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Interpretations of Medievalism in the 19th Century: Keats, Tennyson and the Pre-Raphaelites

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CLAREMONT MCKENNA COLLEGE

**INTERPRETATIONS OF MEDIEVALISM IN THE 19TH
CENTURY: KEATS, TENNYSON AND THE PRE-
RAPHAELITES**

SUBMITTED TO

PROFESSOR NICHOLAS WARNER

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BY

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Thesis Introduction

The phrase “fairy tale” is now synonymous with a children’s story, something so magical that only the mind of an innocent youth can believe in it. Fairy tales are rooted in myth; the term is inseparable from medieval images like the knight, damsel, dragon and sorcerer or enchantress. *Grimm’s Fairy Tales*, otherwise known as “Children’s and Household Tales”, established the genre as appropriate for children but juvenile for adults in the 19th century. Businesses active today, such as Disney, have continued the trend started by the *Grimm Tales*, taking the concept of the “fairy story” from such texts and translating the legends from literature to the silver screen.

These days, “medieval”, indicating the era that produced original fairy tales, is a synonym for out-of-date or obsolete. Shakespeare’s classics are still an emphasized topic in undergraduate college classes; however, many students feel the diction is tedious and off-putting, otherwise boring. If one were to take a history class on the feudal era, one would learn that the lack of technology greatly impacted the quality of life for every member of society and that cleanliness and proper sanitation did not exist anywhere near today’s standards. On the opposite end of the argument for or against things medieval, the phrase “chivalry is dead” means exactly what it says: that the codes of conduct from the medieval era, specifically for men in this case, do not exist in today’s world. The underlying implication of the phrase suggests that contemporary women are not treated with the same courtesy linked to the era of chivalry, and that the expectations set in the knightly code are missed.

The era of medievalism is long gone, having taken with it both detrimental characteristics, such as a deficiency in basic technology, as well as positive ones like

respectable conduct and chivalry. The medieval age has left behind a legacy, however, that has influenced contemporary culture in a number of ways. The current generation can never set foot in the actual feudal era, but that has not stopped the dreamers of the 21st century to construct local “Renaissance Fairs” and experiences like “Medieval Times”, as well as the Las Vegas Casino “Excalibur”, all in the fashion of a medieval encounter. The modern generation obviously finds inspiration in the idea of medievalism, even if many elements of the age are not very appealing to some. The myths originating the medieval era give it a magical quality. It was the age of dragons and unicorns, supernatural forests, mighty knights, beautiful and feminine ladies and enchantment. These characteristics have captured the minds of many artists, along with the poetic and literary styles derived from great medieval writers.

John Keats’ poetry is a symbol for the inspirational powers of medievalism in the eyes of a 19th century artist. Keats’ poems are capable of transplanting readers from their fast-paced modernity into a hypnotically slower time, thanks to this artist’s extensive knowledge of the era and keen eye for detail. His work focuses on the magical connotation associated with medievalism. By emphasizing the theme of enchantment in poems such as *The Eve of Saint Agnes*, *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* and *Isabella; Or the Pot of Basil*, Keats’ poetry acknowledges readers’ imaginations, hoping to tease one’s mind out of the present-day and into the past. Keats’ himself hoped to escape the hustle and bustle of the burgeoning Industrial Revolution through his artwork. In escaping his own present, Keats created a magical window into the past, accessible only to those that had the imaginative powers to let go of their contemporary world. His works separate the

ordinary readers from the true believers in magic, those that one would describe today as having the imagination of a child, capable of believing in fairy tales.

Motivated by Keats' literary exaltation of medievalism, the artwork of the Pre-Raphaelite movement endeavored to express the same captivating sense of the past. The Pre-Raphaelites goal was to inspire the same emotions one felt at reading a poem by Keats, although they were attempting to articulate a literary history with a brush and canvas. The medieval theme of enchantment, originally inspired by Keats' poetry, is also found in paintings by William Holman Hunt, John William Waterhouse and several other Pre-Raphaelites' work that will be discussed in this essay.

Ultimately, this paper strives to capture the ways poets and artists celebrated the medieval era. This essay will discuss Keats' poetry with the theme of enchantment in mind. The Pre-Raphaelite paintings discussed are illustrations of several of Keats' poems; the goal of this thesis is to draw out the medieval characteristics found in these paintings. The poem, *The Lady of Shalott*, by Alfred Lord Tennyson and several painted depictions of it are also included in the chapter on Pre-Raphaelite artwork, as a way to expand the discussion on different artists' views of medievalism, and depictions of a different artist's work other than John Keats. This paper's goal is to offer the aspects of medievalism that were inspirational to several 19th century artists, as well as why feudally inspired works can be pleasurable for viewers experience. This paper is an argument for the imagination in an age when technology threatens to undermine one's creative abilities that are accessible with simple tools like a pen, paint and canvas.

Chapter I Keats on Enchantment

Introduction

The 19th century saw a startling rise in British manufacturing that the country's populace and its social structure struggled to cope with. Industrialization dramatically changed British life. The increase in factory labor and mechanization emphasized the ideals started by the European Enlightenment, such as the use of science and reason over spirituality and religion to examine their world. This set of drastic social and economic changes shifted British life away from the feudal systems of the 17th and early 18th centuries. Consequently, British artists of the 18th and 19th centuries creatively managed the evolution around them in a variety of ways; a group of them fought the accelerated progress of industrialization by recalling themes of the past in their work. One of the last few to be included as a Romantic period artist, John Keats (1795-1821) wrestled with the tide of change he faced by idealizing medieval culture. Keats' poems that embody the magic of the British past are able to transcend the hurried pace of his era, immersing the imaginations of their readers in a world of love and enchantment.

Many of his poems, including *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, *Isabella; Or the Pot of Basil* and *The Eve of St. Agnes*, directly mention Keats' strong delight and fascination in the medieval period. The poet's delight in imagination and the worlds it could take his readers to allowed him to immerse his audience in rich stories of knights, fair maidens, fairies and enchantresses. Nostalgia for a less-fast-paced time, free from the changes of the Industrial Revolution, plays another formative role in the development of Keats' medieval poetry. In *Robin Hood, To a Friend*, Keats' speaker ruminates on the long gone days of the Merry Men:

“No! those days are gone away,
And their hours are old and gray...
You may never behold
Little John, or Robin bold;
Never one, of all the clan,
Thrumming on an empty can
Some old hunting ditty, while
He doth his green way beguile
To fair fair hostess Merriment,
Down beside the pasture Trent;
For he left the merry tale
Messenger for spicy ale.” (1-2, 23-32)

The legendary figure Robin Hood is contradictory to the characteristics of the Industrial Revolution because his lifestyle was spontaneous and the opposite of urban as he lived only in the forest. Robin epitomized the values of the medieval era that John Keats was trying to recall. The speaker’s wistful tone in *Robin Hood* is similar to the tone of *Lines on Mermaid Tavern* as well as *The Eve of St. Agnes*. The nostalgic quality of these poems reveals Keats’ personal affections for the medieval era as well as sadness at its extinction. Another line from *Robin Hood* reveals that the speaker not only misses the days gone by but also hopes to update and apply them to the moment he lives in is, “Honour to bold Robin Hood... Though their days have hurried by, Let us two a burden try.” (57, 61-62) Keats asks us to use our creativity to conjure images of Robin Hood and his Merry Men. His poems force readers to retreat into their imaginations and to visualize history and the magic of legends, as his speaker does in *Robin Hood*. In discussing specific poems of Keats’, I will show how he saturated those works with medieval elements. I will follow the themes of enchantment and magic to link the poems discussed, and as an indication of Keats’ love of the medieval because of its enchanting nature. I will also discuss additional medieval aspects that are distinct in each poem to indicate how true the author

stayed to the era he was trying to portray. In his works *The Eve of Saint Agnes*, *the Eve of Saint Mark*, *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, *Isabella; Or the Pot of Basil*, *Lines on the Mermaid Tavern* and *Robin Hood, to a Friend*, readers will see how Keats uses the techniques described to conjure a sense of the medieval.

The Eve of Saint Agnes

In examining *The Eve of Saint Agnes*, I will draw attention to medieval motifs such as religion and the maiden or lady as well as the enchanting tone. Religious medieval elements being in the title of this poem, “Saint Agnes”. When coupled with the content of the poem, the title implies the rituals young women would perform during the eve of Saint Agnes’, before Keats’ era when such ceremonies were considered frivolous. The first stanza describes the Beadsman, whose name is derived from the Middle English word *bede* or *bedeman*, indicating a “man of prayer” that was hired to pray for a patron (OED.com). This figure, a man who is paid to pray and worship, contrasts starkly with the anti-religiousness and realism of the Industrial Revolution that Keats hoped to steer readers away from. The Beadsman connects with several other medieval era Christian items in the first stanza, the rosary (6) and the “sweet Virgin’s picture” (9). The Beadsman, the already medieval character, is in a church during the first section of this poem, another highly medieval entity.

Keats pairs these religious items with the “bitter chill” (1) in the air, setting a tone of lethargy as though he is casting a dreaming spell from the start of his poem. The tone, which lasts throughout, gives the poem a fairy-tale like quality, similar to the legends

derived from the medieval era (Warner). Architectural elements of the church, like the “sculptur’d dead” knights (14) and “ladies, praying in dumb orat’ries” (16), continue the medieval theme of the poem. The night air is eerie and cold, and in this way enchanting, so much so that it seems to the Beadsman the chill permeates even these statues, “His weak spirit fails/ To think how they may ache in icy hoods and mails” (17-18). The magic of the cold air, slowing or stopping the movement of all living things, contradictorily seems to cause the immobile statues to shiver and come to life.

