

Original Paper

Keats' Gender Ambivalence: Porphyro's Dominance and Passivity in "The Eve of St. Agnes"

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Abstract

This essay studies how the portrayal of characters in "The Eve of St. Agnes" relates to gender issues from the views of feminism. In this long poem, the reinforced patriarchal ideology presented through Porphyro's dominance – his "stratagem", his "male gaze" and his "hunting", and the undermined and even reversed patriarchal ideology presented through Porphyro's passivity – his "being gazed" and Madeline's "resistance", intermingle with each other. As a result, "The Eve of St. Agnes" is an ideologically conflicted text in that it both strengthens and weakens patriarchal ideology, which is largely due to Keats' gender ambivalence. Porphyro's dominance and passivity are externalized display of Keats' inner conflicts caused by gender ambivalence. Eventually, Keats ends this conflict by offering a solution: to reach an androgynous equilibrium between the two ends of his internal gender tension, transcending traditional gender determinations. It is concluded that this solution allows Keats' two selves to get reconciled and liberated in his poetry.

Keywords

"The Eve of St. Agnes", Keats, Gender Ambivalence

1. Introduction

John Keats (31 October 1795 - 23 February 1821) was the second generation of Romantic poets with a British origin, contemporary with Lord Byron and Percy Bysshe Shelley. "The Eve of St. Agnes" is one of Keats's most challenging poems in regards to the views on social structures, life, death, men, and women expressed through his emotions and beliefs.

Feminist approaches is at the heart of this essay. Feminist criticism examines the way in which literature reinforces or undermines the economic, political, social, and psychological oppression of women. In other words, how the work emphasizes and deemphasizes patriarchal ideology.

“The Eve of St. Agnes” is regarded as Keats’s most controversial narrative poem by modern Keats scholars whose opinions sharply differ in the relationship between Porphyro and Madeline. In the eyes of metaphysical critics who think Keats was a metaphysician, there is pure and romantic love and the narrative poem is “a great affirmation of love” (Wasserman, 127). While their opponents, mostly Jack Stillinger and his followers, who deny the existence of such a romance therein and strongly believe that such a relationship, identifiable with the relationship between Iachimo and Imogen in Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline*, ironically represents deception and insult toward females. In between, some scholars deem that Porphyro’s behaviour, though deceptive, is based on the submission of female characters. Thomson contends that Madeline, though may have been tempted to misjudge, in following this festival tradition, has in fact chosen to be true to her own sexual desires (343). Ultimately Madeline chooses to believe what she sees, which suggests that she is at least not disgusted with Porphyro’s presence, or even willing to accept it (Thomson, 345). Lu summarizes the key arguments of these understandings from which a variety of relevant modern interpretations by western Keats scholars stem and into which nearly all other interpretations are confined. In a broader sense, he argues that critical approaches to the understanding of “The Eve of St. Agnes” provide modern Keats scholars with an effective methodology which is universally applicable to the analyses of Keats’s important poems (18).

However, although much attention has been paid to interpret the relationship, few focus on what leads to the variety of interpretation and few connects the interpretation of the text to the poet, Keats, by exploring his gender ideology and his inner conflict. By adopting feminist approaches for analysis, this essay reveals how the depiction in the poem reflects Keats’ gender ambivalence and how Keats eventually ends this conflict by offering a solution.

2. Porphyro’s Dominance: Reinforced Patriarchal Ideology Through Porphyro’s “Stratagem”, “Male gaze” and “Hunting”

The main points of metaphysical critics’ interpretation are that Madeline’s awakening to find Porphyro in her bedroom is a document about the validity of the visionary imagination; and Porphyro in the course of the poem makes a spiritual pilgrimage, ascending higher by stages until he arrives at transcendent reality in Madeline’s bed.

