



# Psychoanalytic Approach to the Bride's Journey Towards Freedom in Felicia Hemans' "The Bride of the Greek Isle"

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**Abstract:** This paper is an analysis of a poem by Felicia Hemans, a 19<sup>th</sup> century Romantic woman writer. Focusing on "The Bride of the Greek isle", the study argues that Hemans death poems explore death as a means of freedom from the patriarchal society. It is not as some critics said that Hemans had morbid passion with death, or that her domesticity in her poems is unbearable. The paper, therefore, explores the journey of the bride, in the poem, as a journey towards freedom not death, using Freud's psychoanalytical division of human's mind into Id, Ego and Superego. Meanwhile, the study analyzes the images that Hemans used, and their significance to the study of women's freedom through death. This paper shows that the three divisions of the narrative poem parallel in the structure the division of Freud's human mind into Id, Ego, and Superego.

## INTRODUCTION

Felicia Dorothea Browne, a British Romantic poet and novelist, was born in Liverpool on September 25, 1793. The war ruined her father, a merchant, and in 1800, he left the family to go to Canada, never to be seen again. Her family moved to Wales when she was seven, after her father lost his wealth. In 1807, her sister Elizabeth died. Her first publication was *Poems* – published in 1808, at the age of fourteen. In 1812, she published *The Domestic Affections and Other Poems* before her marriage from Captain Alfred Hemans at the age of twenty. In 1816 she published *The Restorations of the Works of Art to Italy*. In 1818, Captain Hemans left her to Italy while she was pregnant with her fifth child and never returned. In 1827, Hemans was distressed by the death of her mother. As an artist, she was a successful poet, but not a successful dramatist. She was respected in America; the Americans "regarded her as the head of a new literary school, owing to her influence on Longfellow" (Cottingham, 2001, p. 275). She was "offered a magazine editorship by Professor Norton of Harvard College" (Cottingham, 2001, p. 275). She died in Dublin on May 16, 1835, at the age of 41 because of a scarlet fever, leaving twenty four volumes of poetry and many plays. In addition to all mentioned above, not too much information about Hemans' life, home, and education is available. However, it is important to note that she was born during the French Revolution and lived through the Napoleonic Wars. She developed into an educated woman under the directions of her mother. She read novels and poetry, studied music, and learned many languages such as: Spanish, French, Italian, Portuguese, German and Latin. Her mother was of Italian and German descent and her grandfather on her mother's side was Consul for Austrian Tuscany. It is quite clear, as Cottingham says, that "she was immensely erudite, and very much a poet who made use of her own literary and political culture" (276).

Curran, in *Romantic Women Poets Genre and Gender*, is not equitable with Felicia Hemans when he cites in the chapter related to Felicia Hemans that she is a very tender sentimental writer; she celebrates domesticity. Also, he says that she praises "feminine instincts and female duty" (Cronin 209). According to Cronin, Curran "cannot control his impatience" (209) with her feminine style. Meanwhile, Curran is not aware that Hemans is not celebrating domesticity; she is celebrating "the undomesticity" in a domestic refined way that the patriarchal society will accept.

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However, Susan Wolfson, another critic who studies Hemans from another point of view than Curran, argues that Hemans is not celebrating domesticity like Curran says; she is escaping from domestic life. She considers death of women by the end of Hemans' poems, like the death of Eudora in "The Bride of the Greek Isle", "the epitome of womanly self-sacrifice"(Harding 142). She explains that this death is a "release from marriage and from enslavement alike"(142). Wolfson actually reads Hemans and she knows how to approach Hemans's poetry, thus her idea about self-sacrifice is not complete because self-sacrifice was a necessity to attain freedom; it is the price to attain Eudora's freedom.

