

## TRAJECTORY OF FEAR THROUGH MYSTERY IN EDGAR ALLAN POE'S "LIGEIA"

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### Abstract

Edgar Allan Poe is very careful to get the readers interest by using an impressive introduction. In this story "Ligeia" he introduces the characters Legeia as a special beautiful but a mysterious woman. To create the mystery and horror Poe carefully describes the atmosphere. For instance, Poe fashions the bridal chamber as having wonderful shape such as having five sides. Poe raises horror through "Logeia" and tells the story of a woman's surprising return from death. Poe also asks simple question what if the only reason we died was because we weren't trying hard enough? Poe says it is hard to think about it. Poe takes what could be a very simple story woman comes back from the dead or woman triumph over death by sheer force of will. He leaves open the possibility that we, too, can do the same if we go for it. "Ligeia" breaks down the barrier between life and death, but not just to scare the reader. Instead, the memory of the dead shows the power of love to resist even the permanence of death. Thus, the present paper, discusses about how the story "Ligeia" makes the reader to trajectory the horror and fear.

**Keywords:** Trajectory, Prototypes, emaciated, abundance, strikes, bridal, tapestries, ambiguity, vampires, hallucinations, revivification, nonentity

Mystery is an element in human observation as well as in literary arts that instills the sense of fear in a person. Great dramatists, novelists and even poets have employed the technique of mystery in their works. This has helped them achieve the required attention from the readers or audience. Nevertheless, mystery is the basic prototypes of fiction in American fiction. Poe, combines death within the psychological framework of the character who has lost the loved one Death and its precursors, its aftermath, the resurrection of the dead, the apparitions, the fear of the unknown, the mystery of light and shadows and the agony are vital components of Poe's short fiction. The drawing room style of Poe makes an individual wonder as to how these occult happenings can be so uncommonly common in everyone's life. Because death and decay are not unreal or fantasizing programs me that are unfit for human reality. Death is an irreparable severity of human condition. Though the mystery surrounding death maybe a fantasy, its result is the same and unchanging. This cruel factor of human destiny that faces an abrupt end is a fearful reality that is disguised as a mystery.

The present paper analyses the various methods employed by Poe which instills fear through mystery in his short fiction. The story discussed is "Ligeia" The story is filled with terror and mystery relating to some purposes. These purposes evolve with an action of mystery which in turn develops a kind of anxiety to learn the hidden. So, it is necessary to probe this journey of reading and revealing. Further the story is analyzed for its density and uniqueness with which Poe has derived the concept of mystery. Thus, step by step unveiling the mystery in the story of Poe would be made clear by making the research more comprehensive with the usage of enough alternate readings and critical views.

"Ligeia" is a story with a long winding speculation of how the narrator could have met the lady named Ligeia and how he had fallen in love with her. The narrator begins to recall the circumstances in which he had first met Ligeia. Though he is not aware that how Ligiea had become a prime subject of love in his life, he definitely remembers how he first encountered her in Germany and that her family lived in an ancient city on the Rhine. He is sure about whatever she had spoken about her family. One does not remember her last name. Despite his forgetfulness

about Ligeia's origin, he scarcely recalls the memory of her person. Ligeia is tall, slender, and in her later years, emaciated. She treads lightly, moving like a shadow. Though fiercely beautiful, Ligeia does not conform to a traditional mold of beauty: the narrator identifies strangeness in her features:

The 'strangeness' however, which I found in the eyes was of a nature distinct from the formation or the color, or the brilliancy of the features, and must, after all, be referred to the expression Ah, word of no meaning! Behind whose vast latitude of mere sound we in trench our ignorance of so much of the spiritual. (3)

The narrator recalls that Ligeia's most beautiful feature is her hair. They seem to be unusually concealing her abundance of knowledge that Ligeia possesses and shares with the narrators. Ligeia's understanding of the world of metaphysical studies was is the most stunning of her assets that the narrator had ever loved in her.

As time passes, Ligeia becomes mysteriously ill. On her death bed, Ligeia requests him to read her a poem which she had composed about the natural tragedy of life. The poem describes a theatre where angels have gathered to watch the mysterious actions of mimes, which are controlled by formless, outside presences. Suddenly, amid the drama, a creature intrudes and feeds on the mimes. As the final verses are being read, Ligeia shrieks a prayer about the unfairness of the tragedy and dies. As she breathes her last sighs, there comes mingled with them a low murmur from her lips.

Ligeia's death affects the narrator so much that the narrator moves to England, where he purchases an abbey for himself. He soon re-marries. Poe depicts the narrator's bridal chamber as a Gothic masterpiece, which includes a large window that lets in ghastly rays, a vaulted ceiling, various Eastern knickknacks, and large gold tapestries that hang from the walls. Lady Rowena and the husband spend the first month of their marriage in this huge chamber. Slowly the narrator comes to realize that this lady is not totally in love with him. At the beginning of the second month, Lady Rowena, like Ligeia, becomes mysteriously ill. Although she recovers temporarily, she reveals a hypersensitivity to sounds and an unexplained fear of the gold tapestries, which she fears are alive.