The rituals of St. Agnes’ Eve fall upon the young maiden of the poem, Madeline, to carry out. The ceremony and its outcome are central to both the medieval backdrop as well as the enchanting quality of *The Eve of St. Agnes*: “upon St. Agnes’ Eve,/ Young virgins might have visions of delight... If ceremonies due they did aright” (46-47, 50). These “visions” are of the intended husband of the “young virgin”, and are supposed to take place during the bewitching midnight hour, or “honey’d middle of the night” (49). The ritual is tied in with the Christian medieval atmosphere, initially described through images such as the Beadsman at the start of the poem: the young woman performing the ritual must be pure, as she is intended to be when she is married in the Christian faith, and she must fast before bed, as is done during the Lenten season. The magical nature of the rites Madeline must perform is re-emphasized by another ritual that Madeline’s father carries out, told in an anecdote by the aged Angela to the young Porphyro, “He had a fever late, and in the fit/ He cursed thee and thine, both house and land” (101-102). The blood-feud between families, as well as supernatural curses recall Shakespeare and Arthurian legend. These beliefs echo the mystical fairy-tale quality of the poem that started with the chilly night air bewitching the church statues.

The scene in Madeline's bedroom as Porphyro looks on, starting in Stanza XIX, contains many medieval elements that fortify the magical rapture of the evening. Porphyro plays a passive, voyeuristic role in this scene as Angela hides him in a closet so that he may view Madeline as she partakes in the rituals of St. Agnes' Eve. Religious overtones mark the relationship of Porphyro to Madeline, since he hopes to "win perhaps that night a peerless bride" (167). This moment emphasizes the importance of marriage in medieval society, again noting the prominence of Christianity and its strict statutes in feudal British history. To jump forward a bit, religious influences appear later in the scene in a description of Madeline,

"Rose-bloom fell on her hands, together prest,
And on her silver cross soft amethyst,
And on her hair a glory, like a saint:
She seem'd a splendid angel, newly drest...
Porphyro grew faint" (220-224)

The religious elements, such as Madeline's pose of worship, make her like an ethereal being to Porphyro. Christianity and enchantment are linked inseparably in this section, revealing Porphyro's true desire for Madeline being rooted in her purity and freedom "from moral taint" (225). In basic description of what he sees, Porphyro notices that "legion'd fairies pac'd the coverlet" (168) of Madeline's bed, as though their magic is an agent of the "pale enchantment" that holds Madeline "sleepy-eyed" in the next line. The era of King Arthur is mentioned in the next few lines as well as the magical connotation linked to Merlin, "Never on such a night have lovers met,/ Since Merlin paid his Demon all the monstrous debt" (170-171). This line makes the obvious reference to the depth of

Porphyro and Madeline's love, while connecting their affections with the powerful Arthurian sorcerer and darker magic.

The complex divide between vision and reality acts as a last barrier of enchantment, the one that both divides the lovers and, once broken, finally joins them. Through music, Porphyro hopes to wake Madeline with an antiquated song on a medieval instrument, "Awakening up, he took her hollow lute...He play'd an ancient ditty, long since mute,/ In Provence calle'd 'La belle dame sans mercy'" (289, 291-292). Music from an instrument that provided courtly entertainment is hypnotizing in this already dreamy sequence. Instead of putting Madeline to sleep, it wakes her, "Her eyes were open, but she still beheld,/ Now wide awake, the vision of her sleep" (299). In waking, she believes that the true Porphyro before her is actually the "vision" of her future husband. The transition from sleep to waking was made seamless by Porphyro's lyre, charming her from sleep's hypnotism into his control. The spell, as well as the sleepy tone of the poem, is broken when Porphyro explains to Madeline that she is awake. The tone of the following paragraphs becomes hurried, as though shaking readers from their stupor so that they may escape the impending harm of Madeline's father's curse.

From the very start, *The Eve of Saint Agnes* takes readers far from the urbanism and rush of the 19th century with images of the Beadsman, the church, the stone knights and damsels and the cold feeling of winter rushing in around the castle. The soothing, mystical tone brings one further into the realm of magic and legend in the poem, as readers find themselves rooting for Porphyro and Madeline to escape and live out their fairy-tale love.

The Eve of Saint Mark

Keats' *Eve of St. Mark* has the same bewitching tone as *The Eve of Saint Agnes*, but lacks the emphasis on ritual of the latter. Christian religion, as well as legend, takes the same pivotal role in this poem as they played in *The Eve of St. Agnes*, establishing a mythical and ominous tone from the beginning. The first focus of the poem is on an entire village heading to evening prayer on a Sunday. The stained glass windows of the church are focused on as the last rays of sun hit them, revealing images of "green vallies cold" (8) and "daisies on the aguish hills" (12). The medieval architecture of the church, especially the emphasized window art, tells a story of springtime and renewal. The ritual of going to church is another strong religious element of the poem, one that Bertha misses because of her infatuation with another piece of literature other than the Bible. As the "Sabbath-bell...call'd the folk to evening prayer" (2-3), Bertha finds herself alone and unable to pull herself from a novel. This book is peculiar and entrancing to Bertha,

"A curious volume, patch'd and torn,
That all day long, from earliest morn,
Had taken captive her two eye
Among its golden broideries;
Perplex'd her with a thousand things, --
The stars of Heaven, and angels' wings,
Martyrs in a fiery blaze,
Azure saints in silver rays" (25-32)

The speaker describes a medieval era manuscript with "golden broideries", with delicate religious motifs within them. These images depict Christian legends, such as "The winged Lion of Saint Mark" (35) and the Ark of the Covenant (36). These images are spellbinding, causing Bertha to forget the lapse in time, not realizing that she has been

reading “all day long”. Bertha seems to be chosen as the recipient of this enchantment for the same reasons Madeline was exceptional in *The Eve of St. Agnes*, because both were “maiden fair” (39) and deserving of being “daz’d with saintly imageries” (56).

A disturbing turn takes place in the poem once the sun goes down, after which the speaker describes the entranced Bertha as a “poor cheated soul” (69). The darkness shifts the kind of enchantment that Bertha is experiencing, from that of magical and positive sort that she feels while reading the manuscript during the day to a more sinister kind of fear. Nightfall dims the light of the magical Christian text, inspires the “uneasy” (73) Bertha to see menacing shadows and to feel “some ghostly queen of spades... behind her back” (86-87). Keats is operating with a specific interpretation of the Legend of Saint Mark – namely that one could see the ghosts of those buried in the past year if they stared into a churchyard on the Eve of St. Mark (Chambers, 10-8-10). Bertha’s anxiety does not deter her, reflecting her similarity with the martyred St. Mark, and she continues reading about the saint, “in pagan chains,/ Rejoicing for his many pains.” (91-92) Her experience reading the ancient manuscript is similar to readers’ with the poem; all are completely engaged with a text. The next section is devoted to archaic English; readers of the poem are no longer just witnessing Bertha’s experience superficially, now the audience is reading *through* her eyes. The transition from viewing the scene outside Bertha to being with her as she experiences it echoes the climax with the text that Bertha experiences in the last few lines of the poem. She has undergone a personal transformation after reading of the saint’s “fervent martyrdom” (115). She has survived the whole day reading St. Mark’s text, as though it were some kind of test of endurance and faith.

The magic of *The Eve of St. Mark* is rooted in a particular superstitious belief. Keats manipulates and uproots the alluring legend by showing the religious legend's impact on his main female character as she experiences her own enchantment with a beautiful and mysterious manuscript. The charm of this poem comes from narrowing in on a single individual from a cultural universal, showing the potential that one person has on their own, whether it be martyrdom or finishing a lengthy, enchanting manuscript.

La Belle Dame Sans Merci

The most noticeable medieval element of *La Belle Dame* is its structure as a ballad. The ballad was one of the first kinds of poetry, used originally as a way for cultures to pass down legends and fables to younger generations. Keats' use of the ballad form for this poem identifies an era in which it is taking place, namely a time of knights, enchanting maidens. Its structure also allows this poem to have been put to music and sung by a musician or jester to entertain royals in a court.. The musical nature of *La Belle Dame* exemplifies the powers of melody to hypnotize, as seen in the poem itself in the character of the knight, "alone and palely loitering" (2) because of his melodic encounter with the beautiful enchantress.

The medieval motifs of the poem, aside from form, are of the questing knight and spellbinding lady. The lady's magic, through the knight's eyes, is due to her wildness. The knight is entranced with her strange and inhuman ways, calling her "a faery's child" (14), with long hair and "wild" eyes (16). The language barrier between the two is another reason the knight gives for finding her enticing; although she does not speak in

his tongue, he still believes that “sure in language strange she said --/ ‘I love thee true.’” (27-28) The knight’s fascination with the wild and supernatural woman becomes delusion. She is able to prey upon him because of her superficial innocence, which deceives the knight, who was otherwise unsuspecting of a young lady alone in the “meads” (13). Spellbound, the knight follows her to what he sees as her “elvin grot” (29), where she takes further advantage of him by weeping and inspiring his sympathies, using her magic, or female sexual prowess, to catch the brave, heroic man in a state of vulnerability. She lulls the knight into sleep with her melodic voice, re-establishing the hypnotizing powers of music that are naturally part of the ballad structure, fundamentally tied to the enchantment of the poem.

Once the knight sleeps, he experiences visions of other victims the lady has claimed. This kind of prophetic enchantment, and the sleepy state of mind required to achieve it is similar to Bertha’s experience in *The Eve of St. Mark*. Bertha, however, is a victim of superstitious beliefs and the darkness of nightfall, whereas the knight-at-arms of this poem is victim to enchantment by a seemingly helpless lady. The knight’s visions are “pale kings and princes” (37), all medieval epitomes of masculinity and all of which have fallen victim to the deceptive lady and her magic.