Tricia Lootens agrees with Wolfson that Eudora stands as "a torch to marital misery, an embodiment of preemptive self-sacrifice" (243). Also Aileen Forbes views Hemans' poems as "subjects of sacrifice" in "Hemans' poetics"(158). Lootens also considers that Eudora is a "Patriotic Heroine"(242) who attempts to "mobilize the domestic affections to the service of militaristic patriotism"(242); she is a "martyr" figure, and her suicide is "an ultimate expression of duty"(243). But, the question here is that what kind of duty it is? Probably, it shall be the duty of Eudora towards her gender as a woman to free herself more than a "patriotic" duty.

On the other hand, Brooke Makenzie Walter approaches "The Bride of The Greek Isle" from a different perspective than Wolfson and Lootens. He compares between Eudora, as the heroine of the poem whom he considers an "Atypical Bride"(ecu) and the Byronic hero. He considers that Eudora is characterized like the Byronic hero who is alienated, defiant, and "angst-ridden"(ecu) in addition to her "sentimental" and "domestic concerns"(ecu). In his claim that Hemans concerns are domestic, he agrees with Curran. Nevertheless, this claim is a creative and subtle claim and this conclusion is natural because Hemans is very much influenced by Byron; she starts her poem by an epigraph taken from Byron's play *Sardanapalus*. But all this doesn't mean that Eudora cannot be simply a "Felician Heroine", not a Byronic one. Eudora is really "Atypical Bride", not because she carries the characteristics of a Byronic hero, but because her character is an original character of a bride accepted by the society.

Finally, Elliott approaches Hemans' poem from a feminist perspective. She mentions in her article "*Nothing Beside Remains*", that Michael T. Williamson sees Hemans poems, including "The Bride of the Greek Isle", as "elegiac poems" that laments "the waste of women's psyche" in a patriarchal world. However, those are not "elegies" especially in Eudora's case; those are awakening calls to the patriarchal society, and to women in the patriarchal society.

### Methodology

Meanwhile, the critical opinions that I mentioned are all used in the frame of the Freudian psychoanalytic approach to explore the analysis of the Bride's journey toward freedom. Freud's division of the human mind into the superego contains "morality principles", which derive us to act in a socially accepted behavior where the first part of the poem represents the superego. The ego contains "reality principles", which balances the superego and id and rationalizes the id's instincts. The second part of the poem represents the ego. The id contains "pleasure principles", internal and basic derives and needs, and it is unaware of implication of actions where the unconscious lies. The third part of the poem represents the id. Eudora, the protagonist, represents the feminine id in the stage of superego and ego. This approach will be paralleled with the feminist approach because Hemans is one of the most important feminist romantic women writers.

### Hemans' Bride

Felicia Hemans is one of the most important British gynocritic poets in her era; "the figure who has stamped out the bright stars of romanticism"(Cronin 209). Her importance lies in the ideas hidden

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between the lines of her poems that she tries to present in a socially accepted manner. In her poem "The Bride of the Greek Isle", from her poetry volume *The Records of Women*, she removes the lid of the patriarchal society from the id of women using her special transparent lid that shows clearly what is it in the women's id. Hemans succeeds to transgress the limits of "Domestic sphere". She comments on her patriarchal society in a domestic context, yet with undomestic rebellious content through her "atypical bride's" (Walter 1990) journey toward freedom in her poem "The Bride of the Greek Isle". This poem parallels in its three parts division Freud's division of the human mind; the first part represents the superego; the second part represents the ego; and the third part, which is the end of the bride's journey, represents the duality between the id and the bride itself representing the id.