However, what is perhaps most telling against the critics, in connection with the religious language of “The Eve of St. Agnes,” is that when Porphyro calls himself “A famish’d pilgrim, – saved by miracle,” his words must be taken ironically, unless Keats has forgotten, or hopes the reader has forgotten, all the action leading to the consummation. The miracle on which Porphyro congratulates himself is in fact “a stratagem that he has planned and carried out to perfection” (Stillinger 538).

According to the popular superstition associated with St. Agnes’ Eve, a young maiden who fasts and neither speaks nor looks about before she goes to bed may get sight of her future husband in a dream. Porphyro’s first command of Madeline’s nurse Angela, “Now tell me where is Madeline” (114), is followed by an oath upon the holy loom used to weave St. Agnes’ wool, and it is implied that he is well

aware of what night it is. This implication well-prepared Porphyro's following actions. "St. Agnes' Eve," says Angela, "God's help! my lady fair the conjuror plays / This very night: good angels her deceive!" (123-125). As she is laughing at Madeline's folly, Porphyro gazes at her until "Sudden a thought came like a full-blown rose. . . then doth he propose / A stratagem" (136-139). The overwhelming "stratagem" comes to be felt in the poem – a ruse, an artifice, a trick for deceiving. For Angela, the deception of Madeline by good angels is funny, but Porphyro's is another kind and no laughing matters. She is startled to call him "cruel," "impious," and "wicked" (140, 143); the harshness of the last line of her speech highlights her reaction: "Thou canst not surely be the same that thou didst seem" (144).

Porphyro swears "by all saints" not to harm Madeline: "O may I ne'er find grace / When my weak voice shall whisper its last prayer, / If one of her soft ringlets I displace" (145-148). He then enforces his promise with a suicidal threat: Angela must believe him, or he will . . . Awake, with horrid shout" his foemen, "And beard them" (151-153). Since Angela is "A poor, weak, palsy-stricken, churchyard thing" (155), she resigns to him, promising to do whatever Porphyro wishes – leading him to Madeline's chamber and hiding him in a closet.

At this point, our disbelief that this poem is a mere affirmation of fairy-tale romance is fully aroused. Porphyro's stratagem is frowned on due to the reinforced patriarchal ideology behind it. In this arena of the conflict between femininity and masculinity, Porphyro and Angela both perfectly match the traditional gender characteristics. Porphyro, the man, is decisive in that he proposes the stratagem and is strong enough to convince Angela to do whatever he wishes by using different tactics—a promise to comfort her and a suicidal threat to frighten her. Contrary to Porphyro, Angela, the woman, is weak and submissive in that she does not choose to reject Porphyro's unjustified demands, which, seen from today's social rules, are sometimes "punished in the criminal courts" (Lu 20).

Thereafter, Porphyro first hides in Madeline's closet "of such privacy / That he might see her beauty unspied" (165-166). He then conceals himself behind the curtains—which is again a dark place safe from the others' gaze, and peeps naked Madeline. Porphyro's peeping-Tom behaviour in darkness (it is Madeline who carries the taper) can be seen as a "male gaze" toward Madeline. In this definitive male gaze, the projection of an ideal ego of the male onto the female figure demonstrates the duality-based structure of the language in which Mulvey asserts "man is the active/looker-on and the woman is the passive/looked-at" (440). Joy comes from a *m'acconnaissance* (misrecognition) in perceiving this image as ideal and identifying with it (misrecognition because the ego is in fact full of lack). The ego's identification with "the other" is further followed by its sense of mastery over it. By hiding in the closet, cameraing the perfect naked body without being noticed by others, Porphyro's ideal ego overrides Madeline, which is a typical dominance of Porphyro in the relationship.

In "The Eve of St. Agnes", it is Madeline who plays "the other", the object of the male gaze, the object of desire and inspection. As the object of the gaze, Madeline bears all the idealizations projected on her. Porphyro, who stands for the subject, desire to be united with his "peerless bride" (167) in order to satiate his lack of idealization. Madeline is described several times in the poem as an ideal, perfect,

immortal creature: she is “divine” (57), a “splendid angel” (223), “seraph fair” (276), and even “heaven” (277), etc.

