

Keats' "La Belle Dame sans Merci"- ballad or lyric: A critical analysis

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Abstract

Reviewers of Keats' "La Belle Dame sans Merci" have varying views regarding whether the poem is autobiographical. However, in their critical readings, the poem's genre as a "ballad" appears to be given scant attention, and its role in deciding the context of the poem is left largely untouched. Considering the fact that a typical ballad is an impersonal detached poem style and that a lyric is a very personal creation displaying the thoughts and feelings of the poet, it would be assumed that Keats' use of the traditional ballad genre's formal features, including a detached, unfeeling writing mode, would rule out lyrical or autobiographical interpretations. This article argues that reading the poem against the grain (of its ballad form), that Keats' use of the ballad genre conventions does not necessarily preclude autobiographical interpretations. Instead, it helps them. Keats' poem is lyrical and personal in nature, and its use of conventional ballad type conventions is to divert critical attention from the autobiographical substance of the poem. To make this argument, this paper discusses three revealing contexts in which to place "La Belle Dame." To begin with, "La Belle Dame" is a poetic ballad that, whether at the level of poetic themes and personal concerns or at the level of thought, has much in common with Keats' other poems and letters. However, his revision of the poem for its first publication in the *Indicator* is the most essential pillar in which to understand the ironic relationship of Keats' lyrical material to his conventional ballad style. Suppose the intention of Keats was to strengthen the poem's ballad conventions, downplay its lyrical implications, and strike a self-conscious pose critical of what he felt was the overt sentimentality of the poem and easy submission to wish-fulfilling romance. In that case, this very gesture is a confirmation that the poem is mostly subjective and lyrical, at least in its first edition. As such, the apparently objective ballad style of Keats, later further updated and reinforced, can be seen as a trick to mask his real contradictory feelings about Fanny Brawne's own enthrallment, a trick that ironically exposes as much as it tries to cover.

Keywords: John Keats, Fanny Brawne, "La Belle Dame sans Merci," genre, ballad, lyric, irony

Introduction:

One of Keats' most excellent and poignant poems is "La Belle Dame sans Merci." In a letter that Keats wrote to his brother in America, dated Wednesday 21 April 1819, the original appeared. Afterwards, a slightly modified version of the poem was published in the *Indicator* on 10 May 1820. The poem is written in the style of a traditional ballad. The expression

"Ballad" was not applied to the title of the version of the *Indicator*, but the transcripts of the poem by Richard Woodhouse and Charles Brown would officially become the subtitle of the poem." The poem by Keats is generally seen as "maddeningly simple" and yet "so enigmatic," and perhaps, precisely because of its simplicity, enigmatic [1]. The poem does not assert or negate any hypothesis about the meeting of love between the knight in arms and the fairy lady, but utilizes an elliptical style and understatement that intensifies its magic and enigma. Questions remain unanswered regarding the identity of the knight and the questioner, as well as the lovely lady without kindness, and the essence of affection finds itself nebulous. Is it a wicked seduction by a merciless woman of an unsuspecting knight or is it rather a meeting of love characterized by reciprocal seduction? Other key questions remain unanswered as well: is the whole thing merely a dream and the knight's hellish dream merely a dream within a dream? Why does the knight ignore the warning of the victims of la belle dame's past and desperately continue to wander in a barren land?

Although the problem is actually more complex than this, perhaps an initial attempt to address at least some of these questions would be to take the poem's ballad form and its consequences into account and read it as an impersonal statement about love and fixation. Consequently, this reading would remove other autobiographical or lyrical interpretations

Which would otherwise depict the poem as Keats' own romantic fantasy that betrays his doubts and contradictory feelings about love and women in general and Fanny Brawne in particular in a veiled form.

Autobiographical ballad?