Curran refuses Hemans' feminist style and considers it a tender, sentimental style that celebrates domesticity only. He cannot control "his impatience with Hemans' sentimentality, tenderness, and celebration of domesticity" (Cronin 210). However, it is obvious that Curran doesn't read between the lines of Hemans' poems. Hemans is not celebrating domesticity; she is using it as an armor to express herself without the fear of criticism or unacceptance from the society. Meanwhile, Wolfson argues against Curran and defends Hemans. She points out that Hemans' major theme of *The Records of Women* is the "failure of domestic idealism to sustain and fulfill women's life" (Harding 142). She explains that Eudora's suicide at the end of the poem is an "escape of the domestic life" (142). She considers this suicide as "womanly self-sacrifice" (142). However, Eudora's suicide is a sacrifice of the self to gain the self. Everything in life needs a price in exchange, and Eudora's price that she pays for her freedom is her life. The protagonist of Hemans poem Eudora is the symbol of feminist id; she reveals the hidden desires of women through her actions. Moreover, she represents the id in all stages of the poem. For instance, Eudora is a typical bride in the first part of the poem that represents the superego; nothing of her desires are revealed because the id has no place in the super ego. Eudora's desires are more clear in the second part of the poem that represents the ego; here in the ego the id has some free space and here in the ego stage Eudora has more space of freedom to express her desires. In the third part of the poem, which represent the id stage, Eudora has the freedom to reveal her desires; her id is uncovered and her actions express the id of women. Meanwhile, the id represents the instincts and hidden desires of every person, and the hidden desires of women are not the same as those of men. The development of the narration in the poem is the development of the journey of Eudora towards freedom. It is Eudora's revolution that starts implicitly from the beginning of the poem and becomes clear and complete by the end of the poem.

The poem "The Bride of The Greek Isle" is divided by Hemans into three parts that are analogous to Freud's super ego, ego, and the Id. Freud's approach is based on the study of personality structure into three different elements: id, ego, and superego. The id represents the "pleasure principle" (Guerin, et al 156) where the internal and basic drives and needs are founded. The ego represents the "reality principle" (157) and it balances between the id and the ego. The superego represents the "morality principle" (157); it judges our senses of wrong and right using guilt to encourage socially acceptable behavior. Freud also studies the "unconscious" which is the true feelings, emotions and thoughts of the individual. The behavior of the bride in part one is socially accepted behavior; her wedding represents the morality principle of Freud. Everything in part one is highly socially accepted. Her wedding is perfect, "Maids of bright Scio!" (Hemans 3) comes; nature is celebrating her wedding; her clothing is very beautiful and she is "The bride of the morn" (6). The superego stage is the stage of perfection, the same is the first part of the poem. It describes Eudora in a stage of perfection; her perfect wedding, her perfect aspect, her perfect reaction towards leaving her family and home. Everything in the first part shows what society accepts and expects from a bride to do. The superego represents the family in the society. The relation between Eudora and her family is a relation of love and respect, that the superego accepts or shows as sacred relation and

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it shall be perfect. In this part Eudora represents the typical bride; society accepts her being typical. She is the typical daughter who misses the flowers, the childhood, her sister, father "whose eyes o'er all my youth hath smiled" (65), and her mother "on thy breast, pouring out joy and wo" (67,68). Here she is the typical person regarding the relationship with family and society that the superego expects her to be. Yet within this perfection, obedience, and "celebration of domesticity" (Cronin 209) that supports the superego there is a hidden Id that calls for rebellion. Here in the superego, Hemans underlies Eudora's rebellious spirit between lines, and foreshadows the suicide at the end of the poem. Meanwhile, Eudora's rebellious spirit is clear in "the glance of her dark resplendent eye" (Hemans 15) that is "For the aspect of women at times too high" (16). The bride's courage is hinted at this early stage of the poem. "She goes unto love yet untried and new" (29). How come she goes to the untried and the unknown? Going to the unknown needs courageous spirit that doesn't fear the unknown, but faces it instead. That is the spirit of the seemingly typical bride in the first part, whom Hemans veils her intentions with a "transparent veil" (12) that shows what is going under it. The symbol of the veil and its movement through the three parts of the poem that parallels Freud's study of the human mind is very significant. From beneath the "transparent veil" (12) of Eudora, "Changeful and faint was her fair cheek's hue" (13); in the superego stage, Eudora, who symbolizes the id, cannot reveal everything of her affections. Hemans uses subtly the veil to hide these affections, to hide Eudora's face, and to hide the id that has no place in the superego. In the superego youth and love are celebrated; everything is perfect in the wedding. The bride and the groom have "light leaves around them, blue skies above, / An arch for triumph of youth and love" (93,94); youth and love triumph because there is no place for imperfections or failures.