Porphyro’s voyeur-like behaviour and the idealization of his object of desire go hand in hand with objectifying the other and subjecting her to a mastering look. His position as the active observer is highlighted by Madeline’s passive, “supine” (52), “slept” (252) position. The descriptions of Madeline’s passivity and stillness are suggested in images such as her sleepy eyes in her “silken, hush’d, and chaste” chamber (187), “a mission’d spirit, unaware” (193), “blinded” and “shut” (242-243). In Stanza XXV, line 225, Porphyro further describes Madeline as “so pure a thing, so free from mortal taint”, which indicates that Porphyro both objectifies Madeline as “a thing,” to control over her, and idealizes her as an immortal, innocent being, to confirm his own ideality and completeness.

In addition, the animal imagery and the image of hunting also cement the mastery of Porphyro. In Madeline’s “silken, hush’d, and chaste” chamber, Porphyro takes “covert”. He is “pleas’d amain” (188)—pleased exceedingly by his successful stratagem, as the tone of the narrator’s words immediately follows: “Now prepare, / Young Porphyro, for gazing on that bed; / She comes, she comes again, like ring-dove fray’d and fled” (196-198). The mention of “ring-dove” is interesting considering that Porphyro has taken “covert”—the position of the hunter (or perhaps merely the bird-watcher). There follows a series of bird images that perhaps share some linkage with the hunter’s game. In a variant to the stanza Madeline is “an affrighted Swan”; here she is a “ring-dove”; in the next stanza her heart is “As though a tongueless nightingale should swell / Her throat in vain, and die, he-art-stifled, in her dell” (206-207); later in the poem she is “A dove forlorn” (333); still later Porphyro speaks of robbing her nest (340), and in a variant says, “Soft Nightingale, I’ll keep thee in a cage / To sing me.”

It is unlikely that all these images carry connotations of hunting, nestrobbing, and caging since Romeo will “climb a bird’s nest” when he ascends the ladder to Juliet’s room (II. v. 76). But the single comparison of Madeline’s heart to a “tongueless nightingale” is significant. Keats’ unique use of the nightingale image, according to Field, “opens a darker view of the poem than has yet been presented” (246). The tongueless nightingale is related to the myth of Philomel, a short and violent story. Tereus, the husband of Procne, rapes Procne’s sister Philomel, and then cuts out her tongue to prevent her from disclosing the truth to Procne. In the end of the story, all three are transformed into birds. Procne becomes a sparrow, Tereus a hoopoe, and Philomel a tongueless nightingale. “The details of the Philomel myth, central to the Shakespeare play, appear to have exerted a powerful influence on Keats while he was writing ‘The Eve of St. Agnes’” (Field 246). If we deliberate the comparison of Madeline’s heart to a “tongueless nightingale” and consider the Philomel myth as undersong of the poem, we may be closer to the dark heart of one possibility of the matter: the sex consummation is, in nature, a rape. The image that embraces the fully described rape of Philomel introduces a further note of evil that prevents us from losing ourselves in the special morality of fairy romance. Madeline has the status of one of St. Agnes’ “lambs unshorn” (71); she is a maiden innocent and pure, but a possible rape is about to knock her out of that status. Although this is only one possible interpretation of sex

consummation, the raising of such a possibility undoubtedly indicates Philomel's dominance over Madeline and the reinforced patriarchal ideology here.

So far, "The Eve of St. Agnes" has illustrated the patriarchal power relation dualities of language in the Symbolic order that may be summarized in antinomic duos such as Porphyro (man) / Madeline (woman), subject/object, looker-on/looked-at, active/passive, and hunter/prey. Porphyro's dominance manifests itself in his "stratagem", his "male gaze" and his "hunting", which, all reinforce the patriarchal ideology.

