

L.N. Mithila Univ. Darbhanga

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

Sensuousness / Use of Imagery /  
Descriptive Skill / poetic character-  
istics in The Eve of St. Agnes

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According to Milton, poetry should be simple, sensuous and impassioned. Keats himself longed for a life of sensation rather than thought and there is good deal of truth in Browder's assertion - "Keats is the great poet only when the senses capture him!" The German critic Browder rightly considers him to be a poet of all embracing sensuousness. According to Matthew Arnold, too, Keats is abundantly and enchantingly sensuous.

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Keats loved sense of perception, but had no illusion about their inballibility. For him, the luxury of food is connected with and in a sense gives place to the luxury of sensation. Its best example is the table spread with 'dainties' beside Madeline's bed in The Eve of St. Agnes. Around in that famous sense the whole paraphernalia of luxurious delicacy is the invoked warmth of the south, the bland and delicate food. The privacy of the bed and the voluptuousness of the sexual encounter are mixed to glow into an island of bliss. As an image of man's life it has the force of verisimilitude.

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The word 'sensation' implies the grandification of the five physical senses which all poets in general and Keats in particular possess. This extra sensitiveness to the senses like touch is abundantly present in the poetry of Keats. He delights and luxuriates in all those objects which please the senses. He longs for 'A life of sensation rather than of thoughts'. He teased his eyes with everything that was beautiful. He loved the principle of 'Beauty in

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all things. Beauty enraptured and intoxicated him everywhere in woman, in natural objects, scenery and everything. The soft silken touch of a lovely maiden or the leaning breast of the woman thrilled him as much as the soft petal of a newly blossomed flower. He revelled in the physical ~~de~~ enjoyment of all sensory delights. His poetry abounds in description of all types of sensuous experience. The description of madeline when she addresses herself in bed, ignorant of the presence of her lover, Porphyro, lying hidden in the same bed chamber. —

"She loosens her fragrant bodice by degrees  
Her rich attire creeps rustling to her knees  
Half hidden, like a mermaid in seaweed!"

The above quoted lines present an unsurpassable example of Keats' sensuous appeal and suggestive charms. The senses of touch, smell, sight and hearing are all gratified. Both the senses of touch and smell are gratified by the perfume of fruits and syrups which the poet lovingly enumerates in The Eve of St. Agnes.

~~The~~ The poet himself asserts that thought by itself makes no poetry at all. Sensation gives elevation of deepest truth through concrete perceptions. Thus it can be concluded that Keats is the most sensuous poet of all the poets of the Romantic period.