

L.N. Mittal Univ. Dombivli

B.A. (Part-I) Eng. (H) - Paper-II

TOPIC:

The Eve of St. Agnes as a
narrative poem

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The Eve of St. Agnes is an unforgettable narrative poem of John Keats, a romantic poet of the second generation. The poet narrates romantic love adventures of Porphyro and Madeline in lucid and clear expressions. The charm of the narration continues till the end of the poem.

It is an accomplished fact that Keats made a mark as a successful narrative poet in some of his great poems like, Endymion, Isabella, Lamia and Hyperion but The Eve of St. Agnes is the only immaculate romantic narrative poem. The poet has blended two themes in this poem. One is based on the popular superstition regarding St. Agnes Eve and the other is the love of an adventurous youth Porphyro for Madeline, the daughter of a hostile person. It resembles with Shakespearean Romeo and Sir Walter Scott's Lochinvar. Keats does not treat the subject tragically as one notices in the story of Romeo and Juliet, he makes happy ending of his story as in Scott's Young Lochinvar.

The story of the poem in discussion hinges on the popular belief that if a virgin young girl performs certain rites on the eve of St. Agnes (i.e. 28th January), she might get ~~glance~~ sight of her future husband. in a dream while sleeping on her back with her hands on the pillow above her head.

The first three stanzas establish an atmosphere of bitter cold and old age in a great medieval castle. The actual story begins with stanza VI where the poet narrates the superstitious

notions about the festival of Agnes Eve. The narration is so simple and clear that it makes a reader completely absorbed in the story. We are first introduced to the Beadsmen employed to say prayers on behalf of the castle owners. The old women's fingers grow numb as he tells his prayer beads. Madeline, the daughter of the Baron who owns the castle attends the dance party but leaves as soon as she can to carry out necessary rituals in the hope of dreaming of her lover, Porphyro, a young man, who has secretly come to the castle and managed to gain entrance with the help of Angela, an old nurse, and hides in her bed chamber where he sees her come in. Thus, without wasting any more stanzas on the introduction, the poet presents the central idea of the poem. He very skillfully brings together Madeline and Porphyro. Madeline is well determined to have a glimpse of her lover in her dream. Therefore, the poet attracts our attention on the activities of Madeline. The romantic narration really begins at this stage and moves on without any interruption.

Thus we find that Keats is an expert in narrating story. The Plot of the story is well managed. It has a beginning, middle and an end. The story provides gorgeous stuff of love and romance for the readers.