

Edgar allan poe: narrative structure in "ligeia" assignment

[Art & Culture](#)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Known for his flowing descriptive and gothic style, Edgar Allan Poe does not appear to develop any obvious narrative structure in his work. His short stories are generally identified with the gloomy, desolate, and horrifically shocking sensations they spark within the reader. Particularly in his short story, “Algeria,” Poe seems to have done away with any sort of apparent structure within the story. Rather, he portrays it as a mixture of somewhat chronological events combined with the wandering thoughts from the eccentric mind of the narrator.

However, narrative structure lies beyond the simple storyline of plot and can be revealed via many other elements of a story. In “Algeria,” the elements of theme and repetition play an important role in developing and maintaining its narrative structure. In particular, Poe seems to stress one interestingly repeated quote, as it appears four times throughout the story. “Man doth not yield him to the angels, nor unto death utterly, save only through the weakness of his feeble will” (1, 1, 4, 7).

From the continual emphasis of this quotation, there arises a principle notion of a tension between the predominant themes of life and death. Furthermore, this notion constitutes the backbone of the story from which all other recognizable themes subsequently branch from. The themes of death, guilt, life, and opium – the factor that questions the validity of all – provide recognizable markers to the overriding theme of the tension between life and death within “Algeria.” The pervading theme of death fills Poe’s writing and creates an omnipresent atmosphere of dark apprehension.

The movement of the text incessantly alludes to the upcoming death of Algeria. All the familiar characteristics of her person (her wildly effulgent eyes, her interest in the narrator's studies...) gradually fade away in Poe's description of her illness. " And now those eyes shone less and less frequently upon the pages over which I pored. Algeria grew ill" (5). The death of Algeria renders her husband completely helpless and continually longing for her. " Without Algeria I was but as a child groping benighted" (5). This fruitless despair and misery thus sets the tone of Irresolution for the rest of the story.

Furthermore, It also adds to the structure of the narrative by substantiating the life and death tension. By Juxtaposing this longing of continual yearning with the shock and Irony of the necromancers of Legal, the surprise ending of the story is further emphasized. This motif of sickness and eaten gall reappears as ten Lay Rowena Tall's tenancy ill alpaca AT Nils depressing style, Poe creates a more terrible and incurable sickness for the second wife. " Her illnesses were of alarming character, and of more alarming recurrence, defying alike the knowledge and the great exertions of her physicians" (9).

Continuing to accentuate the horror and angst of death, Poe describes the corpse of Lady Rowena vividly. The lips became doubly shriveled and pinched up in the ghastly expression of death; a repulsive clamminess and coldness overspread rapidly the surface of the body; and all the usual rigorous stiffness immediately supervened. (11) This slow anti-climactic death continues to keep hopes of the narrator and the reader fluctuating, maintaining the feeling of unresolved. The anxiety exhibited within the

irresolution of death therefore supports the structural theme of the tension between life and death.

A more subtly conveyed theme, guilt, continues this trend of unease. This self-blame originates from the narrator's subconscious Jealousy of Liger's intellectual superiority. She maintains the leadership in their marriage. The narrator obviously adores her and is extremely aware of her intellectual strength over him. Proclaiming that she maintains unquestionable supremacy of knowledge, the narrator unintentionally develops this Jealousy. The [intellectual] acquisitions of Algeria were gigantic, were astounding" (4). He seems to conceal a slight resentment of her scholarly dominance.

This becomes noticeable as he states that he renders himself a child in comparison to her authority. I was sufficiently aware of her infinite supremacy to resign myself, with a child-like confidence, to her guidance (4). With a certain bitterness, he later repeats, " Have I ever found Algeria at fault? " (4) It can even be implied that after the narrator reaches the limits of her knowledge, he almost wills her death. Being so caught up with learning worlds of information through her guidance, he is incredibly disappointed when he discovers a boundary to this freely give wisdom.

From these implied feelings of Jealousy and disappointment, he understandably feels incredible guilt and remorse after her death. This could be one of the reasons he obsesses over her death. Because of these circumstances, the resulting unsettled atmosphere of tension reinforces the tension of Liger's death. Challenging the despondency of death, the immeasurable will of life eventually overcomes death, thus breaking the

tensions between the two. Algeria provides the source for this will. Her fight with death portrays her strength of character most effectively.

