

Reincarnation as a Transcultural Motif in Edgar Allan Poe's "Ligeia" and Khalil Gibran's "Ashes of Generations and the Eternal Fire"

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Abstract: This paper examines reincarnation as a central motif in Edgar Allan Poe's "Ligeia" (1838) and Kahlil Gibran's "Ashes of Generations and the Eternal Fire" (1906), analyzing its role in themes of identity, love, and the soul's eternity. Through textual and comparative analysis, the study explores how each author employs reincarnation to interrogate existence and the human condition. Poe's Gothic tale presents reincarnation as a haunting manifestation of psychological turmoil, reflecting his preoccupation with death, loss, and fragmented selfhood. In contrast, Gibran's mystical narrative depicts reincarnation as spiritual renewal, rooted in Eastern philosophy's cosmic harmony. Despite differing tones and cultural frameworks—Poe's Western Gothic versus Gibran's Sufi-inspired lyricism—both texts converge on shared motifs: love's endurance and the metaphysical search for meaning.

By centering reincarnation as a comparative lens, this study bridges Eastern and Western literary traditions, addressing a gap in scholarship between English and Arabic texts. It demonstrates how reincarnation serves as a transcultural nexus, linking Poe's psychological depth with Gibran's spiritual transcendence. Ultimately, the paper highlights reincarnation's dual function—as a mirror of inner chaos and a symbol of universal continuity—enriching comparative literature by illuminating its capacity to unite disparate worldviews through the soul's imagined journey.

Keywords: Reincarnation, comparative, uncanny, psychology, philosophy

1. Introduction

Reincarnation has long been a central concept in both religious doctrines and literary motifs, appearing across diverse cultures and philosophical traditions. While Hinduism, Buddhism, and certain mystical sects within Christianity and Islam embrace reincarnation, mainstream religious institutions in the West and Middle East largely reject it in favor of singular resurrection or final judgment. Despite this doctrinal divergence, reincarnation remains a compelling narrative device in literature, allowing authors to explore themes of identity, memory, and the transcendence of love beyond death. Edgar Allan Poe and Kahlil Gibran engage with reincarnation in fundamentally different ways—Poe through the lens of psychological Gothic horror and Gibran through metaphysical romanticism. This paper examines reincarnation as a cultural motif in Poe's "Ligeia" and Gibran's "Ashes of Generations and the Eternal Fire," analyzing their contrasting thematic orientations, psychological dimensions, and narrative structures.

This study employs a qualitative approach to examine reincarnation as a transcultural literary motif. Through textual analysis, interpretive methodologies, and interdisciplinary frameworks, it explores the psychological and philosophical implications of reincarnation within both Western Gothic and Eastern mystical traditions. Psychoanalytic theories, such as Freud's concept of the

uncanny and object relations theory, offer insight into Ligeia's portrayal of psychological fragmentation, while historical and spiritual frameworks contextualize Ashes, illustrating a harmonious cycle in which love and existence persist beyond temporal boundaries. The qualitative approach enables a nuanced comparison of how reincarnation operates in these works, offering a deeper understanding of its role as both a psychological construct and a spiritual affirmation.

Poe's "Ligeia" presents reincarnation as an unsettling phenomenon intertwined with psychological instability. The narrator's inability to mourn Ligeia leads to a hallucinatory resurrection, culminating in a distorted and ambiguous perception of reality. Object relations theory provides a useful framework for interpreting his idealization of Ligeia as a manifestation of unresolved maternal fixation, wherein Ligeia assumes the role of the "good mother," providing intellectual and emotional sustenance, while Rowena represents the "rejecting mother," embodying mundane reality and emotional detachment. Poe's personal history, particularly his early loss of loved ones, reinforces this reading, as his fictional women frequently serve as projections of his unresolved grief and idealized maternal longing.

Conversely, Gibran's "Ashes of Generations and the Eternal Fire" employs reincarnation to affirm spiritual love and transcendence rather than psychological distress. Influenced by Sufi philosophy, Gnosticism, and Lebanese cultural traditions, Gibran's reincarnation motif reflects continuity rather than pathology, portraying love as an enduring force that transcends lifetimes. His integration of Eastern and Western thought enables a vision of interconnectedness, reinforcing themes of destiny and eternal unity. Unlike Poe's narrator, who fixates on Ligeia as an unattainable ideal, Gibran's protagonist embraces the fluidity of reincarnation as part of a natural and transformative process, framed within a stable and lyrical narrative voice.

By situating these works within broader cultural and literary traditions, this study offers a nuanced understanding of reincarnation as a fluid and evolving motif in literature. The contrast between Poe's Western Gothic depiction of isolation and existential fear and Gibran's Eastern mystical embrace of spiritual continuity underscores the dual function of reincarnation, as both a psychological defense mechanism and a metaphysical affirmation. Through comparative analysis, this research enhances discussions on themes of life, death, and continuity, illustrating how reincarnation serves as a bridge between personal introspection and broader cultural narratives.

