

The eve of st agnes: my response

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Readers have responded differently to being told that the story happened long ago. How do you respond?

Initially 'The Eve of St Agnes' is set in a medieval period 'long ago', which you can determine from the distinct use of archaic language; ideas of chivalry and patriarchy are evoked at the use of this time period thus the ongoing theme of the supernatural, demonstrated by Madeline's firm belief in The eve of St Agnes, serves to induce in the reader thoughts of an alternate immortal life, an idea that is further established through the way in which Madeline and Porphyro are able to escape the castle full of people who would kill and abandon the couple, which one would think to be impossible.

Furthermore Keats' describes the two focal characters as 'phantoms' of which one interpretation could be that life goes on and that death is a mere inconvenience, which again further adds to the concept of immortality in the poem. The references to supernatural folklore; 'elfin grot' and 'faery land' conceptualise the idea of Porphyro and Madeline idealistically untouchable. However, the final stanza, in which the beadsman dies, destroys the immortality image that Keats had previously built up; reminding the reader that death is for everyone.

Furthermore, this idealism entering into realism is perhaps indicative of awaking from a dreamlike state in which the reader becomes more aware of the danger that Madeline is maybe in. Linking to this fear of Madeline that is newly instilled in the reader is the abrupt and ironic dismissal of love after the forty first stanza, which demonstrates the idea that love itself was 'long ago'.

The fact that previously in the *Eve of St Agnes* Porphyro's heart was 'on fire' for Madeline leading him to risk his capture and death for her initially provided a positive image for the reader allowing one to trust his character, however the forty first stanza utilizes a significant amount of cadaverous imagery through the Baron 'dreaming of many a woe' and the idea of Angela dying with 'meagre face deform' which simply dismisses the whole theme of love and is perhaps representative of Madeline's resignation to her fate - either run away with Porphyro or stay and be disgraced and abandoned by her family- that is typical of a patriarchal society. The abruptness with which love is dismissed is a dramatic conclusion to the poem that leaves a foreboding atmosphere as to Madeline's fate, and it is this '[ash] old' atmosphere that perhaps attempts to capture the suppressed and 'nightmar'd' existence that women experienced in medieval times owing to being treated as possessions by men, another interpretation is that Madeline and Porphyro's '[fleeing] into the storm' is them escaping these social conventions leaving behind the 'dark, cold' world. The baron's dreams of 'witch and demon and large coffin-work' are perhaps symbolic of Madeline and Porphyro as characters, foretelling the formidable end that is to come to the couple, or more generally maybe the failure of escaping from patriarchal society. The negative outcome of her escape with Porphyro serves to contradict the so called escape that the two had from the castle. And in turn this is suggestive that whilst one can attempt to escape social confines and convictions - such as St Agnes herself attempted - these attempts always fail eventually, much in the way that St Agnes was later burned for heresy.