Communication, Society and Media
ISSN 2576-5388 (Print) ISSN 2576-5396 (Online)
Vol. 4, No. 3, 2021
www.scholink.org/ojs/index.php/csm

Review Paper

Who is the Ultimate Dream Weaver in John Keats's *The Eve of St. Agnes*?

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Received: July 26, 2021 Accepted: August 15, 2021 Online Published: August 30, 2021

doi:10.22158/csm.v4n3p24 URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/csm.v4n3p24

Abstract

This article aims to interpret dreams in John Keats's narrative The Eve of St. Agnes from different perspectives: the Beadsman's, Porphyro's, Madeline's and John Keats's, the poet. We will analyze their functions respectively, and then draw a conclusion of Keats's purpose in structuring such a way of weaving dreams. After summarizing studies and theories on dream and soul from the perspective of psychoanalysis and scholars' views on The Eve of St. Agnes, we will continue to illustrate the ways in which John Keats constructs three layers of dreams with the pertinent approaches by Freud, Fromm, Lacan, Rank, Žižek, etc. so as to reveal John Keats's viewpoints on life and death, dream and reality, and pleasure and pain.

Keywords

Keats, dream weaver, Lacan, Freud, Žižek, Rank, balance

1. Introduction

The Eve of St. Agnes (1819) is an important and representative work among Keats's five influential narrative poems, the four others being *Endymion* (1818), *Isabella* (1818), *Hyperion* (1819), and *Lamia* (1820). Many highlighting features exist in *The Eve of St. Agnes*, such as the beautiful imagery, the profound atmosphere, the mysterious legend and the intriguing dream. Among these highlights, the dream is an essential part to be discussed unceasingly, as it functions as the main framework throughout the entire narrative with strong connotations for concessive interpretation. Thus, the significance of dream in *The Eve of St. Agnes* is supposed to be taken into further consideration.

Fromm comments that “It was Freud who, at the beginning of the twentieth century, reaffirmed the old concept: dreams are both meaningful and significant; we do not dream anything that is not an important expression of our inner lives and all dreams can be understood provided we have the key” (Fromm, p. 17). As dreams are an essential part of the poem, the understanding of dreams is key to understanding John Keats himself as a poet.

According to Fromm, “Dreams are understood to be the hallucinatory fulfillment of irrational wishes and particularly sexual wishes which have originated in our early childhood and have not been fully transformed into reaction formations or sublimations. These wishes are expressed as being fulfilled when our conscious control is weakened, as is the case in sleep. However, if we would permit ourselves to live out the fulfillment of these irrational desires in our dreams, dreams would not be so puzzling and confusing. We rarely dream that we commit murder or incest or any other kind of crime, and even if we do so, we do not enjoy the fulfillment of these wishes in our dreams. In order to explain this phenomenon, Freud assumes that in our sleep life the moral censor in ourselves is half asleep, too. Thus thoughts and fantasies are permitted to enter into our sleep consciousness which otherwise are completely shut out. But the censor is only half asleep. He is sufficiently awake to make it impossible for the forbidden thoughts to appear clearly and unmistakably. If the function of the dream is to preserve our sleep, the irrational wishes that appear in the dream must be sufficiently disguised to deceive the censor. Like the neurotic symptoms, they are a compromise between the repressed forces of the id and the repressing force of censoring superego” (Fromm, p. 46, p. 47). In this paper, Angela is believed to function as the role of “moral censor” in Porphyro’s dream, and the detailed evidence will be found in *3.2 Porphyro’s Dream*.

In *The Eve of St. Agnes*, Keats mentions “soul” five times in total, “spirit” four times, “phantom” three and “ghost” once. Due to this, the significance of “soul” is worth discussing. Ryan contends that “he never abandoned the belief that a Supreme Intelligence governed the universe and, though shaken by doubts, he ardently desired to believe in a spiritual principle that would survive the death of the body” (Ryan, p. 67). We would agree with the point of Keats’s spiritual belief, or soul belief, that soul survives after the death of body. Rank in his book *Psychology and Soul* notes that “Thus the facts of death and of the individual’s denial of death brought the idea of the soul into being; and, at a time when life was beginning to acquire a spiritual character, the problems of death and of its denial through belief were imbedded in an immortal body-soul which simulated and survived the ego as its Double” (Rank, p. 14). In this paper, we aim to interpret this story as an imaginative case of murder based on the theory of soul belief.

Regarding that Keats prefers adopting the imaginative dream in his works, for he once made a comparison in his letter to Benjamin Bailey: “The imagination may be compared to Adam’s dream - he awoke and found it truth... Adam’s dream will do here and seems to be a conviction that Imagination

and its empyreal reflection is the same as human Life and its spiritual repetition" (Letters, I, 185), we will approach his narrative by adopting Lacanian and Freudian theories to interpret dreams in *The Eve of St. Agnes* in order to understand how John Keats illustrates his views on important issues through the aesthetic composition.

2. Literature Review

Being considered as one of Keats's most successful narratives, *The Eve of St. Agnes*'s aesthetic features and mysterious, ambivalent ending have roused a number of scholars' diverse discussions for centuries. Early arguments were mostly based on the role that Porphyro plays, either a hero or a villain, and with time going by, Madeline's position in the poem is being highlighted, too. There are also comparisons of *The Eve of St. Agnes* among different works of different influential writers, such as John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and *Cymbeline*, and John Keats's own work "La Belle Dame sans Merci". There are indeed a wide range of topics that deserve attention, including gender, witchcraft, Keats's beliefs, and dreams, to name a few.

