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Weaving and the Tarot as Apollonian Repressive Mechanisms in Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott" and Carter's "The Lady of the House of Love"

DR. ÖĞR. ÜYESİ FIRAT KARADAŞ*

Abstract

Storytelling and its most common emblem weaving have a significant place in the history of ideas and literature, and women weaving stories on their web is a recurrent image in mythology, fairy tale and folklore. According to Foucault, weaving stories also has the role of repressing desire and cancelling death. In Lord Alfred Tennyson's poem "The Lady of Shalott" and Angela Carter's short story "The Lady of the House of Love," the female figures repress desire and cancel death by a habitual conciliatory action emblematic of storytelling, which is weaving in Tennyson's poem and the Tarot play in Carter's story. In both works, abandoning this action, that is, giving up spinning shadows/stories of life, and deciding to get involved in actual human experience results in self-annihilation and death. The present article handles weaving in "The Lady of Shalott" and the Tarot in "The Lady of the House of Love" as two similar forms of repressing desire and studies in these works the repression and fulfilment of desire and the consequential death of the female characters. The article bases its theoretical framework on a synthesis of Foucault's idea that narrative is a form of cancelling death with Nietzsche's idea of the binary opposition of the Apollonian and Dionysian states in the human soul, identifying desire and death with the Dionysian and the repressive mechanisms of narrative with the Apollonian.

Keywords: weaving, storytelling, Dionysian, Apollonian, Tarot, postponing death

TENNYSON'UN "THE LADY OF SHALOTT" VE CARTER'IN "THE LADY OF THE HOUSE OF LOVE" ADLI ESERLERINDE APOLLONCU BASTIRMA MEKANİZMASI OLARAK ÖRME VE TAROT

Öz

Hikâye anlatımı ve en önemli simgesi olan örme eylemi, düşünce ve edebiyat tarihinde önemli bir yere sahiptir ve örgü ören kadın tiplemesi mitolojide, masallarda ve folklorda yaygın bir imgedir. Foucault'ya göre, hikâye örmenin arzuyu bastırma ve ölümü öteleme rolü de vardır. Lord Alfred Tennyson'un "The Lady of Shalott" ve Angela Carter'in "The Lady of the House of Love" adlı eserlerindeki kadın figürler hikâye anlatımını simgeleyen ve kendini tekrar eden oyalayıcı eylemlerle arzuyu bastırıp ölümü ötelerler. Bu eylemler "The Lady of Shalott"da aynaya yansıyan şekilleri örmek, "The Lady of the House of Love"da ise Tarot oynamaktır. Makale, "The Lady of Shalott"daki örme eylemiyle "The Lady of the House of Love"daki Tarot oyununu birbirine benzeyen arzu baskılama biçimleri olarak ele almakta ve bu eserlerdeki kadın figürlerin

* Hatay Mustafa Kemal Ün. İng. Dili ve Edb. Böl. fkaradas@mku.edu.tr, orcid.org/**0000-0002-7546-717X**
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arzu bastırma mekanizması olarak kullandıkları bu eylemlerini, arzu tatminini ve bunun sonucunda gerçekleşen ölümlerini incelemektedir. Makalenin kuramsal arka planı, Foucault'nun hikâye anlatımının ölümü öteleme yönüne dair düşüncesiyle Nietzsche'nin Apolloncu ve Dionysosçu diye adlandırdığı insan ruhundaki zıt ikiliğe dair söylediklerinin sentezlenmesine dayanmaktadır. Çalışma, arzu ve ölümü Dionysosçu yön ile, arzu bastırma ve ölüm ötelemeyi de Apolloncu yön ile özdeşleştirmektedir.

Anahtar sözcükler: örme, hikâye anlatımı, Apollon, Dionysos, tarot, ölüm öteleme

1.0 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

That storytelling or narrative has a great significance in human life is an indisputable matter. Also indisputable is that it is used in a wide area of human culture, from psychological discourse to legal and historical discourses, and from gossip to other everyday speech forms. The most common emblems of storytelling are weaving and spinning, which are etymologically textile terms. Phrases such as 'spinning a yarn', 'weaving tales', or 'plot threads' are familiar expressions that suggest an etymological association between storytelling and cloth-making. The English words 'text' and 'textile' have a shared origin in the Latin word *texere*, which means "to weave, to join, fit together, braid, interweave, construct, fabricate, build," and the word 'text' originated from the Latin word *textus* which is the past participle of *texere*.[1] However, weaving is not free of gender; it is mostly regarded as a female activity and the history of Western literature abounds with women weaving stories on their web or loom. For instance, in *The Illiad* it is said that Helen weaves into her web "the numerous struggles of Trojans, breakers of horses, and bronze-armored Achaians, struggles that they endured for her sake at the hands of the war god" (Clayton, 2004, p. 34). In "Helen's Web Unraveled" G. A. Kennedy states that Helen's act is reflective of the poetic process in which Helen is the bard whose poem an audience is hearing or reading (1986, p. 5). In *Weaving the Word* K. S. Kruger argues that Helen's weaving connotes Homer's voice 'telling' the poem; in other words, "her weaving is analogous to Homer's word-weaving" (2001, p. 77). Odysseus' wife Penelope's weaving her father Leartes's shroud at day and unravelling it at night to postpone marriage with one of the suitors in *The Odyssey* is another example for the correlation between weaving and storytelling. According to Clayton, unlike Helen's case, Homer does not give us any information about the content of Penelope's "storytelling cloth" but he "allows us to imagine that Penelope may be weaving anything, including the adventures of Odysseus himself" (2004, p. 34). For Clayton, "Penelope's web is essentially a metaphor for the oral poetic process" (2004, p. 35) and its strongest interpretation is that she weaves "the same tales Odysseus recounts to the Phaeacians, as she waits for him to return" (2004, p. 34).

