

# Freudian Economies and Constructions of Love in Poe's Tales

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## *Introduction*

A clean, Freudian-inspired reading of Poe's texts is hard to come by. A major reason for writing this paper is the very basic claim that Poe's literary constructs are perfectly intelligible to the modern reader without needing what most critics regardless of theoretical persuasion have offered for decades: a psycho-biographical apparatus as introduction. In fact, this paper argues that donning allegorical glasses in order to find correspondences between Poe's life and Poe's work is at best a futile exercise and at worst a blinding of the reader/analyst to the signification of Poe's tales. Paradoxically, the exercise is not futile because correspondences cannot be found, but on the contrary because so many and so comprehensive correspondences can be construed that one should immediately suspect that this is not entirely without auctorial design in itself.

The point is then briefly that there is an allegory embodied in Poe's oeuvre, but it is not an allegory we can decode just by attempting to psychoanalyse the remains of Poe and apply the findings to his literary work (this being for instance the project of Marie Bonaparte (1949)), nor indeed the other way around: psychoanalyse his characters and think they can tell us the truth about Poe. The allegory is accessible, as any signification, through a structural analysis, and explicable through our knowledge of the human psyche.

A further comment to the immediately preceding is of course that by presupposing the presence of an allegory in the author's work, it is by implication also presupposed that this allegory is largely under auctorial control and hence largely intentional. However, the decoding of it is, unlike what Poe dreamt of, largely outside the author's control, and falls within the domain of reader or critic's control. It is, however, possible that

this allegory has the potential to become semi-autonomous and so to speak obsessive in its expression. It seems perfectly normal and artistically interesting for a modern audience that an artist in the field of representational pictorial art (say Monet) should produce a series of art products over the same motif with just the slightest of variations according to the season or changes in the light. May we not also read Poe's oeuvre as a series of variations over a theme (here borrowing from the terminology of music), and just enjoy the subtlety of his craftsmanship in producing the variety of expression of his motifs without ascribing the sinister symptoms of obsession to the author (which is what Hoffman (1972) tends to do when he insists on finding what he calls a *donné* in Poe)?

The analyses in the following indicate that Poe's allegory is habitually under his control, but that it is never as rigidly expressed in his fiction and poetry as it is in his poetics and other criticism. In *Eureka* Poe gave an explicit admission of his unitary philosophy (in contrast to his critical credo of facultative divisions of motive), and one could argue that the unitary philosophy of *Eureka* is a form of blueprint for the whole of the rest of his fictional oeuvre. So there is an overall coherence in Poe's work and one must accept his own formulation of it as a deep undercurrent of allegorical nature (Galloway 1967/86:442). What must be rejected is that this allegory is an unconscious 'allegory of author', and this rejection seems to be supported by the fact that when we decode the allegory of unity through close readings of the work and the work alone, we come up with a perfectly intelligible and psychologically stable, even sound, desire for imposing order on a cruel and chaotic universe, which does not differ in substance from that of other Romantic authors or even many a modern human being.

The compass-points of structural analysis and a psycho-economic understanding of human motivation and mythopoetic activity are used throughout the paper to anchor the argument in the realm of – if not truth – then at least likelihood. This type of analysis runs counter to the current fashion for thick description and historicisation of Poe's oeuvre, yet work such as this is still relevant because it yields comparative insights into figures and forms across the author's output, and because of its general contribution to the field of studies in Romantic poetics.

## *Towards a Freudian Economy of (Narrative) Urges*

It can easily be shown that the psychical value of erotic needs is reduced as soon as their satisfaction becomes easy. An obstacle is required in order to heighten libido; and where natural resistances to satisfaction have not been sufficient men have at all times erected conventional ones so as to be able to enjoy love. (Freud 1977:256-7)

Freud's well-known remark from "On the Universal Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love (Contributions to the Psychology of Love II)" addresses the libidinous economies of love in several senses of the word: both as what is involved in enjoying (physical) love (i.e. pure sexual pleasure), and as what we now call relationships. The latter could be defined as arrangements between lovers involving living together, having a long term sexual relationship, and sharing various other social obligations – conventionally such an arrangement is of course known as 'marriage'. This remark naturalises the male point of view on these matters and assumes that agency in the matter of love is by default with the masculine part. Later we shall see how Poe's story world destabilises this gendering of love's economy.

