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Author(s): Jack Stillinger

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THE HOODWINKING OF MADELINE: SCEPTICISM IN
"THE EVE OF ST. AGNES"

By JACK STILLINGER

I

The commonest response to "The Eve of St. Agnes" has been the celebration of its "heady and perfumed loveliness." The poem has been called "a monody of dreamy richness," "one long sensuous utterance," "an expression of lyrical emotion," "a great affirmation of love," "a great choral hymn," an expression of "unquestioning rapture," and many things else. Remarks like these tend to confirm one's uneasy feeling that what is sometimes called "the most perfect" of Keats's longer poems is a mere fairy-tale romance, unhappily short on meaning. For many readers, as for Douglas Bush, the poem is "no more than a romantic tapestry of unique richness of color"; one is "moved less by the experience of the characters than . . . by the incidental and innumerable beauties of descriptive phrase and rhythm."¹

To be sure, not all critics have merely praised Keats's pictures. After all, the poem opens on a note of "bitter chill," and progresses through images of cold and death before the action gets under way. When young Porphyro comes from across the moors to claim his bride, he enters a hostile castle, where Madeline's kinsmen will murder even upon holy days; and in the face of this danger he proceeds to Madeline's bedchamber. With the sexual consummation of their love, a storm comes up, and they must escape the castle, past "sleeping dragons," porter, and bloodhound, out into the

¹ John Keats, *Selected Poems and Letters* (Boston, 1959), pp. xvi, 333; see also Bush's "Keats and His Ideas," in *The Major English Romantic Poets: A Symposium in Reappraisal*, ed. Clarence D. Thorpe, et al. (Carbondale, Ill., 1957), pp. 239 f. The view is sanctioned by Keats himself, who thought the poem was in some ways like "Isabella"—"too smokeable," with "too much inexperience of . . . [life], and simplicity of knowledge in it," "A weak-sided Poem"; when he later planned a new attempt in poetry, it was "the colouring of St Agnes eve" that he would "diffuse . . . throughout a Poem in which Character and Sentiment would be the figures to such drapery" (*The Letters of John Keats*, ed. Hyder E. Rollins, Cambridge, Mass., 1958, II, 174, 234).

night. The ending reverts to the opening notes of bitter chill and death: Madeline's kinsmen are benighted, the old Beadsman and Madeline's nurse Angela are grotesquely dispatched into the next world. Some obvious contrasts are made in the poem: the lovers' youth and vitality are set against the old age and death associated with Angela and the Beadsman; the warmth and security of Madeline's chamber are contrasted with the coldness and hostility of the rest of the castle and the icy storm outside; the innocence and purity of young love are played off against the sensuousness of the revellers elsewhere in the castle; and so on. Through these contrasts, says one critic, Keats created a tale of young love "not by forgetting what everyday existence is like, but by using the mean, sordid, and commonplace as a foundation upon which to build a high romance"; the result is no mere fairy tale, but a poem that "has a rounded fulness, a complexity and seriousness, a balance which remove it from the realm of mere magnificent tour de force."²

But still something is wanting. The realistic notes all seem to occur in the framework, and the main action is all romance. There is no interaction between the contrasting elements, and hence no conflict. Porphyro is never really felt to be in danger; through much of the poem the lovers are secluded from the rest of the world; and at the end, when they escape, they meet no obstacle, but rather "glide, like phantoms, into the wide hall; / Like phantoms, to the iron porch, they glide. . . . By one, and one, the bolts full easy slide:— / The chains lie silent . . . The key turns . . . the door upon its hinges groans. / And they are gone" (361-370). It is all too easy. Though the poem ends with the nightmares of the warriors, and the deaths of Angela and the Beadsman, the lovers seem untouched, for they have already fled the castle. And besides, this all happened "ages long ago" (370). We are back where we started, with a fairy-tale romance, unhappily short on meaning.

The only serious attempt to make something of the poem has come from a small group of critics whom I shall call "metaphysical critics" because they think Keats was a metaphysician.³

² R. H. Fogle, "A Reading of Keats's 'Eve of St. Agnes,'" *CE*, VI (1945), 328, 325.

³ Newell F. Ford, *The Prefigurative Imagination of John Keats* (Stanford, 1951), pp. 125-130, Earl R. Wasserman, *The Finer Tone* (Baltimore, 1953), pp. 97-137, R. A. Foakes, *The Romantic Assertion* (London, 1958),

To them the poem seems to dramatize certain ideas that Keats held a year or two earlier about the nature of the imagination, the relationship between this world and the next, and the progress of an individual's ascent toward spiritualization.

According to the popular superstition connected 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. Madeline follows this prescription, dreams of her lover, then seems to awaken out of her dream to find him present in her chamber, an actual, physical fact. Her dream in a sense comes true. The events are thought to relate to a passage in the well-known letter to Benjamin Bailey, 22 November 1817, in which Keats expressed his faith in "the truth of Imagination": "What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth—whether it existed before or not. . . . The Imagination may be compared to Adam's dream—he awoke and found it truth." For the metaphysical critics, just as Adam dreamed of the creation of Eve, then awoke to find his dream a truth—Eve before him a beautiful reality—so Madeline dreams of Porphyro and awakens to find him present and palpably real.

But the imagination is not merely prophetic: it is "a Shadow of reality to come" hereafter; and in the same letter Keats is led on to "another favorite Speculation"—"that we shall enjoy ourselves here after by having what we called happiness on Earth repeated in a finer tone and so repeated. . . . Adam's dream will do here and seems to be a conviction that Imagination and its empyreal reflection is the same as human Life and its spiritual repetition."⁴ The idea is that a trust in the visionary imagination will allow us to "burst our mortal bars," to "dodge / Conception to the very bourne of heaven,"⁵ to transcend our earthly confines, guess at heaven, and arrive at some view of the reality to come. If the visionary imagination is valid, the earthly pleasures por-

pp. 85-94, and, at some points, Bernard Blackstone, *The Consecrated Urn* (London, 1959), pp. 275-288, may be included. While Foakes discusses among Keats's poems only "The Eve of St. Agnes," the metaphysical critics as a group represent not so much an interpretation of the poem as a view of all Keats's poetry. As will appear presently, I think "The Eve of St. Agnes" illuminates a quite different view of Keats's concerns and achievement.

⁴ *Letters*, I, 184 f.