2.1 Studies on Gender Ambivalence

In Keivan's studies on gender ambivalence, the theory of Lacanian gaze is applied. "Therefore, for Lacan, the gaze—distinguished from the 'male gaze'—is not a vehicle of mastery belonging to the subject, but a breaking down of that mastery by the *objet a* (the object of desire)" (Keivan, p. 212). By that he holds that the gaze is a mutual one: when the subject is gazing, it is being gazed by Other too. "Resented and humiliated by his contemporaries, Keats sought to assert his authority as a masculine subject through an immature struggle to repel female readers and to gain sexual (visual) mastery over women" (Keivan, p. 210). Keats being a self-conflict in the masculine background, he struggled between his feminine and masculine selves. The relationship between gender and "gaze" has been thoroughly explored in Keivan's work, as he not only interprets the "male gaze" from Porphyro but also conversely illustrates the resistance of the object, which is gazing the subject in return: that is, Madeline gazes back to Porphyro. He claims that "In *The Eve of St. Agnes*, it is Madeline who embodies the m (other), the object of desire and scrutiny, or in Lacanian terms, the *objet petit a"* (Keivan, p. 213). Most importantly, Keivan's conclusion of the inevitable reversing of subjects and objects in the gaze will help promote our assumption of Porphyro's anxiety towards the Real, which will be analyzed in *3.3 Madeline's dream*.

2.2 Studies on Witchcraft and Male Vulnerability

According to Arcana, the whole story reads as a Faery ritual in which the goddess Madeline gives birth to Porphyro, the young god, and helps Angela to rest (Arcana, p. 51, p. 52). Furthermore, in her reading, the interplay between Faery and Christianity is analyzed and ends with the triumph of Faery over Christianity (Arcana, p. 52). From Arcana's point of Witchcraft—the old religion of the Britons,

Porphyro does not take the initiative, and instead, he is conjured and enchanted by Madeline. It is reasonable that Madeline takes the initiative in a way, as the evidence is found in Angela's words: "my lady fair the conjuror plays" (Keats, XIV: 124). However, we doubt whether Angela is being ironic, for she mentions "deceive" (Keats, XIV: 125) and laughs even when she is feeble: "Feebly she laugheth in the languid moon" (Keats, XV: 127). Her attitude towards the festival conveys a sort of contempt. Similarly, Arcana's emphasis on Madeline's power is somewhat relevant to Wolfson's judgment over male vulnerability: "the very texts that show men subjecting women to the control of the male gaze frequently involve figures of male vulnerability" (Wolfson, p. 325). Indeed, by gazing Madeline, "Porphyro grew faint" (Keats, XXV: 224). Nancy Rosenfeld also argues that "The gazing Porphyro, too, appears to be weakened; he takes on the characteristics of an object when, kneeling passively, 'fearing to move or speak', he is temporarily feminized" (Rosenfeld, p. 54). Nevertheless, looked at from the view of Lacanian gaze, Keivan considers the phenomenon as a resistance of the object (Madeline)—"she does look and, thereupon, defies Porphyro and deprives him of his mastery" (Keivan, p. 215)—and by doing so, Keats "challenged the existence of fixed, stable boundaries between the sexes... by blurring the distinction between masculinity and femininity" (Mellor, p. 215). As a conclusion of Keivan, Keats's "feminine and masculine heroes melt into each other" (Keivan, p. 219), which means that the antagonism of the two genders in the end turns into a compromise or a union. We confirm that resistance does appear in the gender dominance, whereas we are inclined to believe that the male dominance will be regained in the end with the awakening of Madeline, and the corresponding reasons will be explained in *3.3 Madeline's dream*.

2.3 Studies on Protestant Ethic

Concerning that Keats was an active Romantic poet, protestant values might be integrated in his narrative. One Chinese researcher Chen Jun illuminates how Keats attempts to impose the Protestant ethics in occupation, love and consumption from the perspective of the rhetorical ethic (Chen, p. 99). As different analytical methods lead to different understandings, we will take the foods as an example to make a comparison from different backgrounds of belief. In the point of Arcana which has been discussed above, the foods in Stanza XXX are prepared by Porphyro and are sacred to the Great Mother, which serve as a ritual supplement (Arcana, p. 50). It is interesting that Arcana believes the foods will not be consumed by Madeline, as Porphyro is the one she will eat: "He is the 'food' that makes the maiden into the mother. He enters the maiden sexually and she as mother gives birth to him" (Arcana, p. 51). Differently, for Chen Jun, the foods are similar to any other luxuries displayed in Madeline's room, that they are only appreciated visually (Chen, p. 105). The reason is that in Protestant ethic of consumption, luxurious consumption is irrational, which should be avoided. Likewise, the luxuries also imply the forbidden lust in Protestant ethic of love, for readers' expectation of sexual scenery is displaced by the description of them (Chen, p. 105). Although both Arcana and Chen Jun believe that

eventually, nobody eats the food, the functions of the food are explained in quite dissimilar ways by different beliefs holders.

2.4 Studies on Poet's Belief

"We do not, after all, commonly think of Keats as a 'religious poet'" (Barth, p. 286), says J. Robert Barth, but he continues that "Robert Ryan's book does, I believe, follow this middle course, taking very much into account both Keats's innate skepticism and suspicion of institutional Christianity, and his unceasing search for a broader religious meaning in his life and in his poetry" (Barth, p. 286) after Ryan's book *Keats: The Religious Sense* was published. However, we believe that the further search of Keats's religious belief has been revealed in Li Zeng and Cui Dan's studies. According to their analysis, Keats's anxiety over the lack of creativity, self value and difficult life was overcome by holding the strong belief of poetry pursuit (Cui & Li, p. 167). For them, Keats's religious belief was replaced by his poetry belief, and his belief was firm and pure instead of being utilitarian and mundane (Cui & Li, p. 168, p. 170). Even when Keats's friends around him were Christian in varying degrees, that "Haydon himself, pugnaciously Christian; the gentle and scholarly Benjamin Bailey, more assured and more tolerant in his Christianity" (Barth, p. 287), he persisted his own belief in poetry no matter how the friends tried to "persuade" him and no matter how hard his life was (Cui & Li, p. 167).