The second part of the poem represents the ego. In this ego the bride represents the Id. In this stage, the id and the superego have their places and the id is rationalized. It is here where "They lifted the veil from Eudora's face, / It smiled out softly in pensive grace" (Hemans 113,114).

Her "transparent veil" (Hemans 12) is lifted from her face; the veil is moved from the id, Eudora, but still not completely removed because it just shows her smile in "pensive grace" (114). This smile is the rationalizing of the id that the ego does; it is considered one of the defense mechanisms to hide the unconscious. According to Freud's theory, in the stage of ego, the ego uses different types of defense mechanisms to balance between the id and the superego. One of the defense mechanisms is "rationalization". Freud believed that defense mechanisms helped shield the ego from the conflicts created by the id, superego and reality. The "crown" (Hemans 5) of Eudora in the first part is transformed into a "chaplet" (Hemans 118) in the second part. This crown, that makes her a queen in the superego because she abides by the rules of the superego, is changed into a chaplet in the ego. Chaplet is usually put on the graves and in the wedding it is put on the heads, "a chaplet for every head" (Hemans 118) foreshadows the pirates invasion and the suicide scene at the end. Eudora, who is the representative of the id, has a little bit of freedom space to express herself in the ego, yet in a refined way. Here in the ego we meet Ianthis, the groom. Ianthis represents the patriarchal figure of restrictions that comes from the superego. Ianthis is killed by the pirates. Eudora's passion explodes. However, it is not the passionate flow that "leads almost inevitably to either insanity or death" (Walter ecu), it is the passion that leads to freedom. It is the passion to freedom from the restrictions of the ego and superego. The "triumph of youth and love" (Hemans 154) is closed by the "fear thro' the summer grove" (Hemans 153). The id is the conqueror here in the second part stage of ego; the unconsciousness is the triumph factor over the consciousness and the superego.

The most important incident of the poem occurs in the second part, ego's stage. The invasion of the pirates occurs. Pirates are ousted from the society. Their invasion symbolizes anti-patriarchal element as it gives Eudora the chance to free herself. This invasion is "not random at all; it acts as a catalyst for her

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personality shift from docility to defiance"(Walter ecu). In other words, it is the pirates invasion that awakens Eudora's Id. This invasion drives her to say no and to rebel. This invasion acts as the climactic point in Eudora's journey towards freedom. The ego juxtaposes between the goblet and the sword, "fling down the goblet, and draw the sword"(Hemans 129). The ego balances between the submissivity of drinking through the goblet, and fighting through the sword. That is, Eudora drank too much through the goblet before, but now it is time to fight with the sword. In the ego of Hemans' poem the aspects of the superego and id are not just refined, they are put face to face to evoke a battle of existence between society, the superego, and Eudora, the id.

Hemans calls her readers to read between the lines. She clarifies that appearances are deceptive; not all what appears to us is true. She says "Under the golden-fruited boughs / There were flashing poniards and dark'ning brows,"( 135,136). Though Hemans is describing the situation of the invasion of the pirates in an artistic style, these two lines are her call to read under the golden-fruited boughs of her poem what is her intention and what is it in the women's id.

