic expression of love as Keats' expression of love for ^{his} sweet-heart Fanny Browne.