2.5 Studies on Buddhism

When the above western "beliefs" as Faery, Christianity and Protestantism have been discussed, there exists an eastern element in Keats's poems, which is Hinduism, or specifically Buddhism. We appreciate and are inspired by Li Zeng and Long Ruicui's analytical assertion of "Saṃsāra" in Keats's belief (Li & Long, p. 117). Actually, Saṃsāra in Buddhism, states Jeff Wilson, is the "suffering-laden cycle of life, death and rebirth, without beginning or ending" (Wilson, 2010). To get rid of Saṃsāra, one needs to get Nirvana, "a concept in Indian religions that represents the ultimate state of soteriological release, the liberation from Saṃsāra" (Meister, p. 25). However, Li Zeng and Long Ruicui have discovered that although Keats recognizes the torment of Saṃsāra, different from Buddhism, he does not believe the existence of Nirvana, which means that for him, the cycle that brings death and pain is endless (Li & Long, p. 118). For Keats, the only way to release is by using imagination, which can make one indulge in the illusory beauty and thus forget the pain (Li & Long, p. 118). As death, pain and imagination are also major themes in our studies, we will extend the idea to the poem *The Eve of St. Agnes* as a conclusive part on Keats's views of life.

2.6 Summary

Although the studies on *The Eve of St. Agnes* are diverse, "dream" in most cases is focused on as a subordinate part since it almost acts as the essential evidence for exploring further understanding. When Nancy Rosenfeld takes "dream" as the focus in her paper, the emphasis though is to make a comparison and contrast with Adam's dream. For Jack Stillinger, "Madeline the self-hoodwinked

dreamer is, I think the main concern of the poem" (Stillinger, p. 547) suggests that Madeline is the "dream weaver" of the whole narrative. However, some other researchers do not deny the "strategem" that Porphyro sets up in promoting the dream to develop further, which indicates that Porphyro is the very dream weaver. Also, the argument over the aid that Angela plays in the dream holds water, too. Therefore, it can be concluded that the question who is the ultimate dream weaver in *The Eve of St. Agnes* is still a puzzle that needs to be decoded further due to its key role in interpreting the narrative.

In this paper, dream will be treated as the core concert and we will depict dreams within dreams from the perspectives of different "dream weavers". As *The Eve of St. Agnes* is a long narrative, we will seek out the clues to prove the feasibility of dream weavers in order to uncover the relationships among the characters, so as to illustrate the mysterious plot and reveal the uncertainties demonstrating the thematic significance. After all, "stories, the argument goes, are the main way we make sense of things, whether in thinking of our lives as a progression leading somewhere or in telling ourselves what is happening in the world" (Culler, p. 83).

3. Analysis and Discussion

3.1 Beadsman's Dream

The beginning sets the Middle-Age renaissance for the romance. From the descriptions of the Beadsman, it can be inferred that he is a soul in spiritual form rather than a concrete physical existence. Here is the essential evidence for such an assumption. Firstly, the narrator's tone was cast to recall his previous period while alive: "The joys of all his life were said and sung: / His was harsh penance on St. Agnes' Eve" (Keats, III: 23-24). It also functions as the evidence that he suffers spiritually from the St. festival. Secondly, the Beadsman is engulfed in the atmosphere of death: "The sculptur'd dead, on each side, seem to freeze... Knights, ladies, praying in dumb orat'ries, / He passeth by; and his weak spirit fails / To think how they may ache in icy hoods and mails" (Keats, II: 14-18). Those dead figures together with animals cast the atmosphere of death around him and the list of images vividly illustrate the passed-away royal and influential figure sculptures who can even sense the coldness and freeze but the Beadsman in contrast cannot sense it at all. Rather than perform as a fleshy human, he seems like a specter that lingers in the human world. Then here comes the questions: how does he die and why does he still linger and haunt in the human world? His descending into this world on such a holy day can date back to the essential reasons.

There is the probability that the Beadsman was murdered before he becomes "the Beadsman", as the old Angela exclaims: "St. Agnes! Ah! it is St. Agnes' Eve— / Yet men will murder upon holy days" (Keats, XIV: 118-119). The emphasis on murder even upon "holy days" exactly shows the probability. Another clue is at the end of the poem: "That night the Baron dreamt of many a woe, / And all his warrior-guests, with shade and form / Of witch, and demon, and large coffin-worm, / Were long

benightmar'd" (Keats, XLII: 372-375). Madeline's kinsmen had nightmares, which corresponds to what Rank states as "the spirit of the murder victim could torment the murderer in his dream" (Rank, p. 15). Therefore, the Beadsman was probably murdered by the knights in the castle. Moreover, it is his violent death that achieves his immortality so that his soul keeps on "living" after death, as Rank continues that "yet because the spirit of the murder victim could torment the murderer in his dream, his immortality was really more certain than that of persons who had died natural deaths. In a certain sense, then, violent death became a source of immortality, as later superstitions and the figures of Christ and Joan of Arc illustrate" (Rank, p. 15).

