

Medievalism in  
The Eve of St. Agnes

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The Eve of St. Agnes is a narrative poem written by John Keats in romantic mode. The poet transports us to the Middle Ages. Medievalism is an important characteristic of the poetry of Romantic revival. Keats depicts a love story of the Middle Ages. The setting of the poem is in a medieval castle and chapel. The love story of Porphyro is set against the background of ~~an~~ family feud between barons. This love story reminds us of Shakespearean tragedy of Romeo and Juliet, which is a story of star crossed love of the medieval. The description of the old nursery with the ancient beadsman, the riotous rivalry, the beautiful decoration of Madeline's chamber and the easement with medieval imagery - all together take us back to the middle ages.

The poem is enriched by magic suggestiveness that is associated with the remote and the unfamiliar. The medieval setting of the poem in castle and nursery casts a romantic green over it whose resolutions spread all around the fabric a strange mysterious and enchanting tale of passionate love. The medieval cult of courtly love is a fine expression in stanza 34 where we find the lover, Porphyro worshipping Madeline as the Goddess. We have a romantic recital of the romantic activities of Porphyro in Madeline's bed chamber.

TO Keats. 'A thing of Beauty is a joy  
for ever! In this poem, we find Keats as a passion-  
ate lover of beauty. Madeline is the very embodi-  
ment of beauty. Her beauty is described in  
glaring sensual terms. First thing which attracts  
the romantic poet is Madeline's fair breast:

" Full on the casement shone the wintery moon,  
And threw warm glances on Madeline's fair breast.  
As down she knelt for heaven's grace and boon."

The moonlight passed into the chamber through  
the multicoloured window panes and threw lights of  
different colours on Madeline's fair breast as she  
knelt in prayer for God's grace and blessing.  
These different coloured lights cast a mysterious  
beauty on and around her and she looks like  
an angel. The sight of Madeline makes Porphyro  
grow faint. — "she knelt, so pure a thing,  
so free from mortal taint."

The <sup>words</sup> poetry of this poem make us surprised  
we are conscious of any classic restraint or any  
attempt at clipping or elaborate description.  
Keats looks upon fine phrases like a lover.  
His craftsmanship is fully evidenced in this  
poem. He has presented melody of verse.  
There is a beautiful example of musicality  
in this poem.

And still she slept an azure sleep,  
From silken Samarcand to cedar's Lebanon.  
As a sensual poet, Keats has provided a feast  
to his senses by his pictorial art. Thus the poem  
is a memorable piece of the romantic imagination.