⁵ "Sleep and Poetry," l. 190; *Endymion*, I. 294 f.

trayed in our visions will make up our immortal existence—will be spiritually “repeated in a finer tone and so repeated.”

In this sense, Madeline’s dream of Porphyro is a case history in the visionary imagination. According to the metaphysical critics, she is, in her dream, at heaven’s bourne, already enjoying a kind of spiritual repetition of earthly happiness. On being roused by Porphyro, she finds in him “a painful change” (300): “How chang’d thou art! how pallid, chill, and drear!” she says to him; “Give me that voice again . . . Those looks immortal” (311-313). Porphyro’s reply takes the form of action: “Beyond a mortal man impassion’d far / At these voluptuous accents, he arose” (316 f.). He transcends his mortal existence, joins Madeline at heaven’s bourne by melting into her dream, and together they store up pleasures to be immortally repeated in a finer tone.

The other main strand of the critics’ thinking concerns the apotheosis of Porphyro. By relating the poem to Keats’s simile of human life as a “Mansion of Many Apartments,” the critics would persuade us that the castle of Madeline’s kinsmen allegorically represents human life, and that Porphyro, passing upward to a closet adjoining Madeline’s bedchamber, and thence into the chamber itself, progresses from apartment to apartment in the mansion of life, executing a spiritual ascent to heaven’s bourne. For a number of reasons, Keats’s simile confuses rather than clarifies the poem.⁶ But the idea of spiritual pilgrimage is not entirely to be denied. Porphyro says to the sleeping Madeline, “Thou art my heaven, and I thine eremite” (277), and when she awakens, after the consummation, he exclaims to her: “Ah, silver shrine, here will I take my rest / After so many hours of toil and quest, / A famish’d pilgrim,—saved by miracle” (337-339).

⁶ The simile occurs in a letter to J. H. Reynolds, 3 May 1818 (*Letters*, I, 280 f.). Porphyro’s eagerness to get to Madeline hardly accords with Keats’s idea that “we care not to hasten” to “the second Chamber”; the identification of Madeline’s bedroom with “the Chamber of Maiden-Thought” seems similarly unfitting, since one of the effects of arriving in the latter is “that tremendous one of sharpening one’s vision into the heart and nature of Man—of convincing ones nerves that the World is full of Misery and Heartbreak, Pain, Sickness and oppression.” Wasserman develops the comparison on pp. 116-125, only to withdraw the letter from consideration (because “the reading of the romance in the light of the prose statement suggests an allegorical interpretation”) on pp. 131 f.; but he subsequently returns to “the chambers of life” on pp. 159, 164.

In brief summary, the main points of the metaphysical critics' interpretation are that Madeline's awakening to find Porphyro in her bedroom is a document in the validity of the visionary imagination; that 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; and that there the lovers re-enact earthly pleasures that will be stored up for further, still more elevated repetition in a finer tone. If these ideas seem far-fetched and confused, the fact should be attributed in part to the brevity of my exposition, and to the shortcomings of any attempt to abstract ideas from a complicated poem, even when it is treated as allegory. Yet one may suggest reasons for hesitating to accept them.

For one thing, when the imaginative vision of beauty turns out to be a truth—when Madeline awakens to find Porphyro in her bed—she is not nearly so pleased as Adam was when he awoke and discovered Eve. In fact, truth here is seemingly undesirable: Madeline is frightened out of her wits, and she laments, “No dream, alas! alas! and woe is mine! / Porphyro will leave me here to fade and pine” (328 f.). For another, it is a reversal of Keats's own sequence to find in the poem the spiritual repetition of earthly pleasures. In Madeline's dream the imaginative enactment of pleasure comes first; it is an earthly repetition of spiritual pleasure that follows, and perhaps in a grosser, rather than a finer, tone. That the lovers are consciously intent on experiencing the conditions of immortality—consciously practising for the spiritual repetition of pleasure at an even higher level of intensity—implies, if one reads the critics correctly, that both Madeline and Porphyro have read *Endymion*, Keats's letters, and the explications of the metaphysical critics.⁷

Much of the critics' interpretation rests on the religious language of the poem. Madeline is “St. Agnes' charmed maid,” “a mission'd spirit” (192 f.), “all akin / To spirits of the air” (201 f.),

⁷ So the critics sometimes write: for example, “Porphyro has recognized that the dream-vision for which Madeline is preparing is an ascent to the ‘chief intensity,’ to the spiritual repetition of what we call happiness on earth; and therefore the feast and the music represent the sensuous and imaginative entrances into essence before the spiritual entrance through love. Consequently, when Porphyro passes into Madeline's chamber he first prepares the remarkably rich foods . . .” (Wasserman, p. 114).

“a saint,” “a splendid angel, newly drest, / Save wings, for heaven,” “so pure a thing, so free from mortal taint” (222-225). To Porphyro, her “hermite,” she is “heaven” (277), and from closet to bedchamber he progresses from purgatory to paradise. Finally, Porphyro is “A famish’d pilgrim,—saved by miracle” (339). But the significance of such language is questionable. In *Romeo and Juliet*, with which “The Eve of St. Agnes” has much in common, Juliet’s hand at the first meeting of the lovers is a “holy shrine,” and Romeo’s lips are “two blushing pilgrims”; subsequently Juliet is a “dear saint,” a “bright angel,” a “fair saint”; “heaven is . . . Where Juliet lives,” and outside Verona is “purgatory, torture, hell itself”; she is compared to a “winged messenger of heaven,” and her lips carry “immortal blessing.” At the same time Romeo is “the god of . . . [Juliet’s] idolatry,” and a “mortal paradise of . . . sweet flesh.”⁸ In other poems Keats himself, in the manner of hundreds of poets before him, uses religious terms in hyperbolic love language: for example, Isabella’s lover Lorenzo is called “a young palmer in Love’s eye,” he is said to “shrive” his passion, and (in a stanza ultimately rejected from the poem) he declares that he would be “full deified” by the gift of a love token.⁹

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. Early in the poem, when he first encounters Angela, she is amazed to see him, and says that he “must hold water in a witch’s sieve, / And be liege-lord of all the Elves and Fays, / To venture” into a castle of enemies (120-122). Although Porphyro later assures Madeline that he is “no rude infidel” (342), the images in Angela’s speech tend to link him with witches and fairies rather than with the Christian pilgrim. By taking a closer look at the poem, we may see that Keats had misgivings

⁸ I. v. 96 f., 105; II. ii. 26, 55, 61; III. iii. 29 f., 18; II. ii. 28; III. iii. 37; II. ii. 114; III. ii. 82.