Here in the castle, he sees the playback of all his life, on the eve of St. Agnes, the night that he dies in. He does not stop walking, until he sees rough ashes: "and soon among / Rough ashes sat he for his soul's reprieve, / And all night kept awake, for sinners' sake to grieve" (Keats, III: 25-27). Among ashes, he sits and is determined to keep awake all night. However, being unconscious, he is brought into dream. Here it is the first layer of dream, the dream of the Beadsman within Keats's dream. Starting from Stanza IV, the environment totally changes from outside to inside when embarking on his dream: "That ancient Beadsman heard the prelude soft... Were glowing to receive a thousand guests: / The carved angels, ever eager-eyed..." (Keats, IV: 28-36). The scene inside the castle is vividly shown in the Beadsman's dream. Here comes the question: How is the dream created? "It is Freud's assumption that the dream is always stimulated by a present event, usually on the day or the evening before the dream occurs. But a dream is provoked only by such events which are related to early infantile strivings. The energy for the creation of the dream stems from the intensity of the infantile experience, but the dream would not come into existence were it not for the recent event that touched upon the earlier experience and made it possible for it to come to life at that particular moment" (Fromm, p. 50). Here, today, is one of the many eves of St. Agnes which is a recent event stimulating his dream and recalling his "childhood" memory. As the Beadsman is a soul of the dead, it can be inferred that his "childhood" belongs to the time when he was alive. His "childhood" memory is mixed with the event of the day and the guilt and fear he feels while wandering in this place. He therefore begins to dream.

He is observing, and until he has another dream—the second layer of dream during his praying, the dream of Porphyro within the Beadsman's dream—he does not get on to move. There a "new" subject appears: "across the moors, / Had come young Porphyro, with heart on fire / For Madeline" (Keats, IX: 74-76), who is the man he used to be when he was alive, and the man is still existing in his childhood memory. The Beadsman knows Porphyro so well that he constructs a perfect dream for Porphyro. Thus is the similar case in the film *Inception* shot by Christopher Nolan, in which the dream maker must be so subtle a person to architect a dream for its subject that the surroundings and people are supposed to be as "real" as possible. Accordingly, the Beadsman has successfully built a reasonable circumstance for Porphyro, who is the hatred target in the castle. When Porphyro ventures in, dangers and obstacles

are becoming more and more obvious: “a hundred swords... barbarian hordes... hot-blooded lords” (Keats, X: 83-86). Later, Angela’s utterance becomes another implication of the Beadsman as the dream maker’s success as she says: “Get hence! get hence! there’s dwarfish Hildebrand; / He had a fever late, and in the fit / He cursed thee and thine, both house and land” (Keats, XII: 100-102). From such preparation for the emotional echoing, even the relationship between Porphyro and Madeline’s family is “close to real”, that they are enemies. At this time, the Beadsman and Porphyro have entered what Lacan names the stage of Imaginary, in which the Beadsman is the signifier and Porphyro is the signified. The dream plays the role of mirror, and the Beadsman acts as a subject finding himself in the dream, while Porphyro is reflected back from the dream. The two layers of dream are like the two sides of a mirror. The Beadsman is trying to internalize the image of Porphyro in his dream and regards themselves as a whole. In such a blurred relationship, his dream goes on.

3.2 Porphyro’s Dream

As the hostile castle is the necessary place where Madeline’s chamber is located, there comes an old dame: “Ah, happy chance! the aged creature came” (Keats, XL: 91). The old dame who is “weak in body and in soul” (Keats, X: 90) does not exist in reality at all, as she only lives in Porphyro’s dream. The eventual termination of her life also echoes her previous death and soul’s existence. According to Freud’s theory of dream, it can be inferred that she is the moral censor in Porphyro’s dream, as she stands in the way of Porphyro’s desire and the way to Madeline’s chamber, standing for the realization of his desire. When Porphyro’s desire for Madeline grows strong, the moral censor is supposed to appear and repress it; and once the desire is repressed, the field of Imaginary has yielded ground to the field of Symbolic: “the pre-given structure of social and sexual roles and relations which make up the family and society” (Eagleton, p. 145), which means that Porphyro is now a social man. “Entry into the Symbolic Realm marks the transition of the primitive infant into a civilized adult human who can represent itself and its world through symbols, specifically through the combination of signifiers and signifieds that create stable signs” (Klages, p. 104). As it is mentioned in *3.1 Beadsman’s Dream*, Porphyro was in the Imaginary representing a signifier of the Beadsman. Hence it is the appearance of Angela that marks the entry of the Symbolic, which brings him social features.

Language for example, is a representation of his social features. While the coming of Angela brings about “words”—verbal expression, Porphyro starts to use language: “Now tell me where is Madeline” (Keats, XIII: 114). As “the transition from the Imaginary to the Symbolic is marked by the child’s ability to name that image of itself, its ego-ideal, as ‘me’ or ‘I’” (Klages, p. 105), Porphyro using “me” marks that he starts to realize a “self”. Moreover, social conscience and social needs, for example, the need to meet Madeline reflecting his biological and spiritual needs, are also his social features in the Symbolic Realm, yet expressed in an euphemistic way in front of the moral censer: “Which none but secret sisterhood may see, / When they St. Agnes’ wool are weaving piously” (Keats, XIII: 116-117).

Meanwhile, Porphyro's continuous begging not only emphasizes his "lack" but also implies the authority and power that Angela has—to permit and lead him to Madeline's chamber. At this moment, he is in the world of metonymy: Angela is a metonymy of moral censor to Freud, and also, the big Other to Lacan.

"Sudden a thought came like a full-brown rose" (Keats, XVI: 136): Porphyro proposes his "stratagem". Significantly, the purpose for Porphyro in the Beadsman's dream to Madeline's chamber can be deduced from Angela's responses: "A stratagem, that makes the beldame start: 'A cruel man and impious thou art! / Sweet lady, let her pray, and sleep, and dream / Alone with her good angels, far apart / From wicked men like thee. Go, go!'" (Keats, XVI: 139-143). Looking back upon Stanza XIV where Angela is laughing at Madeline for being deceived by good angels: "This very night: good angels her deceive! / But let me laugh awhile" (Keats, XIV: 125-126), Angela does not consider it funny anymore. Her attitude changes to be serious. Porphyro's "stratagem" must have caused such a change. If deceiving is even funny for Angela, what can be more serious? We come to the assumption of murder.