However, while reviewers and commentators have been divided about whether or not the poem is autobiographical, Keats' usage of the conventional ballad genre conventions and its significance for the poem's context has been generally overlooked. Generally speaking, without referencing the poem's ballad traditions, those who oppose an autobiographical method do so, and those who regard the poem as fundamentally autobiographical do so amid the ballad style of the poem. "Amy Lowell[2] argues as an example of the first trend that the construction of "La Belle Dame" and other 1819 poems ("Ode to a Nightingale," "Ode on a Grecian Urn," "To Psyche," "On Melancholy," and "On Indolence") can be accounted for by "Keats' accompanying affection for Fanny Brawne," and "the arousal of his growing relationship with Fanny Brawne. She nevertheless rejects the opinion that the poem is autobiographical: "It is, indeed, nothing more, nor less, than that I believe, after carefully examining all the data, La Belle Dame Sans Merci not to be an autobiographical poem, and not connected, except in the most general way, with Keats himself and Fanny Brawne." Lowell argues that the meaning of the poem can instead be interpreted by reference from certain sources,

Critics' views:

In his critical examination of the prose romance *Palmerin of England*, Lowell singles out the prose romance as the most influential piece, besides the poem, in British Romantic prose fiction. Keats's knight and questioner in the poem are dissimilar to one another in terms of identity, and, thus, are unable to be equated or assigned as Keats's spokesperson. Despite this, Patterson goes on to say that the two characters show two influential tendencies in "Keats's poetic mind." The knight seeks to "burst our mortal bars" to achieve an unparalleled level of joy and pleasure, while the questioner is overwhelmed by a Keatsian impulse to pursue "as far as thought can travel" with regard to finding our own limits.

The theory seems to be that the protagonist reflects Keats's desire to feel the ordinary joys of existence on the plane of the real, and that the knight has obviously given up on seeking pleasure in life. The interesting thing is that while writers such as Lowell and Patterson explicitly state that they believe the use of autobiographical details in writing is unethical, they, nevertheless, see some kind of link between their work and that of their subject

When it comes to their relationship and the work it creates, the contrast between poetry and Keats' private life or poetic concerns is important. The interpretations proliferate thus taking the genre of the poem (i.e. Autobiographical) lightly. This reading holds that the poem, rather than being a tale about a love encounter, represents Keats's thoughts, conflicts, and tension. It would appear that the ballad style of the poem and the mark "Ballad" should, at the very least, preclude such interpretations of the author's life or personal experiences, but ironically, that is not the case. When Sidney Colvin [4] says that the poem is a "masterpiece of romantic and tragic symbolism on the wasting power of Love," he is suggesting that the poem uses highly symbolic language to invoke several intense and conflicting feelings. Even though Keats's letter to his brother does not disclose that the poem is private, "it becomes apparent" to Colvin that "these verses have been written with him in mind."

Keats's agony of an impossible love is also argued by John Middleton Murry [5]. The woman known as "La Belle Dame" is, in fact, Fanny Brawne, who happens to be the woman of life itself which, through Fanny, wants to claim Keats for its sacrifice and victim. As Claude Lee Finney [6] considers the poem, he views it as an example of Keats's own apprehension of how his feelings for Fanny Brawne had the potential to diminish his personal freedom and his literary (that is, poetic) [7]. For this reason, the poem is best represented in the form of a ballad that stands in defiance against the shackles of marriage, rather than in the intimate form of his second "Ode to Fanny."

The second ode

The second ode To Fanny, known as the "Bel Dame sans Merci", is an exact and complete version of the poem "La Belle Dame sans Merci". The one makes an overt, personal protest against the constraints of love in an arresting, clear manner; the other uses general symbols to convey the same concept. According to this view, the poem is about the poet's life, and the use of the objective ballad mode is only for literary effect.

vehicle that prevents blunting the effect of the poem's lyrics. In effect, Finney's argument is consistent with an earlier important claim made by Albert Elmer Hancock, who has since been largely forgotten. Keats' ballad "La Belle Dame sans Merci" seems to sum up the poet's encounters of love reflected in later poems such as "Ode to Fanny," "Lines to Fanny," and a "Sonnet to Fanny." Hancock notes that Keats' own magic is embodied here. The knight in the tale is revealed to be John Keats and the fair lady is Fanny Brawne, and the use of the ballad tradition as a backdrop is not merely a neutral stylistic option but rather a mask for their true identities, who are both engaged in a drama of excruciating, passionate love and anguish. Based on his comment, Hancock's cryptic statement summarizes the connection between the poem's personal and lyrical quality and the impersonal, distant ballad.