It is tempting to use Freud's remark also as a starting point for analyses of literary representations of love, i.e. love stories. One would however necessarily have to first think about the relationship between actual libidinous activity and the telling of such activities, or how "love" (in the broadest sense of the word, as suggested by Freud towards the end of the quote) is emplotted in narratives. Such a theory of emplotment would have to explain both the relation between love as a psychological/physical phenomenon and a literary phenomenon and be able to address the structural characteristics of (narratives of) love.

We may begin by attempting to adapt the elements of Freud's remark and their implications to literary representations of love. Let us postulate that an element of love is the expression of it (feelings and acts) in the form of a story, and that such a story is in essence what we call a love story. If love becomes more interesting with the raising of obstacles to its fulfilment, then the same must be true of love stories (In 'translation' of Freud's opening: The narrative value of erotic needs is reduced as soon as their satisfaction becomes easy). It thus follows that love stories concern that which prevents or threatens love, and inversely that happy love has no (interesting) story.

Observations of archetypal narratives of love, such as the story of Tristan and Iseult, which can be read as a sequence of barriers or obstacles to love's fulfilment, followed by a series of threats to the happiness attained after love is accomplished, can supply enough examples of how actual love stories work to validate this initial point. Thus a mapping of the paradigmatic structure of love stories onto Freud's observation of the libidinal economy of the satisfaction of erotic needs seems viable. We can again 'transcribe' Freud: A narrative obstacle is required in order to heighten the reader's interest.

In his remark Freud adds the interesting twist that the barriers to love are largely self-imposed by the would-be lovers. This is not necessarily expressed on the surface of the narrative of love, where the barriers are often explained as the doings of others, but if we accept Freud's observation, it would seem to open up an avenue to a deeper interpretation of such narrative structures. Characters as well as narrators, which all of course are mediated auctorial constructs, would then be seen to have agency in connection with plot complications in love stories.

One step further along the line of logical implications of this collation of libidinous energies with narrative energies would lead us to postulate that love is necessarily a story. Love is not love unless it is told and hence becomes a narrative with a plot, protagonists, barriers, denouement etc. Unstated love must therefore be something else, or perhaps the premise here should rather be that love is always stated, if only inwardly as a story told by the lover to himself. If love is necessarily a story, it is also necessarily tellable, hence automatically told at least once in its very formulation by the lover – internally or externally. This line of reasoning does not substantiate itself directly on Freud's remark, but follows from his opening of the economies of love and its workings. Scholars such as Brooks (1984) and Roemer (1995) have developed readings of literature that trace the economies of plot and narration in Freudian inspired terms.

Zooming in on the function of the barriers to love in narratives we must conclude that the presence of a barrier to the fulfilment of a need or desire is identical to the presence of a narrative or narratable element. This point of view rests on the assumption that we experience the world through narration, if only internally to ourselves, non-vocalized. Certainly, if this is the philosophical basis we choose, every act we perform in the world is in some sense a statement in the narration of our lives. This is an inversion of the idea that every statement we make is also the performance of an act (a theoretical foundation for this idea might be found in speech-act theory).

There is a basic need for mythopoeic activity in human life, and it runs parallel to one of Freud's postulated drives: the pleasure principle. The lover wants to live, so that he/she can love. It is however interesting to speculate on the presence of other drives that by their very nature transcend the libidinous desire for fulfilment in the form of attainment of pleasure. Freud hints at such instincts beyond the pleasure principle (first in a work of just that title) (Freud, 1955), later summarised by him as an opposition between Eros and these death instincts, Thanatos. Here the discussion of thanatic energies will be confined to a postulation of a death wish which is connected to the wish for fulfilment of erotic needs, in fact is a displacement of this wish, itself a displacement of the wish to return to the symbiotic relation with the mother. These symbiotic desires by definition involve a form of suspension of one's individual being (in erotic fulfilment a temporary suspension), and why not seek the ultimate dissolution of individual being: death?