La Belle Dame Sans Merci is the first of the poems analyzed here to be told from the point of view of the victim. It is also the first to cause readers to not sympathize with the enchanting lady, unlike the beautiful Madeline, who is enchanted, or with the independent Bertha, who is aligned with the martyr St. Mark. The magic of *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* as a poem comes from the point of view of the delusional knight, who believes to have experienced a magical woman; the magic experienced in the poems of

St. Agnes and *St. Mark* differs because it is derived from the legends linked with those evenings. Experience of the main characters, however, is integral to the enchantment described in all three poems: the knight imagines the magic of the wild woman, Bertha imagines the ghosts of the dead, and Porphyro sees Madeline as enchanted because of the rituals she is undertaking.

Isabella; Or the Pot of Basil

The next line attached to the title, “A Story from Boccaccio”, explains that the story’s origins lie in the medieval literary tradition, Boccaccio having written in 14th century Italy. Keats is updating a legend like in *The Eve of St. Mark*, bringing a magical, embroidered fairy-tale to the present. The sleepy, rhyming tone of *Isabella* sets the stage for an overall enchanting experience as it did in *The Eve of Saint Agnes*, musically captivating its readers with morose lines such as,

“Fair Isabel, poor simple Isabel!
Lorenzo, a young palmer in Love’s eye!
They could not in the self-same mansion dwell
Without some stir of heart, some malady” (1-4)

The emphasis on the consonant “s”, or sibilance, runs throughout the poem, contributing to its sleepy fairy-tale quality,. The poem’s slow movement also adds to a feeling of drowsiness; the first eight stanzas describe Lorenzo’s nervousness to even talk to Isabella aside from his love for her. The only increase in movement is when Isabella’s brothers ride with Lorenzo into the forest, where they kill him. The poem returns to its slow

movement following the death scene, even when Lorenzo's ghost finally reveals the truth to Isabella.

The content of the legend itself is dark, magical and very medieval. Unfulfilled love, which is represented by the mournful tone of the piece starting even in the first line with "poor simple Isabel" (1), reflects the Petrarchan mode. Instead of only one participant in the relationship being sorrowful, however, both are in this piece. Lorenzo is successful in telling Isabella about his feelings in stanza's eight and nine, "so said, his erewhile timid lips grew bold...Great bliss was with them, and great happiness" (69-71). This bliss, enchanting both young lovers, lasts only until the two realize in line 104 that, "there is richest juice in poison-flowers", turning the mood back to one of troubling apprehension. The next appearance of enchantment in the poem is a concrete one in the form of Lorenzo's ghost. Enchantment in Keats' works like *La Belle Dame* and *St. Agnes* has worked to cloud the vision of its charmed onlookers; here, however, Lorenzo's ghost brings truthfulness, removing the hazy veil from Isabella's vision that her deceitful brothers had lain. A language barrier exists between the dead and the living and, while the vision gets its bearings, the language it speaks is melodious, "Isabella one its music hung" (284), enamored with the sound. Another powerfully magical element of the ghost is that it is still capable of love, one that exceeds the boundaries of living things,

"Its eyes, though wild, were still all dewy bright
With love, and kept all the phantom fear aloof
From the poor girl by the magic of their light" (289-291).

The "dewy bright" sheen in Lorenzo's eyes share the human emotion of sadness that has been a weight on Isabella since Lorenzo's disappearance. The "phantom fear" that one

would normally experience at a vision is taken away by the “magic” of Lorenzo’s glance, holding Isabella mesmerized so that he may tell the reality of his disappearance and the ending of their living love. The vision instructs Isabella where to find the body; her search becomes a hero’s reverent, mournful quest. Upon finding the site, Isabella is imbued with courage, she “did not stamp and rave” (384) as her old nurse would have expected. The poem’s speaker gives readers a warning, for one of the few times in this poem attempting to transport us from outside the stanza’s of *Isabella* to be standing squarely next to her in the mossy forest as she undertakes a difficult task, “Fair reader, at the old tale take a glance,/ For here, in truth, it doth not well belong/ To speak” (389-391). The speaker reveals the importance of Isabella’s action by asking his audience for reverence at the magic of the forest and of the strength of Isabella’s love. The boundary between life and death is removed for just moments as Isabella removes Lorenzo’s head, not like it were that of a monster but instead with “gentleness [that] did well accord/ With death, as life.” (395-396) The last enchanting element of the poem follows, it being the mystical potted Basil plant that Isabella stores Lorenzo’s head in and keeps alive with her tears. After she pots the head of her lover, Isabella slips into a waking coma, “She forgot the stars, the moon, and the sun...And the new morn she saw not: but in peace/ Hung over her sweet Basil evermore” (417, 422-423). Within her daze, she is reverent and nostalgic as she clings to the memories of Lorenzo like she does the potted Basil.

Enchantment in *Isabella; or the Pot of Basil* is a mixture of its hypnotizing tone and of the real magic in Lorenzo’s return from the dead. While the overall set of feelings the poem inspires is sadness, the speaker finds in the sorrow room to appreciate the love had, lost and had again, “O Music, Music, breathe despondingly!...Spirits in grief, lift up

your heads, and smile” (434, 437). This line touches on the melody of the poem and on the “spirits” that walk with the living like Lorenzo. By infusing moments of the poem with the smallest amount of tearful joy, the poem comes full circle as does Lorenzo and Isabella’s love.

Lines on the Mermaid Tavern

Lines on the Mermaid Tavern is the shortest of the works examined in this chapter; however, it holds the clearest example of the speaker’s thoughts on medieval-era poets and connecting their work to contemporary poetry. The sense of enchantment in this poem is unlike any other kind discussed in his other medieval poems. The magic in *Mermaid Tavern* exists in the speaker’s imagined image of medieval era poets indulging in merry excess in the historical London tavern. The second source of magic comes from the poem’s construction of a link between the old and the new by means of a magical, time-transcending “sign-board” that represents the Mermaid Tavern. The first four lines of the poem, meant to be an homage to artists of the past, is also the only few couplets in the piece that are repeated,

“Souls of poets dead and gone,
What Elysium have ye known,
Happy field or mossy cavern,
Choicer than the Mermaid Tavern?” (1-4, 23-26)

The repetition of these lines denotes the significance of the “Mermaid Tavern”, a local watering hole in Cheapside, London during the Elizabethan era (Shelley). The tavern had a reputation of being a local meeting place of literary minds (Shelley). By evoking an image

of famous poets from the era, such as Shakespeare and Sir Walter Raleigh, the poem establishes a mythic tone, ripe with literary legends. Gathering in a single, mythical location over an unidentified time-period, Keats' poem transcends time, connecting the past to the present with many links in between. The speaker asks the souls of dead poets the rhetorical question of whether or not the Mermaid Tavern was the most euphoric place to work, gather or carouse. This question surpasses the physical lifetime of the poets, implying that they had experienced Elysium on earth while in the actual location of the Mermaid Tavern.

The poem designates Medievalism in line 10, in which Robin Hood is heralded, "Drest as though bold Robin Hood/ Would, with his maid Marian,/ Sup and bouse from horn and can." (10-12) Robin Hood is the first historical figure to be singled out in *Mermaid Tavern*; until he is mentioned, only the nameless, ghostly "Poets" exist. The poem refers to Robin as a heroic and poetic figure, worthy of comparing the historical poets to. The poem puts him in a place of honor as he is compared with Keats' esteemed predecessors; the poem likens the experience of wearing Robin's clothes and drinking merrily with his maid as similar to the feeling the "souls of Poets" felt upon experiencing Elysium in the Mermaid Tavern. Directly before the lines designating Robin Hood are descriptive lines illustrating the lush foods of paradise, ending in the exclamation "O generous food!" (9) Robin Hood's legend told that he took from the rich things such as a feast of plenty, which the poem describes as food selections that the "souls of poets" would have indulged in at the Mermaid Tavern. Pairing Robin with this edible luxury makes him fit more perfectly into a medieval role: he was king of thieves, while maintaining a moral compass as the legend goes. Robin Hood is an emphatically

respected character. The poem appropriately compares him and his “merry men” with the old poets, suggesting that both groups of men were virtuous, easygoing and liked to enjoy life.

The following stanza, beginning on line 13, brings the old works of the romanticized, dead poets into present time. The speaker creates a tone of rejuvenation of poetry by disguising artistic works as the tavern’s “sign-board” (14), which gets lost in time until an astrologer sees the embodiment of contemporary poetry. The story is related by the speaker, saying the astrologer

“Said he saw you in your glory,
Underneath a new old-sign
Sipping beverage divine” (18-20)

The line “Underneath a new old-sign” indicates that a contemporary artist, perhaps Keats himself, has updated the works of the past while still sharing in the same “beverage divine” as the old poets. By sharing the identical experience in the tavern, the new and old poets meld together. The bond they share implies that the poets from different times are both similar and dissimilar, as are their works. Much of Keats’ poetry, however, exemplifies his major source of inspiration coming from the medieval era. While the past poets are “dead and gone”, their creativity lives on in the new poets that meet in the Mermaid Tavern.