Additionally, this study contributes to bridging Eastern and Western literary traditions through the universal theme of reincarnation. Poe's Gothic horror highlights existential dread and psychological fragmentation, while Gibran's metaphysical idealism presents reincarnation as a path to spiritual renewal. By juxtaposing these perspectives, the research underscores how reincarnation transcends cultural boundaries, providing insights into human experiences of longing, loss, and transformation. This comparative approach deepens cross-cultural dialogue, enriching literary and philosophical discourse on metaphysical thought and affirming the enduring relevance of reincarnation as a literary motif.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. *Reincarnation: Definitions and Origins*

Reincarnation refers to the transfer of the soul from one body to another after death, enabling spiritual growth through cycles of reincarnation. Nagaraj et al. define reincarnation as derived from the Latin word "reincarnare," meaning "to take on the flesh again" (Nagaraj et al. Introduction, par. 2). The soul reincarnates in humans, animals, or plants based on deeds in previous lives but retains its "I consciousness" (Nagaraj et al. Introduction, par. 2). This concept, known as rebirth, metempsychosis, palingenesis, or transmigration, was embraced by Indian and Greek traditions since the 6th century BC (Nagaraj et al. Introduction, par. 1-2).

Islamic doctrine rejects reincarnation, holding that life ends with death, and the afterlife begins with resurrection and divine judgment. Those who performed righteous deeds enter Paradise,

while evildoers are condemned to Hell. While some sects, including Shiites, Druze, and Ismaili Sufis, have incorporated reincarnation, mainstream Islam maintains that individuals are judged for their deeds in a singular lifetime (Maitah 200–201).

Christianity similarly opposes reincarnation, yet voices claim it was once part of Christian teachings. Manas asserts that reincarnation was removed from the New Testament as it contradicted Church doctrine: “this basic doctrine of metempsychosis was eliminated from the original text” (132). Curtiss describes reincarnation as “the philosophical salvation of Christianity. Without it the scheme of universal salvation fails” (37–38). He argues that rejection of reincarnation stems from ignorance of the early Church Fathers’ teachings (Fuller 16).

Historically, Herodotus recorded Egyptian beliefs in the soul’s immortality: “the human soul is immortal and... enters another body upon the point of birth” (Berthelot 58). However, Vitkovic argues Egyptians believed in resurrection rather than reincarnation (4). The Celts, Indians, and Greeks also subscribed to metempsychosis. Caesar noted that Celtic Druids believed “[t]he soul did not die but passed from one individual to another” (Berthelot 61). Indian thought is dominated by moral retribution: “God can only give rewards or punishments upon the occasion of reincarnation” (Berthelot 65), with transmigration to animals seen as punishment.

Curtiss distinguishes between reincarnation, the rebirth of a human soul into another human body, and transmigration, which he dismisses, arguing that “the lesser can never contain the greater” (Curtiss 11). Despite religious opposition, reincarnation persists across history and cultures, from Greek philosophers such as Pythagoras and Plato (Luchte 18–19) to Ralph Waldo Emerson, who “champions the metempsychotic self as a dynamic part of a radically unsettled cosmos” (Corrigan 5). Furthermore, reincarnation has been featured in numerous literary works, including the stories of Poe and Gibran, which will be discussed in the next section.

2.2. Theories on the Impact of Life Experiences on Individual Psychological and Mental Structures

2.2.1. Sigmund Freud’s “The Uncanny”

Freud’s concept of the uncanny describes feelings of dread when the unfamiliar emerges within the familiar. He links this to repressed childhood fears, such as the castration complex or womb fantasies, that resurface in adulthood (Freud 9). The uncanny is deeply connected to the psychological phenomenon of the “double,” originating from childhood narcissism when children create multiple projections of themselves. As adults, encountering this primitive stage can evoke unsettling feelings. Freud associates the “double” with reflections, shadows, guardian spirits, and the fear of death (Freud 9). His essay remains a foundational work in psychoanalysis, shaping discussions on psychological repression and horror.

2.2.2. Object Relations Theory

Rooted in Freudian principles, Object Relations Theory was later refined by Klein and Fairbairn, who prioritized interpersonal relationships over Freud’s emphasis on the narcissistic libido (Carstea 82; Scharff and Scharff 16). Mills defines object relations as the internalization of experiences with others and how they shape thought, emotion, and behavior (Mills 1). Waska identifies two primary positions within the theory: paranoid-schizoid and depressive. In the paranoid-schizoid position, infants develop defenses against perceived threats, fearing destruction of the self. The depressive position, by contrast, reflects a fear of losing the object’s love rather than complete annihilation (Waska 107–113). These developmental positions influence psychological growth and attachment patterns.

2.3. Early Formation of Poe’s Psyche

Edgar Allan Poe’s struggles, including financial hardship and loss of loved ones, significantly influenced his writing, particularly themes of death. Rufus Wilmot Griswold, Poe’s literary executor, claimed that “Poe’s imaginative writings, especially the poems and stories of his final years, were based on personal events” (Hayes 8). This led to interpretations of his works as reflections of his troubled mind.