This radical formulation of the tension between two drives within the psychological economy throws interesting light on the economy of love stories as well. In a love story the desire for love is also (in some sense) the desire for death. The key to the understanding of this radical claim lies in seeing death and other apparent threats to love as examples of barriers erected and overcome by the lovers. Certainly the libido-heightening involved in dying or risking death for love must be deemed considerable, hence the erection of death-like or at least life-threatening barriers to love becomes economically interesting for the libido.

We have thus a Freudian insight promising to yield results when applied to literary representations. We should now be more specific with regards to the textual loci of these economies. Obviously we might wish to say that death is a feature of the plot of many stories, including love stories. However we cannot have a love story without protagonists and other characters, and thanatic energies may spill over from the event or plot level to the character level as well. Love may seek an object or fasten itself on an ideal, but best of all might be to dissolve that dichotomy and have love fasten itself on a dead protagonist. This would further allow for an operation on the level of characterisation where the lover would be emotionally enriched by this love of an idealised, deceased partner: For the lover, happiness thus easily becomes sadness.

On the level of ideas this construct of love and death would also reveal fundamental truths about the desire of both pleasure and death in the economy of love: Love in its most fundamental and characteristic

form, is the love of love, which is to say that it follows a Platonic ideal and can subsist without a physical object. Secondly, love transgresses all social norms and conventions, many of which we will remember Freud already defined as convenient constructs.

The erotic fulfilment is thus highly suitable as a locus for the death wish, where one's personality can undergo a process of dissolution (also glossable as a reversal of individualization), quite mechanically through merging with the other – so to speak by entering/taking in the other. This can easily be taken one step further and be seen as a quest for that original other who participated in the first mother/child symbiosis, and who has in fact ever since been the missing half of one's self, the identical half or double needed to complete one's personality.

If love is closely akin to telling, we should not neglect the obvious reversal of this claim and state that love is closely related to the act of reading. Love stories are a mediated response to the economies of love, understood as the totality of the drives and instincts, labelable as Eros and Thanatos. A dialectic exists, wherewith we often learn about our psychological motivations through (archetypal) love stories, just as reading also provides us with models for our own formulation of stories. Love lends itself readily to telling and reading, because the psychological mechanisms of love are structured as a process with a beginning, a development and (often) an end – in fact love has a plot much like a story. Furthermore love involves a set of protagonists and antagonists and is episodic in nature. All of these inherent factors in love's psychology make love immediately tellable and readable, much like other archetypal plots: the quest, war-time adventures, the *Bildung* of an artist etc. – all of which may embody love stories in their plots as well.

Love stories are produced/consumed as a surrogate for or at least a symbolic representation of our desire for producing/consuming love itself. Thus we may well fall in love with love stories, use love stories to seduce others into falling in love, take our ideals of love from archetypal love stories etc.

The Freudian economies traced out in the above can serve as a set of theses concerning narrative structures and their correspondences with libidinal structures. Of course a constructivist viewpoint would emphasise that both sets of structures are not in possession of any canonical infallibility, but that is hardly a reason to abstain from a comparison and the ensuing analysis of the extent to which the two structural sets match and mutually elucidate one another.

## *Love's Construction in Four Poe-tales*

For a long time Poe was regarded as an odd, if not perverse figure in American literature. Someone who had an unhealthy preoccupation with horror, madness and death, and someone only suited for raw material for B-movies and really only fit for immature readers. Still, Poe was regarded as a necessary feature of the American canon, but usually seen as essentially a very un-American author, drawing on German traditions, and mainly appreciated by French poets. Most often Poe's biography was seen as a key to understanding Poe's stories, and because Poe's stories were bizarre, Poe, the actual person, was considered psychologically deviant too.

This paper proposes that Poe was not a pervert, that Poe is relevant for all of us, and, perhaps most surprisingly, that Poe mainly wrote love stories, albeit of a slightly unusual nature. Of course, Poe's stories also have horrific (surface) elements, but really Poe uses the vehicle of the love story to say something profound about human nature, and the limits of rationality a human being can be driven to by the most basic conditions of life and love.