3. Porphyro's Passivity: Undermined and Even Reversed Patriarchal Ideology Through Porphyro's "Being gazed" and Madeline's "Resistance"

Although certain actions, words and images of Porphyro manipulated by Keats do indicate the dominance of masculinity over femininity, the poem is by no means a text centers only around reinforced patriarchal ideology.

If we tap into the concept of Lacanian gaze, by which the gendered "male gaze" is inspired, we will find one interesting point: "Gaze, refers to the uncanny sense that the object of our eye's look or glance is somehow looking back at us of its own will. This causes the subject to lose some sense of autonomy upon realizing it is also an object" (Felluga 33). As Žižek elaborates, "the eye viewing the object is on the side of the subject, while the gaze is on the side of the object" (109). In fact, when the subject looks at the the object, the object is "always already looking at it from a point at which [it] cannot see" (Žižek 109). Thus, the looked-at is not always in a passive state. To put it in Beth Newman's words, there is a "resistance" on the part of the looked-at (464). If the second part of Lacan's gaze theory, with "gaze" as a signifier for *objet a* (the object of desire), is taken into consideration, the change from "I look" to "I'm looked at" is inevitable. In "The Eve of the St. Agnes", the change does happen.

This is why readers may have the impression that Porphyro is under the gaze of the castle and of Madeline's kinship. Different parts of the castle are described in a vigilantly scrutinized stance: the voices, "The carved angels, ever eager-eyed" who "Star'd" (34-35), the "glaring watch...with ready spears" (254), "the wakeful bloodhound" beside the Porter with "his sagacious eye" (265), and even the diamonded casement "All garlanded with carven imag'ries" and its "shielded scutcheon blush'd with blood of queens and kings," which occupies a whole stanza (XXIV) in the poem, and acts as if looking with all its glow and glory at Porphyro, humiliating and frightening him like the "Lacanian sardine can". At this point, the strong man is dwarfed by the exposed weakness of Porphyro. Being passively gazed, Porphyro may even have a sense of malaise and anxiety due to the unknown observation. In fact, Porphyro is truly frightened lest one of those "barbarian hordes," "hyena foemen," and "hot-blooded lords" (85-86) from the castle discover him. Hence, the patriarchal ideology is undermined to some extent.

Madeline, however, poises herself in the poem as a Medusan other "to thwart Porp-hyro's challenge to her self-possession" (Kanupriya 236) by looking back at him, melting him into her dream (320), and

turning him into stone: “Her blue affrayed eyes wide open shone / Upon his knees he sank, pale as smooth-sculptured stone” (297-298). Thus, despite Madeline being the victim of the “peeping-Tomism” (Stillinger 75) of Porphyro and despite Madeline being supposed not to look “behind; nor sideways” in her rite (53), she does look and, thereupon, defies Porphyro and deprives him of his mastery. She, hence, gains the agency of the observer, rather than remaining mute and observed. Madeline, according to Kanupriya, is “Medusan in that her gaze represents a female power to freeze / frieze the enthralled male and ‘enchant, subvert, or threaten’ his voice” (241). She becomes “La belle dame sans mercy” (“The beautiful lady without mercy”) evoked earlier in Porphyro’s ditty (292).

The Medusan gaze also indicates that Madeline, as a woman, harbors the same desire as Porphyro does. Madeline’s main purpose and “desire” (54), have been to achieve a vision of Porphyro that night through St. Agnes rituals – therefrom the title of the poem. Madeline has likewise idealized Porphyro as an “ethereal man” (318), with “spiritual and clear” eyes and “immortal” looks (310, 313). Porphyro is the one “desired”. He stands for the passive object while Madeline the active subject.