In this poem, enchantment is not due to spell-binding women and hallowed evenings, as in Keats’ *Eve of St. Agnes*, *Eve of St. Mark* and *La Belle dame Sans Merci*, it has a different kind of magic in describing the everlasting inspiration of medieval poets. This kind of enchantment is in *Mermaid Tavern* existing in the imagined descriptions of

the old poets' experience of "Elysium" and their transcendence of times. Enchanting also is how the "host's sign-board flew away" (14), passing through time and space until its "glory" (18) is seen resting above the newest generation of poets. This abbreviated homage to old poets rejuvenates their work, taking them from the medieval to the romantic era in a different way than any of Keats' other work.

Robin Hood, to a Friend

One may begin and end one's study of Keats' sense of medieval enchantment with *Robin Hood*. The imaginative legend of Robin epitomizes what should be missed about the medieval period to Keats, as expressed in this short, five stanza poem. The poem's negative tone and persistent focus on Robin Hood being inaccessible to current readers gives *Robin Hood, to a Friend* an emphatically nostalgic tone. Keats establishes a nostalgic tone through seemingly tangible images such as

"No, the bugle sounds no more,
And the twanging bow no more;
Silent is the ivory shrill
Past the heath and up the hill" (11-14).

The images are powerful because, even though they are not completed, they give us a sensual hint of what the past was like and allow our imaginations to fill in the rest of the image as we please. The speaker gives readers a tempting ray of hope that the past might again be accessible at the start of the third stanza. They do so by dropping the negative tone, "On the fairest time of June/ You may go, with sun or moon,/ Or the seven stars to light you" (19-21). This fleeting hope lasts another line and is then abruptly taken away

from readers on line 23 with the use of another negative, “But you never may behold/ Little John or Robin bold”. Why would Keats emphasize Robin as a character to be immortalized? Robin was picked for his romanticized legend, which in my mind was highlighted by his living by a moral code of stealing from the rich, giving to the poor and otherwise keeping to himself, not wanting glory. The speaker individualizes Robin and his men, making them stand out against other heroes with repetition of the word “Gone” in the fourth stanza; this emphasizes the fact that the ways of the present world has destroyed the chance for such kinds of idealized heroes to exist anymore.

The last stanza breaks the negative tone again; in doing so it immortalizes the medieval age. The speaker is done reflecting on what is passed and cannot be had again, and so turns his angle to positive remembrance and commemoration of Robin,

“Honour to the old bow string!
Honour to the bugle-horn!
Honour to the woods unshorn!
Honour... to all the Sherwood-clan!
Though their days have hurried by
Let us two a burden try.” (50-53, 60-62)

The final shift to lightness and remembrance takes the weight from the poem and emphasizes the way in which the past being passed can benefit the present. This stanza calls attention to how we may immortalize and learn from what was good in the medieval period, how men came together for causes they believed in. By ending this way, the speaker leaves readers with a positive association with the past instead of a sorrowful one at the idea that it is gone. We are also left with knowing that we may indeed keep the past alive as long as we “burden” ourselves with the same motivations as those heroes of the past, staying true to our own sense of morality and virtue.

Conclusion

These poems transport readers from today into a magical past saturated with legends of fair damsels, dashing young heroes and religious symbols. Keats taps into the past effortlessly by using the structure of medieval verse, imagery, melodious rhyme and by a variety of wistful tones. In finishing poems such as *Robin Hood*, readers can conclude that the past is in fact accessible and a television screen is not required to do so. Another enchanting quality in these poems is how the passage of time seems to slow down, as one's senses turn hazy while they slip away into an ancient legend. Keats' poems act as opiates, sedating readers just like the characters in his poems such as Madeline and the "pale", "loitering" knight, able to see but never to act or change an outcome. The magic of Keats' poetry is not entirely in the poems themselves, but in the poems' ability to exercise the powers of our imaginations as we attempt to conjure an image of Porphyro and Madeline's clandestine meeting as lovers or the thought of Bertha's fascination with Saint Mark. We just needed a little help remembering our childhood flights of fancy, in which we could have been the princess Madeline, hoping to see her future husband, or we could have been bold Robin Hood as he caroused with his Merry Men.

Chapter II Pre-Raphaelite Depictions of Medievalism

Introduction

John Keats' medieval poetry is hypnotizing, weaving an enchanted realm of knights, ladies and magic for readers to indulge in. Keats' fine eye for detail and his use of a nostalgic tone, as discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, allowed his poetry to capture the feeling of an age which otherwise seemed confined to the past. The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood found inspiration in Keats' medieval sentiments. This group of artists, like Keats, hoped to escape the fast-paced urbanism of the Industrial Revolution through their artwork, specifically by painting images of the medieval era. Many of the most remembered paintings out of the Pre-Raphaelite movement illustrate poetry from the Romantic movement. The paintings discussed in this chapter focus on the poems of John Keats, particularly on his works that follow: *The Eve of Saint Agnes*, *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* and *Isabella; Or the Pot of Basil*. In this chapter, I will focus on the medieval traits in these paintings as well as the different ways in which they illustrate parts of Keats' work as well as a medieval-themed poem by Tennyson: "The Lady of Shalott". Tennyson's poem was picked because it represents a similar focus to Keats' medieval poetry. "The Lady of Shalott" portrays medievalism through the lease of Arthurian Legend, depicting a striking and heroic image of Sir Lancelot and an enchanted island near the city of Camelot. This thesis chapter will focus on Pre-Raphaelite depictions of medieval themes, especially in the work of William Holman Hunt, John Everett Millais and John William Waterhouse.

Depiction #1 of John Keats' poem, *The Eve of Saint Agnes*, painting titled *The Flight of Madeline and Porphyro during the Drunkenness attending the Revelry* by William Holman Hunt (1848)

<http://www.victorianweb.org/painting/whh/paintings/96.html>

This image depicts the final stanza of Keats' poem *The Eve of Saint Agnes*, in which the young lovers Porphyro and Madeline flee from Madeline's father's castle. Without knowing the title of this image and not recognizing it as a depiction of Keats' poetry by extension, one can recognize it as a depiction of the medieval age by its many details. Porphyro's clothing is distinctly medieval: he is wearing leggings with a belted tunic over them and a distinct cap with a feather – all details that evoke the image of Robin Hood. Madeline's garb is not obviously medieval, although it still holds a powerful connotation connecting back to Christianity; her long flowing garments and the white shawl that frame her face and hair makes her look like an interpretation of the Virgin Mary. Interpreting Madeline as Mary reveals the religious undertones of Keats' poem, seen in the rites required on the Eve of Saint Agnes of young virgins hoping to see their future spouses. Another medieval element of this image is the feast and partying going on in the left background, in which men are red-faced and smiling while holding metal mugs up towards the ceiling. The man farthest to the left in the feast depiction is wearing a chain-mail hood and sitting up higher than others on a decorative wooden chair. This man's seat of authority coupled with his grizzled, long white beard and chain mail hood indicates his superiority in the castle hierarchy. He is most likely the lord, or in this case, Madeline's father. The two men in the left side of the foreground are wearing tunics one might see worn at a renaissance fair. They are depictions of the "porter" in Keats' poem, whom have passed out from drunkenness as indicated by the large, empty

jug underneath one of the man's resting arms. The architecture of the room is another medieval characteristic of the scene. Two examples of the medieval architecture include the banquet hall in the background that was a common addition to feudal castles and the archways in the background and the one Madeline and Porphyro stand in front of in the foreground. Other medieval elements of the room include the carved wooden chairs that Madeline's father and the drunken man in the foreground sit on, the clay jugs of mead or wine on the ground, the hunting dogs on the left of the painting, the tapestry on the wall of the banquet hall that seems to be depicting a knight, the curtain that hangs behind Porphyro and Madeline that has intricate details within its border and lastly the horn made from an actual bull's horn that lies on the ground at Porphyro's feet. This image abounds with medieval elements like the joyous banquet and the dark architecture. Even the untrained eye would pin this image as a depiction of the feudal era for the many strong elements of the medieval that contextualize this image.

This image is a direct interpretation of Keats' text, described in stanza XLI of the poem,

“They glide, like phantoms, into the wide hall;
Like phantoms, to the iron porch, they glide;
Where lay the Porter, in uneasy sprawl,
With a huge empty flaggon by his side;
The wakeful bloodhound rose, and shook his hide,
But his sagacious eye an inmate owns:
By one, and one, the bolts full easy slide:—
The chains lie silent on the footworn stones;—
The key turns, and the door upon its hinges groan.”

In the image, Madeline and Porphyro silently cling to one-another “like phantoms”. The porter, also identified as the drunk man in the foreground next to the dogs is painted “in uneasy sprawl”, same as in the poem with the “huge empty flaggon by his side”. The

bloodhounds are next to the porter in the image, however the poem only describes one that “rose, and shook his hide”, which is not portrayed in the image. The dogs are the only ones to see the young lovers make their escape, which is described in the poem with the line “his [the dog’s] sagacious eye an inmate owns”, as though the bloodhound’s viewing of the escape makes Porphyro and Madeline guilty like convicts. The painting shows Porphyro with his hand on the door; the door is cracked and there are chains about the young man’s feet. The darkness that comes through the slim crack between the door and the outside world seems ominous in the painting, as though the “hinges groan” even in an image that captures an isolated moment in the poem. The looks on Madeline and Porphyro’s faces are the most telling of the emotions as described earlier by the poem, that the two are truly “beset with fears,/ For there were sleeping dragons all around” (352-353). The lovers show the same fear in their eyes in both the poem as in the painting; this image shows their gaze intently on the “sleeping dragon” or the intoxicated porter that could stymie their escape.