Poe's explicit poetic dictum, stated in the essay "The Philosophy of Composition" (Galloway (ed.), 1967/1986:486), was that the most poetic of all subjects was the death of a beautiful lady – a subject he used in both his poems and tales throughout his life, but never more clearly expressed than in a quartet of early, arabesque tales that bear the names of such beautiful dead, yet undying; buried, yet returning ladies: "Berenice", "Morella", "Ligeia", and "Eleonora". The tales of these women form a core set of love stories, the structures of which we shall examine in the following.

A very simple beginning to this structural investigation is to see what acts take place in these four tales; who are the actors involved in them; and what are the relations between them. From this simple programme it is already obvious that no clear distinction between plot and characters is possible – the two concepts are mutually interdependent. Acts cannot be recounted without explaining who commits them, actors cannot be understood or characterised without recounting their actions. It is also clear that it is not merely a temporal sequence of events/acts which must necessarily be laid out in an investigation of plot, but rather that both a temporal and causal linkage of events is necessary in order to understand events and their motivation (the bridge to closer decoding of characterisation).

It is therefore the merest of beginnings to state that in this quartet we have a pattern of actions which looks as follows in a temporal outline: A marriage takes place or is planned; a death occurs, ending or preventing

the marriage; a man takes action to rectify the situation and overcome the barrier of death as hindrance to love/marriage; this man loses his reason in the process; a new marriage-like consummation of love takes place, but does not bring about a lasting resolution to the problem of love.

Let us introduce some causal links between these temporal events: The marriage is somehow not a fulfilling consummation of love; therefore death must occur to heighten the libidinous/thanatic energies involved in this love. Because death is such an interesting barrier the man now becomes more active in seeking consummation and begins to bring it about. The economy of love and passion, however, is such that these displays of passion cause him to lose his rationality. The various ways in which he re-consumes his love are all of temporally limited duration and most often do not outlast the telling of the tale. This would indicate that there is something inherently wrong with these re-consummations, that they are doomed to fail – the original symbiosis is the one that counts, not subsequent surrogate relations.

Let us then introduce a set of characters acting in this skeletal plot: There is a male lover and a female love-object, although often she is quite as active a lover as he is. There are no other characters involved in these plots. On occasion the first female lover is replaced by another female character (in fact this is virtually the rule), but this female lover/2 is invariably a form of double of female lover/1, and in the process of the tale she is collapsed into female lover/1 and their identity (as identical-ness) is revealed.

The absence of external antagonists in these plots is striking and leads to the obvious conclusion that since everything goes wrong for these lovers all the same, the protagonists in these tales have to function simultaneously as their own antagonists. This is programmatically realised by having dualities built into their characters. Where the females are formal externalised doubles, the male protagonists are doubles in a psychological sense – they embody split personalities, which they invariably discuss in terms of reason vs. madness/ disease.

We will now proceed to see how this is fleshed out in this set of tales. First: the marriage.

In "Berenice" the marriage never actually takes place, but is fixed and ready to proceed just as Berenice 'dies'. This however is not really a significant variation on the marriage theme, since the other marriages/1 in the tales are stated as virtual *faits accomplis*.



In "Ligeia" we learn about the marriage in the following fashion: Ligeia was "her who was my friend and my betrothed, and who became the partner of my studies, and finally the wife of my bosom" (Mabbott (ed.), 1978:311). Not only is the marriage proper told to us in a subordinate clause among other subordinate clauses, it is also presented merely as the last in a series of processes happening between the lovers – first they become friends and betrothed, then partners in study and only then "finally", or even more tellingly in 3 published variants of the text, "eventually", wife and husband. This reduces the status of the marriage to a background event; it is almost part of the setting of the tale.

In "Morella" the situation is even more explicit: "Yet we met, and fate bound us together at the altar" (Mabbott (ed.), 1978:229). Here the marriage (never labelled with that word) is a peculiarly passive thing – not even desired by the lovers, rather something fated. We are hardly surprised when we read on and learn of the male lover's feelings: "I never spoke of passion, nor thought of love" (Mabbott (ed.), 1978:229). This is quite parallel to the planned marriage in "Berenice" which comes about despite the male lover's disgust/fear of Berenice, and is undertaken out of pity for her – though deeply rued by the male lover afterwards: "in an evil moment, I spoke to her of marriage" (Mabbott (ed.), 1978:214).