Madeline’s gaze testifies to the fact that the female, the other, sees and therefore resists being reduced to an appropriable object. That is, Madeline, here similar to Medusa, “defies the male gaze as Western culture has constructed it: as the privilege of a male subject, a means of relegating women to the status of an object.” (Newman 451) Such defiance is surely unsettling, because it spoils the pleasure that the male subject takes in gazing and the hierarchy by which he asserts his dominance. By attributing the gaze to Madeline and reversing the object/subject, passive/active positions, Keats gets to break such fixities of language and the hierarchal order in the gaze relationship between the genders. Patriarchal ideology is challenged, undermined to a great degree and even reversed.

Madeline’s resistance manifests itself not only through her Medusan gaze, but also through another point. The point is that Madeline as the embodiment of the *objet* (the object of desire), and, therefore, as the object of the gaze, does not fulfill Porphyro’s wish. As Copjec describes, in the gaze, “one is looking for confirmation of the truth of one’s being or the clarity of one’s vision, but the gaze of the other will not validate one. In the encounter with the gaze, one meets not a seeing eye, but a blind one” (qtd. in Garofalo 11). This leads to the inevitable failure of mirroring reciprocity in the gaze relationship. After peeping at the idealized, seraph-like Madeline, Porphyro, who is by now near enough to his object of desire, beseeches Madeline to validate this ideality, and to confirm the fantasy of his self-completion, by reciprocating his gaze in all divinity and perfection: “And now, my love, my seraph fair, awake! / Thou art my heaven, and I thine eremite: / Open thine eyes, for meek St. Agnes’ sake, / Or I shall drowse beside thee, so my soul doth ache.” (276-279)

Madeline, though, does not at first respond: “It seem’d he never, never could redeem / From such a stedfast spell his lady’s eyes; / So mus’d awhile, entail’d in woofed phantasies.” (286-288) When she opens her eyes, it is “so dreamingly” a cold blind look that “still beheld / Now wide awake, the vision of her sleep” (298-299). This look does not confirm or satisfy what Porphyro yearns for, but resists, fails,

and scares him, sinking him to his knees so that, kneeling “with joined hands and piteous eye,” he “fear[s] to move or speak” (305-306).

According to Lacan, the object of gaze is an “ever threatening real” over which the subject projects its narcissistic fantasy of fullness and completion. However, coming too close to this object of gaze threatens to inevitably throw the subject into the Lacanian gaze in the end: “the realization that behind its desire is nothing but its lack” (Felluga 38). Hence, the gaze Madeline casts back at Porphyro not only fails to affirm his idealization but also shockingly hits him with the reality and discloses to him that he lacks too many things. He needs to cast a male gaze upon Madeline and find a perfect ego which can provide him with a sense of perfection and completeness. He apprehends how fantasized his perception of a perfect, unified ego has been. Here, Madeline, the woman, is the active one who makes Porphyro understand himself. Porphyro, again, is in a passive position as he cannot figure out his full of lack and the failure of his fantasy without Madeline.

Porphyro’s “being gazed” and Madeline’s resistance to Porphyro’s gaze, including gazing at him back and failing his fantasies, deprive Porphyro of his dominance and doom him to a passive position. In this part of the poem, patriarchal ideology is constantly being undermined and even revised.

4. Keats’ Gender Ambivalence and His Solution: the Creation of an Androgynous Equilibrium between the Two Ends of Gender Tension

By analyzing Porphyro’s dominance and passivity, we reach the conclusion that “The Eve of St. Agnes” is an ideologically conflicted text because the poem both reinforce and undermine patriarchal ideology. The reason why such an ideologically conflicted poem is composed can be found in Keats’ philosophy towards gender, and to be more exact, his gender ambivalence.

