

## The Relation of Memory, Imagination, and the Individual According to Attachment Theory: A Study of Selected Short Stories

Sara Umed Rostam<sup>1</sup>, Ansam Riyadh Almaarof<sup>2</sup>

### Abstract

*Individual's behaviours and actions mostly depend on the type of relationship and the connection they have with their surroundings. This paper delves into the psychological side of the characters chosen from particular short story. Using attachment theory as a framework to analyse their actions, for Individuals` actions depend on the care they received throughout their childhood. The characters in the chosen stories use their memories, imagination, and their relation to others in different shapes according to the attachment style they are struggling with. sometimes memories are useful to tolerate or pass the hardest periods of life, other times they cause huge losses in the reality depending on the extent of attachment to that particular memory. Eventually, this paper provides an insight vision into how past relationships, experiences, and emotional bonds impact individuals` reactions towards traumas, memory recalls, and imagining scenarios as a try to cope. Also, examines the ultimate effect of attachment styles on individual`s behaviour from childhood to adulthood.*

**Keywords:** *Attachment Theory, Attachment Styles, Memory, Individual, Tim O`Brien, "Where Are You Going? Where Have You Been?"*.

### Introduction

Attachment theory dives into the deepest emotions inside individuals, exploring their past to calculate their present behaviours. According to this theory the past events in someone`s life and their relation to others build their personality. John Bowlby evolved attachment theory, and later it was extended by Mary Ainsworth. In this case memory, imagination, and individuals have a very powerful impact on the attachment styles and behaviours.

Attachment theory centres on the development and maintenance of emotional connections between individuals. Furthermore, it provides a framework for understanding the relationships among them (Cherniak et al 126). During the initial phases of their development, children primarily engage in social interactions with their parents. A strong bond and secure relationship with parents are highly associated with enhanced psychological development and a more positive attitude in children (Karunarathne 207).

The theory clarifies how children's personalities are so strongly influenced by their interactions with their parents especially from a tender age (Jones 1). Bowlby at the start was concerned with the protective role that attachment was providing infants(children) throughout their care-givers (i.e. mothers). Later on, he widened his researches to contain the influence of environment and other materials that influenced the inner exploration of children and other types of attachment (Morelli 151).

Attachment takes place when individuals are heavily connected emotionally to a place, an object, or a person. Whilst reaching out for the symptoms and the signs that displays attaching to something is troublesome, these reasons led to the flourish of Attachment as a theory (Sincero 1).

As mentioned in Giulia Perasso article, Mary Ainsworth`s SSP was first applied in the longitudinal Baltimore study of aging; and it has been divided onto eight unchangeable parts until today, it is remarkable to estate that other researchers conducted the "strange situation" experiment before, but Mary Ainsworth was the most recognisable and accurate. It is based on the relationship between the mother and the infant, so it is a mother-child interconnections (1).

---

<sup>1</sup> Email: Saraumed.rostam37@st.tu.edu.iq.

<sup>2</sup> English department, College of Education for Women Tikrit University, Iraq, Email: Sbc.s5@tu.edu.iq.

According to the research by Main and her colleagues, any type of trauma or loss that the mother went through as a child, were frequently the same problems linked to the difficulties between the mother and the child. This led to develop a type of study that elaborates this kind of issues, as a result “Adult Attachment Interview (AAI)” appeared (Wylie and Turner 1).

Despite the fact that people frequently recall their past emotions (such as how they reacted or response to a specific incident) quite accurately, researches also demonstrate on that regular memory biases that depend on people’s personality traits do exist. For example, exaggerating the intensity of past unpleasant events has been associated to greater ratings of nervousness and anxiety (Gentzler and Kerns 20).

Many researches on the first years of a child’s memory concentrated on numerous factors, like the age of the child and the memories that the child is emotionally connected to it. Majority of theorists concur that emotions and feelings play a significant role in the early childhood memories, but they are uncertain whether the negative or positive emotions are more prevalent in those experiences (Tahirovic and Jusic 151).