The narrator continually emphasizes her spirit with repetition of words. “Words are impotent to convey any just idea of the fierceness of resistance with which she wrestled with the Shadow. In the intensity of her wild desire for life – for life —but for life [bold mine] – solace and reason were alike the uttermost folly” (5). As Algeria repeats her famous quote (“Man doth not yield him to the angels, nor unto death utterly, save only through the weakness of his feeble will” (7)) twice Deter allying, near resolute determination not to give nearest to eaten proves undeniable.

Her repetition of this quote could be thought to signify that she can only die if she resigns herself to be weak and feeble – that she will return to life because her will to live surpasses death itself. It could also be thought of as Liger’s last request to her husband – telling him that if his will is strong enough, he can bring her back to life. Whether or not the narrator understands what she says, he acts accordingly. Never does he forget Algeria or stop thinking of her. Feeling that he needs to fill the void that Algeria left, he quickly marries the next available woman, Lady Rowena.

While comparing Algeria to his second wife, however, he becomes further embittered and his will for Algeria to return to life becomes more fanatical. He admits of Rowena, “I loathed her with a hatred belonging more to demon than to man. My Emory flew back to Algeria, the beloved the august, the beautiful, the entombed” (9). At times, Liger’s desire for life combines with his yearning for her and the prophecy almost becomes real. “Now, then, did

my spirit fully and freely burn with more than all the fires of her own. As if I could restore her to the pathway she had abandoned upon the earth" (9).

Immediately after this line is mentioned, Lady Rowena becomes ill with a " sudden illness. " The narrator, perhaps unconsciously, seems to be meddling with the connection between life and death. During Rowan's many fluctuations between life and death, it becomes obvious that the narrator's thoughts are controlling the state of his current wife. As he concentrates on attending her and watching her closely, she falls back into death. As he reminisces about Algeria, however, the corpse becomes alive again. One may suspect that Rowena has died days ago and the glimmer that is Algeria returns only when the narrator wills it.

Liger's final transformation into the living ends the novel with a bang. After all the narrator's lament and yearning for Algeria to live again, his reaction is one more of horror than of happiness as he " shrieked aloud" (13) after his discovery. Perhaps because of his guilty conscience, the narrator responds with fear of her rather than love and he is finally forced to come face to face with his guilt. Consequently, this will to conquer death confronts the tensions between life and death head on and thus shattering them.

The final major theme permeating the plot, opium use, questions the validity of the narrator's accounts such as reviving the dead. Not so subtle hints to the narrator's opium use fill the narrative. He admits numerous times to having used the drug and that it affects his mind. After suffering the pain and loss of losing his love, the orator resorts to opium to blur the sharp reality of this anguish. " I had become a bounden slave in the trammels of

opium, and my labors and my orders had taken a coloring from my dreams” (7).

Furthermore, when he describes seeing the ghost of Algeria and the drops of red fluid in the wine, he questions his state of mind several times. “ But I was wild with the excitement of an immoderate dose of opium C...] I considered [the circumstance to] have been but the suggestion of a vivid imagination, rendered morbidly active by the terror of the lady, by the opium [italics mine], and by the hour” (10). Before his vision of the living Algeria, there are at least three specific references to the narrator having used opium the page before.

Consequently, his account is definitely questionable. In addition, the accounts the mysterious “ noises” Ana “ balloons” AT Rowena can also De coastline as It was common to give opium to those suffering from Tuberculosis (which is what was Rowena was hypothesized to have). The narrator’s opium use could be part of the source of tension so prevalent in this story. Because of his constant dream-like state, it is probable he creates tensions that are not there such as believing he can control he state of Algeria (causing her death, willing her back to life... Etc.). Of course, it is also possible that Algeria never did return to life and he had fallen into another opium dream. The numerous opium references diffused throughout “ Algeria” intensify the narrative structure by adding the element of doubt to the narrator’s account. These major elements from “ Algeria,” death, guilt, life, and opium use, directly reinforce the main structural element holding

the narrative together, the life vs.. Death tension. All four complement each other as well – for without one, the other ones would not be complete.

Without the pervading theme of death, the will to overcome death would not be as shocking. Without the acknowledgement of the opium usage, the story might be taken literally and simply pinned down as a surreal fantasy. With the knowledge that the story is told through the misty veil of opium, however, the possibility exists that there exists no supernatural elements at all and only a narrator in a dreamy state-of-mind. Thus, although “Algeria” seemingly lacks structure initially, its structure subsists within the interweaving of these four prevailing themes.