In his poetics, John Keats introduced “negative capability” as an essential asset to be acquired by each poet. This Keatsian notion, which focuses on the impersonality of the poet, is opposed to “the bullying egotism of ‘Wordsworth & c’” (Homans, 343). In spite of the masculinity of Wordsworth, Byron and other romantics who exploited their poetry, to borrow Laura Mulvey’s words, for “the satisfaction and the reinforcement of their ego” (440), Keats used rather a feminine, receptive, ego-free technique, which also attracted many women readers. “In the nineteenth century, the masculine self was thought to have a strong sense of its autonomy and ego boundaries...The feminine self was thought to be more pliable and yielding” (Mellor 215).

Keats, however, did not aspire to define his poetic self within the dominant frames of the masculine society at that time: “As to the poetical Character itself, I mean that sort of which, if I am any thing, I am a Member; that sort distinguished from the Wordsworthian or egotistical sublime; which is a thing per se and stands alone) it is not itself – it has no self – it is every thing and nothing” (qtd. in Mellor 215). Keats’s rejection of the “Wordsworthian or egotistical” poetic self led to trenchant comments by critics like Hazlitt, who accused him of lacking “the manhood of poetry,” and put his masculine identity into question (qtd. in Mellor 214).

Resented and humiliated by his contemporaries, Keats sought to announce his authority as a masculine subject through an immature struggle to repel female readers and to gain sexual (visual) mastery over women. “One of Keats’s habitual defenses against the power of women readers of whatever class is to transform them from reading subjects into objects of (visual) description” and to assure himself that “women need only be looked at” (Homans 348). Keats maintained the same stratagem towards Fanny Brawne by limiting her “the object of his vision,” and even protecting himself from her admirations that would turn him into a “thing” (Homans 351). Bewildered by the two forces – his poetic genius and the pressure of the masculine poetic society, Keats wavered between his feminine and masculine selves, which accounts for the development of his gender ambivalence.

Through the love story of the two principal characters in “The Eve of St. Agnes”, Keats incarnates his fear and rebellion as well as his doubts and beliefs about life and the relation between genders.

As mentioned before, to defy his critics Keats tried to assert his masculine subjectivity by treating women as objects of his desire and by keeping them under his vision. The same stratagem is undertaken by Porphyro, with whom, according to Jack Stillinger (546-547), “Keats identifies”. Looking at Madeline is the initial objective of Porphyro, that “self-assertive” (Park 90) Keatsian hero. Thus, Porphyro’s dominance, his stratagem and male gaze, which we interpret as incentives for reinforcing patriarchal ideology, are created by Keats to assert his dominance over femininity as a masculine subject. Moreover, in a revised version of “The Eve of St. Agnes”, Keats attempted to create a more masculine subjectivity in the character of Porphyro (Park 90), which Richard Woodhouse rated as “unfit for ladies” in his letter to Keats’ publisher John Taylor.

However, the revised version also shows his internal conflict about the issue and his dissatisfaction with a mere display of masculinity. Different from Keats’s other male figures like Endymion and the knight-at-arms, Porphyro seems a confidently self-assertive lover. Nevertheless, Keats never seems quite comfortable with the simple demonstration of masculinity that the poem’s plot demands, and “the revised version leaves intact almost all the elements of the poem that so clearly distinguish it from a Byronic love-roman” (Park 90). His dissatisfaction partly arises from his aversion to “Wordsworthian or egotistical poetic self”, which is directly related to masculine subjectivity. His own poetic character, however, is a more feminine, receptive, ego-free one. Thus in asserting his authority as a masculine subject, Keats satiates his masculine self, but betrays his feminine half.

Feeling not at ease, Keats reversed the subject and the object by attributing the gaze to Madeline, setting the male in a passive position while the female proactively. The male gaze, which is a vehicle of mastery belonging to the subject, is replaced by the gaze from Madeline. The breaking down of that mastery by the object of desire (the female), which we interpret as undermining or even reversing patriarchal ideology, strikes one (the male) with awareness of the failure in ideal mirroring, and hence, of one’s lack. We may conclude that the gaze from Madeline is a gaze that “escapes patriarchal specular relations, which would not simply reverse the position of male and female... but would

eliminate the hierarchy altogether” (Newman 543). The gaze represents the power of resistance and disillusionment, reflecting Keats’ feminine self’s resistance to the masculine poetic society.