⁹ Lines 2, 64, and the rejected stanza following line 56 (*The Poetical Works of John Keats*, ed. H. W. Garrod, 2nd edn., Oxford, 1958, p. 217 n.).

about Porphyro's fitness to perform a spiritual pilgrimage and arrive at heaven.

II

Porphyro's first request of 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 what night it is. "St. Agnes' Eve," says Angela, "God's help! my lady fair the conjuror plays / This very night: good angels her deceive!" (123-125). While she laughs at Madeline's folly, Porphyro gazes on her, until "Sudden a thought came like a full-blown rose. . . . then doth he propose / A stratagem" (136-139). The full force of "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 of deception, and no laughing matter. She is startled, and calls him "cruel," "impious," "wicked" (140, 143); the harshness of the last line of her speech emphasizes 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 next 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). Because Angela is "A poor, weak, palsy-stricken, churchyard thing" (155), she presently accedes, promising to do whatever Porphyro wishes—

Which was, to lead him, in close secrecy,
Even to Madeline's chamber, and there hide
Him in a closet, of such privacy
That he might see her beauty unespied,
And win perhaps that night a peerless bride,
While legion'd fairies pac'd the coverlet,
And pale enchantment held her sleepy-eyed. (163-169)

At this point our disbelief must be suspended if we are to read the poem as an affirmation of romantic love. We must leave our world behind, where stratagems like Porphyro's are frowned on, sometimes punished in the criminal courts, and enter an imaginary world where "in sooth such things have been" (81). But the narrator's summary comment on the stratagem is that "Never on

such a night have lovers met, / Since Merlin paid his Demon all the monstrous debt" (170 f.). The allusion is puzzling. Commentators feel that the "monstrous debt" is Merlin's debt to his demon-father for his own life, and that he paid it by committing evil deeds, or perhaps specifically by effecting his own imprisonment and death through the misworking of a spell.¹⁰ However it is explained, it strengthens rather than dispels our suspicion, like Angela's, that Porphyro is up to no good; and, with the earlier images of "legion'd fairies" and "pale enchantment," it brings further associations of fairy-lore and sorcery to bear on his actions. Then Angela asserts a kind of orthodox middle-class morality: "Ah! thou must needs the lady wed" (179).

She now leads Porphyro to Madeline's chamber, "silken, hush'd, and chaste," where he takes "covert" (187 f.). In the first draft Stanza XXI is incomplete, but two versions that can be pieced together call Porphyro's hiding-place "A purgatory sweet to view loves own domain" and "A purgatory sweet to what may he attain."¹¹ The rejected lines, mentioning "purgatory sweet" as a stage toward the "paradise" (244) of Madeline's chamber, are documents in Porphyro's spiritual pilgrimage, perhaps. The ideas of viewing love's own domain, or what he may attain, are documents in the peeping-Tomism that occupies the next few stanzas. As Angela is feeling her way toward the stair, she is met by Madeline, who turns back to help her down to "a safe level matting" (196). If the action is significant, its meaning lies in the juxtaposition of Madeline's unselfish act of "pious care" (194) with the leering overtones just before of Porphyro's having hidden himself in her closet, "pleas'd amain" (188)—pleased exceedingly by the success of his stratagem—and with the tone of the narrator's words immediately following: "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. Porphyro has taken "covert"—the position of the hunter (or perhaps merely the bird-

¹⁰ See, among others, H. Buxton Forman, *The Poetical Works . . . of John Keats* (London, 1889), II, 84 n.; Walter J. Bate, *Major British Writers*, ed. G. B. Harrison (New York, 1954), II, 276 n.; Roy P. Basler, *Expl.*, III (1944), item 1.

¹¹ *Poetical Works*, ed. Garrod, p. 244 n. (This edition is hereafter cited as "Garrod.")

watcher). There follows a series of bird images that perhaps may be thought of in terms of 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 "a tongueless nightingale" (206); 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 to me."¹² It is unlikely that all these images carry connotations of hunting, nestrobbing, and caging; 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" seems significant. Leigh Hunt naturally missed the point: "The nightingale! how touching the simile! the heart a 'tongueless nightingale,' dying in that dell of the bosom. What thorough sweetness, and perfection of lovely imagery!" Critics pointing to Sotheby's translation of Wieland's *Oberon* (VI.17), or to *Troilus and Criseyde* (III.1233-39),¹³ may also have missed the significance. For Keats's image embraces the entire story of the rape of Philomel, and with it he 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 also is about to lose that status through what is in some ways a cruel deception. The comparison with Philomel is not inappropriate.

In Stanza XXV, as Madeline is described kneeling, we are told that "Porphyro grew faint: / She knelt, so pure a thing, so free from mortal taint" (224 f.). Though many reasons will suggest themselves why Porphyro grows faint, a novel one may be offered here. In his copy of *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, after a passage in which Burton tells how "The Barbarians stand in awe of a fair woman, and at a beautiful aspect, a fierce spirit is pacified," Keats wrote, "abash'd the devil stood."¹⁴ He quotes from Book IV of *Paradise Lost*, where Satan is confronted by the beautiful angel Zephon:

¹² For the variants see Garrod, pp. 245 n., 253 n.

¹³ Leigh Hunt's *London Journal*, II (1835), 18; Sidney Colvin, *John Keats* (New York, 1925), p. 87 n.; F. E. L. Priestley, "Keats and Chaucer," *MLQ*, V (1944), 444.

¹⁴ *The Poetical Works and Other Writings of John Keats*, ed. H. B. and M. B. Forman (New York, 1938-39), V, 310. (This edition is hereafter cited as "Hampstead Keats.")

"Abasht the Devil stood, / And felt how awful goodness is, and saw / Virtue in her shape how lovely, saw, and pin'd / His loss" (846-849). But since Burton speaks of standing "in awe of a fair woman" Keats must also have recalled Book IX, in which Satan's malice is momentarily overawed by Eve's graceful innocence: "That space the Evil one abstracted stood / From his own evil, and for the time remain'd / Stupidly good" (463-465). Porphyro's faintness may in some way parallel Satan's moment of stupid goodness. "But the hot Hell that always in him burns" soon ends Satan's relapse from evil intent, as he goes about Eve's ruin. So with Porphyro; for "Anon his heart revives" (226), as he pursues the working-out of his stratagem.