For now, it seems that the moral censor is "irritated", and if Porphyro keeps showing his naked intention, he will wake from the dream by the judge of moral censor. In order to escape the judge from the moral censor, Porphyro must deceive the censor, as "if the function of the dream is to preserve our sleep, the irrational wishes that appear in the dream must be sufficiently disguised to deceive the censor" (Fromm, p. 47). Also, "Freud assumes that in our sleep life the moral censor in ourselves is half asleep, too" (Fromm, p. 47). Thus, it is not difficult for Angela to deal with as she is half asleep, as well as feeble. What Porphyro needs to do is to decorate his irrational thoughts and hide his wicked intentions. Therefore, afterwords, Porphyro manages to redeem the bad influence and makes further explanation: "I will not harm her, by all saints I swear... O may I ne'er find grace... If one of her soft ringlets I displace, / Or look with ruffian passion in her face: / Good Angela, believe me by these tears" (Keats, XVII: 145-150). Indeed, he needs not displace any piece of her hair by killing her. The method of his murder is romantic and gentle, and it will be found out in *3.3 Madeline's dream.*

Successfully, Angela is dealt after Porphyro's intensifying swears and begging. "One way in which we cope with desires we cannot fulfil is by 'sublimating' them, by which Freud means directing them towards a more socially valued end" (Eagleton, p. 132): "thou must needs the lady wed, / Or may I never leave my grave among the dead" (Keats, XX: 179-180). Marriage is socially moral, and getting to Madeline's chamber without the nomination of marriage is immoral; as the moral censor, guiding a man to hide in a lady's chamber is indecent, too. Therefore, the only way to avoid being blamed is through marriage. If the young lovers end up getting married, Angela will take no responsibility of doing such an indecent thing. As for the situation is: Porphyro is disguised and Angela is deceived, the whole struggle between Porphyro and Angela is like the struggle between self and other and the

struggle between id and superego. One is repressing and the other is being repressed. The disappearance of Angela means the disappearance of superego, as Porphyro has lost his conscience and morality. According to Lacan, "a person's desire is always the desire of the Other, the desire to be the Other, to eliminate the distinction between 'self' and 'other' on the structural or phenomenological level" (Klages, p. 78). Along with the disappearance of old Angela, Porphyro naturally considers that he has successfully taken the place of center in Symbolic Order and that he will be capable to determine what he should do next. In Madeline's chamber, the desire for Porphyro to possess Madeline is the desire to take the control, so as to become the authority to Madeline. However, when he approaches Madeline, another "big Other" will replace Angela.

Porphyro is prepared, waiting and gazing: "She comes, she comes again, like ring-dove fray'd and fled" (Keats, XXII: 198). In the hunter's game (Stillinger, p. 541), Madeline is like a ring-dove, waiting to be hunt. For us though, the emphasis here is the adverb "again", which sufficiently proves that it is at least the second time that Porphyro has been hiding here as a "hunter", that he has experienced it in reality before the dream. Here, the desire to kill and possess Madeline is getting stronger: "As though a rose should shut, and be a bud again" (Keats, XXVII: 243). Once Madeline is killed, her spirit will be reborn and be a bud again. Nevertheless, Porphyro is still waiting to move: "And listen'd to her breathing, if it chanced... Noiseless as fear in a wide wildness" (Keats, XXVIII: 246-250). Porphyro is very cautious and even fearful. When Madeline's kinsmen are outside of the chamber, it is still dangerous because of Madeline herself. The reason why Porphyro fears her may be primarily attributed to the cause of his death: Madeline did not try to save him or even resulted in his death.

3.3 Madeline's Dream

Madeline's dream is still a dream within the dream—the third layer of dream, which means that she is created by Porphyro. After the entrance of Madeline's chamber: "A casement high and triple-arch'd there was, / All garlanded with carven imag'ries... with blood of queens and kings" (Keats, XXIV: 208-216), the circumstance well prepares for Madeline to dream, and also implies her status which is far away from Porphyro. However, unlike the previous cases, the new dreamer does not replace the former dreamer in Madeline's dream. Instead, the two dreams are interwoven, and that explains why when Madeline is dreaming, what Porphyro is doing is still clearly shown. In the castle where people are in the revelry, all unsociable descriptions to Madeline show her faithfulness to the legend, and such faithfulness makes it "reasonable" for Porphyro to possess her, for he deems her waiting for his coming. However, while "supperless" (Keats, VI: 51) can be explained by a "fast" which would make sense in a religious ceremony, what is the reason of "Nor look behind, nor sideways" (Keats, VI: 53) which is also repeated when Porphyro is hiding and gazing: "But dares not look behind, or all the charm is fled" (Keats, XXVI: 234)? Our explanation is that as it is in Porphyro's dream, the legend and rituals to follow are obeying his unconsciousness. As for "supperless", the reason is that Porphyro will prepare