narrative framework this article aims to investigate the investigation into this relation further. A potential solution to the obvious inconsistency mentioned above is implied by Hancock's statement, as a quick glance at the entire quote shows. It can be seen that here there is a convergence of form and substance.

instead of being incongruent Keats may have embraced the impersonal and distant ballad form as a ruse in order to keep himself safe from the repercussions of his candid admissions. To conclude, this essay will discuss the degree to which Keats's poem is "lyrical" and how the poet might have tried to mask his poem's "lyrical" existence by using the impersonal ballad form. Moreover, considering the recent positive assessments made by Gerome McGann, Theresa M. Kelley [9], and Andrew Motion, [10], the present article will demonstrate how the result of such revision will ironically promote assumptions about the autobiographical nature of the poem rather than negate their validity.

Nature of the poem:

This essay studies three contexts to discuss these points, which can illuminate the meaning of the poem. First, placing "La Belle Dame" in the sense of the other poems and personal letters of Keats will demonstrate how much it has in common with them, particularly that it addresses typical Keatsian themes of passion, thralldom, and fixation. A second significant point to consider is that "La Belle Dame" is a conventional ballad rather than a literary one. Being a Keats creation and sharing similar themes with the poet's other poems and letters mean that "La Belle Dame" is largely an expression of Keats' personal interests and predictions. At least such a view has the virtue of highlighting the continuity in the works of Keats. Finally, in the sense of Keats' revision of the poem for release in the *Indicator* in 1820, perhaps the definitive hint as to how one can view the poem can be found.

As mentioned above, the recent critical trend assumes that Keats undertook this revision in order to respond to his critics and detractors by removing the excessive sentimentality of the poem and distancing the poet's identity from the knight's persona. The revision itself, however, ironically gives the lie to the ballad form's impersonal pretensions. Instead of deflecting the critical focus away from Keats' (love) life, the modifications made in the text of the *Indicator* can be seen to validate the poem on the basis of his (love) life, his disputes, illusions and fears of Fanny Brawne's enthralling passion. Instead of illuminating and insightful, the poem's reference as "ballad" can thus be seen as ironic.

Jack Stillinger[11] has recently argued that the poem is "symbolic," in an effort to judge the multiple interpretations of "La Belle Dame," although it never describes its own symbolism. As such, all meanings "remain hypothetical," including autobiographical ones. The poem's complexity could only be clarified by resorting to genre for Stillinger: this work advertises itself as belonging to a class of poems in which the normal materials are elementary, unexplained, and even supernatural incidents. There will be, of course, a meeting with a mysterious woman. Singing, strange food, lovemaking, bad dreams, and a calamitous turnaround would naturally take place. Many commentators have seen the poem as a dream to relate the series of events or images that appear in the poem with no clear logic or sense of causality[12]. However, according to Stillinger, "The actions are made logical solely by the genre of the poem." They are just the kind of acts in ballads that occur. The claim of Stillinger has the advantage of pointing out the formal characteristics of a typical ballad and the masterful use of the genre by Keats to present his strong tale of doomed love and obsessive fixation. In such an argument, however, the genre is nothing more than a collection of formal characteristics that have little influence on the poem's real meaning. As such, while Stillinger believes that the ambiguity of the poem can be overcome by reference to genre, his gloss does not allow us to find any particular significance for it.

Resolving Ambiguity by studying the genre

This essay argues that genre can also overcome the ambiguity of the poem, not in Stillinger's context, but in the sense that it ironically promotes a certain autobiographical reading of the poem. In reality, Pace Stillinger, genre will tell us what actions to expect in a ballad, but only by locating the poem in the sense of Keats' other poems, his individual situation, and his fears, desires, and conflicts can one understand the symbolism and meaning of these actions. For instance, the fact that the themes of the poem-love, thralldom, and death-are common problems in the poems and letters of Keats may warrant an autobiographical view that sees the poem as an extension of the other descriptive and lyrical poems and letters of Keats where he clearly records his own fears and anxieties about love, thralldom, and death. "For example, as the prototype of "La Belle Dame sans Merci," most critics find Keats's *Endymion*. Both *Endymion* and the knight pursue a dream goddess recklessly to the verge of diversion. It is just that, in the end, *Endymion* is capable of reconciling himself with reality and of saving himself from the terrible fate that the knight will later endure. The knight is absolutely enthralled, unable to observe the shifting seasons and the passing of time, or to take steps to alter his lot and end his misery. In such a cold barren land, he keeps waiting to relive his suddenly broken romance with a woman who will surely

not turn up again, not least because in his dream vision she may have been just a figure, or a figment of his imagination. As Evert puts it succinctly, the