The attachment style affects the way of recalling memories. When it comes to recalling memories, avoidant attachment individuals use advanced defence strategies to limit memory retrieval, anxious attachment individuals use overactivation strategies to prevent the expression of emotions, and secure attachment individuals have moderate emotions and views on recalling memories (Tao 1).

Imagination has a powerful bond to attachment theory; individuals tend to imagine past events as a coping mechanism. People with insecure attachment rely on imagination in order to cope. The impact of this imagination is either negative or positive on the reality.

Insecure attachment individuals use imagination to overcome their harsh realities. For instance, if someone used to live in a specific place in their childhood and forced to leave it for many years, imagining that place is going to be like a consolation for them. In this case, imagination worked as a coping mechanism (Vygotsky 7).

Everything that comes from the imagination is always derived from actual events or from the experiences of the individual. In this case the insecure attachment individuals use their imagination to build a new reality that makes them stay in the safe zone (Vygotsky 13).

Eventually it is important to declare that the most widely accepted theories in the study of new-born and children in all aspects of life; their behaviour, disciplines of child therapies, mental health of infants, as well as their emotions and the consequence of their childhood experience on them as adults, all these aspects allied in the field of attachment theory.

This theory is also helpful in displaying the right path for care-givers to understand infants emotionally and psychologically in a better way. It helps in understanding the different types of attachment and its effect on individuals and how a person develops emotionally (Crouch 22).

### *Questions of the Paper*

How do the selected texts depict the impact of memories and imagination on individuals?

How do the selected stories explain the influence of attachment theory styles on individual’s actions?

### *Aims of the Paper*

The main objective of this paper is to delve into the complex connections between memory, imagination, and an individual's sense of self, as illustrated through the lens of the attachment theory framework. The essential objective of this paper attempt is to clarify the underlying mechanisms by which an individual's attachment style applies an influence on the processes of memory recall and imaginative prediction.

## Methodology

The paper utilizes a psychoanalytic point of view to survey the complex dynamics among memory, imagination, and psychological development in individuals. The strategy admits the impact of John Bowlby's attachment theory in illustrating the influence of early emotional connections on an individual's cognitive and emotions.

The text elaborates the effect of early attachment figures on an individual's internal world, concentrating on the unconscious processes that form memory development and imagination. The paper is going to assort individuals into the different styles of attachment, according to their behaviours and actions.

## Discussion

The first story that is going to be discussed is Edgar Allan Poe's "Ligeia," this story is being told by an unnamed first-person narrator who was formerly married to Lady Ligeia (Gutierrez 14). The characters in this short story play a significant role, Poe uses his characters in a genius way that gives a gothic and horror to the theme of the story. The main character is an anonymous wealthy man who has an obsession with his first wife.

His role is to create a shaky narrative that conflicts reality with his tortured mind by giving an unreliable, first-person narrative of his interactions with Ligeia and Lady Rowena. Following the death of Ligeia, the narrator becomes addicted and imprisoned to her memories to the extent that he imagines her existence (Ashour 5).

In Edgar Allan Poe's "Ligeia," the first-person narrative is essential for a number of reasons, most notably because it influences the tone, themes, and the reader's experience. Readers can learn a great deal about the narrator's feelings, obsessions, and thoughts through this point of view. This fosters a feeling of closeness that makes the narrative more interesting and personal.

Readers are left doubting the accuracy of the events recounted due to the unreliable storyteller. This ambiguity heightens the mystery, which is an essential component within the gothic genre. Because of his criminal mentality or insanity and his obsession with his beloved Ligeia, the narrator is untrustworthy and much of what he says is doubtful. After her death, he also acknowledges that he frequently used opium, which adds to the instability of his voice (Ashour 11).

This tale by Edgar Allan Poe, contains various types of attachment. The first type is anxious attachment, individuals with this style have a conflict feeling, they want to be close to their loved ones and at the same time afraid from being abandoned. In this story it occurs between the narrator and Ligeia. The narrator's love for Ligeia is incomparable, for he always praises her beauty, her knowledge, and how he needed her for emotional fixation.