Madeline undresses, then falls fast asleep. Porphyro creeps to the bed, "Noiseless as fear in a wide wilderness" (250), and "'tween the curtains peep'd, where, lo!—how fast she slept" (252). At the bedside he sets a table, when, in the midst of his preparations, a hall-door opens in the castle, and the revellers' music shatters the silence of the room. Porphyro calls for a "drowsy Morphean amulet" (257)—and then "The hall door shuts . . . and all the noise is gone" (261). Madeline continues sleeping, while he brings from the closet the feast of candied apple, quince, plum, and all the rest.

Aside from the unheroic implications of "Noiseless as fear in a wide wilderness" and of the word "peep'd," there are three things worth noting in the stanzas just summarized. One is the relationship the poem has at this point with *Cymbeline*, II.ii.11-50, in which the villainous Iachimo emerges from the trunk, where he has hidden himself, to gaze on the sleeping Imogen. Readers since Swinburne have noted resemblances.¹⁵ Imogen is "a heavenly angel," and like Madeline a "fresh lily," "whiter than the sheets," as she lies in bed, sleeping, in effect, an "azure-lidded sleep" (262)—and so on. But no critic has been willing to include among the resemblances that Porphyro's counterpart in the scene is a villain. In the speech from which these details have been drawn, Iachimo compares himself with Tarquin, who raped Lucrece, and he notes that Imogen "hath been reading late /

¹⁵ See Thomas B. Stroup, "Cymbeline, II, ii, and The Eve of St. Agnes," *ES*, XVII (1935), 144 f.; Claude Lee Finney, *The Evolution of Keats's Poetry* (Cambridge, Mass., 1936), II, 557 f.; *TLS*, 6 April, 4 May, 1 June 1946, pp. 163, 211, 259.

The tale of Tereus; here the leaf's turn'd down / Where Philomel gave up."

The second point concerns Porphyro's call for a "drowsy Morphean amulet"—a sleep-inducing charm to prevent Madeline's awakening when the music bursts forth into the room. Earlier he has wished to win Madeline while "pale enchantment held her sleepy-eyed" (169). Here he would assist "pale enchantment" with a "Morphean amulet." It may not be amiss to recall Lovelace, and the stratagem by which he robbed Clarissa of her maidenhood. "I know thou wilt blame me for having had recourse to *Art*," writes Lovelace to John Belford, in Richardson's novel. "But do not physicians prescribe opiates in acute cases." Besides, "a Rape, thou knowest, to us Rakes, is far from being an undesirable thing."¹⁶

The third point concerns the feast that Porphyro sets out. In his copy of *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, opposite a passage in which Burton commends fasting as an excellent means of preparation for devotion, "by which chaste thoughts are ingendred . . . concupiscence is restrained, vicious . . . lusts and humours are expelled," Keats recorded his approval in the marginal comment "good."¹⁷ It is for some reason of this sort that Madeline fasts, going "supperless to bed" (51). Porphyro's feast seems intended to produce the opposite results, and there is more than a suggestion of pagan sensuality in the strange affair of eastern luxuries that he heaps as if by magic—"with glowing hand" (271)—on the table by the bed.¹⁸

Next Porphyro tries to awaken Madeline, or so it seems: "And now, my love, my seraph fair, awake! / Thou art my heaven, and I thine eremite" (276 f.). The last line carries the suggestion that Porphyro has been reading of the martyrdom, not of St. Agnes, but of Donne's lovers in "The Canonization," whose bodies are by "reverend love" made "one anothers hermitage." It is curious that in the proposition that follows, "Open thine eyes . . . Or I shall drowse beside thee" (278 f.), Porphyro does not wait for an

¹⁶ *Clarissa*, Shakespeare Head edn. (Oxford, 1930), V, 339 f.

¹⁷ Hampstead Keats, V, 318.

¹⁸ Foakes, p. 91 n., relates the feast to "Paynims" in line 241, but says that "such suggestions are discontinued as Porphyro is transformed" by kneeling by the bed (297, 305 f.) and by being "saved" through the completion of a spiritual journey (337-339).

answer: "Thus whispering, his warm, unnerved arm / Sank in her pillow" (280 f.). "Awakening up" (289), he takes Madeline's lute and plays an ancient ditty, which causes her to utter a soft moan. It would seem that she does at this point wake up: "Suddenly / Her blue affrayed eyes wide open shone. . . . Her eyes were open, but she still beheld, / Now wide awake, the vision of her sleep" (295-299). Not unreasonably, we might think, she weeps, sighs, and "moan[s] forth witless words" (303).

We shall see in a moment, however, that she has not after all awakened from her trance. The "painful change" she witnesses—the substitution of the genuine Porphyro for the immortal looks and voice of her vision—"nigh expell'd / The blisses of her dream" (300 f.), came near expelling them, but did not in fact do so. Apparently she is to be thought of as still in her trance, but capable of speaking to the Porphyro before her, when she says, "Ah, Porphyro! . . . but even now / Thy voice was at sweet tremble in mine ear" (307 f.). To her request for "that voice again . . . Those looks immortal" (312 f.), Porphyro offers neither, but rather impassioned action of godlike intensity. At the end of Stanza XXXVI, the image of "St. Agnes' moon" combines the notions of St. Agnes, the patron saint of maidenhood, and Cynthia, the goddess of chastity, and the symbolic combination has "set," gone out of the picture to be replaced by a storm: "Meantime the frost-wind blows / Like Love's alarum pattering the sharp sleet / Against the window-panes; St. Agnes' moon hath set" (322-324).

