

Introduction Poem: The Eve of St. Agnes

The Eve of St. Agnes is beautiful and compelling narrative poem. The Eve of St. Agnes contains only a single action and thus gives scope to Keats' genius of sensual description and lyrical contemplation. Musical in its matched verse, vivid in colours, sights and sound, the poem is generally thought of as a highly idealized picture of the world as imagined by the two young ecstatic lovers.

Keats' treatment of St. Agnes in the poem, in particular the hostile setting for the lovers and part played by the Cerberus aged female attendant is chiefly influenced by

Romeo and Juliet, with some additional touches from Mrs. Radcliff's Gothic tales and possibly from the version of the medieval romance of Tristan and Isolde and Blanche fleur in George Ellis's 'specimens of Early Romances'.

The Eve of St. Agnes is the most entrancing of English verse tales. The narrative itself is well-sustained - but there are negative virtues: in themselves they can't give the poem perpetual ethos. The poem has all the brightness of a medieval illuminated manuscript, all the old-world charm of Spenser, whose stanza Keats has here used.

The poem is also Keats's most important

(3)

of his persistent, idealized vision of the middle age, that major element in English Romanticism; and appropriately in further exploration of narrative forms, he adopted the Spenserian stanza of the *Faerie Queene*, employing it, on the whole with considerable skill and ~~awareness~~ ~~effect~~ effectiveness.

The deliberate contrast of light and shade, of cold and warmth, of life and death is a direct expression of Keats' oxymoronic vision of existence.

To be continued.

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