foods for her later in the chamber, but as for "Nor look behind", it is in case that Porphyro will be found. From this, it can be inferred that Porphyro in reality was found by Madeline, which has now brought him the trauma of the Real. "Lacan then argues in 'Of the Gaze as *Objet Petit a*' that there is an intimate relationship between the *objet petit a* (which coordinates our desire) and the Gaze (which threatens to undo all desire through the eruption of the Real)" (Felluga, 2011). As Madeline is the *objet petit a* in Porphyro's gaze (Keivan, p. 213), the gaze on Madeline has opened a door for eruption of the Real and the trauma of the Real. For the Real, "in Lacan's trajectory, the Real is prior to the Symbolic and thus poses a threat to the stability of the Symbolic Order" (Klages, p. 92); and for trauma, Žižek mentions in his speech in London that "In a first approach Freud imagined trauma as some kind of dense, raw presence of some Real which brutally intrudes into our symbolic space and curves it" (Žižek, 2003). At this point, the symbols in Porphyro's Symbolic Realm get curved for their traumatic impact, thus making it reasonable why the articulation "not look behind" creates anxiety: it is the brutal intrusion of the Real, which breaks the tranquility in Porphyro's gaze and creates "a kind of imbalance and a gap" (Žižek, 2003) in his symbolic space. "Lacan emphasizes 'desire' and 'anxiety' as the two important pre-requisites for a true gaze. In short, the gaze must be an object of the scopic drive, producing not only pleasure but also anxiety" (Krips, p. 93). Being the object of Porphyro's gaze, Madeline functions as the *objet petit a* (Keivan, p. 213), and the anxiety that Madeline exerts on Porphyro is the Real that intrudes in his Symbolic Realm, which curves his perfect stratagem and the image of ideal Madeline. If Madeline looks behind, dating back to his previous "childhood memory"—the intrusion of trauma, it reminds him of being found and killed and will impede his fulfillment of desire in the dream. Therefore, the repeated "not look behind" and Porphyro's fear—"then from the closet crept, / Noiseless as fear in a wide wilderness" (Keats, XXVIII: 249-250)—well demonstrate "this uncanny feeling of being gazed at by the object of our look affects us in the same way as castration anxiety (reminding us of the lack at the heart of the symbolic order)" (Felluga, 2011). However, to make up the lacks in Symbolic Order, he adopts the approach of "traversing the fantasy" (Žižek, 17), which will be interpreted in *3.4 Keats's Dream*.

As the description to Madeline is "Hoodwink'd with faery fancy" (Keats, VIII: 70), Porphyro's attitude should be positive towards faery fancy, for it is her hoodwinking that helps him with the "stratagem" (Keats, XVI: 139). According to Stillinger, "The full force of 'stratagem' comes to be felt in the poem—a ruse, an artifice, a trick for deceiving" (Stillinger, p. 539). Although Stillinger later in his essay explains that his emphasis on "stratagem" should not be the main concern: "I must now confess that I do not think his stratagem is the main concern of the poem" (Stillinger, p. 546), we insist that "stratagem" is the prerequisite of his dream and even the whole story, for it functions as a seemingly well-designed revenge. He wants to fulfill what he did not succeed in reality by creating the dream. In the real world, he wanted to possess Madeline but got killed by her kinsmen—those drunken and brutal

knights. Now he will take actions in his dreaming world again. Therefore, it is not only a revenge but also a fulfillment of desire to gain dominance over Madeline.

"Out went the taper as she hurried in; / Its little smoke, in pallid moonshine, died" (Keats, XXIII: 199-200): with the coming of Madeline, the taper goes out, which symbolizes the darkness of the room and the hiding Porphyro, who is a murderer on St. Agnes' eve. "Her heart was voluble, / Paining with eloquence her balmy side; / As though a tongueless nightingale should swell / Her throat in vain, and die, heart-stifled" (Keats, XXIII: 204-207): the simile to a dying nightingale predicts that after she hurries in, her destiny will be deemed on the hunter (Stillinger, p. 540)'s hands. "How fast she slept" (Keats, XXVIII: 252). At the time when Madeline is dreaming, Porphyro is dreaming too, for their dreams are integrated and interwoven with each other. Porphyro is still observing though: "The boisterous, midnight, festive clarion, / The kettledrum, and far-heard clarinet, / Affray his ears, though but in dying tone:— / The hall door shuts again, and all the noise is gone" (Keats, XXIX: 258-261). It can be seen that Porphyro is precise in his stratagem, as he will not take action until everyone in the castle falls asleep. However, the word "again" reappears. As it has been interpreted above, it is at least the second time that Porphyro has heard the hall door shut with one in reality and the other in the dream. From here it can be further deduced that in reality Porphyro could only be found by Madeline, as other people in the castle had fallen asleep, which indicates that Madeline was the most "direct" cause of his death, because without her "notifications", her kinsmen would not be able to notice Porphyro during their "noiseless" sleep.

Eventually, Porphyro's stratagem is put into practice when the foods are taken out. Those alien foods imply the potential danger: "Filling the chilly room with perfume light" (Keats, XXXI: 275). The perfume filling the room is poisonous, and by smelling it, Madeline will die in her sweet dream. This method of killing is astonishing, as it will not either wake the guests or frighten fair Madeline away. "And now, my love, my seraph fair, awake!" (Keats, XXXI: 276): immediately after the perfume was filled, Porphyro starts to wake her. If he successfully murders Madeline, her soul will be reborn after her death. "Open thine eyes, for meek St. Agnes' sake" (Keats, XXXI: 278): the word "meek" is Porphyro's expectation for the new Madeline. By waking up Madeline to start her "new life", Porphyro wishes her to be meek, for she did not obey one of the rules of the ceremony "Nor look behind" in reality.

As Porphyro fails in waking her, he plays a ditty for her, and it does work: "she utter'd a soft moan: / He ceased—she panted quick—and suddenly / Her blue affrayed eyes wide open shone" (Keats, XXXIII: 294-296). The ditty is "magic" in waking her, because it talks about her. By playing "La belle dame sans mercy", Porphyro means to satirize her. Dating back to when Angela met with Porphyro, the first sentence she said was "Mercy, Porphyro! hie thee from this place: / They are all here tonight, the whole bloodthirsty race!" (Keats, XI: 98-99). Here the word "mercy" as an antonym of "sans mercy" is

to highlight Madeline without mercy. In his dream, he regards himself as mercy which is opposite to Madeline who is without mercy. It is another fulfillment of irrational wishes. Moreover, "the whole bloodthirsty race" refers to Madeline's whole family, which should include Madeline. By describing her as a bloodthirsty race without mercy, Porphyro does not show any sense of guilt on his stratagem.