In "Eleonora" no formal marriage/1 takes place, but Eros sneaks up on the two hitherto innocent lovers and traps them, which leads to a marriage-like vow undertaken by the male lover, promising to stretch his fidelity quite a bit beyond 'till death do us part'. That is to say, the sequence of events is slightly altered in "Eleonora". Passion precedes the 'marriage', whereas in "Berenice", "Morella" and "Ligeia" the marriage is in itself quite passion- and loveless. In each case, however, the marriage which should be the end/consummation of love is merely the beginning of a process of love, but simultaneously of something else, namely a fall from reason.

It may seem paradoxical that this fall from reason is in fact also an embarking on a quest for knowledge. This, however, is the case. The male lovers engage in studies of what is typically (in "Morella" and "Ligeia") labelled "forbidden" knowledge (Mabbott (ed.), 1978:230 & 316), and it is undertaken under the tutelage of their wives whose intellects are so developed as to reduce their husbands to childlike status. Egæus, the male lover in "Berenice", is also a diligent student (his favourite books all deal with the theme of resurrection) and observes that the nature of his studies helps his peculiar disease to develop (Mabbott (ed.), 1978:212-3). It must be said that Egæus' disease is already in full progress before his marriage

plans are made, and that since he was born in a library, he has always lived in a world of books. Indeed his disease is one where reality and irreality become indistinguishable for him.

"Eleonora" of course is set in a bookless world, but this does not prevent the lovers from starting a course of "examination" of and "discourse" (Mabbott (ed.), 1978:641) on their feelings and the changes in their physical surroundings apparently brought about by their love. In fact this discourse on biology turns out to be fatal, because it inevitably ends in a discussion of death, which as soon as it is raised as a topic, becomes a physical reality for Eleonora.

In summary it will be seen to be a recurrent phenomenon that an attempt at gaining 'forbidden' knowledge is going on in these marriages or proto-marriages.

It is always so that the female part is in possession of the knowledge desired (or stumbles upon it as in "Eleonora"). In "Berenice" the possession of knowledge on Berenice's part is slightly peculiar, since it is located in her teeth, but this idea fixates itself in Egæus' mind one day, and is seen by him as the key to getting his reason back: "I more seriously believed *que tous ses dents etaient des idées*" (Mabbott (ed.), 1978:216).

In "Morella" and "Ligeia" the knowledge is explicitly ascribed to the wives, but the husbands realise that it is futile for them to grasp at this knowledge – it may seem within their reach when their wives are there to help them, but after they die it slips away. This is hardly surprising, because it is becoming obvious that the 'forbidden' knowledge is tied up with death and dying. As mentioned Egæus' studies deal with resurrection, Eleonora's knowledge is that of her own mortality (and impending transition to angel-hood), and in "Morella" the field of study is "theological morality" (Mabbott (ed.), 1978:230) or more specifically "the notion of that identity which at death is or is not lost forever" (Mabbott (ed.), 1978:237). Ligeia's great project is crystallised in her preoccupation with immortality, which she reduces to a question of will – indeed there is a fourfold reiteration of this tenet which also serves as motto for the tale: "Man doth not yield himself to the angels, nor unto death utterly, save only through the weakness of his feeble will" (Mabbott (ed.), 1978:310, 314, 319 & 319-20). Thus it is plain that the forbidden knowledge is that of how to transcend death and live on (in some form) forever.

In all four tales it becomes necessary to make attempts at applying this knowledge of transcendence of death, and in the process of doing so

the lovers in all four tales transgress against aspects of morality. In all four tales the female lover/1 dies, and these deaths are tied in with the occurrence of passion in some form. In "Berenice" the death of the title character is preceded by a ghostly visit she pays to Egæus' library. She is in fact already "vacillating" and "indistinct" in outline (Mabbott (ed.), 1978:214) when she comes. She is silent and her eyes are "lifeless" (Mabbott (ed.), 1978:215). But her teeth are quite vivid and spark off an attack of Egæus' disease, which he in fact describes in these terms: "For these [the teeth] I longed with a frenzied desire" (Mabbott (ed.), 1978:215). This is quite as passionate as Egæus ever gets, and he remains in this monomaniac state till after Berenice's death is announced.