1.1 Narrative as Cancelling Death and Prolonging Life

[1] Source: Online Etymology Dictionary (https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=text, https://www.etymonline.com /search?q=textile)

Among its many functions, storytelling has the role of prolonging life and warding off death. In "What is an Author" Michel Foucault argues that the Greek epic was "intended to perpetuate the immortality of the hero. If the hero was willing to die young, it was so that his life, consecrated and magnified by death, might pass into immortality; the narrative then redeemed his accepted death" (1989, p. 979). Eluding death, he says, was also the theme and pretext of Arabian narratives—such as *The Thousand and One Nights*. He states, "one spoke, telling stories into the early morning, in order to forestall death, to postpone the day of reckoning that would silence the narrator. Scheherazade's narrative is an effort, renewed each night, to keep death outside the circle of life" (1989, p. 979). Read against Foucault's idea, Helen and Penelope weave stories in their webs to prolong life and elude death. Kruger proposes that "Helen seems to be escaping the text she is weaving, for as soon as the Greeks capture Helen, the epic will be completed and the poet silenced" (2001, p. 78). Besides, "by weaving the war heroes in the red folding robe, Helen bestows immortality on the warriors as does Homer by depicting them in his epic poem" (2001, p. 78). Thus, in line with Foucault's idea, Helen's weaving has two functions: to ward off her metaphorical death by continuing the epic and to immortalize the heroes. In a similar vein, Penelope's web does not only delay marriage with one of the suitors, which means her metaphorical death as the epic hero's wife, but it also prolongs the life of the hero as she is the weaver of the tales that make up the epic and immortalize the hero.

1.2 Nietzsche's Apollonian and the Dionysian States and Narrative as an Apollonian Repressive Mechanism

As an art form, weaving, as already suggested, has the role of repressing desire and cancelling death. In *The Birth of* Tragedy (1872), Nietzsche identifies art with what he calls the Apollonian state of being and thinks that art is an Apollonian strategy of keeping the Dionysian, that, is, death and desire, away from the reasonable world. Nietzsche discriminates between two dualities of human existence: the Apollonian and Dionysian, the former representing the art world of dreams and the latter the art world of intoxication and desire. For Nietzsche, our inmost beings, our common subconscious experiences, express themselves in dreams. The joyful necessity of the dream experience has been embodied by the Greeks in Apollo, the soothsaying god. He is the 'shining one,' 'the deity of light,' and thus he is ruler over the fair appearance of the inner world of fantasy. In contrast to the incompletely intelligible everyday world, he is the higher truth, helping and healing in sleep and dreams. In Freudian terms, he is the superego of human life that makes life autonomous and intelligible. Quoting Schopenhauer, Nietzsche describes the Apollonian state of being as follows: "Just as in stormy sea, unbounded in every direction, rising and falling with hauling mountainous waves, a sailor sits in a boat and trusts in his frail barque: so in the midst of a world of sorrows the individual sits quietly, supported by and trusting in *principium individuations*" (1995, p. 3). There sits in Apollo "the unshaken faith in this *principium* and the calm repose of the

man wrapped therein receive their sublimest expression" (1995, p. 3). He is also "ruler over the beautiful illusion of the inner world of fantasy." However, the most important aspect of the image of Apollo is that "delicate boundary which the dream image must not overstep lest it have a pathological effect." In this regard, Apollo represents "a measured restraint, that freedom from the wilder emotions, that calm of the sculptor god" (1995, p. 3).

However, according to Nietzsche, human experience has also another dimension, an annihilating one, one that should be kept under control by the Apollonian dimension. Nietzsche calls this dimension the Dionysian one. The Dionysian nature is proposed with the analogy of intoxication and drunkenness, and it represents "the blissful ecstasy that swells from the innermost depths of man" and takes place when the Apollonian nature collapses (1995, p. 3). Suggesting the correlation between the Dionysian and forgetfulness. Nietzsche adds:

> Both under the influence of the narcotic draught, of which the songs of all primitive men and peoples speak, or with the potent coming of spring that penetrates all nature with joy, Dionysian emotions awake, and as they grow in intensity, everything subjective vanishes into complete self-forgetfulness (1995, p. 3).

Continuing this correlation, Nietzsche argues that with the wake of the Dionysian and the collapse of the Apollonian, the individual, with all his restraint and proportion, succumbs to the "self-oblivion of the Dionysian state, forgetting the precepts of Apollo" (Nietzsche, 1995, p. 12). The Dionysian state signifies not only a state of oblivion and self-forgetfulness but also a return to one's origin. Under the charm of the Dionysian, a human being begins to experience his/her innermost nature and gets united with his/her primordial self; "nature which has become estranged, hostile, subjugated, celebrates once more her reconciliation with her prodigal son, man. Freely earth proffers her gifts, and peacefully the beasts of prey approach from desert and mountain. The chariot of Dionysus is bedecked with flowers and garlands; panthers and tigers pass beneath his yoke" (Nietzsche, 1995, p. 4). In other words, this is a dimension in which the cultural, social and rational side of being collapses, and desire, set free, annihilates the Apollonian control mechanism.

Though he does not use the term 'desire' to identify the Dionysian state, his definition of the Dionysian suggests a parallelism between the two. Nietzsche says that almost everywhere in ancient Greece "the Dionysian festivals centered in extravagant sexual licentiousness, whose waves overwhelmed all family life and its venerable traditions; the most savage natural instincts were unleashed, including even that horrible mixture of sensuality and cruelty which has always seemed to be the genuine 'witches brew'" (1995, p. 6). According to Nietzsche, these festivals continued until the figure Apollo rose in full pride and guarded the Greeks against the feverish excitements of these festivals. Therefore, "wherever the Dionysian prevailed, the Apollonian was checked and destroyed. But, on the other hand, it is equally certain that, wherever the first Dionysian onslaught was successfully withstood, the authority and majesty of the Delphic god exhibited itself as more rigid and menacing than ever" (1995, p. 12).