Madeline has brought him death on the eve of St. Agnes. So heartless she is that he considers her as "la belle dame sans mercy". Soon, she wakes with a painful change and begins to weep. The change is that she wakes to find herself dead and sees Porphyro "Who knelt, with joined hands and piteous eye, / Fearing to move or speak". She now wakes as a soul, finding Porphyro kneeling in front of her. "Ah, Porphyro!" (Keats, XXXV: 307): by the waking of Madeline, Porphyro wakes, too. By now, Porphyro has successfully disguised the stratagem of killing in deceiving Angela and witnessed the waking of Madeline as a soul. "We rarely dream that we commit murder or incest or any other kind of crime, and even if we do so, we do not enjoy the fulfillment of these wishes in our dreams" (Fromm, p. 47). Indeed, the perfect success of stratagem worries Porphyro, and therefore, he wakes kneeling, seeming to make a confession. "How chang'd thou art! how pallid, chill, and drear!" (Keats, XXXV: 311): the one she sees at present is the Beadsman, as Porphyro has been waken from worry and guilt. Unlike young Porphyro, the Beadsman looks "ancient" (Keats, IV: 28), and relating to the place where he fell asleep and started to dream, the atmosphere was drear in cold winter, which corresponds to the description from Madeline "drear". Freud's opinion towards "anxiety dream" goes as "We may wish something but know that the gratification of the wish will make other people hate us and bring about punishment by society. Naturally, the fulfillment of this wish would produce anxiety" (Fromm, p. 124). Even when the stratagem has gained its success, anxiety still exits, and different from the anxiety brought by trauma, this perfect kind of success has brought him an extreme kind of anxiety. By the waking of them both, the dream has returned back to its first layer—the Beadsman's dream, together with him winning "a peerless bride" (Keats, XIX: 167). Through Madeline's begging, it can be seen that she totally loses control of any authority: "For if thou diest, my Love, I know not where to go" (Keats, XXXV: 315), "for my heart is lost in thine... A dove forlorn and lost with sick unpruned wing" (Keats, XXXVII: 331-333). Such vulnerable words are all from the Beadsman's repressed wishes in his dream as he expects her to fully rely on him. The words make him feel just after killing, as if comparing with the responsibility he now holds for Madeline, that the killing he performs is insignificant. His response for those words goes as: "Though I have found, I will not rob thy nest" (Keats, XXXVIII: 340), which is saying: "though I have owned you, I will not harm you". The masculine comfort though shows his love for Madeline. In this case, the whole story of revenge turns to a loving ending.

After the lovers' compromise, they manage to leave the human world. "Let us away, my love, with happy speed; / There are no ears to hear, or eyes to see" (Keats, XXXIX: 347-348): as they are souls, or

spirits, they are not restricted in their human bodies anymore; thus they can flee with a happy speed, and no one alive in the castle will hear them move. “In all the house was heard no human sound” (Keats, XL: 356): they cannot make any human sound as they have been inhuman. In Stanza XLI, the words “phantom” and “glide” are repeated, which again emphasizes their lack of human existence and the form of soul or spirit. In this sense, the story can be concluded as “Porphyro as liberation of Madeline” (Stillinger, p. 147): her soul has gained new freedom that allows her to escape from the castle with forbidden love and with no sound.

3.4 Keats’s Dream

As the initial dream weaver, all the dreams above belong to Keats’s dream. In brief, Keats creates the Beadsman in his dreamy writing, the Beadsman creates Porphyro in his dream, and Porphyro creates Madeline in his dream. As it has been analyzed in the Beadsman’s dream, the dream is created for its dreamer only in a specific circumstance which “suits” the dreamer. For the dream of the Beadsman, the circumstance is religious and drear, which suits to the Beadsman who is harsh penance to grieve; for the dream of Porphyro, the circumstance suits its dreamer for its dangers; and for the dream of Madeline, who is living in a castle, it is due to the splendid decorations in her room described in detailed.

At the end of the story, “The Beadsman, after thousand aves told, / For aye unsought for slept among his ashes cold” (Keats, XLII: 377-378). At the moment, the viewpoint from the lovers has switched to Keats’s. For Keats, the Beadsman is still dreaming and does not seem to wake. Rank has claimed the reason why we sleep tight in our dream: “The same also holds for many patently sexual dreams which symbolize life even according to psychoanalysis, and it certainly holds for the dream itself as a proof of the bodily soul. With the body-soul, man took his first significant step into a supernatural world, because it assured him not only that he still lived while he slept, but that he could sleep peacefully without dying” (Rank, p. 139). It is the immortality in dream that preserves the sleep, and that also explains why we wake from anxiety dream. Different from Freud’s point that “The anxiety dream is no exception to the general rule that the latent content of a dream is the fulfillment of an irrational wish” (Fromm, p. 124), Rank discovered that “Anxiety dreams interrupted sleep when it came too near to death and threatened the feeling of immortality. Both types of dream served to deny death; the one, by positively evoking the dreamer’s own bodily soul and the souls of dead or absent persons; and in the other, negatively, by rescuing the dreamer from deathlike sleep. Thus dreaming itself became a denial of death, because it always proved that one still survived and had not fallen into one’s final sleep” (Rank, p. 116). To sum up, it is the denial of death that wakes us from anxiety dreams. Thus, with Rank’s view on dream, the story ending with the Beadsman dreaming in his ashes cold where he fell asleep in demonstrates that the lovers are not dead at least, and perhaps they get to the warm south. The assumption based on its ending through the Beadsman’s dreaming here can be understood as

"authenticity of dreams" (Stillinger, p. 147) from the perspective of Imagination in Stillinger's reading, as the dreaming world reflects in the reality an authentic state. Thus, we maintain skepticism towards those critics "(e. g., Amy Lowell, *John Keats*, Boston, 1925, II, p. 175; Herbert G. Wright, "Has Keats's 'Eve of St Agnes' a Tragic Ending? ," *MLR*, XL, 1945, pp. 90-94; Bernice Slote, *Keats and the Dramatic Principle*, Lincoln, Neb., 1958, p. 35f.) who have suggested that the lovers face reality, perhaps even perish, in the storm" (Stillinger, p. 550).