Maternal loss likely impacted Poe's writing, especially in "Ligeia," which explores themes of reconciliation in loss. The narrator's longing for Ligeia, representing beauty and intelligence, reflects Poe's desire to reconnect with lost loved ones. Zlotnick-Woldenberg analyzes "Ligeia" through object relations theory, arguing that the narrator's opium-induced hallucinations render the tale psychological rather than supernatural. Ligeia symbolizes the good mother, while Rowena represents the bad mother, illustrating the narrator's "poor reality testing and loose boundaries" (Zlotnick-Woldenberg 403) through mechanisms such as splitting, denial, and idealization.

Although no direct link exists between Poe and his narrator, autobiographical elements are evident in his work. Poe projects personal struggles onto his characters, suggesting an emotional response to loss and separation (Zlotnick-Woldenberg 404). However, while Poe's own emotions may be reflected, "Ligeia" remains a Gothic fiction narrative.

Angela Carter's reinterpretation of Poe's life in *The Cabinet of Edgar Allan Poe* blurs the line between literature and biography. Kokoli asserts that Carter transforms Poe's personal history into metafiction, positioning her within a critical literary tradition (Kokoli 57–58). In *The Cabinet*, Carter examines the relationship between Poe's family dynamics and literary themes, particularly the influence of his mother, Elizabeth Poe. Carter's work offers a feminist analysis of Poe's legacy, challenging traditional literary genealogies (Kokoli 59). Kokoli highlights the role of maternal influence in shaping Poe's writing, particularly in "Ligeia". The story presents its female protagonist as a symbol of resilience and intelligence, defying societal expectations. Kokoli's feminist and psychoanalytic approach enables readers to comprehend Poe's examination of gender, power, and maternal influence within his literary universe (Kokoli 60–61). Through this perspective, Poe's stories reflect complex psychological and cultural dynamics that transcend conventional Gothic literature.

2.4. Khalil Gibran: Influences and Motifs

Like Edgar Allan Poe, Khalil Gibran faced adversity that shaped his literary work. He experienced his father's abuse and his mother's helplessness (Naimy 20). Emigration, illness, and the loss of his mother, brother, and sister deeply affected him. Gibran's strong bond with his mother fueled his rebelliousness toward religion and tradition. Her unconventional marriages drew societal criticism, prompting her to consider a life in a monastery. This emotional turmoil inspired Gibran to challenge societal norms and advocate for marginalized women in his literature. He idealized his mother's traits in works like "Marta Al Baniyyah" and "Wardah Al Hani," possibly as a childhood defense mechanism (Khalid 19).

Bushrui and Jenkins' *Kahlil Gibran: Man and Poet* explores Gibran's journey from Lebanon to global literary recognition. His writings bridged Eastern and Western traditions, emphasizing spirituality and unity. His vision sought to reconcile opposites, including Christianity and Islam: "His desire to reconcile Christianity and Islam... was practical in that he foresaw the dangers of sectarianism in Lebanon" (Bushrui and Jenkins 6). The biography also highlights his struggles with loss and his reliance on Mary Haskell's support. Beyond biography, Gibran's influence extended to the Arabic literary renaissance. His leadership in Arrabitah shaped modern Arabic literature. His universalist themes continue to resonate with global audiences, affirming his relevance in an interconnected and spiritually seeking world.

3. Case Study Analysis: Edgar Allan Poe's "Ligeia" (1838) and Kahlil Gibran's "Ashes of Generations and the Eternal Fire"

3.1. The Psychological Gothic in Edgar Allan Poe's "Ligeia"

Edgar Allan Poe's short story "Ligeia" (1838) is one of his most enigmatic and psychologically rich gothic tales. Through the unnamed narrator's obsessive love for his deceased wife, Ligeia, and his detachment from his second wife, Rowena, Poe constructs a narrative that oscillates between supernatural suggestion and psychological realism. Critics have long debated whether "Ligeia" should be

interpreted as a tale of will transcending death or as a study in psychological disintegration, particularly influenced by grief, addiction, and unresolved childhood trauma.

From the outset, the narrator exalts Ligeia as a woman of unparalleled beauty and intellect. Her physical and spiritual attributes are depicted with reverence that borders on worship. He describes her as possessing otherworldly beauty: "the beauty of beings either above or apart from the earth—the beauty of the fabulous Houri of the Turk" (Poe 182). More significantly, her eyes are central to his obsession: "Those large, those shining, those divine orbs... twin stars of Leda" (181–182). Her intellect and spiritual depth also captivate him: "her rare learning... made their way into my heart by paces so steadily and stealthily progressive that they have been unnoticed and unknown" (180). This intense idealization suggests an unbalanced dynamic in their relationship; Ligeia becomes both muse and spiritual authority. Her death devastates the narrator, who subsequently isolates himself in a decaying English abbey and succumbs to opium addiction.