In "Morella" the narrator has specifically denied his erotic interest in his wife and sought satisfaction merely through her tutelage, but after a while her physical presence becomes "oppressive" to him, and he can "no longer bear the touch of her" (Mabbott (ed.), 1978:231). This loathing on the narrator's part takes on the nature of a desire for her to die: "I longed with an earnest and consuming desire for [...] Morella's decease" (Mabbott (ed.), 1978:232). In fact the narrator's loathing for Morella is what kills her, since this is the only cause for her lingering disease, which is explained to us rather quaintly and laconically in one sentence: "Yet was she woman, and pined away daily" (Mabbott (ed.), 1978:231). Now, this passionate desire for Morella's death must have also had other physical consequences for the relationship between the two, for after she has been dying "for many weeks and irksome months" (nine perhaps), she – to our absolute astonishment – gives birth to a daughter "which breathed not until the mother breathed no more" (Mabbott (ed.), 1978:233). A more direct linkage between passion, death and birth would be hard to find.

In "Ligeia" a twist occurs, in that the passion is located first in the wife of the love relationship. This is rather queerly described as a general trait in her personality in the following way: "Of all the women whom I have ever known she [...] was the most violently a prey to the tumultuous vultures of stern passion" (Mabbott (ed.), 1978:315). This passion is later invested in Ligeia's struggle with death – her spirit writhes convulsively in this fight, we learn – much as her body may have writhed when visited by the "tumultuous vultures" of physical passion/orgasm. But she still has passionate devotion left for her husband, whom she identifies with the principle of life itself (Mabbott (ed.), 1978:317, l. 25-7).

In "Eleonora" the passion (Eros) precedes the death of Eleonora by a very short time-span, in fact she is compared with "the ephemeron [...]"

made perfect in loveliness only to die" (Mabbott (ed.), 1978:642). Erotic love which alters the nature of the valley is originally causal in bringing about her death, since it is "change" as a concept that leads her to think of death in the first place, and the thought of death promptly brings it about in her. A fate she quite happily accepts, by the way – quite unlike Ligeia. It turns out that Eleonora has access to inside information about life after death, which eases the passage for her. After all she is able to return at will and visit her still living lover, a feat Ligeia is only capable of by will (and once only).

Now that these deaths have been "accomplished" (a tell-tale phrase from "The Black Cat", Mabbott (ed.), 1978:856) to the accompaniment of passion displayed to hitherto unseen degrees, the lovers need to take action to remedy the situation which would seem to signal the end of love. In doing so the lovers quite matter-of-factly transgress in various ways.

In "Berenice" Egæus leaves his beloved library for the first time and violates Berenice's burial vault with the object of course of getting hold of her "*dents*" or "*idées*" (inevitably glossable as '*identité*') and thereby his reason, which then can cure him of his passion and his disease. This act is not intended by him to bring Berenice back, but as it unfortunately does so, his project fails and his newfound reason is then scattered all over the library floor in the shape of neat little ideas/teeth.

Grave-robbery and hinted-at necrophilia are Egæus' transgressions, but it is simply his passion that he is punished for by his renewed loss of reason. In "Morella" the narrator's transgression is that he raises his daughter to take her mother's place in his life, with all the hints of incest this involves. He denies the identity between Morella/1 and her daughter far beyond the point where the identity is painfully obvious for the observer, but in the story-world there are no outside observers since he raises her in "rigid seclusion" (Mabbott (ed.), 1978:235). Only when he names her Morella at her baptism is he forced to face the fact that the hated Morella/1 has come again as Morella/2 whom he has loved "with a love more fervent than I had believed it possible to feel on earth" (Mabbott (ed.), 1978:233, variant o).

This obtuse narrator has not learned his lesson. Just as his passionate hatred for Morella/1 led to her death, his passionate love for Morella/2 causes her to die. Indeed the very instant he names her, thus unveiling her identity, she falls "prostrate on the black slabs of our ancestral vault" (Mabbott (ed.), 1978:235). And although all the four elements seem to the narrator to call out Morella's name, Morella/2 dies, and the physical

identity between her and Morella/1 is hammered home, as there is no body in the charnel where Morella/2 is placed and Morella/1 should have been. Again passion has been the double downfall of a male lover.