She partly arose and spoke, in an earnest low whisper, of sounds which she then heard, but which I could not hear of motions which she then saw, but which I could not perceive. The wind was rushing hurriedly behind the tapestries; and I wished to show her (What. Let me confess it, I could not *all* believe) that those almost inarticulate breathings, and those very gentle variations of the figures upon the wall, were but the natural effects of that customary rushing of the wind (9).

Lady Rowena's health becomes worse day - by - day and the narrator feels sure of her death. A red fluid from nowhere appears and drops itself in the glass of wine that Rowena is drinking." ...and in a second thereafter, as Rowena was in the act of raising the wine to her lips, I saw, or may have dreamed that I saw, fall within the goblet, as if from some invisible spring in the atmosphere of the room, three or four large drops of a brilliant and ruby colored fluid" (10).

The effect of the opium makes the narrator believe such incidents. Three days later, Rowena dies, and on the fourth day, the narrator sits alone with her corpse but cannot keep his mind from the memories of Ligeia. Later that night, the narrator wakes to the sounds of moaning from Lady Rowena's death bed and to his astonishment, he sees that a tinge of color has returned to Rowena's face. There was now a partial glow upon the forehead and upon the cheek and throat; imperceptible warmth pervaded the whole frame; there was even a slight pulsation at the heart. The lady *lived*; and with redoubled ardor I betook myself to the task of restoration" (12). Faced again with memories of Ligeia, the narrator, horrified, encounters another reawakening of the corpse. This time, however, the corpse moves from its deathbed and advances, shrouded into the middle of the apartment. Aghast, the narrator mysteriously questions the identity of the corpse. Though he feels that it must be the lady Rowena, he notices the body has grown taller. Glancing from her feet to her head, the narrator discovers raven-black hair emerging from behind the shroud—it is the lady Ligeia standing in the bridal chamber. "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" (13).

Poe has employed an undying difficulty of the self in the character of the narrator in this story. The mystery of life and death is hidden in the mind of this person. The readers are kept unaware of the reasons to the illness of Rowena and Ligeia. Both the female characters are an embodiment of fragility and unease of victimization. The modern day women of the nineteenth century faced bizarre conditions of mental illness like depression, PMS (Premenstrual Syndrome), anxiety etc. These conditions are said to be prevalent among the women of the modern era. Such symptoms and depressions are ignored by the folk of that era and so it becomes fatal too.

Like vapours, neurasthenia was a term used in 1829 to describe vague anxiety, fatigue, depression, and heart palpitations. The disorder became popular in the late 1800s and was often attributed to women who were viewed as weak against the stresses of modern day living. “Lady Ligeia” (14).

These syndromes had no proper cure and hence women underwent such weird consequences as seen in the characters of Poe. In the case of Rowena, it is evident that the illness is caused by a confusing malady. Poe had been trying to rearrange the disheveled shelved ambiguity of the pity that the women underwent in nineteenth century America. He has tried to make the readers get absorbed in its consequence which is “death”. He wanted to instill a moral sanity in understanding the physiological conditions of women. The flaws lie not only in the alignment of a relationship but also in understanding the person from the inside out. Beauty is given the primordial position in the plot, especially in the story “*Ligeia*”. Simultaneously, the erroneous observation of the male lover is enhanced. The narrator in *Ligeia* is rather more absorbed in the extraordinariness of Ligeia’s beauty than of her illness. “Wanting the radiant luster of her eyes, letters, lambent and golden, grew duller than Saturnian lead. And now those eyes shone less and less frequently upon the pages over which I pored. Ligeia grew ill” (5)

The narrator is nothing but a silent spectator of this infectious disaster in Ligeia’s life. He can see the beauty fade away slowly with time. Like the physicians of the nineteenth century, who were helpless in finding a cure for these weird diseases in women, the narrator is helpless and is a sufferer of incurable agony. The idea of losing his love right before his eyes makes him more emotional and disturbed. Poe suggests through mystical notes of illness, pain and death, the cleverness of fate that plays frivolous games in the lives of the loved ones. On the one hand, he brings out the wrath of fear in the mystery of fate; and on the other, he releases a complicated scenario of physical and mental ailments of the day.

There are also references and theories where critics say that Poe has made vampirical allusions to increase the mystic atmosphere in “*Ligeia*”. Different theories and approaches have been applied to this story, ranging from racial theories, over gender, formalism and myth criticism to feminism and many others.