The third part of the poem represents women's id. "Hemans allows the readers to see Eudora's self-sacrifice as an act of liberation"(Walter.ecu). Eudora in the id acts freely; her id is uncovered by Hemans. Eudora kills herself as a sign of rebellion and courage. In the surface level of action Eudora's suicide is explained as a "correlation between passion and death"(Rudy jstor). That is Eudora kills herself because of her passion and lament towards Ianthis. However, in the deep level of action, Eudora's suicide is differently analyzed. Hemans' language changes towards a masculine language after the pirates invasion. Eudora's actions are interpreted as masculine ones because they nobody expects expect from a woman to be courageous. The most arguable act in the poem is here in the third part, it is the suicide of Eudora. This suicide is the id's language to express its refusal for the restrictions of patriarchal society. when Eudora burns herself she initiates the sparkle of freedom in the dark world of femininity. Her fire glow is very powerful to an extent that "Man may not fetter, nor ocean tame / The might and the wrath of the rushing flame!"(Hemans 189,190). We wonder what does Hemans means by "man". Does she mean the mankind or the masculine gender? Hemans challenges in these words the man as a masculine gender and a figure of dominance in the society. she expresses that the women are powerful and no man can face their powers. All this shows that Eudora is "atypical bride"(Walter ecu); not because she is a Byronic heroin as Walter says, but because she is the courageous figure of women who expresses her id with a power that no man can tame; "Man may not fetter, nor ocean tame / The might and the wrath of the rushing flame!"(Hemans 189,190).

The image of the veil, that is traced through all the parts of the poem, is "... Flung back and her free dark hair / Sway'd by the flames as they rock and flair"(Hemans 205,206). The removal of the veil symbolizes the uncovering of the id. Eudora's veil is gone, and her dark hair is free from the bondage of society, superego. This evokes a sense of relief for Eudora's id that is reflected as a relief also on the tension of readers. Moreover, the image of crown is used no more in the stage of id. She doesn't need a crown in the id to announce her a queen, like in the superego. At the id stage she wants to be free. She doesn't want anything to restrict her; thus, crowns restrict, and they are symbols of bondages and rules in the society.

Eudora's journey comes to an end. She puts this end by herself. Death is a choice according to her. However, the death of Eudora is not the end of her life; it is the beginning of her life; it is her awakening. Lootens interpretation of Eudora's death is martyrdom; it is "ultimate expression of duty"(243) towards patriotism. She explains that "the bride may stand as a torch to marital misery, an embodiment of pre emptive self-sacrifice"(243). Similarly, Wolfson interprets Eudora's death as "self-sacrifice"(Harding 142). She also considers the act of suicide is a



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"release from marriage and from enslavement alike"(142). Eudora frees herself from this "enslavement"; the fire burns her "marriage robe"(Hemans 219); Hemans say "As flames to her marriage-robe draw near / And starting, she spreads her pale arms in vain / To the form they must never infold again" ( 219-221). The fire of rebellion burns the bond of enslavement , which is symbolized by the "marriage robe" (219). Also the poetry line "To the form they must never infold again"(221) shows that her freedom is eternal freedom; her hands will never "infold again". Walter interprets Eudora's suicide as "an act of liberation"(acu). All explains Eudora's suicide as an act of self-sacrifice; however, there is nothing in life without a price. Eudora's sacrifice is the price for her freedom.

Finally, Hemans starts her rebellion before the poem started. She starts the poem with an epigraph by Sardanapalus from Byron's play *Sardanapalus*. The male hero in this play kills himself rather "live degraded". Hemans message is to parallel between the male hero in Byron's play, and her female heroin in her poem. She wants to say that men and women are equal. Eudora also, like Byron's male hero, "will not live degraded". All the incidents in the poem happen in an Isle, and the isle is an isolated place. This isle is the id of femininity; Eudora and women in general are isolated from the society the same as this isle is isolated. This means that women cannot express themselves except in an isolated society, which is symbolized by the "Isle". The Isle here reminds us of Dorothy Wordsworth poem "Floating Island". By the end of Wordsworth's poem, the island is "Buried beneath the glittering lake / Its place no longer to be found,"(Wordsworth 25,26). The island disappears, "Yet the lost fragments shall remain / To Fertilize some other ground."(Wordsworth 27,28). This island is like Hemans bride; though the bride dies and disappears, she remains , lives, and is immortalized by her death. Even when she is dead, her "fragments . . . . . fertilize" other women and give them the reason to rebel. Hemans dares to question, until when women's id will be isolated from the society? Until when they will be imprisoned in their domestic role? Eudora is the free spirit that lives inside every women. She is the Felician heroin who initiates in our souls the sense of freedom, and encourages us to free our ids and say "No".

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