Depiction #2 of John Keats’ poem, *The Eve of Saint Agnes*, painting by the same name, by John Everett Millais (1863)

<http://www.arc-store.com/millj673.html>

This image illustrates a section of Keats’ poem towards its middle; one in which Madeline prepares herself for the ceremonies necessary to enact the legend of Saint Agnes. This image is not as obviously medieval as *The Flight of Madeline and Porphyro during the Drunkenness attending the Revelry* by William Holman Hunt. Madeline’s dress, the style of her hair, the architecture of the room nor any other elements of the

painting clearly indicate the time-period in which it is supposed to take place. The image does designate its origins in Keats' poem, however, because of the detail Millais paid to the poem's description of this scene. This image depicts Madeline's room, which is a description in the poem beginning in stanza XXIII and ending the stanza after,

“Full on this casement shone the wintry moon...
She seem'd a splendid angel, newly drest,
Save wings, for heaven:—Porphyro grew faint:
She knelt, so pure a thing, so free from mortal taint.

Anon his heart revives: her vespers done,
Of all its wreathed pearls her hair she frees;
Uncclasps her warmed jewels one by one;
Loosens her fragrant boddice; by degrees
Her rich attire creeps rustling to her knees:
Half-hidden, like a mermaid in sea-weed.” (217, 223-232)

Following a chronological progression through the poem, the first phrase that Millais' painting captures is the “wintry moon”, whose light falls across the floor and Madeline in the center of the room. The next section of the poem enters the thoughts of Porphyro, who is watching Madeline perform the rites of Saint Agnes from his hiding spot in the closet. It is hard to discern whether or not Millais intended this image to be as though viewers were seeing through Porphyro's eyes; it is entirely possible that this is either simply a painting of Madeline or of Porphyro's view. If Millais is staying true to the poem, however, then he does proceed as we do, chronologically through this section of the poem and painting as though we too are the voyeurs, like Porphyro as he “grew faint” at her beauty and purity. Another case for this image being a depiction of the scene as Porphyro would have seen it is the grace captured in Madeline's figure, as well as her angelic face, which is white with rosey cheeks and distinct features in the painting. She is, indeed, very beautiful, as Porphyro's thoughts in the poem reveal. The section of the

poem that this image most provocatively captures is Madeline's undressing. In the image, she has already removed the "wreathed pearls her hair she frees" and is in the process of "[loosening] her fragrant bodice" which has sent her dress falling about her feet in the painting. In the poem, the speaker calls this image of her "half-hidden, like a mermaid in sea-weed", which conjures another provocative vision of a half naked woman swimming about with her long hair streaming out behind her in the water. This implication describes Madeline accurately in the moment the painting captures: her hair is loose and flowing like the mermaid and her legs are captured in the dress, as though sea weed hides part of her body from the onlooker. The color of her dress and undergarments, which are not described in the poem thus were up to Millais to decide for himself, are blues and greens, as well as shimmering stones on the dress at Madeline's feet. These colors and the gleaming jewels represent the colors of the ocean, furthering the depiction of Madeline as looking like a mermaid as the poem describes her.

This image directly interprets of the section in John Keats' poem, as seen in the details included in the painting that the text similarly describes. This is also the case with Hunt's *The Flight of Madeline and Porphyro*. Millais' interpretation of the text accurately depicts Madeline undressing and being bathed in the moonlight as though the image were magically pulled from the page of poetry. Hunt's painting stands out for its infinite details when compared with Millais' image. The details in Hunt's image, such as the feast, the hunting dogs and Porphyro's clothing, indicate the medieval era much more clearly than the details in Millais' image. Millais, however, could have chosen to emphasize medieval architecture or physical emblems of the feudal in Madeline's room

as Hunt did, but instead chose to blur the room and concentrate on the young woman. Thereby, Millais minimizes the specifically medieval accents of the room, making the painting only identifiable by its emphasis of the detail in Keats' poem. Because of Millais' decision to stick to the text and focus less on details that he would have to conjure from his own imagination, he puts all of his energies into making Madeline look magnificent in this image. By making Madeline breath-takingly beautiful in the moonlight, and by making her the clear focus of the image by blurring the rest of her surroundings, Millais paints us into Porphyro's thoughts. There is a greater sense of the legendary eve that the poem describes in this image than in Hunt's image. The magical element of this painting is also due to the section of the poem that it describes, especially when comparing it to Hunt's section, which is not magical but practical. Millais' choice to paint the image as he did, however, brings out the magic of the poem better than had he paid attention to detail in the painting as a whole. Madeline is enchanting in this illustration, as she looked in this moment to Porphyro. Both paintings accurately represent Keats' work, and both add aesthetic beauty to the poem's words in their own way. Millais' work, although less realistic in detail, truly makes the magic of the text come to life on the canvas.

Depiction # 1 of John Keats' poem *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* , painting by the same name, by John William Waterhouse (1893)

<http://www.artmagick.com/pictures/picture.aspx?id=5617&name=la-belle-dame-sans-merci>

Waterhouse's image depicts a section from *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* in which the knight has come across the lady and she captures him with her gaze. Interestingly, this section does not happen in real time in the poem because the poem is told retrospectively from the knight's memory. If there were a section to describe it according to the knight's recollection in the poem, it might be the following,

“I met a lady in the meads,
Full beautiful—a faery's child,
Her hair was long, her foot was light,
And her eyes were wild.” (13-16)

This section describes the first meeting of the knight and the lady, particularly the moment during which the lady's “wild” eyes and other untamed ways captivate him. The sense of the medieval in this image is not as detailed as the Hunt image above because the poem it describes, *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, offers less concrete description of setting and objects that exaggerate the sense of the medieval than in *The Eve of Saint Agnes*. Another reason for why there is less obvious medieval detailing in this image is due to the fact that the poem describes a sequence of outdoor, pastoral settings, thus depicting architecture and other feudal objects is unnecessary. There are several elemental medieval characteristics in this image, however, specifically the motifs of the lady and the questing knight. The knight is identifiable because of his armor. He is not a king, a prince or any other important member of a court, he is as nameless in the painting as he remains throughout the poem. The lady's long, charming hair and her flowing

purple gown, as well as the characteristics of her face like her soft nose and lips, pin her as a medieval woman, specifically a “lady”. Had these two characters been drawn in any other clothing, it wouldn’t have been easy to place them in the medieval epoch (especially without the knight’s armor). If the characters had been posed in any other way, it wouldn’t have been easy to place them as a depiction of John Keats’ *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*. Waterhouse created a memorable depiction that is a creative interpretation of the text. This painting is an interpretation of the text because they illustrate the knight’s imaginative retelling of his memories and the lovely lady’s seduction.

The muted colors of the painting are an element that stands out when compared with the depictions of *The Eve of Saint Agnes*; Hunt’s depiction was of a colorful feast and Millais, while more muted than Hunt’s, still emphasized the vivid colors of Madeline’s dress and her glowing body in the moonlight. The subdued colors in this depiction of *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* reveal the mood of the poem, specifically of the knight’s emotional state of morose, dull depression. When the first speaker in *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* comes across the knight, he describes him as “alone and palely loitering” (2) and “haggard and so woe-begone” (6). Even though the experience of the two people depicted in the painting is not one of sadness, for in that moment the knight is happily entranced by the wild woman, the neutral colors of the image are foreboding, as though want to draw attention to the eventual outcome of the text. In the image, the most captivating element is the lady’s gaze. She is sitting beneath the knight and her hands are softly playing with the knight’s handkerchief. She seems to be in a pose that assumes

submission; however, her intent stare, even on the soft features of her face, implies her power over the knight.

The painting to capture a particular element of the poem: that of the femme fatale, the woman who feigns submission while being in control the whole time. The look of love on her face in the painting isn't love at all but instead one of manipulative power. Dramatic irony plays a role in the viewing of this image because spectators are aware of what will happen to the knight if they've read the poem. This image makes an educated viewer cringe with the knowledge that the knight is falling under the spell of the enchantress, and there is nothing anyone can do to change his fate. This knowledge makes this image memorable and provocative; women in both the medieval era as well as during the 19th century in which this image was painted were expected to be well-mannered and never to be aggressive. The small, white flowers in the painting that surround the two people reinforce the manipulation of the lady because they soften her image; if this painting had no flowers and instead the background was simply a deep dark wood, the deception of the lady would not have been as effective. She truly plays with our minds as well as the knight's in this painting. There is a similar sense of enchantment in this image as with Millais' painting of Madeline. Waterhouse did not use the exact same technique of blurring the background to give us a sense of what Porphyro perceived in the Millais, however, the painting's emphasis on the woman's misleading yet captivating facial expression draws viewers in the same way her look deceives the knight.

Depiction #2 of John Keats' *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, painting by the same name, by Sir Frank Dicksee (circa 1902)

<http://www.illusionsgallery.com/LaBelleDame-Dicksee.html>

This illustration depicts the lady atop the knight's horse, which occurs in the sixth stanza of the poem. This poem is told retrospectively from the point of view of the knight; none of the events taking place in it happen in real time. Consequently, paintings such as this and the Waterhouse depiction above give viewers a glimpse into the knight's imagination. The stanza describing this particular image is narrated as such:

“I set her on my pacing steed,
And nothing else saw all day long,
For sidelong would she bend, and sing
A faery's song.” (21-24)

This image is true to the text in essence; the lady is on the knight's horse and he is staring intently into her eyes as a visual depiction of the line “And nothing else [I] saw all day long”. This illustration portrays several medieval elements, beginning with the same motifs used in the poem and in Waterhouse's painting of the lady and questing knight. It is clear after viewing two depictions of this poem that the most striking part of *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* to 19th century Pre-Raphaelite painters was the interaction between the lady and knight. The two figures were necessary to paint together to get across the full effect of the poetry; one without the other may not have identified the image it captured as either medieval or as a depiction of Keats poem. The horse is another expression of medievalism; Dicksee has taken this symbol of knighthood and exaggerated the horse as a symbol of masculinity by making him muscular, large and dark in coloring. The horse's tack is flashy, red and gold in color. The knight's armor is also detailed and ostentatious;

this knight seems to be more important than the knight in Waterhouse's depiction, who had no horse and wore humble armor. The representation of the lady fits that medieval motif because of her long gown and similarly long and luxurious hair. The flowers in her hair are also medieval, styled in a way that one might see in a renaissance festival.