In "Ligeia" where passion is the domain of the female lover, the narrator is "crushed into the very dust with sorrow" (Mabbott (ed.), 1978:320) over her death. He therefore decides to re-marry. "After a few months" (Mabbott (ed.), 1978:320) he has bought and redecorated an English abbey – most particularly furnishing a pentagonal bridal chamber in a turret – and married a woman as physically and mentally different from Ligeia as possible. This marriage takes place under the influence of opium and "in a moment of mental alienation" (Mabbott (ed.), 1978:320-1) according to the narrator. He has however prepared quite elaborately for the event by designing the bridal chamber as nothing so much as a tomb *cum* torture chamber for his new bride.

His transgression is, of course, that he intends to drive Rowena mad and kill her. Rowena never becomes a character in her own right, since she never does anything, never leaves the chamber and never fights her husband's attempts on her life. She is in fact merely a body, necessary for the narrator and the disembodied will of Ligeia in their little experiment in re-animation of the dead.

After quite a protracted agony of recurring diseases Rowena eventually dies, though not until she is helped along by "three or four large drops of a brilliant and ruby colored fluid" (Mabbott (ed.), 1978:325) which mysteriously find their way into her wine one night. The narrator suggests that Ligeia placed them there, but is uncertain – after all he is high on opium which is becoming his favourite alibi for not being accountable for what he sees and does.

The stage is now set for a re-consummation of the narrator's lost love, and this takes place as Rowena in a night-long set of orgasmic re-vivifications and new little deaths becomes transformed into lover/1, Ligeia. This process excites the narrator who is becoming "a helpless prey to a whirl of violent emotions of which extreme awe was perhaps the least terrible, the least consuming" (Mabbott (ed.), 1978:329). What these other, unnameable emotions that consume him are, we can only guess – but happiness at regaining his lover certainly does not seem to be one of them. In fact madness is what the narrator himself repeatedly (Mabbott (ed.), 1978:330) refers to his state as, and the telling ends when he has "shrieked aloud" Ligeia's name. Again a tale which ends in passion and unreason – again it would seem because of a causal link between the two states.

The ending of "Eleonora" is somewhat different from the pattern we have seen hitherto where the only variation has been that in "Berenice" there was no doubling of the female lover, though there certainly was a return of Berenice from the 'dead' in an altered state. But here in "Eleonora" the bereaved lover (in some variants named Pyrros, and what an ardent lover he is with already one passionate death behind him) neither does peculiar things to his dead lover's body, nor has a weird relationship with his daughter, nor procures a convenient blonde to perform experiments on – no, he remains true to his vow for "years" (Mabbott (ed.), 1978:643). But eventually the eroticism of the valley itself subsides and he no longer likes it there, in fact he is "*pained*" by the valley (Mabbott (ed.), 1978:643) and longs for love.

So, in fact, he does transgress in a fashion – he breaks his vow and invokes a dreadful curse for doing so. But as all other transgressions in these tales it is done without a second thought. He "yielded" and "bowed down without a struggle" (Mabbott (ed.), 1978:644) – this fool without hesitation lets passion sweep him away again: "What indeed was my passion for the young girl of the valley in comparison with the fervor, and the delirium, and the spirit-lifting ecstasy of adoration [...] at the feet of the ethereal Ermengarde?" (Mabbott (ed.), 1978:644)

The object of this extreme passion is Ermengarde, who is in every aspect a carbon copy of Eleonora, although the narrator seems to think her a vast improvement over "the young girl of the valley". Nonetheless we learn nothing of Ermengarde to distinguish her from Eleonora, whom we already know had become an angel or spirit – and Ermengarde is described as nothing less: She is "ethereal", a "seraph" and an "angel" (Mabbott (ed.), 1978:644). And when narrator Pyrros looks "down into the depths of her memorial eyes I thought only of them and of *her*" (Mabbott (ed.), 1978:644). It is forgivable if the reader feels confusion here. Just who is the 'her', he is thinking of? Might we not be tempted to believe that he at least partially was thinking and talking of Eleonora too? Certainly it never becomes clear wherein the difference between lover/1 and lover/2 consists in this case, and we are left with the impression that they are both extremely un-corporeal entities. Indeed the description of the female lovers in "Eleonora" is the strongest example of Platonic love-ideals in these Poe-tales.