"In fact, knight "is just what Peona said Endymion would become if he didn't mend his imaginative ways, a heroic figure lost in bravery, lost in love, and so much in the grasp of a malignant imagination and out of contact with the real world that he was hardly even rational.

Letters to Fanny:

Moreover, love is often synonymous with death in Keats's lyrical poetry and in his letters to Fanny, his family, and friends. Death is often eroticized and expressly desired, or portrayed as an unavoidable result of love. It is considered more often than not as a type of thralldom, irreconcilable with personal liberty and poetic aspirations. Keats writes to Fanny in a letter dated 27 July 1819 of his "swooning admiration" of her "beauty." "In spite of myself, you absorb me," he confesses. "Keats goes on to say to Fanny in an emotional tone and a phraseology that recalls the style and passions of the poem "Bright Star," that "I have two luxuries to brood about in my walks, your beauty and the hour of my death. "O that I should have possession of both of them at the same moment." Here in Keats' revelation, death is not conceived as an alternative to a lost romance, but as equal to romance and attendant upon it. In Keats' private letters and his works, there is also ample proof to show that he always compares love with death and pain or projects his sexual and death impulses on women[13].

His "La Belle Dame sans Merci" is an outstanding "literary ballad." However, being a literary ballad means that it is not a conventional one inherited from folk culture, although elements of the poem by Keats may also be considered traditional, of course. Modern ballads have unknown authorship and can be viewed as myths or legends in different ways.

A certain cultural group's stories, that is, represent the aspirations and expectations, fears and anxieties of the group. This can justify many scholars' interpretive practices who do not read Keats' poem as an impersonal narrative, since Keats's ballad is, after all, Keats's. Keats created this poem and, as such, it must also represent the thoughts, values, and beliefs of the poet in some way.

A argument that can also be easily substantiated with regard to the other poems, letters, and notes of Keats, as we have seen above. By the way, it is on this account that all those who point out Keats' indebtedness to past and contemporary sources end up remembering the poem's distinctly Keatsian character. In all its aspects, whether in its vision or in its masterful technique and strong suggestive nature, the poem as a finished product is Keats's. For example, Robert Gittings[14] catalogs a list of the sources that relate to the making of the poem, but he concludes that none of them can account for the strength and underlying depth of a poem that brought to the surface Keats's darkest and most simple experiences. "Stephen Coote[15] also concludes that source searching in the end "fails to adequately account for the subtlety of its exploration of sex and death," while pointing out potential sources for Keats' poem. This is also the approach of Ernest C. Pettet and Francis L. Utley[16]. Since Keats's masterpiece can not be limited in any way to the sources from which it derives its inspiration, as Gittings puts it, it can then be seen as being triggered by real private incidents in Keats' life, by his "darkest and most fundamental experiences." In his interrupted and miserable relationship with his mother, or in his brother's misery and death due to false love, the latter may have roots[17]. They may also be rooted in his love and death dreams and connections or his doubts and anxieties regarding his connection with Fanny Brawne.

Paul de Man (in his "Introduction to the Poetry of John Keats") says, in essence, that "Introduction to the Poetry of John Keats" is sufficient to understand all that follows. de Man argues that considering Keats's tragic short life and brief poetic career, Keats was deficient when it came to the insights of the rich history he might have drawn on. He derived inspiration mainly from reading the works of previous and contemporary poets. Most significantly, he developed his skills and learning through the act of publishing. When we derive our interpretation from the job itself, we are on very safe ground.