The woman in this image is blatantly in control of the situation. She is seated on the knight's horse, thus she is higher up than the knight and must look down at him to see into his eyes. Her dress is ostentatious, as was the case with the horse's tack and the knight's armor. She seems like a wealthy lady as compared with the drab dress and the meek pose of the lady in Waterhouse's image. This woman, with her long red hair, is outright seductive compared with the woman in Waterhouse. The lady's face isn't as soft as in Waterhouse's painting. Because of her brazen gaze, it seems as though she is looking into the knight's eyes with the obvious intention of seducing him. The lady's seductive look in this piece is ostentatious when compared with the other paintings' depictions of the woman; the expression on the knight's face makes him look dumbstruck, instead of peaceful and enchanted like the knight in the Waterhouse painting. The scenery in this image, the flowered field, the reflective lake and the sunset, emphasizes the ostentation of the lady's dress, the horse's fine tack and the knight's armor. Everything in this image is overstated as compared with the neutral colors of Waterhouse's image. This painting is how one might imagine the knight remembers this instant because of his great infatuation with the enchantress; everything is in bold colors, representative of the knight's overwhelming emotions at recalling his love of the lady.

Depiction #3 of John Keats' poem *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, painting by the same name, by Arthur Hughes (circa 1893)

<http://www.artsunlight.com/artist-NH/N-H0002-Arthur-Hughes/N-H0002-054-la-belle-dame-sans-merci.html>

This image depicts the same section of John Keats' poem as does Dicksee's above, in which the knight has set the lady on his "pacing steed" and been unable to see anything else all day (stanza VI, *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*). The essential medieval elements of this piece are the same as the other two depictions of the poem: the knight and the lady. The lady is recognizable by her long hair and gauzy dress. The knight is wearing a belted tunic over his armor. He does not look as regal as Dicksee's knight, nor as understated as Waterhouse's. The horse included in this image is another motif of the era. The horse's stature follows the same pattern as the knight in that his trappings are practical and decorative, but not as much as Dicksee's charger, and that he is a reasonable size and musculature. Another medieval characteristic of this painting that the other paintings have not dealt with are the ghosts of kings and princes that are painted into the upper right corner, behind the lady. The poem describes this scene as such,

“And there I dream'd—Ah! woe betide!
The latest dream I ever dream'd
On the cold hill's side.

I saw pale kings and princes too,
Pale warriors, death-pale were they all;
They cried—“*La Belle Dame sans Merci*
Hath thee in thrall!”” (34-40)

In the text, the dead do not warn the knight until the lady lulls him to sleep, where he sees ghosts in his dreams. In the image, the ghosts are painted “death-pale” and transparent.

One ghost is an identifiable medieval king because of his golden crown, the golden sword he grasps in his left hand, the belted blue tunic he is wearing and the authorial beard he has.

When compared with the other paintings depicting this poem, the image by Hughes is less realistic than the other two because the characters are painted with less of a three-dimensional quality than either Dicksee's or Waterhouse's depictions. This ages the painting, making it seem as though it is part of a manuscript from the medieval era itself instead of a kind of photographic portrayal of the medieval era. Another difference between Hughes' painting and the other two images is that in his image, the knight seems to have more control. He is holding his shield in a threatening manner as though he might swing it as the woman; his body posture suggests that he is scared of the lady, since he is turning away from her. The lady looks forlorn, in the same understated manner as Waterhouse painted her. The lady shrugs her shoulders in this depiction, bringing her closer to the knight's eye level. She seems to be offering herself to him peacefully, yet her intent gaze on the knight suggests her underlying manipulative powers. In this image, the lady is portrayed in a less powerful way than in the other two images of the same poem. In Hughes' picture, it looks as though the lady is a prisoner by her slumped, defeated body language and the two flower wreaths around her wrists that look like shackles. The knight does not look as though he is in a position of power either, however, because of the fearful look on his face and his turned torso, making him look as though he wants to run from the lady.

The description of *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* is limited as compared with the longer *Eve of Saint Agnes* poem. Artists that chose to portray a scene from John Keats' *The Eve of Saint Agnes* had more concrete details to work with. It was as though the detail in that poem was like a set of directions from John Keats himself as to how to paint that medieval legend according to his vision. Dicksee, Hughes and Waterhouse have greater room to stretch because of their choice of poem. *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* is more sparse in descriptive details than in *The Eve of Saint Agnes*. This reason explains the variation in detail and form that the three images of the same couple, the knight and lady from *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, portray. The muted colors of Waterhouse's image convey the impending and foreboding doom awaiting the knight. The bright colors of Dicksee's image express the knight's imaginative abilities and memory of his encounter with the enchantress in the meads. Lastly, Hughes' painting stylistically conveys the era it depicts, as well as the idea that neither the knight nor the lady are in total domination in the last image; it is as though both are trying to escape responsibility because of the knight's fear and the lady's seeming submission. All three paintings express the fundamental relationship and associated climax with it by portraying the knight and the lady, but most importantly the lady's gaze that is fixated on the knight. Each does so in a different way and, because of this slight variation, each painting asks a different set of questions that viewers should ask themselves, the most important being "who seems to be in power in this painting, and who in the next?"

Depiction of John Keats' poem, *Isabella; Or the Pot of Basil*, titled *Isabella and the Pot of Basil*, by William Holman Hunt (1868)

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Basilpot.jpg>

This image depicts a scene in Keats' poem *Isabella; Or the Pot of Basil* that is near the very end of the poem. This illustration portrays the following section:

“And she forgot the stars, the moon, and sun,
And she forgot the blue above the trees,
And she forgot the dells where waters run,
And she forgot the chilly autumn breeze;
She had no knowledge when the day was done,
And the new morn she saw not: but in peace
Hung over her sweet Basil evermore,
And moisten'd it with tears unto the core.” (417-424)

Intricate and numerous details inundate this painting, as was the case with Hunt's other image, *The Flight of Madeline and Porphyro during the Drunkenness attending the Revelry*. Medieval elements of this painting are not as obvious as in Hunt's other image. After one looks closely, however, some elements begin to stand out that date the era the painting depicts. The quilt-like tapestry that the basil pot sits on has floral detailing, as well as intricate borders like a manuscript. Beneath the tapestry is a wooden box that is shaped like an individual altar one might use for kneeling on, as was customary in the Christian faith that has already been identified as medieval in this paper. The skulls that decorate the basil pot remind one of the head of Lorenzo inside of the pot, recalling the skull exposed in Shakespeare's medieval play *Hamlet*; the skulls also remind a reader of the haunting image, Lorenzo's ghost, which recall several of Shakespeare's plays such as *Macbeth*, *Richard III* and *Hamlet*. The architecture and furnishings of the room remind one of Venice during the Renaissance, for example the bed in the background that is

raised and has red curtains surrounding it, the candle-lit golden chandelier, the colorful, detailed tiles on the floor and the marble walls. The many details of this piece combine to recall the story of Lorenzo and Isabella and its medieval origins; separately, however, the pieces do not immediately recall an era of knights and ladies, unlike all other paintings discussed in this paper.

One would need to be familiar with Keats' poem, but would not need to know the title of this image to understand it is Isabella, clutching her Basil pot in remembrance of her decapitated lover. The tale is distinctive because of its plot and images such as the Basil pot. Because of this painting ensures its identification because of its inclusion of the ornate basil pot. The details and vibrant colors of this piece are striking; one's eye might catch new aspects of the piece every time they revisit it. With the intricate attention to details of the architecture and furnishings of this piece, it is easy to look over the protagonist of the story the image illustrates. In this piece, Isabella is slouched over her Basil plant, clutching a handkerchief and letting a blanket slide to the floor around her feet. The expression on her face is interesting; she looks serene and calm. She seems drained of any of the sorrow one would feel to know their true love had died; in fact, she seems devoid of any emotion at all. Isabella's lackluster emotional state is described in the passage above, when "she forgot the stars, the moon, and sun", as well as the passage of seasons and transition from day to night. Hunt has done a realistic job portraying Isabella's numbness, as seen in her face. As compared with the other paintings described in this paper, Isabella's face is similar to Madeline's in Millais' painting. Both women look as though they are at peace, even if their reasons for being at peace differ immensely. Isabella is not a seductress, as is the case with several of the illustrations on

La Belle Dame Sans Merci; she is, however, a prisoner to the Basil pot and Lorenzo's memory, making her look similar to the lady in Hughes' depiction of *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*. Isabella's dark, almost black, hair signifies her background as Italian. This painting differs from all others because the legend it illustrates takes place in a culturally very different land from *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* and *The Eve of Saint Agnes*. This image stands out among the paintings of knights and damsels for reasons of its origins as well as Isabella's distinct emotional position when compared with the other medieval ladies in these paintings. No lover will save Isabella from her fate, as was the case in *The Eve of Saint Agnes*; she will similarly never enchant and ensnare a knight or princes or kings, from *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*. She will live and be miserable without Lorenzo, a fact that she is incapable of emotionally reacting to in this painting as seen on her blank face.