Keats's final manuscript version of the consummation, rejected by his publishers on moral grounds, as making the poem unfit to be read by young ladies, is more graphic. For a rather lame conclusion to Madeline's speech (314 f.), he substituted the lines, "See while she speaks his arms encroaching slow / Have zon'd her, heart to heart—loud, loud the dark winds blow." Then he rewrote Stanza XXXVI:

For on the midnight came a tempest fell.
 More sooth for that his close rejoinder flows
 Into her burning ear;—and still the spell
 Unbroken guards her in serene repose.
 With her wild dream he mingled as a rose
 Marryeth its odour to a violet.
 Still, still she dreams—louder the frost wind blows

Like Love's alarum pattering the sharp sleet
Against the window-panes; St. Agnes' moon hath set.¹⁹

The revised version makes clearer that Madeline is still dreaming: "still the spell / Unbroken guards her in serene repose." And it makes clearer the connection between the sexual consummation, the setting of St. Agnes' moon, and the rising of the storm. When Porphyro's "close rejoinder flows / Into . . . [the] burning ear" of Madeline, we may or may not recall Satan "Squat like a Toad, close at the ear of *Eve*" (IV.800); but one would go out of his way to avoid a parallel between the advent of the storm in Keats's poem and the change in Nature that comes about when our first mother in an evil hour reached forth and ate the fruit: "Earth felt the wound, and Nature from her seat / Sighing through all her Works gave signs of woe, / That all was lost" (IX.782-784). Unlike Eve, however, rather more like Clarissa, Madeline by this time has no choice; the revision heightens the contrast between her innocent unconsciousness and the storm raging outside: "Still, still she dreams—louder the frost wind blows."

As printed, the poem continues "'Tis dark: quick pattereth the flaw-blown sleet." Then Porphyro: "This is no dream, my bride, my Madeline!" Another line describes the storm: "'Tis dark: the iced gusts still rave and beat" (325-327). And now Madeline finally does wake up, if she ever does. Her speech shows a mixed attitude toward what has happened, but above all it is the lament of the seduced maiden: "No dream, alas! alas! and woe is mine! / Porphyro will leave me here to fade and pine.— / Cruel! what traitor could thee hither bring?" (328-330). She will curse not, for her heart is lost in his, or, perhaps more accu-

¹⁹ Garrod, p. 252 n. After hearing the revised version, Richard Woodhouse wrote to the publisher John Taylor, 19 September 1819, "I do apprehend it will render the poem unfit for ladies, & indeed scarcely to be mentioned to them among the 'things that are.'" Taylor replied six days later that if Keats "will not so far concede to my Wishes as to leave the passage as it originally stood, I must be content to admire his Poems with some other Imprint" (*Letters*, II, 163, 183). According to Woodhouse's note heading one of the transcripts of the poem, Keats "left it to his Publishers to adopt which [alterations] they pleased, & to revise the whole" (Garrod, p. xxxviii). Though the argument cannot be made here, there are grounds for urging that a new text be made, embodying revisions found in the late fair copy (Garrod's *E*) and those noticed as alterations (*w*) in the second Woodhouse transcript (*W*²).

rately, still lost in her romantic idealization of him. But she is aware that her condition is woeful: Porphyro is cruel; Angela is a traitor; and Madeline is a "deceived thing;— / A dove forlorn and lost" (333). In subsequent stanzas Porphyro soothes her fears, again calls her his bride, and seems to make all wrongs right. He tells her that the storm outside is really only "an elfin-storm from faery land" (343), and that she should "Awake! arise! . . . and fearless be, / For o'er the southern moors I have a home for thee" (350 f.). They hurry out of the chamber, down the wide stairs, through the castle door—"And they are gone . . . fled away into the storm" (370 f.).

III

After giving so much space to Porphyro, in admittedly exaggerated fashion portraying him as peeping Tom and villainous seducer, I must now confess that I do not think his stratagem is the main concern of the poem. I have presented him as villain in order to suggest, in the first place, that he is not, after all, making a spiritual pilgrimage, unless the poem is to be read as a satire on spiritual pilgrimages; in the second place, that the lovers, far from being a single element in the poem, are as much protagonist and antagonist as Belinda and the Baron, or Clarissa and Lovelace; and in the third place, that no matter how much Keats entered into the feelings of his characters, he could not lose touch with the claims and responsibilities of the world he lived in.

Certainly he partially identified himself with Porphyro. When Woodhouse found his revisions objectionable, Keats replied that he should "despise a man who would be such an eunuch in sentiment as to leave a maid, with that Character about her, in such a situation: & sho^d despise himself to write about it."²⁰ One may cite the narrator's obvious relish in Porphyro's situation as Madeline is about to undress—"Now prepare, / Young Porphyro, for gazing on that bed" (196 f.)—and Keats's later objection to the poem that "in my dramatic capacity I enter fully into the feeling: but in *Propria Persona* I should be apt to quiz it myself."²¹ But sexual passion worried him: to Bailey he confessed in July 1818, "When I am among Women I have evil thoughts," and he wrote in his copy

²⁰ *Letters*, II, 163.

²¹ *Letters*, II, 174.

of *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, "there is nothing disgraces me in my own eyes so much as being one of a race of eyes nose and mouth beings in a planet call'd the earth who . . . have always mingled goatish winnyish lustful love with the abstract adoration of the deity."²² Though it has touches of humor,²³ "The Eve of St. Agnes" is a serious poem; regardless of the extent to which Keats identified with his hero, he introduced enough overtones of evil to make Porphyro's actions wrong within the structure of the poem.

From now on, however, it may be best to think of Porphyro as representing, like the storm that comes up simultaneously with his conquest, the ordinary cruelties of life in the world. Like Melville, Keats saw

Too far into the sea; where every maw
The greater on the less feeds evermore. . . .
Still do I that most fierce destruction see,
The Shark at savage prey—the hawk at pounce,
The gentle Robin, like a pard or ounce,
Ravening a worm.²⁴

Let Porphyro represent one of the sharks under the surface. And to borrow another figure from Melville, let the main concern of the poem be the young Platonist dreaming at the masthead: one false step, his identity comes back in horror, and with a half-throttled shriek he drops through transparent air into the sea, no more to rise for ever. There are reasons why we ought not entirely to sympathize with Madeline. She is a victim of deception, to be sure, but of deception not so much by Porphyro as by herself and the superstition she trusts in. Madeline the self-hoodwinked dreamer is, I think, the main concern of the poem, and I shall spend some time documenting this notion and relating it to Keats's other important poems—all of which, in a sense, are about dreaming.

²² *Letters*, I, 341; *Hampstead Keats*, V, 309.

²³ For example, the lame and anticlimactic justification, "in sooth such things have been," as Porphyro's imagination expands from "sight of Madeline, / But for one moment" to the progression "speak, kneel, touch, kiss" (78-81); the picture of Porphyro gazing on Angela "Like puzzled urchin" (129); and some of Porphyro's reactions, relayed with tongue in cheek by the narrator: "The lover's endless minutes slowly pass'd" (182), "lo!—how fast she slept" (252), "It seem'd he never, never could redeem / From such a stedfast spell his lady's eyes" (286 f.).

