

MOURNING, MELANCHOLIA AND NARCISSISTIC DEPRESSION IN EDGAR ALLAN POE'S "LIGEIA"

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ABSTRACT

In Edgar Allan Poe's story "Ligeia" the narrator recites his memories and this narrative technique requires the readers to focus on his narration of his memories, what he remembers and why he remembers certain elements of his past, and leaves some out. Nonetheless, as the key object that shapes the narrator's memories is the "eye," the discussion of the motif of the eye will be one of the discussions in this paper. As well as the signification of the eye, the narrator's remembrance of Ligeia's physical appearance, and repeating the beauty of her eyes over and over again, makes the readers suspicious about the cause of the narrator's sadness: is he really mourning for his lost wife, or is he mourning for something else? As a result of this set of questions, this article will dominantly use Freud's ideas on mourning, melancholia, remembering and forgetting so as to identify what it is that the narrator has lost and what that loss means to the narrator.

ÖZET

Edgar Allan Poe'nun kısa öyküsü olan "Ligeia," anlatıcının geçmişe dair hatırladıklarını anlatır ve bu anlatım tekniği sayesinde okuyucu anlatıcının neyi neden hatırladığı üstüne düşünmeye başlar. Anlatıcının hatırladıklarının arasında en belirgin olan ölen karısının gözleridir ve hikâye boyunca gözlerle ilgili değişik yorumlar ve anılar tekrarlanmaktadır. Bu tekrarlar okuyucuyu gizlenen sorulara yöneltir: Anlatıcı gerçekten karısının ölümüne mi üzülüyor yoksa kaybettiği karısının dışında başka bir şey midir? Bu makalede Freud'un yas tutma, melankoli, hatırlama ve unutma gibi kavramları kullanılarak, anlatıcının gerçekten neyin yasını tutmaya çalıştığı incelenecek.

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In his 1917 published article "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud defines mourning as a "reaction to the loss of a beloved person or an abstraction taking the place of the person, such as fatherland, freedom, an ideal," whereas melancholia is defined as a "painful depression, a loss of interest in the outside world, the loss of the ability to love"(310) with a source that is hardly explicable. Although both appear to be similar in their cause and effect, as both are caused by loss and the result is the "reduction in the sense of the self"(310) and withdrawal from the outside world, they are different. First, mourning is defined as a reaction. It is an explainable reaction to an identifiable cause, whereas melancholia is a type of depression with a non-explainable cause and considered to be pathological. In some cases the cause of the melancholia can be identifiable, but Freud argues that the person may know who he has lost but "not *what* it is about that person he has lost" ("Mourning and Melancholia" 312). Therefore, in melancholia it is very difficult to locate the real reason since it requires an investigation of the unconscious, as the activated repressed element is considered to be the non-explainable, hidden source of melancholia and therefore it demands a more multidimensional analysis.

In his article "Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through," Freud states that one "does not remember anything at all what he has forgotten and repressed, but rather acts it out. He reproduces it not as a memory, but as an action; he repeats it, without of course being aware of the fact that he is repeating it" (394). He suggests that, instead of remembering the painful past that has been repressed, the person "presents a mass of confused dreams and associations" (394) and unconsciously repeats these confused signals with his actions or feelings. For Freud, the reason for this repetition is the resistance to remember. Instead of accepting and revealing the reality, the patient struggles to avoid it by transferring unwanted thoughts into an irrelevant direction, in other words to cover it by various actions or feelings. Freud gives an example of a patient who

Instead of remembering that he became hopelessly stuck in his infantile sexual explorations, he presents a mass of confused dreams and associations, wails that he is no good at anything, and sees it as his fate never to bring any undertaking to a successful conclusion. Instead of remembering that he was intensely ashamed of certain sexual activities and fearful of discovery, he exhibits shame regarding the treatment that he has embarked upon, and tries to keep it secret from all and sundry. (394)