Poem, *The Lady of Shalott* by Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1842)

This poem is included in the chapter because I wanted to include illustrations of another medievalist poem other than those based on John Keats' work. By including the poem, I can emphasize the medieval elements in it and both the medieval and magical elements that it inspires in artwork. The topic of this poem is derived from Arthurian legend, mentioning Sir Lancelot, the city of Camelot and a magical woman in the likeness the Lady of the Lake. The depictions of it concern the magical woman that, separated from the world of Arthur's court by magic. The focus of this discussion on *The Lady of Shalott* is to point out on the unmistakably medieval essentials the poem has. The major elements of the text that point to the feudal era are the motifs of the knight,

Lancelot, and the lady, the lady's enchanting powers and characteristics of Arthurian legend including Lancelot and the city Camelot.

The poem's setting is pastoral. The speaker describes a river surrounded by "long fields of barley and of rye" (2) and of parallel roads that run towards Camelot. Upriver from the city is an isolated island that the passers-by can see, but no one ever visits; there, the poem's protagonist lives a lonely existence. The tone of isolation and sadness, expressed in the following lines, continues throughout the poem to denote the lady's emotions.

"By the island in the river
Flowing down to Camelot.
Four gray walls, and four gray towers,
Overlook a space of flowers,
And the silent isle imbowers
The Lady of Shalott." (13-18)

The "grey walls" surrounding her on the "silent isle" imprison the lady. Another aspect of her imprisonment is the mysterious and magical "whisper" which has told her "A curse is on her if she stay/ To look down to Camelot." (29-31) The lady's entrapment in this poem recalls that of Madeline in her father's castle in Keats' poem *The Eve of Saint Agnes*; Porphyro must free Madeline in the end of the poem by running away with her to fulfill their love. The lady has several magical qualities, many of which act as diversions to preoccupy her time that she spends alone. An intriguing quality of the lady's magic is her mysteriousness, caused by the magical fortress that keeps her captive; no one near Camelot has ever actually seen her, "Only reapers reaping early.../ Hear a song that echoes cheerly/ From the river winding clearly" (28, 30-31). The world is as isolated from the lady as she is from the world; no one knows anything of her but her beautiful

singing voice. In her fortress, the lady spends her time “steadily” (43) weaving “A magic web with colour gay” (38). This raises the question of who taught the lady to weave if she’s been isolated from the world, as well as if she’s been isolated all of her life. The unknown origins of her weaving and of the kind of “magic” associated with the web add to the intrigue and mystery of the poem. The lady has another magical ornament in her rooms, a mirror that allows her to see the world in shadows, specifically showing the “highway near/ Winding down to Camelot” (49-50). Her magical web and mirror are creature comforts; weaving her magic web is a pastime, making time’s passage not move so slowly and the mirror allows the woman to feel connected with the outside world. Interestingly, the web is colorful but the world in the mirror is not. , The web seems to have sucked the colors from the world while keeping the lady safe from the dangers of reality, locked away on the island.

The lady seems content with her simple existence until the arrival of Lancelot. The poem describes Lancelot beginning in stanza IX and continues to fashion his image over three more stanzas, making it clear to readers how distracting his image was to the lady. Lancelot’s magnetism is described most clearly in the first stanza depicting his image,

“The sun came dazzling thro' the leaves, □
And flamed upon the brazen greaves □
Of bold Sir Lancelot. □
A red-cross knight for ever kneel'd □
To a lady in his shield, □
That sparkled on the yellow field, □
Beside remote Shalott.” (75-81)

His image burns like the sun, which “flamed upon his brazen greaves”; the lady cannot look away and cannot think of anything else but leaving her fortress. The following descriptive stanzas of Lancelot describe other shining elements of his image, such as the “gemmy bridle” (82) and “Thick-jewell’d” (92) saddle on his horse and how his “helmet and the helmet-feather/ Burn’d like one burning flame together” (93-94). Lancelot is like a star to the lady; one that burns so brightly that she forgets the threat of the curse and “look’d down to Camelot” (113). In doing so, the lady seals her fate and willingly accepts that the curse is upon her in a powerful sequence at the end of the poem,

“at the closing of the day
She loosed the chain, and down she lay;
The broad stream bore her far away,
The Lady of Shalott.

Lying, robed in snowy white
That loosely flew to left and right—
The leaves upon her falling light—
Thro’ the noises of the night
She floated down to Camelot” (132-140)

The lady puts herself in a boat, knowing that she will die before meeting Lancelot or seeing any of the other members of Camelot that she was so accustomed to seeing through her mirror instead of in reality. Once in the boat, dramatically floating without anyone directing her, she begins to sing. Her voice, however, as turned from something beautiful into a haunting song described in stanza XV as “carol, mournful, holy,/ Chanted loudly, chanted lowly”. She does so “Till her blood was frozen slowly”. Her dying slowly, alone and without getting to fulfill her wish of seeing Lancelot with her own two eyes is the dramatic and tragic heart of the poem.

Magic is at the core of this medieval poem. Magic gives the lady life and joy, while also keeping her captive, detained and isolated from Camelot. The enchanting vision of Lancelot distracts the beautiful woman and causes her to set in motion the supernatural curse that will ultimately end her life. The mournful tone of *The Lady of Shallot* isn't simply a product of the main character in it; it affects readers alike as they reflect on their own isolation from those in the poem as well as from a time of knights, ladies and the magical kingdom of Camelot.

Depiction #1 of Alfred Lord Tennyson's poem, *The Lady of Shallot*, painting by the same name, by John William Waterhouse (1888)

<http://www.jwwaterhouse.com/view.cfm?recordid=28>

This image depicts the story of the lady during one of the poem's most climactic sections, when she realizes her fate and sends herself down the river to be seen for the first time by the people of Camelot. This image has an uncanny quality because of how realistic it looks, almost as though a camera's lens has captured a magical moment in medieval history. The painting takes place in a natural setting on the river, so architectural elements do not play a part in characterizing the image as medieval as the two images described in this chapter by Hunt have (*The Flight of Madeline and Porphyro during the Drunkenness attending the Revelry* and *Isabella and the Pot of Basil*). Instead, one looks to the character in the piece to reveal the era the illustration depicts, specifically of a medieval lady; this was also the case in the three depictions of *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* that characterize the feudal motifs of the lady and the knight. In this particular image, the lady is painted wearing a headband that looks similar to the wreath

of flowers the enchantress wears in Dicksee's portrayal of *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*. Her hair is also long, flowing and auburn colored, in agreement with the depiction of the lady character in Millais' *The Eve of Saint Agnes*, as well all three depictions of *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*. The lady's dress is white, flowing, has long sleeves that dribble down into the water and has golden embellishments that match her headband, signifying the modest yet eye-catching clothing worn by wealthy women in the medieval age. The quilt the lady sits on is similar to the tapestries one might find in a medieval castle; the theme of the tapestry or quilt was seen in *The Flight of Madeline and Porphyro during the Drunkenness attending the Revelry* by Hunt, and in Hunt's other image *Isabella and the Pot of Basil*. The design at the boat's prow has an intricate design such as one might see on a Viking ship, indicating the boat's place in history, preceding the 19th century when the painting was created.

If one did not immediately recognize this woman or the items around her as medieval, one would only need to turn to the title of the piece to recognize who she is and her literary significance in Arthurian legend. The part of Tennyson's poem that this image depicts begins in stanza XIV,

“Down she came and found a boat
□ Beneath a willow left afloat, □
And around about the prow she wrote □
The Lady of Shalott.

And down the river's dim expanse
Like some bold seer in a trance,
Seeing all his own mischance –
With a glassy countenance
Did she look to Camelot.
And at the closing of the day
She loosed the chain, and down she lay;
The broad stream bore her far away,

The Lady of Shalott.

Lying, robed in snowy white
The loosely flew to left and right –
The leaves upon her falling light –
Thro' the noises of the night,
She floated down to Camelot” (123-141)

The first part of this section of the poem depicted in the illustration is the writing on the boat's prow. The Lady in the poem writes her name because she knows that she will die before getting the chance to meet anyone, especially Lancelot. Her action is significant because she *wants* those who find her to know her identity. If someone did not know that this image was a depiction of Tennyson's *The Lady of Shalott*, the writing on the boat's bow would immediately signify both the white lady in the image's name as well as the poem's title. Other than the inscription on the boat, Waterhouse paid close attention to other descriptive phrases of this section in the poem as well. The look on the lady's face in this image is of hope; she is sitting upright, her chin also tilted up as though she anticipates her first clear view of the city. The description of the lady's emotional state is in the second stanza quoted above, “Seeing all his own mischance --/ With a glassy countenance/ Did she look to Camelot.” The lady in the poem knows that she will die without ever meeting the man that inspired her to break her isolation, “with a glassy countenance”. In the image, she has a look of mournful acceptance but also with the knowledge that those who find her will know her name; thus, she is hopeful. In the image, the lady is shown holding the chain keeping the boat tied, described on line 133. This image depicts a climactic moment in the poem; by loosening the chain she holds with her right hand, it will allow “the broad stream [to bare] her far away” in the direction of Camelot, and to her own death. By painting this scene, when the lady is alive but

actively choosing to meet her demise, this image captures the loneliness the lady feels throughout the duration of the poem. This loneliness, as well as the temptations of the world, cause her to desire something more that she cannot get until she leaves. Because she cannot get what she actually wants, to meet the people whose shadows she has spent her life looking at, she will settle to simply be known and potentially be remembered. Waterhouse's painting captures the threshold the lady stands on, the boundary between life and death and, in her case, ignorance in isolation versus truth in the knowledge and community Camelot offers.