We would now expect disaster to strike the passionate fool as we have seen the pattern unfold in the other tales, but this does not happen. In the tale the narrator is absolved of his vow "for reasons which shall be made known to thee in Heaven" (Mabbott (ed.), 1978:645). Apart from

registering acute disappointment over this outcome, what shall we make of this? Two points may be brought forward. First, since the love affair with lover/2 is so bodiless, the passion may not have to trigger off another death – in a sense Ermengarde is already a spirit rather than flesh and blood. Secondly, and more sinisterly, there is a very strong hint in the story that this happy ending is a figment of the narrator's imagination, since he, like all the other male lovers, has a duality in his "mental existence" (Mabbott (ed.), 1978:638). He certainly insists that his whole existence in the valley (with lover/1) is a period of "lucid reason", whereas the second part of his life (where he meets lover/2) is under a "condition of shadow and doubt" (Mabbott (ed.), 1978:638). Poe has thus crafted yet another narrator who dreams of happiness and reason – and this time he has even let him stay within the dream to the end of the tale.

Of these four tales two are told linearly ("Eleonora" and "Morella") and two involve a circularity in the telling ("Ligeia" and "Berenice"). The circular tales begin after the action they involve has taken place, and feature the narrators musing over what went wrong with their great projects. In "Ligeia" the narrator even refers to his own writing process, the telling of the tale (Mabbott (ed.), 1978:311, l. 2). From this retrospective vantage point where "Ligeia" is narrated, it is clear that "Ligeia" did not end well for the narrator – Ligeia once re-animated did not stay with him.

Likewise is Egæus left with only misery to contemplate at the end of the events/beginning of the tale. He remains in "the anguish of to-day", dreaming of "the ecstasies which might have been" (Mabbott (ed.), 1978:209). This circularity highlights how temporary the re-consummations of love have been for these narrators.

In "Morella" the bitter laugh of the narrator at the end leaves no doubt (nor indeed do the events) that love/2 was as temporary as love/1 was for him. But "Eleonora" seems to break the mould – even if love/2 is only imagined by Pyrros, is it not eternal (or at least life-long) for him? Indeed it would seem to be so, and therefore it is apt that "Eleonora" is the last such tale in Poe's oeuvre. After long experimentations with solving the problem of how you can remain faithful to the original (innocent, childlike) love, even after the loved one is dead, and still marry again, he found the formula in "Eleonora" – let the loved-one/2 be as disembodied and angelic as love/1, and things will be fine. But the loss of reason still remains a price to be paid, the second love is still a double of love/1 and her incorporeal state leaves her as veiled as any corpse from the grave.

## *Conclusion*

The structural analyses of the quartet of love stories illustrate Poe's one overriding purpose of writing – namely an ongoing experiment in coming to terms with a divided world and a divided mind, desperately seeking for unity, hardly ever admitting this, but in the process trying every available model of fiction and every obstacle/aid to the project psychologically conceivable. That the obstacle/aid he most often placed at the crux of his tales was death in every form you would care to dream up, is surely not accidental. Still we need not search exclusively or at all in Poe's sad psychosexual life story for explanations for this omni-presence of death (partly as ideal condition, partly as arch-foe). After all it is a theme on which every Romantic writer, every transcendentalist had to formulate a stand: the ultimate barrier to human existence, the end of philosophy and rational planning and the transition into faith and intuitive speculation. Here Poe differs not greatly from his contemporaries or those who have come after him as mere mortals all. This is also why it is too easy to see Poe as just the odd one out in American or any other letters in ideational content or even in psychology. The close match between the postulated Freudian economies of love and love stories, and Poe's tales of love show little about Poe's own psycho-sexual predilections. Rather, they show us that Poe is not just for perverts, but for us and in us all.



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