D.H. Lawrence links vampirism to this story claiming that “the narrator in *Ligeia*” (is) a vampire of the mind” (qtd. in Carlson “Tales of Psychical Conflict: “*Berenice*”, “*Morella*”, *Ligeia*” 177). The craze that readers of all ages have for the concept of vampires is extensive and eternal. The wine that is consumed by Rowena is also toxicated by few drops of dark red colored liquid. Seeing through the assertions of D.H. Lawrence, it might be true that Poe has had thought of relating a scrap of vampirism to thrill the audience. The heaviness of death and the eeriness of a vampire story would obviously captivate any reader’s mind. Various researchers have offered a wide range of such theories regarding the relationship between the narrator and Ligeia. Even the terminology used about the lady Ligeia is shadowy. According to Johanyak, the use of terminology “suggests more a ghost than a woman” (67)

Extensive intake of Opium is one of the reasons that the narrator gets such trances and hallucinations of fairy-like character in his life. It is one of the assumptions that Ligeia might be just a spirit. It comes out of the inference of the unhealthy nervous system of the narrator. According to Katherine Darton, the dependency on opium may result in the symptoms like: “Anxiety, Delirium (which may include confusion, disorientation and hallucinations)” (Darton 7). So the extensive intake or dependency of a person completely on opium may conclude in such disorientations of vision. That is why Ligeia or Rowena may be just a construct of the narrator’s brain. Especially Ligeia is marked as a being of the spirit in the story.

Thus, the expression of Ligeia as an ill woman or a supernatural being is in both ways an aspect of thrill and fear. This fear thrusts itself in the reader's mind to emboss the mist of mystery and start the act of convincing the effect of death in every man's life. However, in either case, Poe wants to urge the importance of trivializing a woman's feelings through this story. The impact is definitely rubbing the emotions of the human senses to imbibe the pains that the narrator undergoes. The pain of the women travels through the distressful words of the narrator. The reader re-lives the characters through its sounds and intensity.

The more interesting part of mystery is in the contrasting characters of Ligeia and Lady Rowena. Rowena is fair-haired and blue-eyed. Rowena does not possess any great intellectual capacity, but she speaks only through the narrator's indirect speech and dies as a powerless means to revivification of Ligeia. Even the description of the bridal chamber is more extensive than Rowena's physical description. This describes how a man could be more lured to fantasy than to reality. The disease starts to engulf the relationship of the narrator and Rowena. He stands there rather wondering at the dying woman than trying to save her. Poe tries to juxtapose these contradictory situations in the narrator's life, so as to induce the effect of the suspense that preludes the death of Rowena. One might guess that at some point Rowena might be saved, but in vain. Rowena remains a nonentity; she is a representative of the old, passive and submissive female, while Ligeia, the intelligent and powerful woman, has conquered the powerless bride and therefore represents the new woman.

Poe becomes a feminist in the case of Ligeia. The feminist orientations of the time certainly affected the writings of this powerful writer. Mystery is a theatrical weapon that allows the writer to master the stage with. With its mastery Poe wipes the wave of feminist ideals onto the streets of unconquered or ignorant minds of the people. Female emancipation saw the dawn of speaking the issues of lesbianism and prostitution in the public arena. It becomes transparent that the modern woman is the sufferer of social evils. The opium-stricken lads with the mysterious backdrop could unveil the tragic occurrences to which the society is blindfolded. Mystery might seem just a method to entertain or as a construction of the structure of a literary art. But the fact is that Poe with his mind blowing style has wrought mystery and reality to bring out the consequences of fate and will. "Death" portrays fate and "drug-addiction" becomes will. In the very words of Poe, "the death, then, of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world" (165).

Poe speaks of death, love, fear, and beauty, the four main factors that even threatened the very walls of Troy that were reduced to ashes in no time. Man has yielded to be enthralled by the fury of these four attributes of human nature. Without fear there is no mystery or demystification. Does it really work with the human psyche? To understand this enigma, one must assess the biology of fear. It states that,

Fear is not only anchored in stimuli, but also in behaviors. Certain sets of stimuli and behaviors covary; if they did not. We would never be able to attribute fear to other people or animals. (Ekman 169) So, fear is an outcome of behaviour. The opium intake is itself a behaviour that drags anxiety, a deep inflicted fear in any person. Ghostly images and motions behind the tapestries as witnessed by Rowena create an intense feeling of mystery and fear in the reader. The voices that she hears or the shadows that she watches are never witnessed by the narrator. Such supernatural incidents make the reader afraid of the mystery. The ebony bed, the ottomans from India, the wine goblet, the unearthly features of Ligeia, the cold face after the death of Rowena, the bride chamber and the raven-black hair are the various descriptions which are creepy enough to paralyze the intellect. Poe uses various such references to generate mystery out of nothingness. Thus, the nothingness and the strangeness are two qualities that defer the resultant fear. Everyday life is surrounded by such trifles which one might not even notice. But Poe's ingenious talent lies in raising such lowly things to the height of arousing a mystical effect.

The death of Rowena is also heightened making her come alive for a few seconds and then die again. This excites the mood of threat to the highest level by making the reader puzzled by such an unusual intrusion beyond nature. And the immediate arrival of the apparition of Ligeia concludes giving a tremendous shiver through the spine. The reader still has questions about the illness and death of Rowena that may haunt them all night. Rowena might have been poisoned by

an unusual seizure or paralyses of a strange kind. The hidden pain of Rowena brings the picture of the incurable diseases of the century and also the agony of a modern woman in facing a defective as well as a deceitful life. The narrator is a mere witness though he is the only one alive till the end of the story. With death, the women's souls are regenerated to quench the thirst of a healthy life that they might have dreamt to live.

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