In an attempt to fill the void left by Ligeia, he marries Lady Rowena, whom he perceives as inferior in both intellect and affection: "I loathed her with a hatred belonging more to demon than to man" (Poe 190). Rowena's mysterious illness and death, preceded by the narrator's vision of "three large drops of brilliant and ruby colored fluid" falling into her wine (Poe 192), blur the boundaries between the real and the hallucinatory. High on opium and emotionally unstable, the narrator watches Rowena's corpse reanimates through a series of increasingly lifelike signs until she ultimately rises, revealing herself, he believes, as Ligeia: "these are the... wild eyes—of my lost love—of the LADY LIGEIA" (Poe 195).

This reincarnation is traditionally interpreted as evidence of Ligeia's indomitable will overcoming death. Quinn sees her return as a supernatural triumph in a metaphysical struggle for identity and existence (270). However, Zlotnick-Woldenberg reinterprets this sequence as a product of a psychological collapse. She proposes that the events are "hallucinations during an opium-induced psychotic break" (403), wherein the narrator, unable to process grief or guilt, psychically substitutes Ligeia for Rowena.

Applying object relations theory, Zlotnick-Woldenberg frames Ligeia as the embodiment of the "good mother," an idealized and spiritual figure, while Rowena represents the "rejecting mother," a figure of unwanted reality. The narrator's emotional instability, exacerbated by loss, addiction, and unresolved trauma, renders him susceptible to psychological defenses such as projection and splitting (403). As a result, he maintains the fantasy of Ligeia while projecting his resentment and abandonment anxiety onto Rowena, ultimately culminating in her death. This reading resonates with Poe's biography. As a child, Poe suffered the early death of his mother and emotional neglect by his foster family. Zlotnick-Woldenberg argues that such early trauma contributes to the pathological grief that underpins the narrator's experience (404). The mother figure, thus internalized and idealized, becomes the unconscious model for Ligeia.

D. H. Lawrence strengthens autobiographical interpretation by arguing that the narrator is a projection of Poe himself. When the narrator meticulously describes Ligeia's physical features, Lawrence suggests Poe is attempting to dissect her essence "like an anatomist anatomizing a cat" (101). For Lawrence, the narrator and, by extension, Poe's desire to know Ligeia is parasitic, even fatal: "To know a living thing is to kill it" (101). Lawrence further suggests that both the narrator and Ligeia share responsibility for Rowena's demise: "It is the spirit of Ligeia, leagued with the spirit of the husband, that now lusts in the slow destruction of Rowena" (108). In this reading, both are portrayed as vampiric figures who drain Rowena of life in order to restore the lost ideal.

The narrator's fixation on Ligeia's eyes is symbolically charged. He repeatedly states that he comes close to uncovering their secret, only to find the memory receding: "in our endeavors to recall to memory something long forgotten... we often find ourselves upon the very verge of remembrance, without being able... to remember" (Poe 182). Bonaparte asserts that the eyes transcend mere mystery; they serve as an intimation of a more profound identity. The narrator's struggle lies not in

recalling Ligeia's expression, but in discerning the origin of those eyes, which potentially reflect the mother's gaze from early childhood (227). Pruette endorses this interpretation, observing that Poe frequently projected his idealized image of his mother onto the ethereal women in his fiction, including Ligeia (378).

The psychological defense of denial is central to the narrator's inability to accept Ligeia's death. As Osterweis et al. explain, children may simultaneously acknowledge the reality of a parent's death while denying its emotional finality, creating a prolonged and maladaptive grief response (Common Defensive Strategies, par 2). The narrator's reincarnation of Ligeia through Rowena can be seen as such a defense, a symbolic denial of the maternal loss that haunts him.

Ogden discusses the concept of the "paranoid-schizoid" position, in which an individual evades the process of mourning by substituting the lost object with a surrogate. This act of substitution facilitates an illusion of continuity, thereby negating the necessity for grief (24). The narrator's hallucination of Ligeia's return through Rowena operates in this precise manner, serving as an endeavor to maintain the maternal figure and avert psychological deterioration.

Object relations theory posits that all emotions, anxieties, and instincts are relational and structured around internal and external "objects": people or symbolic representations of people (Mitchell 206). Poe's story illustrates these principles as the narrator projects his internal psychic needs and conflicts onto the women in his life. Ligeia becomes the internalized ideal object—perfect, immortal, and wise—while Rowena becomes the external scapegoat for the narrator's anger and unresolved grief.

Poe's recurrent theme of the reincarnated wife underscores his profound connection to death and memory. In narratives such as "Ligeia", the deceased reemerge, often symbolizing facets of the narrator's psyche. As Pruette notes, "the dead are not wholly dead to consciousness" (378), and this spectral return functions both as a means of denial and a fulfillment of wishes.

Bonaparte associates the maternal figure with omniscience and forbidden knowledge (227), qualities frequently attributed to the female characters in Poe's works. These projections elucidate Poe's internal conflicts: He both reveres and fears the maternal figure, yearning for reunion while dreading the ramifications of such closeness. The narrator's animosity toward Rowena culminates in her demise, which allows Ligeia to return, reincarnating her body and serving as a means of maintaining the sanctity of the Ligeia/mother figure.