Robert De Man makes several points related to the topic in the following statement. In truth, Keats owe much to earlier poets and poetry, but he is essentially a unique artist. Since it draws its inspiration from Keats, the work should not be discussed in terms of the source materials. Instead, it should be discussed by referring to Keats and the work itself. For de Man goes on to say, Keats's debt to other sources is primarily technological rather than thematic. Instead of talking about subjects or problems that were common in previous poets, his writing shows his own interests and prejudices. Extending de Man's quotes is necessary to make it clear the ideas come from which writers: as de Man points out, Keats will never be able to draw inspiration from the history of grandeur; his use of older models will often be more of an impressionistic than a conversation between past and present, as is depicted in *The Prelude*. These strategies used by Keats, as seen in his poem "The Eve of St. Agnes" and his poem "Hyperion," stem from earlier poets like Spenser and Milton; but as it was not explicitly a reference to them, the poet had to draw all of his strength from his own or near vicinity.

Keats's poem "La Belle Dame sans Merci" is identical to Keats's earlier poem "The Prisoner." Keats's earlier poem, "The Prisoner," is also a modern retelling of "The King in Yellow," a short story written by the 18th-century French writer Robert Blake. When Walter Jackson Bate says, "La Belle Dame is a lyrical distillation of diverse feelings, and at a troubled yet richly thoughtful moment," he may have inferred as he wanted us to arrive at. The presence of concern and preoccupation literally gave rise to this by-product. When Bate says "La Belle Dame" is "not only a lyrical poem that embodies Keats's different feelings and troubles at the time of its composition, but also a part of the larger context of Keats's private and professional life, and knowing this context will help us better understand the poem," he means that "La Belle Dame" is not just a lyrical poem, but it is also connected to Keats's life and career, and having an understanding of the wider context helps us comprehend the poem.

Keats and Fanny Brawne

Another important context in which the poem occurs is Keats's dispute with Fanny Brawne, who is a significant source of distress for him, regarding the impact of his romantic feelings for her on his career as a poet. The poem's revision for publication in the *Indicator* and the resulting debate about the poem's motives, interpretations, and merits or disadvantages are both relevant contexts in which to consider the poem's significance and the irony of its type. The original "noble knight" starts as an earnest "noble warrior," but by the time of the revised edition, he is a cynical "vile wight. Stanza 8 poses a noticeable contrast from the beginning of stanza 9. In the original version, the speaker says that the beautiful lady "wept and sighed with pain," and that he "shut her wild, restless eyes with four kisses.

The overwhelming majority of critics and commentators agree that the original, unpublished version of the poem appeared in Keats's letter to his brother and was later published by Milne in the first edition of Keats's works in 1848 is considerably better in terms of artistic and literary quality. More recently, in a path-breaking essay entitled "Keats and the Historical Method in Literary Criticism," Jerome McGann has given the *Indicator* a substantial boost in interest.

on the one hand, derisively viewed as a lower-quality copy, but on the other, considered to be the end product of Keats's assumptions about how critics would receive his poem. When viewed in context, the critiques raised against the *Indicator* edits are not intended to be impartial. Rather, they refer only to "a more and a less 'romantic' version of the ballad."

According to him, McGann sees the *Indicator* text as more "romantic" than the more detached, "more self-conscious and critical" letter text. Keat's posthumous work contains many elements, including a pessimistic tone in regards to the wight and a critical commentary on his own poetry, but it also allows the reader to see and understand the cynicism and critical nature of the work. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, when Keats was writing his poem, the archaic Spenserian "wight" had already formed a distinctly ironic undertone. Using the ironic "wretched wight," Keats overtly poses as an artist, alerting his readers that he, as a poet, stands at a self-conscious distance from his subject. Besides, considering the aggression to him and his works by the prevailing literary environment, when Keats signs the poem "Caviare," he intends once again to stress his self-conscious place as a poet and to share with his readers of the *Indicator*, "who are presumed to represent an undebased literary sensibility," "a mildly insolent attitude towards the literary establishment."