²⁴ "To J. H. Reynolds, Esq.," ll. 93-95, 102-105 (*Garrod*, p. 487).

If we recall Keats's agnosticism, his sonnet "Written in Disgust of Vulgar Superstition" (Christianity), and his abuse in the *Letters* of "the pious frauds of Religion,"²⁵ we may be prepared to see a hoodwinked dreamer in the poem even before we meet Madeline. He is the old Beadsman, so engrossed in an ascetic ritual that he is sealed off from the joys of life. After saying his prayers, he turns first through a door leading to the noisy revelry upstairs. "But no. . . . The joys of all his life were said and sung: / His was a harsh penance on St. Agnes' Eve" (22-24). And so he goes another way, to sit among rough ashes, while the focus of the narrative proceeds through the door he first opened, and on into the assembly of revellers, where we are introduced to Madeline and the ritual she is intent on following. In the final manuscript version, between Stanzas VI and VII, Keats inserted an additional stanza on the ritual, in part to explain the feast that Porphyro sets out:

'Twas said her future lord would there appear
Offering as sacrifice—all in the dream—
Delicious food even to her lips brought near:
Viands and wine and fruit and sugar'd cream,
To touch her palate with the fine extreme
Of relish: then soft music heard; and then
More pleasure followed in a dizzy stream
Palpable almost: then to wake again
Warm in the virgin morn, no weeping Magdalen.²⁶

Then the poem, as it was printed, continues describing Madeline, who scarcely hears the music, and, with eyes fixed on the floor, pays no attention to anyone around her.

Several things deserve notice. By brooding "all that wintry day, / On love, and wing'd St. Agnes' saintly care" (43 f.), and by setting herself apart from the revellers, Madeline presents an obvious parallel with the Beadsman. Both are concerned with prayer and an ascetic ritual; both are isolated from the crowd and from actuality. A second point is that the superstition is clearly an old wives' tale: Madeline follows the prescription that "she had heard old dames full many times declare" (45). It is called

²⁵ Garrod, p. 532; *Letters*, II, 80.

²⁶ Garrod, p. 238 n. In Ben Jonson's quatrain, quoted by Hunt from Brand's *Popular Antiquities* and often cited in notes to Keats's poem, the assurance that the ritual produces "an empty dream" is worth recalling (*Leigh Hunt's London Journal*, II, 1835, 17).

by the narrator a "whim": "Full of this whim was thoughtful Madeline" (55). The irony of the added stanza enforces the point. Madeline's pleasures turn out to be palpable in fact. When she awakens to find herself with Porphyro, she is anything but warm: rather, she wakes up to "flaw-blown sleet" and "iced gusts" (325, 327); it is no virgin morn for her; and she is a "weeping Magdalen," who cries, "alas! alas! and woe is mine!" (328). But at this point, early in the poem, "she saw not: her heart was otherwhere: / She sigh'd for Agnes' dreams, the sweetest of the year" (62 f.). Perfunctorily dancing along, she is said to be "Hood-wink'd with faery fancy; all amort, / Save to St. Agnes and her lambs unshorn" (70 f.).

The superstition is next mentioned when Angela tells that Madeline "the conjuror plays / This very night: good angels her deceive!" (124 f.). Porphyro thinks of the ritual in terms of "enchantments cold" and "legends old" (134 f.). Proceeding to her chamber, Madeline is called "St. Agnes' charmed maid," "a mission'd spirit, unaware" (192 f.). When she undresses, "Half-hidden, like a mermaid in sea-weed" (231), she is perhaps linked briefly with the drowning Ophelia, whose spreading clothes momentarily support her "mermaid-like" upon the water; like Ophelia, she is engrossed in a fanciful dream-world.²⁷ "Pensive awhile she dreams awake, and sees, / In fancy, fair St. Agnes in her bed, / But dares not look behind, or all the charm is fled" (232-234). This last line carries a double meaning: in following her ritual, Madeline must look neither "behind, nor sideways" (53); but the real point is that if she did look behind, she would discover Porphyro, and then "the charm" would be "fled" for a more immediate reason.

Asleep in bed, Madeline is said to be "Blissfully haven'd both from joy and pain . . . Blinded alike from sunshine and from rain, / As though a rose should shut, and be a bud again" (240-243). Her dream is "a midnight charm / Impossible to melt as iced stream," "a stedfast spell" (282 f., 287). It is while she is in this state of stuporous insensibility—while "still the spell / Unbroken guards her in serene repose," "Still, still she dreams—louder the frost wind blows"—that Porphyro makes love to her.

²⁷ *Hamlet*, IV. vii. 176-179. The point is made by Stuart M. Sperry, "Madeline and Ophelia," *N&Q*, n. s., IV (1957), 29 f.

On awakening to learn, "No dream, alas! alas! and woe is mine," she calls herself "a deceived thing," echoing Angela's words earlier, "good angels her deceive!" Her condition is pitiful, yet at the same time reprehensible. Her conjuring (perhaps like Merlin's) has backfired upon her, and as hoodwinked dreamer she now gets her reward in coming to face reality a little too late. The rose cannot shut, and be a bud again.

IV

Whether "The Eve of St. Agnes" is a good poem depends in large part on the reader's willingness to find in it a consistency and unity that may not in fact be there.²⁸ But however it is evaluated, it stands significantly at the beginning of Keats's single great creative year, 1819, and it serves to introduce a preoccupa-