After her death, the narrator fell into a deep breakdown, unable to continue his normal life. Living in his memories with Ligeia led him to a state of anxiety because he couldn't let Ligeia go; this contrast between his love for her and fear of abandonment caused him an anxious attachment.

I would in vain attempt to portray the majesty, she came and departed as a shadow. I was never made aware of her entrance into my closed study save by the dear music of her low sweet voice, as she placed her marble hand upon my shoulder. In beauty of face no maiden ever equalled her (Edgar Allan Poe Complete Tales and Poems 301).

Following the death of Ligeia, the narrator is unable to move on and accept her death, he lives in her memories. Daydreams and imagines of her return one day, he is in a constant fear that even her memories will leave him, he always thought that without her, he is nothing or he is a child who knows nothing about this world. As a solution he remarries, Rowena, but in vain. He is still attached to Ligeia's ghost and memories.

How poignant, then, must have been the grief with which, after some years, I beheld my well-grounded expectations take wings to themselves and fly away! Without Ligeia I was but as a child groping benighted. Her presence, her readings alone, rendered vividly luminous the many mysteries of the transcendentalism in which we were immersed (Edgar Allan Poe Complete Tales and Poems 303).

His relation to Ligeia, leads the narrator to mix between fantasy and reality, not aware about his surroundings. Even he became addicted to opium only to hallucinate Ligeia's ghost, all of this caused him an anxious attachment.

The other style of attachment that exists in this tale is avoidant attachment, this style happens when individuals ignore relationships to avoid pain and weakness. This style exists between the narrator and Rowena, his second wife. Though he is married to her, but he is emotionally away from her, ignores her, and continues his imagination with Ligeia.

He doesn't make any connection with her, he does so as a protection from going through the same loss and pain he went through after the death of Ligeia. Also, he is quite preoccupied with his obsession to his first wife, and not being able to live his reality. Even though he was with Rowena yet he kept imagining Ligeia, and remembering his life with her.

Disorganized attachment is also depicted in this tale through the narrator's contrast behaviour. The contrast exists in accepting the reality, which is Ligeia's death, and holding to his Imagination and recalling Ligeia's memories, and not being able to build a connection with Rowena either. When Rowena's dead body was in front of him he didn't care about it he continued his vision and fantasy about Rowena, "And again I sunk into visions of Ligeia—and again" (Edgar Allan Poe Complete Tales and Poems 308).

Eventually, the story ends with the narrator imagining Ligeia in front of him and he starts describing her, "'Here then, at least," I shrieked aloud, "can I never—can I never be mistaken—these are the full, and the black, and the wild eyes—of my lost love—of the lady—of the LADY LIGEIA.'" (Edgar Allan Poe Complete Tales and Poems 309).

The second short story that is going to be conducted is "Where Are You Going? Where Have You Been?" by Joyce Carol Oates. According to Teran and Akatsuka this short story "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" by Joyce Carol Oates, was first published in the 1966 edition of Epoch magazine, and later republished in the 1970 collection Wheel of Love.

This story is considered nearly as one of Oates's most significant work, it continued to remain the favourite among readers and critics, for its story, themes, and the subjects that it deals with (ed). The story presents a 15 years old Teenager girl, Connie, she lives with her parents and has an older sister.

Teenage Connie feels anxious about her physical traits and looks to other people for approval. She believes that her mother in particular misunderstands her. She is naïve, conceited, rebellious, and attention-seeking. A run-in with Arnold Friend, whom is a cunning character, marks Connie's growth throughout the narrative. Her meeting him causes her to come to a terrifying realisation about her fragility.

Arnold Friend, plays a crucial part in the narrative. He presents the danger and threats that exists in the adult world and personifies the fears and anxieties of adulthood. the sensation of dread and anxiety in the story is increased by his character's continued ambiguity (LitChart).