In the Dionysian state, the fulfillment of desire begets utmost pleasure but at the same time suffering and annihilation. It is like the death-wish in Freudian psychoanalysis, in which death metaphorically means both a fulfillment of desire and annihilation of the conscious self. Nietzsche defines this dual nature of the Dionysian as: "The curious blending and duality in the emotions of

the Dionysian revelers remind us—as medicines remind us of deadly poison—of the phenomenon that pain begets joy, that ecstasy may wring sounds of agony from us. At the very climax of joy there sounds a cry of horror or a yearning lamentation for an irretrievable loss" (1995, p. 6). In this regard, non-being is an indispensable factor of human existence and man oscillates between being and non-being to the extent that he positions himself vis-à-vis the fulfillment of desire.

What is important for the purpose of this study is that Nietzsche identifies art with the Apollonian state of being and thinks that art is an Apollonian strategy of keeping the Dionysian, that, is, death and desire, from surging up in everyday life. He states that the Greeks overcame the Dionysian state of being with the middle world of art; the Dionysian dimension was "veiled and withdrawn from sight through art." It was "the direst necessity to live" (1995, p. 8) that the Greeks created their gods and art. The human artist is like a mediator who keeps the Dionysian artistic energies from bursting forth from nature. Very much like Freud, Nietzsche sees art as a form of dream, a repressive strategy for veiling the Dionysian from sight or for filtering the annihilating effects of the Dionysian. Nietzsche defines art as an Apollonian dream-inspiration in which the Dionysian human state, man's oneness with his primal nature of the universe, is "revealed to him in a *symbolic dream-picture*" (1995, p. 5); when human will is most endangered by the Dionysian, art approaches, as a redeeming and healing enchantress, transforming these horrible reflections, to use Freud's terms, to displaced or condensed images of a dream.

Based on this theoretical framework, weaving, as an emblem of storytelling and thus an art form, can be said to be a repressive mechanism for the self to prevent the deepest side of the soul from surging up, which follows that what one weaves on the web is a condensed or displaced form of what they repress. Repressing desire is the only way for the healthy self to continue life, and so storytelling, as Michel Foucault suggests, plays the role of prolonging life and eluding death. Alfred Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott" and Angela Carter's "The Lady of the House of Love" represent the main female figures' oscillation between the Apollonian control mechanism and Dionysian desire and annihilation. The Lady in the "The Lady of Shalott" and the Countess in "The Lady of the House of Love" try to prolong their lives by keeping desire out of their everyday circle of life, and in both works the confrontation with desire results in death, verifying our correlation of desire with death in our theoretical framework. The Apollonian apparatus used for repressing desire and cancelling death is the mirror and the act of weaving in Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott," and it is the Tarot in Angela Carter's "The Lady of the House of Love." The web and the mirror in "The Lady of Shalott" and the Tarot "The Lady of the House of Love" present an artifactual/narrative world of shadows, an Apollonian dream picture that satisfies the Dionysian impulse, that keeps it from bursting forth,

that makes life goes on in its usual order; in other words, the Apollonian dream picture created with the mirror and the Tarot serve for the suppression of desire and cancellation of death. Weaving of the shadows of the mirror in "The Lady of Shalott" and of the Tarot cards in "The Lady of the House of Love" signify that narrative is the repressive mechanism of the Apollonian, taking into account the time-honored metaphorical link between 'weaving' and storytelling. By spinning narratives/shadows of reality with the mirror and the Tarot, both the Lady and the Countess ward off death and control desire. As soon as they begin to fulfill desire, the Apollonian state collapses, the mirror shatters or the Tarot disentangles, their world of shadows breaks down, and in the end both die.

2.0 SPINNING THE MIRROR'S MAGIC SIGHTS IN TENNYSON'S "THE LADY OF SHALOTT"

Lord Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892) is a late English romantic poet who is often regarded as the chief representative of the Victorian Age in poetry. He was the Poet Laureate succeeding William Wordsworth. "The Lady of Shalott," together with his other famous poems "Lotus-eaters," "Morte d'Arthur," and "Ulysses," appeared in 1842 in the two-volume *Poems*. "The Lady of Shalott" is about the loneliness of a woman named "The Lady of Shalott" and her imprisonment in her world of shadows. The setting of the poem is a medieval one, Camelot, the famous castle of King Arthur and his knights. In the poem Camelot is full of life and represents the spatio-temporal reality and the socio-cultural sphere. In contrast, the Lady's world is static, inert, and outside the real, and her only contact with the real is her mirror, in which "shadows of the world appear" (Tennyson, 1891, p. 1). The poem begins with imagery corresponding to or symbolizing the Lady's loneliness and imprisonment. The "silent isle" which "embowers/The Lady of Shalott," the "four gray walls, and four gray towers" (1891, p. 1), the lilies around her island, and the whitening willows all symbolize her loneliness, isolation, and death-in-life state. In a way, her life is based on a total rejection of the Dionysian desire. The "shivering" imagery in "aspens 'quiver' and little breezes 'dusk' and 'shiver' reinforce her loneliness and imply the fragility of her world. Nobody has seen her wave her hand or at the casement stand. Nobody has ever seen her face and nobody knows anything about her. Only reapers, "reaping early/In among the bearded barley," hear her sing, and in the evening, as they pile sheaves, they listen to her singing again and whisper: "'Tis the fairy/Lady of Shalott" (1891, p. 1), which signifies her unreality in the eyes of the reapers.

The Lady can see reality only through its refracted shadows on the mirror because of a curse she herself does not know. She weaves "the mirror's magic sights" in her loom, which bears close resemblance to an artist's weaving shadows of reality in a work of art, the shadows sliding one after another like a narrative sequence, functioning as an Apollonian world of dream aiming to cancel the waking point, the world of desire and death. In essence, "the mirror forms her perception of reality, which the Lady, in turn, reproduces creating the tapestry" (Nikiforova, 2018, p. 639). Unlike Narcissus who sees his own reflection in the lake, the Lady sees not herself but the outside world with all its vivacity on the mirror. As Joseph Chadwick discusses, the mirror, "showing "shadows of the world" rather than her own reflection, indicates that she is utterly