McGann's essay has had the effect of inspiring critics and commentators to regard the *Indicator* text of "La Belle Dame" more favorably as Keats' "last deliberate choice." Theresa M. Kelley states, "Keats's 'Belle Dame sans Merci' represents how poetry and the dissemination of poetry may be implicated in the process of publication and critical reception as well as personal circumstance." Kelley thus stresses how the poem varies between the two versions. Since the poem was originally written for George and Georgiana Keats' private family audience, George had to later change the poem for "the more problematic audience of *Indicator* readers." Keats's oblique reaction to the controversy that dominated early reviews of his poetry is registered in both entries.

Irony:

R. S. White notes that Keats's ballad is ironic because it lets him critique the man in love, as well as separate himself from Fanny Brawne and the misery she endures. White claims that making certain changes to the *Indicator* version changes the original poem's tone, making it sound even more ironic about the lovesickness of the knight and the wight. The good "knight at arms" is contrasted with the reprehensible "wretched wight" as an example. Additionally, Hamlet's reference to the poem as "A Ballad" (albeit an incomplete one) takes the poem away from the lyric's subjective and personal mode. Since Bate indicates that Hunt and possibly Woodhouse thought of the poem's magic and dreamlike qualities as "sentimental," he posits that Hunt and possibly Woodhouse believed "with myopic good will" that the "sentimental" element of the poem will be considered good. This definition is far too personal and arbitrary, dwelling on the concerns and humiliations that plagued

Keats. As White believes, corrections to Bate's claim encourage critics and readers to no longer read the poem as sentimental. Thus, in a way, Keats has created two poems: one that differs in its overall tone, and another that encourages varied readings. Some commentators, e.g. the "sentimentalist", have noted variants of the "passionate poet, neglected by a ruthless femme fatale" above, and consider these variations to be accurate representations of the story. But a nearly opposite reading of the same story is "if anyone knows who the unknown poet is, please tell them that I have made an unsuccessful attempt to find them, and I would like to write a long, private letter of apology."

Ballad or lyric?

In other words, to agree that the poem is a distanced ballad and the man is a "everyman" in love who just happens to also be making a condemning argument adds up to a rejection of male fantasy. We are not viewed with the woman's opinion, but with her construction and the man's reactions, which are biased by his dream and lovesick state and don't always have much to do with the woman's behavior. In courtly verse, she is portrayed as unattractive, yet distant. In the poem, does Keats misgivings about dominant, seductive women betray his masculinity and misogyny? A critical and compassionate view of men's propensity to construct self-justifying and self-pitying illusions that pretend actual women's acts and feelings don't matter. White's statement highlights McGann's vital role through clarifying his crucial stance and reproducing his distinction between the more emotional, immersed letter type and the more guarded Indicator form. Additionally, it implies that new interpretations of the poem can become available if we concentrate on the variations Keats made to the published edition. In its defense, it may be argued that since these psychoanalytical readings focus on male fantasies and predictions, these involve the projection of sex and death impulses, as well. Schulkins concludes that in "La Belle Dame" Keats is denying romantic idealizations, exonerating the beautiful lady from the cruelty people assign to her, and portraying the knight as "the victim of his own romantic notion."

The view expressed by Keats, that men are the victims of their own romantic and infantile conduct, while women are merely passive objects of false adoration, is close to the one expressed by White in his [22] study. Using this knowledge, it would be possible to read the numerous factors and circumstances that led to Keats's works as "raw material" and use these as sources for his personal vision, which in turn leads to a literary, memorable treatment of obsession, death, and sex.

White's idea, which recalls Kelley's theory, has validity, too, especially if we consider Keats's anxiety about how his earlier love poems would be received. *Isabella*, an epic poem of about 50,000 words, which Keats completed in the spring of 1818, initially caused him to balk because he felt it was still mawkish and too romantic. To make matters worse, he also assumed that publishing it would only intensify the attention he was already receiving from his opponents and in the conservative press. N. Cox [24] says, Keats's doubts about *Isabella* are strong indications that he realized that "romance, a form of enchantment linked to wish fulfillment, was seen as lightweight and weak, and incapable of giving forth sterner fare—in Keats's words, 'too smokable.' In this context, "too smokable" was a pejorative way of saying "easily exposed in its faults," or more precisely, easy to ridicule.