"Ligeia" is a tale that navigates the intersection of the supernatural and the psychological, embodying themes of obsession, memory, loss, and denial. Through the lens of psychoanalytic and object relations theory, the story is revealed not as a simple ghost tale but as an intricate exploration of pathological mourning and unresolved maternal fixation. Poe's narrator, unable to reconcile with the loss of an idealized object, projects his inner turmoil onto the women in his life, ultimately creating a phantasmagoria of grief and resurrection. In reviving Ligeia, the narrator resurrects not only a lost love but also the shadow of a mother never truly mourned.

3.2. *Spiritual Growth and Renewal in Gibran's "Ashes of Generations and the Eternal Fire"*

"Ashes of Generations and the Eternal Fire" is a fictional tale narrated by a reliable third-person narrator. It explores the concept of reincarnation and aims to prove that true and devoted love persists beyond death. It would be inaccurate to assert that Gibran's use of reincarnation in his narrative serves solely a psychological function. His developmental trajectory encompassed both mental and physical dimensions, with his mother playing a pivotal role in guiding him through successive stages of growth. He had a good and healthy relationship with her, and when she died, he was twenty, and he mourned her appropriately with no ill psychological harm.

Dreidi et al. state that "the quality of the mother-child relationship is considered to be the most important key in ensuring the child's well-being in physical, emotional, and behavioral development." While the early trauma inflicted by his father's cruelty to his mother contributed to the emergence of a rebellious and protective disposition, it is the maternal relationship that appears more

fundamentally tied to the formation of his future identity. His desire to protect his mother is reflected in his dedication to defending women against societal injustices and male-biased traditions, as evident in stories such as “Warda al-Hani” and “Marra al-Baniyyah” (Khalid 61), but not in *Ashes*.

In *Ashes*, it was not his mother’s memories that influenced the character’s reincarnation; rather, it was love. Bushrui and Jenkins argue that the story “deals with the themes of reincarnation and preordained love” (76). The narrative suggests that, although temporarily concealed, love reemerges in a new form. Gibran, the author, explains to his beloved, Micheline, that he envisioned writing this story to assure her that his affection for her would endure eternally, even after his death:

How I wish you knew Baalbek, Micheline. You shall know it someday; you shall know my Lebanon, its white peaks and blue sea. The last few days, I have been turning in my mind a fantastic story with glorious Baalbek for a background. The story is about a priest of Astarte in the temples of Baalbek 2000 years ago and a maiden like Micheline. The lovers die and are reborn again to carry on to perfection the holy hymn of love—Kahlil and Micheline. I have already thought of a good title for the story: *The Ashes of the Ages and the Eternal Fire*. The ages burn and turn to ashes, while the fire of Love burns on ever stronger, ever brighter. What do you think of that? (Naimy 71)

Gibran’s employment of reincarnation comes from different impulses, which can be revealed by studying and analyzing his mentality and cultural background. He was a Lebanese, an Easterner, who sought authenticity and recognized that many “virtues” are socially constructed behaviors rather than expressions of actual being, which he believed is more evident in the simplicity of a “shepherd” than in the complexity of a “sophisticated” city dweller. (Bushrui and Jenkins 23)

Gibran grew up in an environment where reincarnation was widely accepted as a doctrine, particularly among groups such as the Druze. Additionally, Indian literature and culture, rich in various beliefs, with reincarnation being among the most prominent, were well-known and influential in the Middle East. States Gibran: “There are millions in India, China, Japan, and the Malayas [*sic*] who believe in the constant renewal of individual human life. Even in Lebanon, there is a small sect called the Druses who believe in reincarnation” (Naimy 73–74). Gibran likely immersed himself in studying and exploring such civilizations and beliefs as a curious seeker, eager to uncover what he did not yet understand and clarify the mysteries of human history, science, and civilization.

It is evident that Gibran believed in reincarnation from his response to Mary Haskell’s question about his embrace of the concept. Gibran declares:

I was lost between life and death. Whenever I thought of human relations, I found me as one walking in the dark and always stumbling on riddles. In *Reincarnation*, I have found the key to the riddles and the lantern to light the hitherto obscure human relationships. (Naimy 72)

Gibran reflects on his existential struggle to understand the complexities of life, death, and human relationships. He describes feeling lost and confused, as if wandering in darkness and confronted with unsolvable mysteries. However, the concept of reincarnation offers him a way to make sense of these puzzles. For Gibran, reincarnation symbolizes continuity and interconnectedness, serving as a “key” to understanding the cycles of existence and a “lantern” that illuminates the deeper meaning behind human relationships. It provides a framework for viewing life as part of a larger, evolving journey, helping to make sense of the seemingly chaotic and unresolved human experience.