For Freud, this is "nothing more than the repetition of homosexual stance" (394). Yet, no matter how much the patient tries to shut out his memories by covering them, he finds himself constantly conversing through shame as the new cover. Then the question arises: If the past memories are painful and unpleasant, why are they being repeated and carried into the present through certain actions or feelings? In his article "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" Freud suggests that the repetition compulsion is associated with pleasure:

The resistance of the conscious and pre-conscious ego serves the interests of the pleasure principle; it seeks after all to forestall the unpleasure that would be caused if the repressed part of the psyche were to break free- whereas our own efforts are all directed at opening the way to just such unpleasure by calling upon the reality principle [...] It is plain that most of what the compulsion to repeat makes the patient relive necessarily causes the ego unpleasure, since it brings out into the open of workings of repressed drive- impulses; but, as we have already seen, this is unpleasure of a kind that does not conflict with the pleasure principle, for though it constitutes gratification for the other. (146- 147)

According to Freud, self- control is the key motive in the repetition compulsion. Since the past experiences have occurred without any control of the self, repeating it in a different way allows the person to possess control over the incident, and this control is the root of the pleasure. Therefore, no matter how unpleasant the past is, reliving it in the present is pleasant. However, understanding the motivation behind repetition is not enough to locate the cause of the repressed element. An effective identification of what is being repeated is equally essential as Freud suggests that "repetitional compulsion bears to the transference and the resistance exhibited by the patient [...] the transference is itself merely an instance of repetition, and this repetition involves transference of the forgotten past" (395). Edgar Allan Poe's short story "Ligeia" is a case in point where the repetition of the "eye" motif encourages the reader to search for its reason.

"Ligeia," which has the relevant hidden and multidimensional implications of melancholia, has been analyzed in relation to supernatural (Roy Baster), domestic values (Cynthia Jordan), gender (Leland Person), narration and repression (Robert Con Davis) and on gaze considering the fact that the dominant element in the story is "eye". With this paper I aim to offer an additional analysis for the reason that in "Ligeia" the narrative of the memories requires the readers to focus on what the narrator remembers and why he

remembers certain elements of his past, and leaves out some. Nonetheless, as the key object that shapes the narrator's memories is the "eye," the discussion of the motif of the "eye" would be relevant. As well as the signification of the "eye," the narrator's remembrance of Ligeia's physical appearance, and repeating the beauty of her eyes over and over again, creates a suspicion about the cause of the narrator's sadness: is he really mourning for his lost wife, or is he mourning for something else? As a result of this set of questions, this article will dominantly use Freud's ideas on mourning, melancholia, remembering and forgetting so as to identify what it is that the narrator has lost and what that loss means to the narrator.

First published in 1838, "Ligeia" combines Poe's recurrent themes of death, vagueness and mystery juxtaposed with the narrator's romantic and "agonized search for an ideal fulfillment once mystically achieved or fitfully envisioned" (Gargano, 339). There are two separate themes; love and hate, life and death. In the story these themes are constructed through two separate characters, Ligeia and Rowena, who at the end are united with each other, suggesting the necessity of combining binary opposites as well as presenting the duality of the self. The first part of the story is about the narrator's recollection of his first wife Ligeia and pivots around her physical characteristics. According to what the narrator remembers, Ligeia is a passionate and inspiring woman with "Lofty and pale forehead," "delicate outlines of the nose-," "sweet mouth," "the magnificent turn of the short upper lip- the soft, voluptuous slumber of the under" (227). The narrator takes extreme pleasure in remembering and describing her eyes as "large eyes of Ligeia," "larger than the ordinary," "fuller than the gazelle eyes" (228), though other physical details of her face are implicitly mentioned. In the first part, the narrator gives an account of how she made him feel, how she died and the details of his mourning and how his life changed after losing the person he loved. Following upon a period of mourning, in the second part of the story, the narrator enters into a loveless marriage with Lady Rowena, with whom he was unable to unite either mentally or emotionally. Due to the narrator's inability to satisfy himself emotionally in his second marriage, he filled his dull days with memories of Ligeia, all the while distancing himself from Rowena and severing himself from the outside world. What follows his miserable days is the death of his second wife and the narrator's hallucination that the dead body of Rowena has reawakened and been transformed into Ligeia. During this plot structure, what mostly catches the

reader's attention is the narrator's obsessive repetition and quasi-mystical description of Ligeia's eyes:

For eyes, we have no models in the remotely antique. It might have been, too, that in the eyes of my beloved lay the secret to which Lord Verulam alludes. They were, I must believe, far larger than the ordinary eyes of our own race. They were even fuller than the fullest of the gazelle eyes of the tribe of the valley of Nourjahad. The hue of the orbs was the most brilliant of black, and far over them, hung jetty lashes of great length. The brows, slightly irregular in outline, had the same tint. The "strangeness," however, which I found in the eyes, was of a nature distinct from formation, or the colour, or the brilliancy of the features, and must after all, be referred to the *expression*... The expression of the eyes of Ligeia- for how for long hours have I pondered upon it! How have I, through the whole of a midsummer night, struggled to fathom it!... Those eyes, those large, those shining, those divine orbs? They became to me twin stars of Leda, and I to them devoutest of astrologers. (227- 228)

The narrator's metaphorical language arises from his striking fascination with Ligeia's eyes as no ordinary language would be satisfactory in translating their beauty and what they meant for the narrator. Her eyes are like the "twin stars of Leda" for him and through this metaphor, the narrator, similar to a poet, draws an imagery of indefinite sky. Ligeia's eyes are the stars, he is the astrologer and through this unity they exist. In addition to its poetical promise for unity, as they myth tells, "The twin stars of Leda," Castor and Pollux are mythically presented as a promise for eternity. The immortal Pollux asked his father Zeus to let him share his immortality with his mortal brother Castor. His wish having been granted, Castor and Pollux became the two brightest stars. Together they were more powerful and more visible. Having had the chance to be united with Ligeia, the narrator finds himself more at ease with his feelings and therefore more spirited as he is the "devoutest of astrologers" responsible for interpreting their meaning. Through the knowledge of and ability to interpret immortality, the narrator feels his power. This mythic allusion, together with the narrator's repetitive narration is an example for Freud's repetition compulsion, as with it the narrator remembers the painful event of Ligeia's death yet relives it and obtains gratification although the reality reveals that he no longer possesses power. It is this power that the narrator has lost with the death of Ligeia. Therefore, it can be suggested that what the narrator worships is not the beauty of Ligeia's eyes, but their hidden meaning: unity, power and eternity. That is why it pleases him to remember her and to associate himself with the powerful responsibility of interpreting the twin stars Castor and Pollux.

As well as the lost power, such a mythical and obsessive description of the narrator's beloved's eyes that he is captivated by reveals his fascination as well as his fetish with his dead wife's eyes, hence allowing them to function as the love object which does not exist anymore. Thus, fetishism serves as a cover for the lost object:

Fetish is a penis substitute [...] It is a substitute not just for any penis, but for a specific and very special one, one which is of great significance in early infancy but which is subsequently lost [...] It is precisely the purpose of a fetish to prevent this loss from occurring. To put it more plainly, a fetish is a substitute for the woman's (mother's) phallus, which is the little boy once believed in and which- for reasons well known to us- he does not want to give up. (Freud, "Fetishism" 91)

When a boy perceives that the girl has no penis, instead of repressing it, he acknowledges it, but still denies this lack. Freud suggests that the realization of the missing penis turns into denial rather than repression and argues that the person acknowledging the lack "both retains this belief and renounces it [...] the perception remains and a very energetic action has been undertaken to maintain the denial" ("Fetishism" 91). In accordance with Freud's suggestion that "in his psyche, yes, the woman still has a penis, but this penis is no longer the same thing as before. Something else has taken its place, has been appointed its successor" ("Fetishism" 91); the boy devotes himself to find a substitute for the missing penis and fetishism therefore functions as an act of seeking the missing penis which is not seen and thus becomes the object of desire. What needs to be explained at this point is the motive for the boy's insistence on denying this lack rather than accepting the difference. Freud suggests the reason to be "because if women have been castrated, then his own penis is in danger, and the piece of narcissism, with which nature providently equips this very organ, recoils at the thought" ("Fetishism" 91). Therefore, denying the lack acts as a safety for the boy's power and identity. In the light of Freud's theory of seeking the missing penis, it can be claimed that the castration complex, where the adult male fears losing his penis as the female has lost hers and therefore she becomes biologically different and socially the Other, causes the male to substitute the missing penis of the female by the other parts of her body. For Freud, the object choice in fetish is significant:

The organs and objects chosen as substitutes for the missing female phallus will be those already used to symbolize the penis [...] The process involved when a fetish first becomes established seems reminiscent, rather, of the way memories are blocked out in traumatic

amnesia. Here, too, the patient's interest stops in its tracks, so to speak, if indeed it is the last impression prior to the uncanny, traumatic one that becomes fixed as the fetish. ("Fetishism" 92)

The last thing that the boy sees before realizing the missing penis is the dominant element of fetish object choice. According to Freud, usually feet and shoes can be prior examples of fetishism as the boy looks at woman from the below and feet or shoes are the last things he sees before realizing the missing penis, yet it is not limited to these objects. In "Ligeia," the narrator's dead wife's substituted missing penis is her eyes as indirectly they are the last things he sees before she dies:

And as she breathed her last sighs, there came mingled with them a low murmur from her lips. I bent to them my ear and distinguished, again, the concluding words of the passage in Glanvill. (232)

The above description of Ligeia's death bed allows the reader to visualize the scene. With a tired body, Ligeia threw herself to her bed and started to murmur. In order to hear what she says, the narrator bends down and puts his ears to her lips. As soon as she concludes her last words, the narrator distances himself from her lips and he sees her eyes. Her eyes become the last thing he has seen before she dies, therefore turning it into a fetish object for the narrator. The missing penis, which turns into a fetish object through the eyes, functions as a reassurance rather than disturbance for the narrator as the his anxiety of the disappearance of the penis is avoided by Ligeia's eyes. Her eyes create a sense of peace, power and it is due to the eyes of Ligeia that the narrator manages to unite with the world and it is due to lack of her eyes that the narrator is estranged, disturbed and threatened.

As a result of turning Ligeia's eyes into a fetish object, one can suggest that it is an objectification of Ligeia, turning her into an icon displayed for the enjoyment and reassurance of men. Admittedly it can also be claimed that by remembering his dead wife, the narrator recreates and emphasizes the importance of her character:

Of all the women whom I have ever known, she, the outwardly calm, the ever-placid Ligeia, was the most violently a prey to the tumultuous vultures of stern passion. And of such passion I could form no estimate, save by the miraculous expansion of those eyes which at once so delighted and appalled me- by almost magical melody, modulation, distinctness, and placidity of her very low voice- and by the fierce energy (rendered

doubly effective by contrast with her manner of utterance) of the wild words which she habitually uttered. (229)

In the light of the narrator's description, Ligeia carries all the characteristics of a True Woman, such as placidity with internal passion, and as opposed to the expectations of True Womanhood she mysteriously manages to control and dominate the feelings of the narrator, all the while altering the conventions. She does not only become the intellectual partner of the narrator, but she also emerges as the agent of inspiration and passion for him. With this description, we can claim that Ligeia might have set the essentials of a strong, passionate New Woman as opposed to a submissive True Woman. Therefore it would be safe to agree with Leland Person's argument that "Ligeia reverses the conventional power imbalance between husband and wife. Whereas a True Woman was supposed to be submissive and completely dependent upon her husband, Ligeia remands the narrator to a feminine place within the domestic sphere." (135) This suggestion raises a crucial question: if remembering how passionate and effective she is indicates the reversal of power relationship between husband and wife, what does forgetting about her social background reveal?