Depiction #2 of Alfred Lord Tennyson's poem, *The Lady of Shalott*, painting by the same name, by William Holman Hunt (circa 1887)

http://penelope.uchicago.edu/~grout/encyclopaedia_romana/britannia/saxonadvent/hunt.html

This painting depicts the section in story of the lady slightly before the section that Waterhouse's image depicts. This image shows a very detailed portrayal of the lady after she has set the curse in motion by looking towards Camelot, in the thirteenth stanza of the poem:

“She saw the helmet and the plume, □
She look'd down to Camelot. □
Out flew the web and floated wide; □
The mirror crack'd from side to side; □
"The curse is come upon me," cried □
The Lady of Shalott.” (112-117)

The chaos depicted in this image distracts a viewer; the poem's content is the focus of the illustration, not the medieval elements contained in it. The feudal age is, however, indicated by a number of things. The lady's wild, long, flowing and auburn-colored hair,

though in a different positioning, is stylistically similar to every other lady depicted in an illustration in this paper. The lady's conservative dress in this portrayal, with the long sleeves and tight bodice, is another indication of the age and is also similar to the dress in several other paintings described in this chapter, for example Waterhouse's *The Lady of Shalott*. The images of men and angels that are either painted or carved into the wall, look like the ones a sight-seer might find on the ceiling of a European church; even though Christianity is not specified in this poem, Hunt chose a symbol that could prompt his viewers of religion's strong influence in medieval times. The most frequently discussed medieval motifs of this paper, the lady and the knight, are in this image as well. The lady is in the foreground, signifying her importance in the poem, and the knight is in the background riding his horse, hardly noticeable at first. Once a viewer sees him, it is possible to identify the time-period that this painting depicts as well as the poem it illustrates.

The most dominant parts of this painting are the woman's floating hair and the spindly threads of the loom that are about in the same way as the lady's tresses. These elements indicate another climactic section of Tennyson's poem when the curse first overwhelms the lady. In this image, one actually sees the cause of the chaos, Lancelot, whereas in Waterhouse's piece we only see the hauntingly calm aftermath. This piece is more identifiable as *The Lady of Shalott* than Waterhouse's because all of the most representative parts of the poem are included in it: the loom, the mirror, the river and fields outside, the lady and the knight. This image also captures the turmoil associated with that pivotal moment in which the lady looks "down to Camelot" (113), and so sets the curse in motion. The look on the lady's face is hard to label with an emotion that

makes sense for the context of the poem and the painting. She looks almost determined, as though she still believes she can clean up the mess and carry on, or perhaps to actually visit the outside world, as she pulls on the threads that bind her with dainty hands. She looks powerful, like the lady depicted in Dicksee's *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, because she is actively trying literally to "undo" herself from the situation she is in. Her lavish room in the image makes it seem as though she is wealthy and accomplished, not trapped and isolated. She is distinct from the other illustrated women in this chapter because she does not need a man to save her, as was the case in *The Eve of Saint Agnes*, and she also does not need to seduce a man to enjoy herself, as was the case in *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*. This woman's life has made sure of her independence.

Both images of *The Lady of Shalott* emphasize the mystical nature of the poem; however, they do so in different ways. The first image shows a beautiful woman dressed in regal white clothing with a haunting look about her, whereas the second image actually illustrates the magic in the poem. Both create an air of mystery and enchantment by depicting the climactic part of Tennyson's poem and by choosing to directly interpret the text into their images.

Conclusion

The outstanding link between all paintings discussed in this chapter is that every one illustrates a beautiful woman. In many of the paintings, a man also accompanies her; however, the lady almost always draws the most attention in this collection of paintings, with the exception of Hunt's *The Flight of Madeline and Porphyro* I'd argue. The ladies are generally depicted with long, beautiful hair and are wearing conservative, luxurious

dresses. As a whole, these medieval women epitomize a standard enchanting of beauty prescribed to them by the Pre-Raphaelites' imaginations. The women are either feminine and non-aggressive, pale-faced and rosy-cheeked like in Waterhouse's *The Lady of Shalott* or Hughes' *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, or they are both feminine and aggressive, seen in Hunt's *The Lady of Shalott* and Dicksee's *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*. All still manage to maintain their femininity and a kind of purity that seems to emanate from their beauty.

The prevalence of the knight and lady in theme these paintings indicates how strong representative those two figures are of the medieval time-period. One painted without the other makes a painting more difficult to identify as a depiction of the medieval era. As stated above, the style in which painters depicted the lady, as an outstanding beauty and an epitome of femininity, is also indicative of the medieval era. The inclusion of the knight and the lady motif in a piece brings in a sense of fairy tale charm to the viewer's experience. One can step out of their present and easily into a feudal past while experiencing one of these detailed pieces, all of which express a sense of the medieval age in a distinctive way. The reader's sense of escaping into a dreamy fantasy thanks to Keats' or Tennyson's poetry is similar to what one feels upon examining these images. Painting an image assumes one will be capturing an isolated moment instead of recounting an entire myth; this was the difficulty faced by the artists when choosing which moment from *The Eve of Saint Agnes*, *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, *Isabella; Or the Pot of Basil* and *The Lady of Shalott*. By incorporating objects in their paintings that were both predominantly medieval as well as indicative of the poetry, such as the feasting scene in Hunt's *The Eve of Saint Agnes* or the knight in shining armor in

Dicksee's *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, the artists recreated a sense of Keats' and Tennyson's poems in their entirety. The paintings are like triggers, using the memory of the reader to recall the text and pair it with their encounter with the illustrations. The combination creates realism, as though the characters in the poems spring to life in the paintings. The sense of the magical is not lost in translation, however, since the paintings pictorially fortify one's impression of the poems, giving colorful existence to the images readers have created in their minds from reading Keats or Tennyson's work.

Thesis Conclusion

The medieval time-period captured the hearts of all the artists described above; they found inspiration in not only the legends and fables originating in the feudal age but also in the work of their contemporaries. Medievalism was a creative outlet for the 19th century artists' community to cope with the changing landscape of Europe, from a pastoral and sylvan set of societies to bustling, industrial cityscapes. Medievalism was a way for artists to fight the swiftly changing pace of life during the Industrial Revolution by depicting images contrary to urbanism and pragmatism, which included forests, knights and magic. The charm and popularity of medievalism was not limited to the Romantic and Pre-Raphaelite artistic movements; 21st century readers understand the medieval motifs of Keats', Tennyson's and the Pre-Raphaelite's art because medieval themes are still prevalent in today's society.

Contemporary culture has perpetuated the use of medieval characteristics from ancient myths and legends. Favorite novels from the current generation include *Lord of the Rings*, *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *The Last Unicorn*, all of which include aspects of medievalism and enchantment. While the word "fairy tale" has become associated with children's stories, novels such as those listed above satisfy adults in a similarly imaginative and escapist way. While technology was the original target of medievalists, it is now an aid to medieval fantasy by bringing it to the screen in films such as the Harry Potter series, *King Arthur*, and even spoofs such as *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*.

Medievalism is not limited to film or text either; it is continually changing, morphing to fit the ever-changing contemporary world. Today, many women use the image of the "white knight" to describe the perfect man. Today's version of the knight is

a man with respectable values and work-ethic; these men stand out, sadly, because the common belief is that they are rare and that, traditionally, when a woman “found one” they should hold on to him. The same modern women, when let down by the difficulty of dating and finding love in the current chaotic world, end up using another medieval phrase, “chivalry is dead”. The implication is interestingly the same reason Keats and Tennyson wrote and the Pre-Raphaelites painted; all were discouraged with the degradation of values since the medieval era and hoped to immortalize those ancient codes of conduct and ideals in art, so that following generation could continue to experience the magic of remembering a magical, medieval past. There are other examples of medieval themes seen today, as continued proof of the popularity of those values. Enchantresses like the one in Keats’ *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* and Tennyson’s *The Lady of Shalott* have become mesmerizing and beautifully seductive women of film, such as Marilyn Monroe, Cindy Crawford and Salma Hayek. These women represent the idea of the Femme Fatale, originating with characters like the woman in *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*. The character of the sorcerer, or magician or even jester associated with the medieval court exists today in entertainers such as singers. Magic and enchantment, while not the same kind used by Merlin or found in legends like *The Eve of Saint Agnes*, survive symbolically in much of today’s technology, for example the miracles of modern medicine, space travel, and film technology also. These contemporary interpretations of medieval values reemphasize the role of magic and the characters of the lady and the knight that were so prevalent throughout the discussion in this paper about medieval characteristics in 19th century art.

In conclusion, this paper was my attempt to describe the fascinating and predominant elements of medievalism that appealed to the artist, as well as the artist's goal for the viewer's experience. Imagination has the final say, when it comes to creating a world lost to the past; one noticed this in Keats' and Tennyson's emphasis on enchantment in their poetry and in the illustrations that were inspired by the texts. Every piece, whether written on paper or painted onto it, may ensnare the reader in a pleasurable fantasy as long as the reader is willing to be taken there. In this world of technology, everyone's mind needs a break from the expected. The excitement of the unexpected, of the suspension of reality, explains the appeal of the artwork described in this thesis, because of its emphasis on medievalism and magic at its core. Keats' and Tennyson's poetry drag a willing reader into the heart of medieval myth, like Madeline trying to see her future love in *The Eve of Saint Agnes*. Images painted by the Pre-Raphaelites enchant us as the fair lady does to the knight in *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*. Viewers can step out of their reality and enter a realm of impossibilities, a world where mysterious rites performed on a legendary eve can show one their future, where spellbinding women enchant knights and where curses affect the way a history unfolds. These poems and paintings capture the original meaning of a fairy tale, as well as the imagination of children and adults alike.

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