Although Gibran, as a Christian, misinterpreted specific verses of the Qur’an that discuss death and resurrection, his references to them to support his ideas about reincarnation demonstrate his familiarity with and influence from various religions, diverse beliefs, and intertwined civilizations. He drew from these beliefs to align with his visions and support his convictions:

Life does not begin with birth and end with death. We hunger after perfection. We all seek God. And who can find God in twenty, a hundred, or a thousand years? “You were dead, and He brought you to life. Again, He [Allah] shall cause you to die and shall bring you back to life. In the end He shall gather you unto Himself,” so said the prophet of the Arabs, and so proclaimed many prophets of the East. (Naimy 73)

The theme of reincarnation in *Ashes* could not only stem from his deep engagement with spiritual and metaphysical ideas shaped by his experiences and worldview, but also from his Christian beliefs. Khalid says that Gibran commended the crucified Christ as a symbol of suffering, redemption, and eternal continuity (24). Thus, this belief may have inspired his exploration of cycles of life, death, and rebirth. Moreover, reincarnation may have served as a compelling metaphor for his longing for transcendence, liberation from temporal constraints, and the enduring spirit of the homeland.

Some Christians pursued deep knowledge, leading to doctrines like Gnosticism, emphasizing inner contemplation and spiritual experiences to uncover the divine essence beyond logic. Gibran embraced a Gnostic perspective, uniting God, man, and nature, and infused his romanticism with Sufi ideals of liberation, pantheism, and reincarnation to achieve spiritual perfection. His intellectual growth was enriched by diverse cultural influences, Arab, English, and French, broadening his imagination and deepening his creative and philosophical pursuits. (Elgaoubi 211–212)

Gibran's idealized vision of Lebanon as a pure and eternal homeland, free from division and decay, mirrors the concept of reincarnation, a continuous renewal that transcends physical and temporal limitations. He could symbolically address his desire to revive and perfect Lebanon through reincarnation, embodying the eternal fire of hope and unity that survives the ashes of past struggles. This theme would also resonate with his Sufi-inspired longing for spiritual perfection and a connection to the divine, aligning personal and national transformation with the cyclical renewal of the soul.

4. Comparative Reflection: The Psychological Gothic in Poe's "Ligeia" and the Metaphysical Romanticism in Gibran's "Ashes of Generations and the Eternal Fire"

Edgar Allan Poe's "Ligeia" and Kahlil Gibran's "Ashes of Generations and the Eternal Fire" are tales that explore the porous boundary between death and life. However, they diverge profoundly in narrative tone, thematic focus, psychological underpinnings, and philosophical worldview. While Poe's narrative plunges into the psychological abyss of grief, denial, and pathological idealization through Gothic horror, Gibran's tale elevates love and spiritual continuity via metaphysical idealism and Eastern mysticism. Both stories employ the trope of reincarnation; however, where Poe's tale is suffused with despair and fragmentation, Gibran's is imbued with spiritual fulfillment and continuity. This comparative analysis delineates their core thematic differences, psychological and philosophical orientations, and the respective functions of the female figure within each narrative.

4.1. Ontological Worldviews: Psychological Gothic vs. Metaphysical Romanticism

Poe's "Ligeia" operates within the Gothic tradition, where the supernatural is inextricable from the narrator's crumbling psyche. The tale raises interpretive ambiguity between a metaphysical triumph over death and a descent into madness. The narrator's opium-fueled delusions, his idealization of Ligeia, and the repulsion toward Rowena suggest a psyche tormented by grief and incapable of mourning. Death in "Ligeia" is a psychological impasse, an experience that becomes internalized, neurotically relived, and ultimately hallucinated.

In contrast, Gibran's *Ashes* offers a spiritual and culturally embedded vision of life after death. Reincarnation is not a symptom of trauma or psychological fragmentation but a vehicle for eternal love and ontological harmony. For Gibran, death is a passage, not an end. Drawing from Eastern mysticism, Sufi ideals, and esoteric Christianity, reincarnation is presented as a spiritual evolution. The narrator is not a tormented self, projecting his inner conflicts onto external objects, but rather a seeker affirming the immortality of the soul and the continuity of love across lifetimes.

4.2. The Female Figure: Idealized Mother-Wife vs. Eternal Beloved

In "Ligeia," the female figures embody stark oppositions: Ligeia is the "idealized mother," the immortal soul and spiritual authority, while Rowena is the mundane, "rejecting mother" figure. This split aligns with object relations theory, in which the narrator projects internal psychic con-

flicts, especially unresolved maternal loss, onto external women. Ligeia is revered for her wisdom, intellect, and mystical intensity. Her physical features, especially her eyes, become symbolic loci of knowledge, beauty, and pre-oedipal maternal fusion. Her resurrection through Rowena is not romantic rebirth but psychological denial of loss, a pathological refusal to let go of the maternal ideal. Critics like Zlotnick-Woldenberg and Bonaparte persuasively argue that the tale dramatizes a psyche caught in a regressive mourning process, resulting in a delusional resurrection (Zlotnick-Woldenberg 403; Bonaparte 227).