By having the ability to choose what to remember and what to forget about her, the narrator implicitly describes and presents her as an ideal object.

I cannot for my soul, remember how, when, or even precisely where, I first became acquainted with the Lady Ligeia [...] I have never known the paternal name of her who was my friend and my betrothed [...] (226)

At the very beginning of the story the narrator confesses that he cannot remember how they met or even what her paternal name was. This inability of remembering Ligeia's social background signals the narrator's control over her which becomes evident by separating her from her ancestral and cultural background and therefore objectifies her as a product of his imagination. By disconnecting her from her personal reality, she becomes a clear and a blank page for the narrator, on which he can exercise his power and recreate her according to his desires. According to Žižek, "Deprived of every real substance, the Lady functions as a mirror on to which the subject projects his narcissistic ideal." (90) This suggestion may evoke the argument that rather than remembering and therefore recreating his dead wife, the narrator recreates

himself as he wishes to be. The lady functions as a mirror that projects the narrator's love of himself, as well as an object that causes excitement and erotic satisfaction for him. In this connection, the Ligeia becomes the object and a valid description of an ideal True woman who is submissive, domestic and objectified. Therefore, Ligeia is hardly recreated through the memories of the narrator or she hardly creates any kind of role reversal as Leland Person has suggested. On the contrary she functions as a mirror that the narrator's narcissistic ideal is projected from and therefore it can be argued that the power of the narrator is created and worked through her eyes. In this way she remains as a true woman whose role is to be dominated by the male.

Although in the first part of the story the eye functions as a substitute for the missing penis, through which the narrator constructs and projects his power all the while creating a unity with the world, after losing it with the death of Ligeia, the narrator substitutes this lost with something else. During the period of mourning for his dead wife as well as his lost power, his sadness starts functioning as a medium for the completeness that has been lost. As quoted previously the narrator is not able to communicate "*what* it is about that person he has lost" ("Mourning and Melancholia." 312) He established a unity with Ligeia, but now that she no longer exists, he has to find another means of unity. According to Julia Kristeva, the depressive now reconstructs the unity with sadness:

Their [The depressive people's] sadness would be rather the most archaic expression of an unsymbolizable, unnameable narcissistic wound, so precocious that no outside agent (subject or agent) can be used as referent. For such narcissistic depressed persons, sadness is really the sole object; more precisely it is a substitute object they become attached to, an object they tame and cherish for lack of another. (12- 13)

Kristeva explicates her argument by suggesting that sadness is a mood that is non-communicable. It is a silent yet still powerful way of communication because no outside agent can refer to or interfere with it. The depressive person is in total control of his mood and this relationship between the depressive person and the sadness represents another type of subject-object relation. In this combination the depressed person is the subject and the sadness is the object. As a result Kristeva's argument suggests that sadness gives the depressive power, which is searched for and cherished once found. This power is similar to Freud's theory on repetition compulsion, as in Kristeva's suggestion sadness is

repeated so as to establish a kind of power and gratification and in Freudian terms this created power is the source of pleasure.

With this narcissistic depression the story moves to a different level as soon as Ligeia dies and the narrator remarries. The narrative of the second marriage presents a new lady who is in stark contrast to the former one, all the while letting the consciousness to develop through the existence of an alternative. This duality is reflected in the narrative structure as well as the plotline of the story, as a result of two distinctive separations, Ligeia and Rowena, who are harmoniously united at the end.