Keats also worried about the general public's negative reaction to his work, as well as the conservative critical appraisal of it. Keats says that the love interests in his poetry may well have worried that their loves would carry a defensive mockery from those readers who would want to suppress their addiction to the genre-defining wish-fulfillment enchantments. Another reason Keats made use of the disconnected ballad type is that since the "La Belle Dame" is part of the romantic genre, using this form is seen as Keats's attempt to show himself as being emotionally powerful and impervious to romance's fantasies of what a "perfect" woman would be like. Even for those who followed McGann's advice, including Kelley, it is not clear why there are two separate versions of the poem. Keats is credited with inspiring the condition, which they describe as being inspired by the artist's ultimately doomed attempt to escape his gradually draining emotional entanglement with Fanny Brawne. Thus, the Indicator text appears more self-conscious and critical than the romantic original edition. Keats distanced himself from Fanny Brawne by publicly disclosing his relationship with Fanny Brawne. Another way to view this example is that Andrew Motion claims that Keats's alias "Caviare" suggests a contemptuous attitude towards the readership of the magazine by alluding to Hamlet's "Caviare to the general." The actor Hamlet explains the dismal failure of a new play the company had previously put on because it was too complex for the public's lowbrow taste. Tranquil movement indicates that Keats felt immense self-doubt, as he was confronted with public scrutiny from conservative publications and reviews. Additionally, he felt confused about his relationship with Fanny Brawne. His poetic strength was steadily sapped, and his sense of independence diminished.

McGann describes the original poem as "more romantic" in language from Keats' time, which can be paraphrased as "more sentimental". Keats' revision of the poem was regarded as "more rewarding" by Motion, eliminating the risk of coming across as too sentimental. When it comes to the valiant knight-at-arms, he is first replaced by a distinctly "wretched wight." By their life histories, they illuminate Keats' emotional condition in the weeks before his death as a poet.

Their position in the ballad tradition creates a level of detachment and irony. It may be that this means that Keats, in a new attempt, is distancing himself from Fanny. "As Motion perceives it, the Indicator version has an ironic tone that is not present in the original." However, the main irony is that the poem's original lyrical content is personal and the ballad detached form and modifications written for public consumption are used to fully erase this personal content. So Keats' sarcastic attitude against the wretched wight is present even with the ballad tradition. This may also mean that Keats' writing style reveals more than he wants the reader to know. When the influence of detachment is more pronounced, there is greater participation by Keats, and therefore a greater revelation. Reflecting Hancock's earlier assertion that Keats's poem can be read as an autobiographical discovery only shielded by literature, Keats invokes the ballad tradition. In this context, the title's reference to the poem as a "ballad" seems to be an ironic excess.

To return to our previous discussion, according to McGann [25], when the ancient "wight," already obsolete in Spenser's period, is used in the context of the story, it provides a gap between the narrator or poet and the "wight," thereby providing the narrator with a measure of objectivity. "This apparent objectivity may be little more than a mask for the proximity of Keats to the wight as well as the narrator," Kelley maintained. [26].

McFarland claims that an attempt to conceal the identity of Keats the knight at arms by changes to the poem's Indicator edition is a failure. Not as well disguised, but it better suits the decorum of the poem, the poetically "less effective" "wretched wight" would be more aptly called a "knight at arms. To put it differently, in contrast to the "completely masked," "more medieval knight," the "wretched wight is without such protective masking." So while the Keatsian revelation that "No cuirass glistens on my bosom's swell" could go unnoticed by the average reader, McFarland's remarks about the "wretched wight" are more evident and unmistakable. Additionally, in the end, both poems underscore the destructive consequences of passion. Therefore, in order to disguise his enthrallment with Fanny Brawne, Keats' objective poetic manner and the Indicator revisions, which involve the substitution of the "knight at arms" by a "wretched wight," may be just a gimmick.