In Porphyro’s position change, Keats’ masculine self and feminine self are in constant struggle and edges over each other respectively. However, until the end of the story, neither side was able to score an overwhelming victory as the story does not end in a conflict between masculinity and femininity, but in reconciliation of the two.

Ultimately, the lovers revolt against their society by escaping the castle and “fleeing away to the storm” (371). The story of their gaze duel though have gone through different stages of revolt and resistance, comes to an end. By designing an end unifying the two selves, Keats creates his “solution sweet” (322) to his gender ambivalence: an androgynous equilibrium between the two ends of his internal gender tension, transcending the conventional definitions. His feminine and masculine heroes melt into each other “as the rose / Blendeth its odour with the violet” (320-21). Porphyro and Madeline “experience various stages of reality and fantasy,” and “their separate realities collide” till they begin to share the “wish for their union to become reality” (Housser 134). Sharing the same desire for union, Porphyro and Madeline are unified to confront the reality. In this way, Keats thus challenged the existence of fixed, stable boundaries between the sexes. He fulfilled that in two ways: by occupying the position of a “woman” in his life (adopting a feminine technique and rejecting masculine poetic society) and in his writings (identifying with Madeline), and by blurring the distinction between masculinity and femininity (unifying Porphyro and Madeline). Keats deliberately resists what he sees as Wordsworth’s masculine construction of the self: “bounded, unitary, stable, complete, and instrumental, an empowered agent” (Mellor 215). In the final stanza of the poem, the narrator suggests the transcendence of the lovers’ union over time and space by saying “And they are gone: ay, ages long ago / These lovers fled away into the storm” (370-371). Such an ending seems to indicate Keats’ confidence in his solution to gender ambivalence: the androgynous equilibrium between the gender tension, which transcends conventional gender definitions, is able to end the conflict between his masculine and feminine selves permanently, and thus end his gender ambivalence permanently.

5. Conclusion

Keats’ gender ambivalence arises from the conflicted ideology between his ego-free poetic character, which is feminine and mocked by the mainstream, and the Wordsworthian egotistical poetic self, which is masculine and widely accepted by society.

Bewildered by the two forces – his poetic genius and the pressure of the masculine poetic society, Keats oscillated his feminine and masculine selves. He expressed his internal turbulence in “The Eve of St. Agnes”, a poem that becomes the arena of the conflict between masculinity and femininity. On one hand, to defy the critics, Keats sought to assert his masculine subjectivity by showing Porphyro’s dominance. On the other hand, by creating a romance of female resistance at a time when he could not rest comfortably within the masculinist constructions of Apollonius or of Hazlitt, Keats externalizes his

own resistance and gender confusion. He thwarts his own antagonism towards women by eventually granting the gaze to Madeline.

However, the mere display of conflict is not able to end his inner conflict. So a solution is desperately needed, which Keats is conscious of. As a result, more than turbulence, the poem promises to reconcile and reunite his two selves. Identifying himself with his principal characters and unifying the two characters at the end of the story based on their same desire, Keats blurred the distinction between masculinity and femininity and thus created a solution: an androgynous equilibrium between the two ends of his internal gender tension, transcending conventional gender definitions. Therefore, the poem uncovers a further connotation: it becomes the battlefield where Keats's gender vacillation gets to confront the reality and to go beyond the stereotypical gender determinations of his time. It becomes a textual poetic arena where his divided selves get along in peace and liberation in an unknown place not defined in the structures of the system. Keats, manipulates his narration, in an unconventional and dynamic way, towards a new, free, undefined and unknown gender structure, which promises deconstruction and resistance to the existing gender convention. He, along with his masculine and feminine selves, eventually achieves harmony in the poetry through his poetic language.

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