Gibran's female figure, modeled on Micheline, is less a psychological construct and more a spiritual archetype. She represents an eternal soulmate whose connection transcends bodily death. The tale is shaped by a third-person narrative voice, suggesting a degree of narrative stability and philosophical clarity absent in Poe's deeply subjective and unreliable narrator. Gibran's tale celebrates not the compulsive reanimation of the dead, but the continuity of soulmates across temporal cycles. The woman is not a projection of trauma, but a partner in divine union, fulfilling Sufi-inflected romantic ideals.

4.3. Death and Rebirth: Neurotic Denial vs. Spiritual Continuity

The concept of return after death functions diametrically in each tale. In "Ligeia", the resurrection is grotesque, fragmented, and psychologically dubious. The reanimation of Ligeia through Rowena occurs in a decaying Gothic abbey, amid opium hallucinations and terror. The resurrection is inseparable from the narrator's mental collapse, wherein the boundaries between hallucination and reality disintegrate. Object relations theory suggests this event functions as a psychic substitution of the lost maternal object, a defense against grief that culminates in psychosis rather than transcendence (Ogden 24).

Conversely, in *Ashes*, reincarnation is explicitly framed as a metaphysical affirmation of eternal love. Drawing on cultural beliefs in reincarnation (including those of the Druze and Indian traditions), Gibran presents reincarnation as an evolutionary and spiritual process. It is not pathological, but purposeful: love that once burned continues to flame in another life. Gibran's confession to Micheline reinforces this idea; he uses the story to assure her that love endures even as bodies perish (Naimy 71). The eternal fire of love persists beyond the ashes of generations, forming a hopeful ontology that contrasts starkly with Poe's haunted realism.

4.4. Autobiographical Undercurrents: Traumatic Fragmentation vs. Romantic Idealism

Both Poe and Gibran bring autobiographical resonance into their tales, but with divergent psychological implications. Poe's early maternal loss, foster family rejection, and experiences of addiction and instability manifest in "Ligeia" as themes of unresolved grief, maternal fixation, and emotional regression. Pruette and Bonaparte link the narrator's idealization of Ligeia to Poe's projection of his dead mother onto ethereal female characters (Pruette 378; Bonaparte 227). The narrator's need to preserve Ligeia's image, particularly her eyes, is a symbolic attempt to resurrect the maternal gaze and retain fusion with the lost mother.

By contrast, Gibran's relationship with his mother was healthy and nurturing. Her guidance through formative stages and Gibran's appropriate mourning upon her death created no visible pathology. Instead of projecting maternal trauma, Gibran transforms the maternal impulse into a defense of women and an exaltation of romantic and divine love. His tale reflects not regression, but progression toward enlightenment, love, and metaphysical integration (Elgaoubi 211–212). His embrace of reincarnation, informed by multiple religious and philosophical traditions, serves as a response to existential riddles rather than psychological breakdown.

4.5. Cultural and Religious Contexts: Western Gothic Alienation vs. Eastern Mystical Integration

Poe's narrative is embedded in a Western Gothic framework that emphasizes individual alienation, inner torment, and the horror of the unknown. Death is feared, enigmatic, and disruptive. His Chris-

tian-inflected cultural milieu allows little room for metaphysical continuity of self; instead, the story becomes a site for exploring psychological defenses against the finality and meaninglessness of death.

In contrast, Gibran's Eastern background and syncretic spirituality, blending Sufism, Gnosticism, Christian mysticism, and Eastern philosophies, provide fertile ground for embracing reincarnation as a cultural and metaphysical given (Naimy 72–74). His tale is not about resisting death but about interpreting it as part of a divine rhythm. The shepherd and the natural world in Gibran's worldview represent an authentic simplicity aligned with divine cycles, far removed from the decaying Gothic settings of Poe's psychologically tormented narrators.

4.6. Stylistic and Narrative Techniques: Unreliable Subjectivity vs. Lyrical Objectivity

Poe's first-person narration in "Ligeia" is claustrophobic and subjective. The reader is confined to a psychologically unreliable narrator whose perception is distorted by addiction, grief, and obsession. This unreliability is central to the tale's interpretive indeterminacy. Are we witnessing the supernatural or the hallucinatory breakdown of a deluded mind?

Gibran's tale, on the other hand, is narrated in the third person and with a philosophical omniscience that lends the narrative an air of certainty and serenity. The style is lyrical, meditative, and declarative, more concerned with spiritual truth than psychological fragmentation. This shift in narrative perspective reinforces the stability of Gibran's metaphysical universe in contrast to Poe's disorienting psychological labyrinth.

Though "Ligeia" and "Ashes of Generations and the Eternal Fire" address love's persistence beyond death, they embody two profoundly different literary and philosophical visions. Poe's story dramatizes a Gothic psychological crisis, in which the narrator's grief and pathological idealization manifest as hallucinatory resurrection, rooted in trauma and unresolved maternal fixation. Gibran's tale, by contrast, is a metaphysical celebration of spiritual continuity, cultural synthesis, and eternal love, free from the pathological undertones that define Poe's Gothic universe.