dependent upon the world from which she is separated" (1986, p. 18). In this regard, her inner self and thus her Dionysian state are unknown to her. She perpetuates her life by forgetting her own self seeing the world via the mirror and weaving the shadows of the mirror on her web. Relying on O. V. Stroeva's analysis of Narcissus' image from the archaic era to the age of "selfie," Nikiforova argues that "The Lady of Shalott is an anti-Narcissus, she lives in "anti-selfie" genre. Not only the outside world is inaccessible for her, but even the self-contemplation" (2018, p. 639). Through the mirror that hangs before her she sees the road on the bank of the river "winding down to Camelot." In contrast to her static world, Camelot is reflected on the mirror as center of action and attraction; things and people either move to or move from Camelot: the road "runs by/To many-towered Camelot," the river flows down to Camelot, and the "shallop flitteth silken-sail'd" skim down to Camelot (Tennyson, 1891, p. 1). On the highway near "winding down to Camelot" she sees "the river eddy whirls," "the surly village-churls," and "the red cloaks of market girls" (1891, p. 1). She also sees on the mirror go to towered Camelot "a troop of damsels glad," "an abbot on an ambling pad," "a curly shepherd lad," "long-haired page in crimson clad,", or a "funeral with plumes and lights" (1891, p. 1), which shows that life appears on the mirror with all its vitality, with the co-existence of life and death, and Camelot is represented as the vantage point where all the roads of life meet.

This conciliatory act of weaving continues until she sees on the mirror "knights come riding two and two" and she realizes "she hath no loyal knight and true" (Tennyson, 1891, p. 1), which signifies the first sign of the wake of the Dionysian, though "in her web she still delights / To weave the mirror's magic sights" (1891, p. 1). When she sees two young lovers in the magic mirror, she realizes she is no longer satisfied with the world of shadows and confesses "I am half sick of shadows" (1891, p. 1). Her sense of imprisonment and dissatisfaction peaks with the appearance of Sir Lancelot in the mirror riding down to Camelot like a sun "dazzling thro' the leaves, /And flamed upon the brazen greaves" (1891, p. 2). The mirror, which functions until this point of the poem as an Apollonian repressive mechanism hindering the surge of desire, causes it to burst here because, instead of an exact reflection of Lancelot, it presents an elevated image of him and thus makes him an embodiment of desire for the Lady of Shalott. In other words, "the mirror brings certain ambivalence, because it tears the Lady from a fulfilled life in the real world, but also shows her Lancelot, for whom she will break the ban and turn away from the mirror-screen" (Nikiforova, 2018, p. 639). His shield sparkled on the yellow field with the image of a red-cross knight "for ever kneel'd/To a lady in his shield," and his gemmy bridle glittered like a "some branch of stars" hung "in the golden Galaxy" (Tennyson, 1891, p. 2); the sun in the blue uncloudy sky makes his saddle-leather shine as if it were thick-jeweled, and his helmet and helmet-feather burn "like one burning flame together" (1891, p. 2). As he rode, his brow glows in the sunlight, his war-horse trodes "on barnish'd hooves," and "from underneath his helmet flow'd /His coal-black curls" (1891, p. 2). The mirror's illusory reflection of Lancelot becomes more obvious when it is said that from the bank and from the river "he flash'd into the crystal mirror" (1891, p. 2); thus, he flashes from the bank into the river and from both into the Lady's mirror, which brings to mind Plato's idea that art, as a mimetic form, is twice removed from reality and which follows that the Lady of Shalott is twice

removed from reality as she perceives Lancelot on the mirror like a ball of light reflected both from the bank and from the river. For the first time, instead of the outer world, the mirror shows her own reflection, her inner self, that is, her Dionysian desire embodied as Lancelot.

The collapse of the Apollonian and the burst of the Dionysian are complete when the Lady of Shalott leaves her loom and looks at the spatio-temporal reality without the mediation of the mirror to see Sir Lancelot with naked eyes, which, in addition to the Nietzschean reading, can be interpreted in Foucauldian terms as the Lady's unwillingness to perpetuate her life by spinning the shadows of the mirror on her loom. The first thing she sees is the blooming of the water-lilies outside of her tower, which is followed with the crack of the mirror and the destruction of her web:

> Out flew the web and floated wide;
> The mirror crack'd from side to side;
> "The curse is come upon me," cried
> The Lady of Shalott. (Tennyson, 1891, p. 2)

Thus, the surge of desire results in the destruction of the Lady's mirror and web, which means that when desire is present, the mirror and the web—which function as two Apollonian repressive mechanisms—are absent and vice versa.


The Lady of Shalott

What follows the destruction of the Apollonian is death, which is presented in the poem as the ultimate end of desire. As soon as her mirror is cracked and her web destroyed, the Lady comes down from her tower, finds a boat afloat on the river, writes her name on it, lies down on it and surrenders herself to the stream bearing her to the central point of desire, Camelot, which signifies the end of living for her. The use of the river image to symbolize the Lady's voyage towards death implies the correlation of death with the river and the poet's reliance on the Greek myth of Lethe in his use of the river image. In the Greek myth, Lethe was one of the five rivers in Hades, the underworld, and it was the river of oblivion and forgetfulness. People who died had to cross Lethe as they went to the underworld and drink from its water to forget their past. Thus, two points make Lethe important for our comprehension of the river in "The Lady of Shalott": first, its being the river of forgetfulness, and second, its functioning as the passage to death. Moving and traveling with the stream of the river is presented in the poem as the only way of dissolution by forgetting. This idea brings to mind Nietzsche's correlation of the Dionysian with self-forgetfulness, self-oblivion and death, which is mentioned in the theoretical background of this article. Nietzsche takes forgetfulness with a recognition of the truth in ancient myth that there is no peaceful death without first experiencing Lethe. In his *The Use and Abuse of History* (1884), Nietzsche writes:

> In the smallest and greatest happiness there is always one thing that makes it happiness: the power of forgetting, or, in more learned phrase, the capacity of feeling 'unhistorically' throughout its duration. One who cannot leave himself behind on the threshold of the moment and forget the past, who cannot stand on a single point, like a goddess of victory, without fear or giddiness, will never know what happiness is. (2019, p. 6)

The only way that can remove from the Lady the almost intolerable consciousness of being is to forget the historicity of the moment and free herself from the bounds of physical reality. Forgetfulness "is the essential accompaniment to the epiphanic experience that Nietzsche names "Eternal Return"" (Harding, 1991, 113), which can be interpreted as the return of the self to its origin, that is, the primordial self where resides the Dionysian.