Nevertheless, Keats is not trying to avoid reality by depicting the Beadsman never waking. Instead, he is trying to find a balance or comfort in mundane reality. We would say that the Beadsman may be traversing the fantasy. In the realm of Symbolic Order, "where we agree to follow the rule of the Phallus... we acknowledge that we are not the center... and thus acknowledge our 'lack'" (Klages, p. 59). By traversing the fantasy, the boundary between "reality" and imaginary is redefined. In other words, the Beadsman has to accept his "fantasy", as the lack in Symbolic Order reveals his lack in "reality" and accordingly is urging him to seek for the fantasy of the Real. Žižek points out that "To 'traverse the fantasy' therefore, paradoxically, means fully identifying oneself with the fantasy - namely, with the fantasy which structures the excess that resists our immersion in daily reality" (Žižek, p. 17). Therefore, if anyone argues that the Beadsman never waking from the dream is the avoidance of reality, we would refute that with: instead of avoiding it, he is trying to find a balance, as Žižek clarifies that "a fantasy... providing an imaginary scenario which enables us to endure the abyss of the Other's desire" (Žižek, p. 18). For the Beadsman, the trauma of his childhood always exists in the Real, that is, the realm that he can never enter. By dreaming, traversing the fantasy and committing a murder in Symbolic Order, he actually is trying to heal the trauma of the Real.

For Keats's purpose in the poem *The Eve of St. Agnes*, it is said by Stillinger that "It serves to introduce a preoccupation of all the major poems of this year: that an individual ought not to lose touch with the realities of this world" (Stillinger, p. 550, p. 551). We acknowledge its correctness and would make a supplement: an individual ought not to lose touch with imagination and dream while accepting the reality. In summary, while the Beadsman's dream functions as a compensation for his cruel reality, Madeline's awakening functions in an opposite way. She wakes and weeps for being deceived, but still, she embraces her reality as having been murdered and flees into the storm with Porphyro to make a new living. Although being hoodwinked by her dream, she is not a negative character, for she accepts the reality fast. As it has been discussed above, the power of women was evidently shown in the text; however, at the end of the story, Porphyro as a male character regains his dominant position. The change is distinct before and after Porphyro's stratagem, and it eventually ends with Madeline being vulnerable and subjective and following Porphyro to his warm south. Although women are powerful in their way, usually in a sexual way—the gazing Porphyro grew faint - their destinies still depend on men. After all, "he does not want ladies to read his poetry: that he writes for men" (Letters, II, 163). From

this perspective, the understanding of the story can be regarded as “patriarchal domination of women” or “Keats’s disparagement of women” (Stillinger, p. 149).

Therefore, by integrating all layers of dreams, Keats tries to portray a state of balance between life and death, dream and reality, and pleasure and pain. The bringing out of “aching pleasure” (Stillinger, p. 551) from Keats’s “Ode on Melancholy” is more than suitable to comment on the character the Beadsman in *The Eve of St. Agnes*. Although in Saṃsāra he suffers from endless replacing of life and death, dream and reality, and even reality and fantasy, in his dreaming world, he wins a peerless bride and sets out to the warm south with his love. He seeks pleasure outside of reality but still cannot escape from the Real, which is why it is arching. Certainly, it has to be admitted that pain and pleasure are inseparable. Without the experience of pain, one may not cherish pleasure, and without the moment of pleasure, life may be overwhelmed by endless pain. “If the major concern in these poems is the conflict between actuality and the ideal, the result is not a rejection of the actual, but rather a facing-up to it that amounts, in the total view, to affirmation” (Stillinger, p. 555). We do not deny the fact that Keats embraces actuality, though in our opinion, Keats does not create a conflict between actuality and the ideal, as Keats’s use of “ambiguity of idealism and reality” (Stillinger, p. 148) has created a harmony between the dreaming world and the real world. On February 23, 1821, Keats died, at the age of twenty-five. He had requested that his tombstone read only “Here lies one whose name was written in water” (Li, p. 115, p. 116). He attempts to bring the reality into dreams, and meanwhile, just as water trickles down and merges into its surrounding, he attempts to make dreams flow in reality.

4. Conclusion

The essay has focused on “dream” narrative in Keats’s *The Eve of St. Agnes* (1819). With the sequence developing in the poem, we have analyzed different dreamers’ dreams and discussed their respective functions and purposes from the psychoanalytical perspective. The dream weavers including the Beadsman, Porphyro and Madeline, have contributed their portions in weaving Keats’s dream. Unlike the film *Inception*, Keats does not try to “plant” any idea in his readers, yet he expects his readers to follow the clues he has designed by sensing and imagining, which is why the ending remains quite ambiguous. It urges readers to ponder over the relationship between reality and dreaming world, so as to reflect on the meaning of life. No matter how mundane our life is, there is always a “warm south” waiting for those with hopes and dreams and those who are brave to embrace reality. Thus, we would consider the story as a tragicomedy.

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Note(s)

Note 1. This article represents the periodical research result of Project of Chinese Scholarship Council on “Keats’s Poetry Writing and Anxiety of Identity” (No: 201608220138); of Project of Jilin Province Social Science Fund on “A Study on English Romantic Poets’ Interactivity and Keats’s Poetic Composition” (No: 2019B162); of Project of Social Science Research of Education Department of Jilin Province on “Anxiety of Influence - Keats’s Inheritance and Transcendence of English Renaissance Poets” (No: JJKH20201301SK); of Key Project of Social Science Research of Higher Education Institution of Jilin Province “Under the Background of ‘Cultural Cultivation’ on the Study of Online Curriculum Construction and Innovative Teaching Practice of English Literature Course” (No: JGJX2020C99).