²⁸ Keats's conclusion seems a matter for unending debate. The meta-physical critics, remarking that the storm is "an elfin-storm from faery land" and that the lovers "glide, like phantoms" out of the castle, uniformly agree that Madeline and Porphyro transcend mortality, entering an otherworld of eternal felicity, while Angela, the Beadsman, and the warriors remain to die or writhe benighted. But the "elfin-storm" is Porphyro's explanation; the narrator calls it "a tempest fell" of "frost-wind" and "sharp sleet," and other critics (e. g., Amy Lowell, *John Keats*, Boston, 1925, II, 175; Herbert G. Wright, "Has Keats's 'Eve of St Agnes' a Tragic Ending?," *MLR*, XL, 1945, 90-94; Bernice Slote, *Keats and the Dramatic Principle*, Lincoln, Neb., 1958, pp. 35 f.) have suggested that the lovers face reality, perhaps even perish, in the storm. Still another view (Wright, p. 92) is that the lovers face penance in "that second circle of sad hell," the circle of carnal sinners in the Fifth Canto of the *Inferno*, in which (as Keats described it in his sonnet "On a Dream") lovers are buffeted about in a storm very much like the one in "The Eve of St. Agnes." It is possible that Porphyro is evil only to the extent that Madeline is a hoodwinked dreamer, that when she awakens from her dream the evil represented by him is correspondingly reduced, and a happy human conclusion is justified. But it seems doubtful, and one may at this point have to fall back on the remark of the publisher J. A. Hessey, "[Keats] is such a man of fits and starts he is not much to be depended on" (Edmund Blunden, *Keats's Publisher*, London, 1936, p. 56), or that of Haydon, "never for two days did he know his own intentions" (*The Diary of Benjamin Robert Haydon*, ed. Willard B. Pope, Cambridge, Mass., 1960, II, 317). Whatever the fate of the lovers, Woodhouse noted that Keats "altered the last 3 lines to leave on the reader a sense of pettish disgust. . . . He says he likes that the poem should leave off with this Change of Sentiment" (*Letters*, II, 162 f.).

tion of all the major poems of this year: that an individual ought not to lose touch with the realities of this world.

In the poems of 1819, Keats's most explicit, unequivocal statement about the conditions of human life comes in the "Ode on Melancholy." Life in the world, we are told in the third stanza, is an affair in which pleasure and pain are inseparably mixed. Beauty and the melancholy awareness that beauty must die, joy and the simultaneous fading of joy, "aching Pleasure" and its instant turning to poison—all are inextricably bound up in life. There is no pleasure without pain, and, conversely, if pain is sealed off, so also is pleasure. One accepts the inseparability of pleasure and pain, or one rejects life entirely, and suffers a kind of moral and spiritual emptiness amounting to death. The former is the better alternative: he lives most fully "whose strenuous tongue / Can burst Joy's grape against his palate fine."

The first stanza of the ode contains a series of negatives—what not to do "when the melancholy fit shall fall." Beginning with forgetfulness, progressing through narcotics to poisons and death, the images all represent anodynes to escape pain in life. But they are rejected, because they shut out pleasure as well as pain, and reduce life to nothing: "For shade to shade will come too drowsily, / And drown the wakeful anguish of the soul." Elsewhere in Keats the anodyne is dreaming, trusting in the visionary imagination, and, to cut short further explanation, the dreamer in the poems of 1819 is always one who would escape pain, but hopes, wrongly, to achieve pleasure. Either he comes to grief through his delusion, or he learns his lesson and wakes up.

Take Madeline as the first instance. In bed, under the delusion that she can achieve bliss in her dream, yet wake up in the virgin morn no weeping Magdalen, she is "Blissfully haven'd both from joy and pain" (240)—for all practical purposes in the narcotic state rejected by the "Ode on Melancholy," experiencing nothing. Keats reiterates the idea two lines later, "Blinded alike from sunshine and from rain," and the folly of her delusion is represented by the reversal of natural process, "As though a rose should shut, and be a bud again" (242 f.). As generally in Keats's poems, dreaming is attended by fairy-tale imagery: under the spell of "faery fancy," Madeline plays the conjuror, and Porphyro is linked in several ways with fairy-lore, witchcraft, and sorcery, as well as pagan sensuality. It is possible that Madeline never com-

pletely awakens from her fanciful dream; for she believes Porphyro when he tells her that the storm is "an elfin-storm from faery land" (343), and she imagines "sleeping dragons all around" (353) when they hurry out of the castle.²⁹

The heroine of "The Eve of Saint Mark," written a week or so after the completion of "The Eve of St. Agnes," in some ways resembles Madeline. Among the "thousand things" perplexing Bertha in the volume she pores over are "stars of Heaven, and angels' wings, / Martyrs in a fiery blaze, / Azure saints in silver rays" (29-32). Enwrapped in the legend of St. Mark, "dazed with saintly imag'ries" (56), she ignores the life in the village around her, and cuts herself off from reality—a "poor cheated soul" (69), "lost in dizzy maze"³⁰ and mocked by her own shadow.

The wretched knight-at-arms in "La Belle Dame sans Merci" is similarly a hoodwinked dreamer. La Belle Dame is "a faery's child"; she sings "A faery's song," speaks "in language strange," and takes him to an "elfin grot." When he awakens from his vision he finds himself "On the cold hill's side." But he is still the dupe of his dream, still hoodwinked, because he continues, in a barren landscape, "Alone and palely loitering," hoping for a second meeting with La Belle Dame. And he denies himself participation in the actual world, which, against his bleak surroundings, is represented as a more fruitful scene, where "The squirrel's granary is full, / And the harvest's done."³¹

In "Lamia," the hoodwinked dreamer is of course Lycius, who falls in love with the serpent woman Lamia, in whose veins runs

²⁹ When I read an earlier version of this paper before the English faculty of the University of Illinois, it was suggested that if Porphyro awakens Madeline to reality, he should be considered an agent of good in Keats's terms. It may be observed, however, (1) that Madeline dreams through the consummation; and (2) that Porphyro does not necessarily represent all aspects of reality, or even one aspect consistently throughout the poem. Contradiction arises mainly from the assumption of allegory.

³⁰ A variant following line 68 (Garrod, p. 451 n.). With Walter E. Houghton's interpretation, "The Meaning of Keats's *Eve of St. Mark*," *ELH*, XIII (1946), 64-78, I disagree in only one point: that Bertha is a "poor cheated soul" not because she is tied down to the actual, wasting away in oblivion, but because she is cheated by her fancy into denying the actual.

³¹ In my brief treatment of "La Belle Dame" and "Lamia," as in this section of my paper generally, I am indebted to David Perkins' chapters on Keats in *The Quest for Permanence* (Cambridge, Mass., 1959).