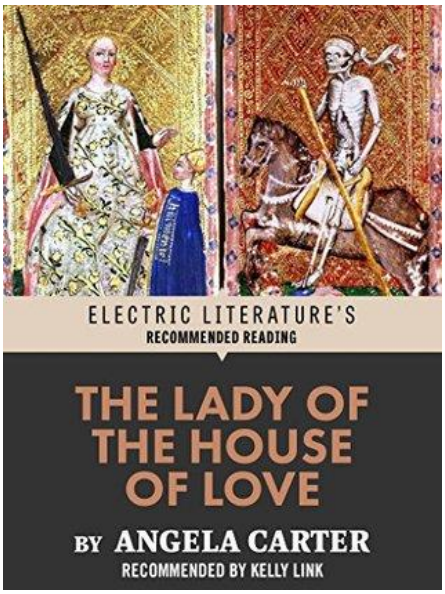
Thus, it can be said that the river which carries the Lady to self-forgetfulness and dissolution suggests an association with death and a reliance on the Lethe myth. Like Lethe, it also implies a passage to peaceful death. In *The Lady of Shalott*, as the Lady floats closer and closer to Camelot, her trance gets deeper and deeper until she falls into a snowy white sleep. Images of snow, white and cold are widely used at this point of the poem to represent her peaceful death and untainted virginity:

> Lying, robed in snowy white
> That loosely flew to left and right—
> The leaves upon her falling light
> (Tennyson, 1891, p. 2)

Chanting her last mournful song, "her blood [is] frozen slowly/And her eyes [are] darkened wholly" (1891, p. 2). Symbolic of the association of Camelot with desire and death, she dies as soon as she reaches the first house of Camelot. Indicative of the socio-temporal side of Camelot in contrast to the lonely world of Shalott, knight and burgher, lord and dame come to look at her as she floats dead-pale through the houses. Lastly comes Lancelot and says, "she has a lovely face;/God in his mercy lend her grace" (1891, p. 3)). Lancelot's short and superficial answer shows the illusiveness of the mirror's reflections because Lancelot who appears in the mirror as a ball of light and an embodiment of desire is in reality not worth of the Lady's sacrificing her life.

3.0 THE TAROT GAME TO KEEP PSYCHIC BALANCE IN ANGELA CARTER'S "THE LADY OF THE HOUSE OF LOVE"

In Angela Carter's short story "The Lady of the House of Love" this time it is the Tarot that plays the role of the mirror and the web. The Countess in Carter's work is also alone, looks at life through the images of the Tarot, and in a way 'spins' stories via these images for the fulfillment of desire. The Countess in the story looks at the world with her eyeglasses that always represent the world in a refracted way. The Tarot, the sequentiality of its cards always showing the same narrative pattern and always excluding desire, plays the role of continuing life and keeping desire out of the circle of life. The Countess's confrontation with desire ends with the destruction of the Apollonian repressive mechanisms—her eyeglasses and the Tarot—and with death, which, as already said, is the ultimate end of desire.



Angela Carter (1940-1992) is one of the most original writers of the 20th century English literature. Her themes range from gothic fantasy and traditional fairytales to magical realism, surrealism, and picaresque. With her feminism, handling of sexuality, rewriting of famous fairytales and with her idea on female sadism, Carter's work has broken many long-established taboos and opened the way for a different understanding of literature. Most of her novels, including *The Magic Toyshop* (1967), *Several Perceptions* (1968), *Heroes and Villains* (1969), *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* (1972), *The Passion of New Eve* (1977), and *Nights at the Circus* (1984), have become among the most widely read, interpreted and conversed novels of the 20th century English and world literatures. *The Sadeian Woman and the Ideology of Pornography* (1979), one of her non-fictions, has been one of the most disputed treatises on female sexuality since it was written. *The Bloody Chamber* (1979), a collection of short stories that are rewriting of famous fairy tales, is for many her best work.

"The Lady of the House of Love" is one of the stories in *The Bloody Chamber*. The story is based on the fairy tale *Sleeping Beauty in the Wood* and vampire stories. It is "a reworking of the vampire legend, in which the vampires' remaining descendant is a young woman who exploits men's sexual appetites in order to obtain her prey" (Sellers, 2001, p. 117). This vampirella or vampress, who is called the Countess in the story, is the daughter of the famous vampire Nosferatu and is "the last bud of the poison tree that sprang from the loins of Vlad the Impaler who picknicked on corpses in the forests of Transilvania" (Carter, 2006, p. 109). Wearing an antique bridal gown, the beautiful queen of vampires sits all alone in the dark and plays the Tarot "ceaselessly construing a constellation of possibilities as if the random fall of the cards on the red plush tablecloth before her could precipitate her from her chill, shuttered room into a country perpetual summer and obliterate the perennial sadness of a girl who is both death and a maiden" (2006, p. 107) Like the Lady of Shalott and Sleeping Beauty in the Wood, she is alone and leads a life of trance, has no human contact, and is described as a nightbird totally isolated from the spatio-temporal phenomena usually associated with daylight; "closely barred shutters and heavy velvet curtains keep out every leak of natural light" (2006, p. 108). She is so beautiful that her beauty is an abnormality, a deformity, a symptom of her disorder. She is powerful because she is "the commandant of the army of shadows who camp in the village below her chăteau" (2006, p. 109). However, the Countess is indifferent to her weird authority and dreams she would like to be a human. When she grows hungry and eats whatever living creature she finds, she loathes her food. When she finds rabbits, instead of eating them, she would like bringing them home and playing with them, but hunger always overcomes her. Though powerful, she is dissatisfied with her condition; everything is as it should be; she is queen of night, queen of terror, but she is reluctant for the role.