The first part of the story may offer the idea that Ligeia's existence is proved due to the narrator's memories, yet the second part of the story suggests that the existence of Ligeia is hardly defined with the memories of the narrator but with the presence of Lady Rowena, who serves as the binary opposite in the story. As opposed to the fetishist love for Ligeia, the narrator is full of "hatred belonging more to demon than to man" (234) for his second wife Lady Rowena. For the narrator, marriage to Ligeia is the source of passion, inspiration and learning, yet to Lady Rowena it is the source of hate. Another opposition is presented in the contrasting appearances of the two ladies, the former one being a woman of dark features, and the latter being a "fair-haired, blue-eyed" (238) lady. Besides these oppositions, Poe also creates a kind of harmony between the two women by choosing two different names that are assonantal Ligeia and Rowena. By signaling the harmony of the opposites, Poe allows his readers to consider the two relations as parts of a whole. Then the question rises: If Rowena can be considered as a substitute for Ligeia, why could not the narrator form a new subject- object relationship with Rowena? Kristeva suggests that in the depressed narcissist "no erotic object could replace the irreplaceable perception of a place or pre-object confining the libido or severing the bonds of desire."(13) With the lack of interest, the depressed turns away from the symbolic realm, thus he cannot associate himself with any agents of the symbolic world. Words and images are meaningless for him, and he lacks motivation for this new kind of engagement. Apart from rebuilding a similar relationship that has been lost, the depressed finds no point either to speak or to write.

In "Ligeia," the narrator remarries at the time of sadness, where he fails to build a sort of communication with his new bride. Apart from this linguistic inability in the narrator, we also witness the emotional change in his part. He is

no longer capable of attaching himself with his feelings that the opposite sex inspired:

I have said that I minutely remember the details of the chamber- yet I am sadly forgetful on topics of deep moment- and here there was on system, no keeping, in fantastic display, to take hold upon the memory. (233)

As opposed to the narrator's detailed and emotional description of the feelings Ligeia created, he is forgetful of the deep moments with Lady Rowena. With the new unity that the narrator creates with his sadness, he physically and mentally distances himself from Lady Rowena. He spends his time by himself and he uses a way of verbal communication that is to a certain extent very formal. He addresses her as Lady Rowena Trevanion, Lady of Tremaine or Lady Rowena. He is able to remember the paternal name and where she comes from, which is contrary to the situation in Ligeia. Therefore the motive behind this detail differs. Contrary to the fact that the narrator developed his power and constructed Ligeia according to his interests by disconnecting her from her social background, he was not able to disconnect Lady Rowena from her social circle. Therefore he could not project his narcissistic power on her, yet at the same time he did not need Rowena to form any kind of power, as he was finally united with his sadness. The narrator and the sadness are the new "twin stars of Leda," a promise for power, eternity and unity.

Yet, at the end of the story, the narrator faces with a threat to deconstruct his unity with sadness: Ligeia is back:

The greater part of the fearful night had worn away, and she who had been dead, once again stirred- and now more vigorously than hitherto, although arousing from a dissolution more appalling in its utter hopelessness than any[...] The corpse, I repeat, stirred, and now more vigorously than before. The hues of life flushed up with unwonted energy into the countenance- the limbs relaxed- and, save that the eyelids were yet pressed heavily altogether and that the bandages and draperies of the grave still imparted their charnel character to the figure, I might have dreamed that Rowena had indeed shaken off, utterly, the fetters of death [...] Could it, indeed, be the living Rowena who confronted me[...] And now slowly opened the eyes of the figure which stood before me. "Here then, at least," I shrieked aloud, "can I never- can I never be mistaken- these are the full, and the black, and the wild eyes- of my lost love- of the Lady- of the Lady Ligeia." (237- 238)

At the end of the story the dead body of Rowena has reawakened and been transformed into Ligeia, who is the source of his sadness that he is peacefully united with. The motif of the eye, first closed and then opened,

returned at the end of the story, yet this time rather than being the source of happiness, it became the cause of the narrator's shock. This last sentence and especially the words that the narrator use obscure the things they want to say, all the while authorize the punctuation signs to divulge the meaning and the narrator's state of mind. Exclamations, capitals, dashes and repetitions used in this last sentence signals the narrator's panic, his inability to hold his thoughts together in order to form a full sentence and his lack of self-control. This inadequacy to express himself turns him into an object. His effort to create and maintain himself as a subject is entirely deconstructed with the reappearance of Ligeia. The narrator as the subject, who is seduced into an illusion of his own image, exists only in relation to an object, and thus when the object disappears, his melancholia appears.

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