Reaffirming the position of the original poem as a personal lyrical representation of tortured love and doomed efforts, revisions of the poem support the idea that Keats was rejecting Fanny. He also says that in the past, when he felt depressed, he would challenge her instead of finding reassurance. In a desolate world where "the sedge is wither'd from the Lake / And no birds sing," the lonely knight "is likewise alone and palely loitering." Lately, couples are able to endure more pain and suffering in a relationship than what the relationship brings, because leaving the relationship causes a comparable amount of pain and suffering. Keats admits in a letter to Fanny Brawne written on the 8th of July in 1819 that he is lonely without her and that life apart from her is devoid of happiness. And on the 13th of September, Keats tells her, 'If I were to see you today it would destroy the half comfortable sullenness I enjoy at present into downright perplexities. I love you too much to venture to Hampstead. I feel it is not paying a visit, but venturing into a fire.'

Passion leads to past

McFarland notes that this unbridled love for Fanny Brawne has caused Keats to elevate his great medieval imagining. Keats uses the word "honey" in his poem "La Belle Dame" as a metaphor for desire, says Kelley. But the food given to the knight by La Belle Dame, "honey," is also what Keats wishes to acquire from Fanny. For example, according to Kelley, in his last letter to Fanny Brawne, Keats tells her that he is lonely without her because anything else tastes like "cinder" in his mouth. Similarly, Kelley states that the Isle of Wight is present in Keats's letters to Fanny, signifying the wight's emotional isolation. Keats may have found poignantly ironic the fact that the Isle of Wight is a diminutive form of "wight," a male knight in the 13th century.

Fear of criticism

In Motion, Bate, White, and Cox's estimation, Keats' revision of "La Belle Dame" may have stemmed from his concerns that the critics would find it "sentimental" and "smokeable" and therefore consider it to be on the same level as his earlier poems, with their conservative critics attempting to snuff it out. Corollary: Since the Keats party changed the poem to make it less intimate, it would be more compelling to conclude that the poem is more original and has a stronger lyricism. For Keats, writing in ballad form was nothing more than a smokescreen to hide his true feelings, worries, and daydreams. Given McGann, Motion, and White's persuasive case for arguing

that Keats used detached ballad mode and ironic stance when writing his “Lyrical Ballads,” it may be the case that readers’ ridiculing Keats for his “sentimentality” may be a sign of their romantic wish-fulfilment fantasies. Keats is right when he says that, on a daily basis, Keats swings between moments of intense self-absorption and moments of ironic self-awareness of the man in love. One of his letters reads: Nothing affects me quite as strongly as love – It gets to the point where I can’t even contain myself and start laughing in my lover’s face. However, Keats candidly acknowledges that the most romantic of men is the one who mocks their feelings.

McGann, Motion, and White’s claims indicate that, like the observed tonal change from the “sentimentalist” poem to its sarcastic, disconnected “ballad” version, the poem’s movement between two extremes can be compared to the swinging between two extremes. In this poem, the poet is seen to be in love, and then sees himself from the viewpoint of someone who seems to be judging him. In this context, one can see that White is in agreement with White when she says that “Keats’ unclear attitudes toward women and physical love in general are exhibited by the poem’s indeterminacy of point of view.”

Conclusion:

Traditional ballads are impersonal, factual, and detached stories, whereas lyric poems are generally emotional and subjective. At first glance, it seems as if they are contradicting terms; Keats’s poem can be considered a “lyrical ballad.” Because Keats is using irony to divert critical attention away from his private love life, it seems, as if his poem is in the tradition of ballads that contains lyrical content, even though that is certainly not the case. This conclusion is strongly supported by several pieces of evidence, which can be found in Keats’ life and works. According to this theory, “La Belle Dame” is less an impersonal, distanced narrative poem than a personal account of Keats’ own.

When we take into account the context of Keats’s revisions to the poem before it was published in the *Indicator* in 1820, the concept of this concept becomes much more apparent. Keats may have revised the poem in order to enhance its sentimentality and lighten the mood. To put distance between the idea that he is himself the desperate man in love, offered up to the allure of romance’s wish-fulfilment dreams, he maintains that he is merely an inexperienced, untalented lover. Although it is being done with the intention of hiding this, trying to hide such a personal dimension of the poem is a way of unwittingly confirming that “La Belle Dame,” at least in its initial composition, is a subjective poem in which Keats portrays his own fears, conflicts and desires.

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