The Tarot which the Countess constantly plays is of major significance for the purpose of this article. The Countess "rises when the sun sets and goes immediately to her table where she plays her game of patience" (Carter, 2006, p. 108). Thus, like the mirror and weaving in *The Lady of Shalott* and storytelling in the *Arabian Tales*, the Tarot functions an Apollonian means of conciliation for overcoming boredom and keeping the Dionysian outside the reach of everyday experience. It is said: "Nothing can console her for the ghastliness of her situation, nothing. She resorts to the magic comfort of the Tarot pack and shuffles the cards, lays them out, reads them, constantly constructing hypothesis about a future which is irreversible. (2006, p. 110). As soon as the sun sets, she gets up and puts on the only dress she has, which is her mother's wedding dress, and reads her cards until she grows hungry. Based on the information so far, it can be said that the Tarot suggests conciliation and overcoming boredom while the wedding dress symbolizes waiting for the uncoming groom and the unfulfilled desire of marriage.

As suggested with the antique wedding dress, her life is a system of repetitions, a closed circuit; "the narration insists on the inescapability of the past which will repeat itself through her with the same inexorability as the pattern of the Tarot cards she continually turns over" (Sellers, 2001, p. 117). Her Tarot play always shows the same configuration: La Papesse, La Mort, La Tour Abolie; that is, wisdom, death, dissolution" (Carter, 2006, p. 109). The card La Papesse, one of the cards which always turns up in the Countess' play, "may be seen as symbolizing the archetype of the Virgin" (Nichols, 1980, p. 12). La Mort which means death signifies "end of an era, sacrifice, and destruction" that leads to rebirth, that is, the beginning to a new phase (1980, p. 19). Death is usually personified on the card as Grim Reaper riding a horse but more often holding a sickle. Personifying death as the Grim Reaper, in "The Lady of the House of Love" it is told that when the shepherd boys and gipsy lads come to wash their dusty feet in the water of the fountain near her castle, "the Countess's governess brings them into the drawing room where the cards on the table always show the Grim Reaper" (Carter, 2006, p. 111). La Tour Abolie, literally meaning the ruined tower, is the card associated with "sudden, disruptive revelation, potentially destructive change."[2] Thus, these cards do not only suggest what she experiences at present but also foretell what is going to happen in the end of the story, which is the Countess's eventual death and dissolution when she confronts desire.

The Tarot also reveals the inner workings of the mind, which has drawn critics to study the Tarot in terms of psychoanalysis. Karl Gustav Jung has been the most cited and mentioned psychoanalyst in this respect because of his fragmentary ideas about the Tarot. In a seminar in 1 March 1933, Jung says:

> Another strange field of occult experience in which the hermaphrodite appears is the Tarot. That is a set of playing cards, such as were originally used by the gypsies. There are Spanish specimens, if I remember rightly, as old as the fifteenth century. These cards are really the origin of our pack of cards, in which the red and the black symbolize the opposites, and the division of four—clubs, spades, diamonds, and hearts—also belongs to the individuation symbolism. They are psychological images, symbols with which one

[2] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Tower_(Tarot_card)

> plays, as the unconscious seems to play with its contents. They combine in certain ways, and the different combinations correspond to the playful development of events in the history of mankind. The original cards of the Tarot consist of the ordinary cards, the king, the queen, the knight, the ace, etc.,—only the figures are somewhat different—and besides, there are twenty-one cards upon which are symbols, or pictures of symbolical situations. For example, the symbol of the sun, or the symbol of the man hung up by the feet, or the tower struck by lightning, or the wheel of fortune, and so on. Those are sort of archetypal ideas, of a differentiated nature, which mingle with the ordinary constituents of the flow of the unconscious, and therefore it is applicable for an intuitive method that has the purpose of understanding the flow of life. (Jung, 1997, p. 923)

In *Jung and Tarot: An Archetypal Journey* S. Nichols argues,

> A journey through the Tarot cards is primarily a journey into our own depths. Whatever we encounter along the way is an aspect of our own deepest, and highest self. For the Tarot cards, originating as they did at a time when the mysterious and irrational had more reality than they do today, bring us an effective bridge to ancestral wisdom of our innermost selves. (1980, p. 1)

For Nichols, in our journey through the Tarot, we use the cards as projection holders because the cards "represent symbolically those instinctual forces operating autonomously in the depths of the human psyche which Jung calls archetypes" (1980, p. 9). In *The Magical World of the Tarot: Fourfold Mirror of the Universe*, G. Knight states that Jung equated the Tarot cards with the functions of Intellect, Intuition, Feeling and Sensation. Suggestive of Nietzsche's definition of Apollo as a healing god, Knight puts forth the healing aspect of the Tarot arguing that Jung "used this fourfold structure to bring healing through the contemplation of images that emerge from the unconscious mind (1996, p.2). Implying the correlation between the Tarot and the Apollonian further, Knight adds:

> The fourfold structure of the playing card pack is an extended mandala—a healing figure of psychic balance. Add to this the twenty-two figures of the Tarot and we have a powerful tool indeed—the intriguing system of interlocking images that can reveal the workings of the mind and the world about us (1996, p. 2).

Thus, describing the Tarot as a healing figure of psychic balance affirms the argument of the article that the Tarot functions as an Apollonian repressive mechanism.

Like The Lady of Shalott, the Countess's world of shadows and psychic balance continues until she encounters desire, when a young man representing the spatio-temporal reality happens to intrude her static world. Like Lancelot in *The Lady of Shalott*, the intrusion of the young man into her unreal, static and isolated life results in the wake of the Dionysian and the collapse of the Apollonian. Suggesting the wake of Dionysian desire and the story's association with the fairy tale *Sleeping Beauty in the Wood*, as soon as he comes to the village it is said: "A single kiss woke up the Sleeping Beauty in the Wood" (Carter, 2006, p. 112). He is described as rooted in change and time, and coming to the world of the Countess with a bicycle, which is the symbol of the world of time and change, "he is about to collide with the timeless world of the vampires, for whom all is as it has always been and will be, whose cards always fall in the same pattern" (Carter, 2006, p. 112). The Tarot does not only heal the Countess by keeping her psychic balance but also foretells the

approach of desire: "The waxen fingers of the Countess, fingers of a holy image, turn up the card called Les Amoureux. Never, never before has the Countess cast herself a fate involving love" (2006, p. 112). As soon as he comes to the village, he is invited to the castle and then to the unlit room of the Countess. The instant effect of their confrontation on the Countess is love.