Where Poe's narrator clings to memory and constructs delusions as a defense against grief, Gibran's protagonists traverse time and space as agents of cosmic love and spiritual evolution. Ultimately, "Ligeia" speaks to the terror of disintegration, Ashes to the hope of transcendence. The former is a tale of psychological collapse; the latter, of metaphysical affirmation.

5. Conclusion

Reincarnation, as explored in Edgar Allan Poe's "Ligeia" and Kahlil Gibran's "Ashes of Generations and the Eternal Fire", emerges as a powerful literary and cultural motif that transcends temporal and geographical boundaries. While rooted in diverse traditions, Western Gothic and Eastern mysticism both engage with the concept of reincarnation to reflect on loss, identity, and the continuity of existence. The comparative analysis of these two texts reveals how reincarnation functions as both a psychological defense mechanism in Poe's work and a spiritual affirmation in Gibran's, demonstrating its adaptability in conveying complex emotional, philosophical, and metaphysical themes.

Poe's "Ligeia" presents reincarnation as an obsessive and unsettling phenomenon, deeply intertwined with psychological instability and pathological mourning. The narrator's idealization of Ligeia, coupled with his rejection of Rowena, signifies an inability to process grief in a healthy manner. Object relations theory offers a compelling lens through which to examine his distorted perception of reality, portraying Ligeia as the maternal ideal and Rowena as the rejecting figure (Zlotnick-Woldenberg 403; Bonaparte 227). His hallucinations of Ligeia's return function not as a supernatural victory over death but as a defense mechanism, a denial of loss that manifests in delusions of resurrection. This psychological reading aligns with Poe's own troubled life, marked by early maternal loss and emotional instability (Hayes 8; Pruette 378). His Gothic style amplifies these themes, constructing an atmosphere of dread, fragmented memory, and existential despair.

On the other hand, Gibran's "Ashes of Generations and the Eternal Fire" approaches reincarnation from a spiritual and romanticized perspective. Instead of functioning as a psychological projection, reincarnation in Gibran's work symbolizes cosmic love and spiritual renewal. Influenced by Sufi mysticism, Christian Gnosticism, and Lebanese cultural traditions, Gibran integrates reincarnation as a means of sustaining human connections beyond physical limitations (Elgaoubi 211–212; Naimy 72–74). His story illustrates love's persistence through lifetimes, affirming its transcendent nature rather than portraying reincarnation as a desperate attempt to resist grief (Bushrui and Jenkins 76). The third-person narrative voice and lyrical style reinforce the stability and clarity of Gibran's philosophical vision, contrasting sharply with Poe's unreliable and fragmented narrator.

Methodologically, this study employs a qualitative approach to analyze the thematic and psychological dimensions of reincarnation in these texts. Through textual analysis, interdisciplinary literary criticism, and engagement with psychoanalytic and philosophical theories, the research sheds light on the intricate ways in which reincarnation is represented in literature, extending beyond its religious origins. Poe's Gothic horror and Gibran's metaphysical romanticism embody two contrasting yet complementary perspectives on reincarnation, demonstrating its role as a fluid and adaptable motif that can reflect psychological turmoil, cultural heritage, and existential thought.

Furthermore, this study contributes to the broader discourse on cultural bridging, illustrating how reincarnation serves as a universal literary and philosophical theme that connects Eastern and Western traditions. Poe's narrative, steeped in Western Gothic realism, explores the psychological fragmentation inherent in grief and obsession, while Gibran's Eastern mysticism embraces reincarnation as a means of continuity and spiritual fulfillment (Naimy 73; Bonaparte 228). By juxtaposing these divergent approaches, this research highlights how reincarnation serves as a bridge between cultural paradigms, fostering a deeper engagement between Western notions of identity and existential dread, and Eastern perspectives on transcendence and interconnectedness. The shared theme of reincarnation underscores humanity's universal desire to make sense of mortality and love, proving that literature remains a powerful medium for cross-cultural dialogue.

Ultimately, Poe and Gibran's works demonstrate that reincarnation is more than a religious belief or supernatural phenomenon; it is a profound reflection of human longing, emotional processing, and spiritual transformation. Whether depicted as a haunting psychological illusion or a mystical affirmation of love's endurance, reincarnation emerges as a compelling motif that speaks to universal themes of loss, memory, and the nature of existence (Corrigan 5; Manas 132). By engaging with these narratives through interdisciplinary perspectives, this study not only enhances literary analysis but also enriches discussions on the intersections of psychology, philosophy, and cross-cultural literary traditions.

This research confirms that reincarnation, as depicted in "Ligeia" and "Ashes of Generations and the Eternal Fire", encompasses both psychological and spiritual dimensions, providing insight into the complexities of grief, love, and human identity. While Poe's narrator is consumed by loss, Gibran's protagonist embraces renewal, highlighting reincarnation's dual function as both an expression of existential despair and an affirmation of cosmic harmony. Through the lens of literature, reincarnation continues to illuminate humanity's deepest fears and hopes, reaffirming its place as a timeless and transformative theme in global storytelling.

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