Poe's motif of memory utilizes the ability of recollection to exist in a nebulous region that both represents and transcends reality. Memories are shadows of reality in that they both are and are not the subjects they represent. Therefore, "Ligeia" is not a tale of resurrection, it is a tale of memory in which the resuscitated Ligeia does not exist outside of the narrator's memory. The narrator uses his will to manipulate Ligeia's memories to impose his vision on reality. As McEntee states, "this tale has its origins in old memories that the narrator decides to resurrect" (75). The narrator is in complete control as he immerses the reader in the realm of his memories while filtering the events of the story. The narrator's selective memory informs his descriptions of Ligeia, demonstrating his obsession with an idealized construct of her character. The perversity with which he clings to this constructed memory poisons his second marriage to Lady Rowena and leads the narrator to sacrifice her as a vessel for his memory of Ligeia. The final moments of the tale depict the narrator's desperate struggle to project his memory of Ligeia into reality. Therefore, the mysterious and pervading "will" that dominates the Glanvill epigraph belongs to the narrator and his memories. Knowing that the narrator's memory filters the events in the narrative, the lack of information regarding Ligeia's past indicates the narrator's possessive nature. The story opens with the narrator professing, "I cannot, for my soul, remember how, when, or even precisely where, I first became acquainted with the lady Ligeia" (310). Considering his devotion to Ligeia, this lapse in memory is certainly strategic, particularly when contrasted with the general acuity of his memory throughout the narrative. The narrator omits any information regarding Ligeia's past, even their meeting, which would necessitate a depiction of a Ligeia that lies beyond his memory. Later, the narrator realizes that he has "never known the paternal name of [Ligeia]" effectively wiping away Ligeia's history (311). This selective presentation of information displays a view where the narrator's presence completely dictates Ligeia's identity; in essence, she does not exist outside of the conceptions of the narrator. In Edgar Allan Poe: A Study of the Short Fiction, Charles E. May is correct in his assertion that "Ligeia seems to have no source in the real world" (62), because the narrator obscures all of her real world attributes in order to take possession of her.
“If you compare several representative passages of the greatest poetry you see how great is the variety of types of combination, and also how completely any semi-ethical criterion of ‘sublimity’ misses the mark. For it is not the ‘greatness,’ the intensity, of the emotions, the components, but the intensity of the artistic process, the pressure, so to speak, under which the fusion takes place, that counts.”

T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent"
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