From the moment he comes to the village, the young man is presented as a bridegroom who will wake the Sleeping Beauty in the Wood with a kiss. The bridegroom is come, it is said, and he will go to the chamber which is prepared for him. In her interior monologue, the Countess thinks: "I am condemned to solitude and dark…I've been waiting for you in my wedding dress, why have you delayed so long" (Carter, 2006, p. 119). "Can love free me from shadows?" she asks (2006, p. 119). Her life hovers between a no-man's land between life and death, sleeping and waking. Repeating the reference to the fairy tale, it is said the bridegroom has come and one kiss, only one "woke up the Sleeping Beauty in the Wood" to free her from her world of perpetual repetition (2006, p. 119). Bearing close resemblance to Lancelot, the young man in "The Lady of the House of Love" is presented with sun imagery. He is described as a sun dazzling the Countess's darkness; in the form of interior monologue, bringing to mind Lancelot's stepping off the mirror in *The Lady of Shalott*, the Countess thinks:

> When you came through the door retaining about you all the golden light of the summer's day of which I know nothing, nothing, the card called 'Les Amoureux' had just emerged from the tumbling chaos of imagery before me; it seemed to me you had stepped off the card into my darkness, and, for a moment, I thought, perhaps you might irradiate it" (Carter, 2006, p. 119)

The sun imagery continues in the following part of the story. It is told that when he looks at the Countess, "due to his heroism, which makes him like the sun," he sees before him not a vampirella but "an imbred, highly strung girl child, fatherless, motherless, kept in the dark too long" (2006, p. 120). Again in the form of interior monologue, she thinks, "your golden head of a lion, although I have never seen a lion, only imagined one, of the sun, even if I've seen the picture of the sun on the Tarot card, your golden head of the lover whom I dreamed would one day free me" (2006, p. 121). Thus, while the Countess is told to be a shadow belonging to the world of shadows, the young man is represented with light and sun imagery as belonging to the spatio-temporal reality that is usually associated with daylight.

The realism and scientific approach of the man is in sharp contrast to the unreal world of the Countess. His observations of the Countess before and after they make love indicate his realism and scientific outlook: he observes that the Countess is sixteen or seventeen years old and dressed fifty or sixty years out of fashion; she is like a shipwrecked bride dressed up in her mother's clothes, or a dead mother's clothes to bring her to life again; she has photophobia because she wears dark glasses to prevent herself from light; she has a hectic, unhealthy beauty; her voice is disembodied; her fingernails or claws need to be manicured; and her teeth need to be shown to a dentist. Besides, he is disturbed by her fleshy mouth.

Just like the crack of the mirror and the destruction of the web in *The Lady of Shalott*, as soon as the Countess surrenders herself to Dionysian desire and makes love with the young man, the painted cards of the Tarot fall on the floor and get entangled, and the dark glasses also fall on the

floor and smash to pieces. As in *The Lady of Shalott*, the ultimate end of desire is also death in Carter's story. As the Countess thinks in her interior monologue, "the end of exile is the end of being" (2006, p.123). After they make love, she feels for the first time fully human, but with a consequence because she thinks "I will vanish in the morning light; I was only an invention of darkness." Using flower imagery to suggest the sex experience, she thinks she plucked a fanged rose from between her thighs, like a flower laid on a grave. And after her death, like the blooming of the lilies in *The Lady of Shalott*, a rose blooms after her desire fulfilment and consequential death. As seen, the end of Dionysian desire is self-forgetfulness, death and oblivion. Her death is presented as deep sleep among her entangled cards which is in fact death sleep. Death, or annihilation of the self, as in The Lady of Shalott, emerges in the story as a direct result of the collapse of the Apollonian and destruction of the psychic balance of the Countess. The fall and entanglement of the Tarot and the smash of the eyeglasses imply the end of a story whose main intent is to keep the Dionysian outside the circle of life.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Based on Foucault's notion that storytelling has the function of perpetuating life and cancelling death and Nietzsche's idea of the Apollonian and Dionysian as two opposing states of the human soul, in Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott" and Carter's "The Lady of the House of Love" the female figures are concerned with conciliatory acts that can be interpreted to have the same function as storytelling in Foucault's sense. In "The Lady of Shalott," the Lady sees the world only through a mirror hanged in front of her, the shadows of which she weaves on her loom. She is forbidden to look at the world with naked eyes because of a curse she does not know. Relying on the time-honored correlation between weaving and storytelling and keeping in mind Nietzsche's idea that art is an Apollonian healing strategy that keeps psychic balance by repressing the Dionysian, the Lady can be said to spin shadows of the world on her loom to prolong her life by repressing desire and thus cancelling death. However, with the reflection on the mirror first of a newly-wed couple, then knights passing to and fro, and lastly of Lancelot, the Lady can no longer suppress desire, which—to use Nietzsche's terminology—results in the surge of the Dionysian state and the collapse of the Apollonian. The end of the Apollonian suggests the end of being for her because as soon as she confronts desire in the form of Sir Lancelot reflected on the mirror as a ball of light both from the bank and from the river, her two Apollonian repressive mechanisms—her mirror and her web—are destroyed. The river that carries her to death in the end of the poem suggests a parallelism with the river of Lethe in the Greek myth, which Nietzsche mentions to present his idea of self-forgetfulness. As said in the theoretical background of this article, Nietzsche associates self-forgetfulness and self-oblivion with the Dionysian state, and so the river symbolizes a passage to the state of self-oblivion and death that are the ultimate forms of Dionysian desire.