"elfin blood," who lingers by the wayside "fairily," with whom he lives in "sweet sin" in a magical palace with a "faery-roof" (I. 147, 200, II. 31, 123). "She seem'd, at once, some penanced lady elf, / Some demon's mistress, or the demon's self" (I. 55 f.). What she promises to do for Lycius is what, according to the "Ode on Melancholy," cannot be done for mortal men: "To unperplex bliss from its neighbour pain; / Define their pettish limits, and estrange / Their points of contact, and swift counterchange." The inseparability of pleasure and pain is for her a "specious chaos"; she will separate them "with sure art" (I. 192-196)—or so the blinded Lycius thinks. But "Spells are but made to break," wrote Keats, in a passage subsequently omitted from the text.³² "A thrill / Of trumpets" reminds Lycius of the claims of the "noisy world almost forsworn" (II. 27-33), and he holds a wedding feast, at which "cold philosophy," in the form of his old tutor Apollonius, attends to put "all charms" to flight. The "foul dream" Lamia vanishes under the tutor's piercing gaze, and Lycius, too engrossed in his dream to survive, falls dead.

From "Lamia," we may merely dip into "The Fall of Hyperion" to recall Keats's condemnation of dreamers. They are "vision'ries," "dreamers weak," who seek out wonders, but ignore what is most important, the human face (I. 161-163). "Only the dreamer venoms all his days" (I. 175), the speaker learns on the steps of Moneta's temple. "The poet and the dreamer are distinct, / Diverse, sheer opposite, antipodes. / The one pours out a balm upon the world, / The other vexes it" (I. 199-202).

Keats's mature view of dreamers illuminates perhaps most importantly the two best odes, on a Grecian Urn and to a Nightingale. In each poem the speaker begins as dreamer, hoodwinked with the idea that he can unperplex bliss from its neighbor pain, that he can find an anodyne to the ills of the flesh by joining the timeless life pictured on an urn, or by fading away into the forest with a bird. In each case the result is an awareness that spells are but made to break: the speaker recognizes the falseness of the dream, the shortcomings of the ideal he has created, and he returns to the mortal world. Life on the urn is at first attractive: unheard melodies are sweeter; the lovers will remain young and fair; the trees will never lose their leaves. Yet it is a static situation, in which life is frozen to a standstill, and there is no fulfillment.

³² Garrod, p. 205 n.

Love must be enjoyed, not be stopped forever at a point when enjoyment is just out of reach. The final judgment is that the urn is a "Cold Pastoral," a "friend to man" that, as a work of art, teases him out of thought but offers no possible substitute for life in the actual world.

In the "Ode to a Nightingale," the speaker would fade away with the bird, and forget "The weariness, the fever, and the fret" of the mortal world, "Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes, / Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow." But when he imaginatively joins the bird in the forest, he immediately longs for the world he has just rejected: "Here there is no light. . . . I cannot see what flowers are at my feet." "In embalmed darkness" he is forced to "guess each sweet" of the transient natural world. As he continues musing, the bird takes on for him the fairy-tale associations that we saw earlier connected with Madeline's dream, *La Belle Dame*, and *Lamia*: its immortal voice has charmed "magic casements . . . in faery lands forlorn." The realization that the faery lands are forlorn of human life tolls the dreamer back to his sole self, and he wakes up. The nightingale, symbol of dreams and the visionary imagination, has turned out to be a "deceiving elf." The fancy "cannot cheat so well."

The metaphysical critics are right in asserting Keats's early trust in the imagination. What they sometimes fail to recognize, themselves eager for glimpses of heaven's bourne, and to an extent hoodwinked with their own rather than Keats's metaphysics, is that before Keats wrote more than a handful of poems we would not willingly let die, he in large part changed his mind.³³ Late in January 1818, on sitting down to read *King Lear* once again, he wrote a sonnet bidding goodby to romance: "Let me not wander in a barren dream."³⁴ A few days later he called it "A terrible division" when the soul is flown upward and the body "earthward press'd."³⁵ In March he wrote, "It is a flaw / In happiness to see

³³ Glen O. Allen, "The Fall of Endymion: A Study in Keats's Intellectual Growth," *K-SJ*, VI (1957), 37-57, argues authoritatively that the change occurred during the winter of 1817-18, while Keats was completing and revising *Endymion*. Ford, p. 141, acknowledges the change, but connects it with "La Belle Dame," and thereafter discusses among important poems only "Lamia." Perkins, p. 220, feels that "the over-all course of . . . [Keats's] development might be partly described as a periodic, though gradually cumulative, loss of confidence in the merely visionary imagination."

³⁴ Garrod, p. 483.

³⁵ "God of the Meridian" (Garrod, p. 482).

beyond our bourn," and about the same time he recognized that "Four seasons"—not just eternal spring, as the visionary might conjure up—"Four seasons fill the measure of the year." Similarly "There are four seasons in the mind of man," who "has his Winter too of pale misfeature, / Or else he would forego his mortal nature."³⁶ In July, on his walking trip to Scotland, he wrote:

Scanty the hour and few the steps beyond the bourn of care,
Beyond the sweet and bitter world,—beyond it unaware!
Scanty the hour and few the steps, because a longer stay
Would bar return, and make a man forget his mortal way:
O horrible! to lose the sight of well remember'd face. . . .
No, no, that horror cannot be, for at the cable's length
Man feels the gentle anchor pull and gladdens in its strength.³⁷

It is the gentle anchor of mortality that ties us to the world; man gladdens in its strength. "Fancy," said Keats to Reynolds, "is indeed less than a present palpable reality." It would be a distortion of fact to maintain that he always held this later view, but it is worth noting that even when he and his fancy could not agree, he declared himself "more at home amongst Men and women," happier reading Chaucer than Ariosto.³⁸

The dreamer in Keats is ultimately one who turns his back, not merely on the pains of life, but on life altogether; and in the poems of 1819, beginning with "The Eve of St. Agnes," his dreaming is condemned. If the major concern in these poems is the conflict between actuality and the ideal, the result is not a rejection of the actual, but rather a facing-up to it that amounts, in the total view, to affirmation. It is a notable part of Keats's wisdom that he never lost touch with reality, that he condemned his hoodwinked dreamers who would shut out the world, that he recognized life as a complexity of pleasure and pain, and laid down a rule for action: achievement of the ripest, fullest experience that one is capable of. These qualities make him a saner if in some ways less romantic poet than his contemporaries, and they should qualify him as the Romantic poet most likely to survive in the modern world.

University of Illinois

³⁶ "To J. H. Reynolds, Esq.," ll. 82 f.; "Four Seasons" (Garrod, pp. 486, 536).

³⁷ "Lines Written in the Highlands after a Visit to Burns's Country," ll. 29-33, 39 f. (Garrod, pp. 492 f.).

³⁸ *Letters*, I, 325, II, 234.