In Angela Carter's "The Lady of the House of Love," one of the stories that appears in her short story collection *The Bloody Chamber*, it is the Tarot that can be associated with storytelling in Foucault's terms. The Countess who is the last rosebud of the family of vampires is the queen of shadows that haunt the village in which her castle is located. However, she is reluctant to play her role as a vampirella, and deep inside she would like to be a human. She overcomes her boredom and perpetuates her existence with the Tarot play, the cards of which always show the same configuration: La Papesse, La Mort, and La Tour Abolie (virginity, death leading to rebirth, and the abolished tower). These cards do not only represent her present state but also foretell her eventual death and dissolution when the Dionysian surges in her life. The Tarot has the function of prolonging life and cancelling desire and death in the story because as soon as she faces desire, her game of patience ends and she surrenders herself to the Dionysian. Depending on the Jungian interpretation of the Tarot, the Tarot cards can be said to be archetypal symbols that represent the inner workings of the mind and a mandala, that is, a healing figure of psychic balance, a role that is assigned to Apollo by Nietzsche. With an allusion to the fairy tale *The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood*, the young man comes and wakes the Countess up from her long sleep, the consequence of which is the collapse of the Apollonian and the rule of the Dionysian.

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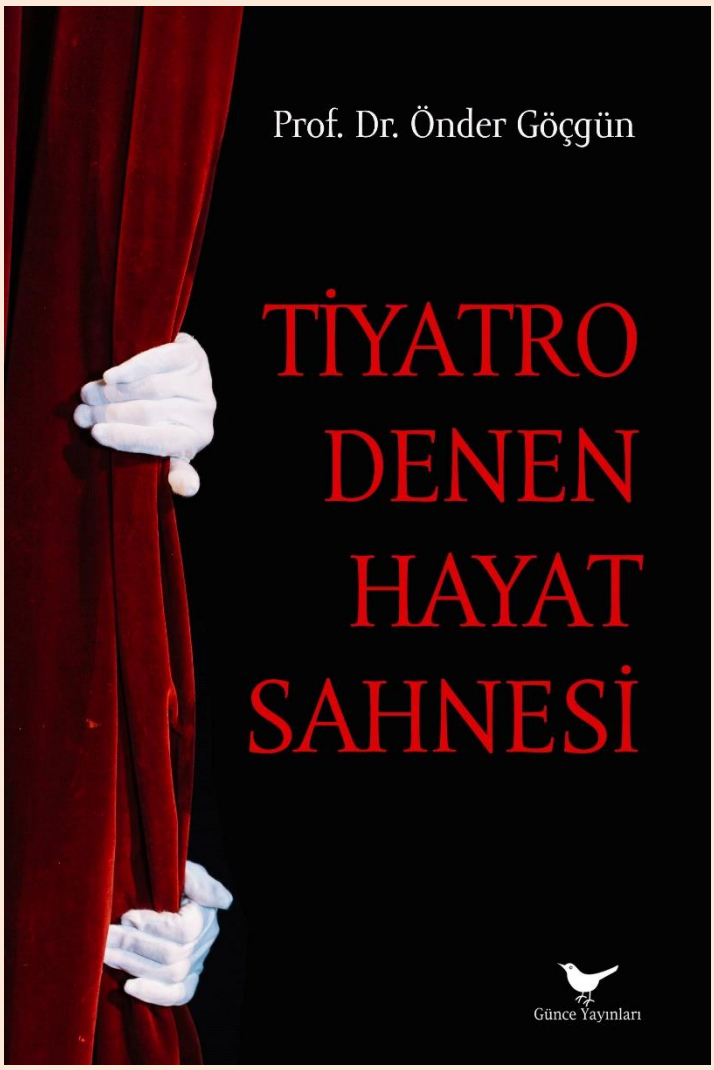

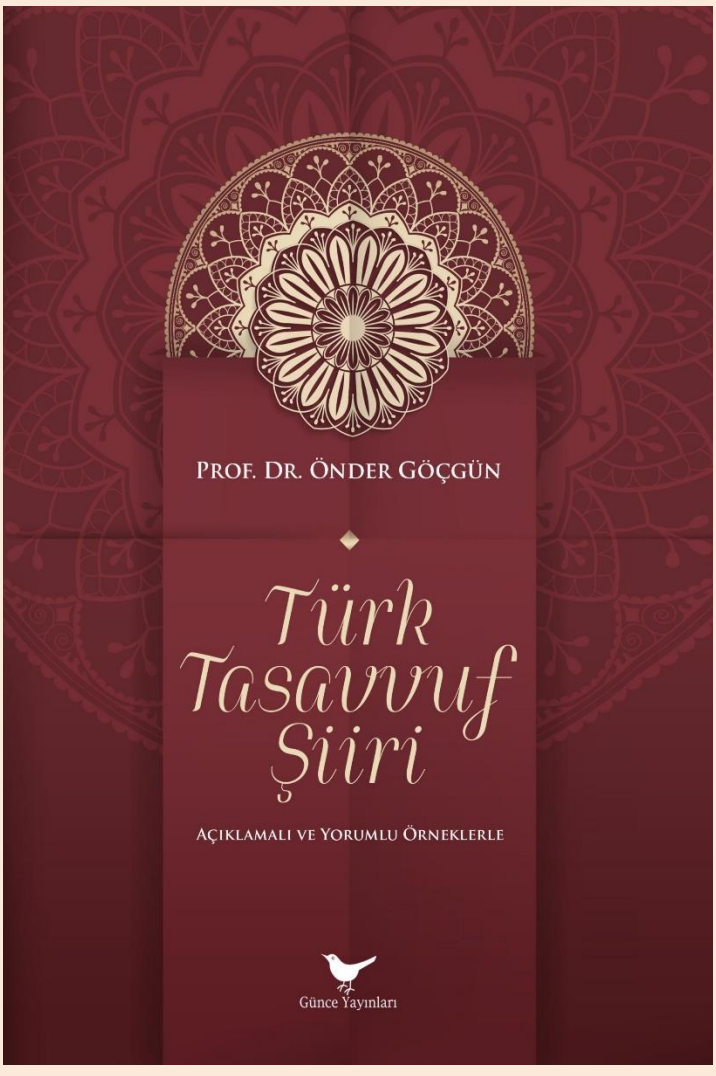

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