Joyce Carol Oates was motivated to create this story after reading about a young man from Arizona, Tucson, at the beginning of the 1960s, who was able to seduce young little girls and murder them later, in Life magazine (Tearle). This story is being told by third person omniscient narrator; the attachment that exists between Connie and her family in general and between Connie and her mother specifically. The type of attachment is ambivalent, avoidant-anxious attachment, also elements of disorganised attachment can be seen.

Ambivalent attachment is when the child is anxious after the separation, it leads the child to be anxious and resistance about any relationship, one of its sub-types is avoidant-ambivalent attachment. This style leads the child to avoid the caregiver and depend on themselves although they look for closeness somewhere else. And that is what this story exploring through the relation between Connie and her family.

As for disorganised attachment, it is the attachment that appears mostly with adults. Conflict feelings is its feature, the adult is struggling with two contradictory emotions; just like the protagonist, Connie, she wants her family to see her, look after her, and to behave with her kindly, though she desperately wanted to go away from them.

Her relation to her family leads to her weakness and to seek attention elsewhere. Her father was an absent character in the story as well as in Connie`s life, her sister was busy with her own life, and her mother always scolded her for her behaviours; this attachment led Connie to be anxious and to avoid her family, and to have a conflict feeling of wanting to gain her mother`s acceptance and to ignore her sentimentally.

Her relation with her mother was complicated, her mother always compared Connie to June, her older sister; criticising her for how she always was busy about her looks, going out with her friends, and meeting boys, unlike her sister who was mature, responsible, and does not pay attention to vain matters. Although Connie was doing so only to attract their attention and to ignore her family at the same time, this is related to disorganised attachment. the comparison is cleared in this speech by Connie`s mother, “Why don’t you keep your room clean like your sister? How’ve you got your hair fixed—what the hell stinks? Hair spray? You don’t see your sister using that junk” (Oates, as cited in Jones 1).

The constant comparison between Connie and her sister by her mother led her to hide things and avoid her mother. Although she always warned Connie from going out and meeting boys, she never listened due to the lack of attachment between them (avoidant attachment). As Connie complains to her friend: “She makes me want to throw up sometimes” (Oates, as cited in Jones 1).

It is important to underscore the fact that, Connie had lack of confidence to herself; this can be observed through how she constantly approaches the mirror and looks at herself. This absence of self-confidence is mainly due to her family, especially her mother`s continuously judging and comparing her to June. Another sign of Connie`s insecure avoidant attachment is how she neglects her family, and looking for that emotions and secure attachment in her relation with boys.

Even she had a two-sided personality, one when she was at home and another outside with boys, as the narrator explicitly shows it:

Everything about her had two sides to it, one for home and one for anywhere that was not home: her walk, which could be childlike and bobbing, or languid enough to make anyone think she wash earring music in her head; her mouth, which was pale and smirking most of the time, but bright and pink on these evenings out; her laugh, which was cynical and drawling at home—“Ha, ha, very funny,”—but high pitched and nervous anywhere else, like the jingling of the charms on her bracelet (Oates, as cited in Jones 1).

The attachment between Connie and Arnold is disorganized. Arnold is manipulating Connie`s feeling, he uses her lack of care and emotion. For instance, he lied about his real age:

She said suddenly, “Hey, how old are you?” His smiled faded. She could see then that he wasn’t a kid, he was much older—thirty, maybe more. At this knowledge her heart began to pound faster. “That’s a crazy thing to ask. Can’t cha see I’m your own age?” “Like hell you are.” “Or maybe a couple years older. I’m eighteen.” “Eighteen?” she said doubtfully. He grinned to reassure her and lines appeared at the corners of his mouth (Oates, as cited in Jones 4)

The type of attachment is disorganized style, Arnold`s presence makes Connie feel a mix of random feelings, she is afraid, helpless, and curious; she doesn’t have any clue about what to do. She started to threaten him by saying she is going to call the police, because Arnold knew about how Connie is emotionally

weak and vulnerable, he didn't even blink by that, yet telling her that he is not coming in, but she is going to come out to him.

Arnold kept his trying in persuading her to come out. A wave of terror went through Connie, and she yelled for her mother, "Arnold Friend said. "But I promise it won't last long and you'll like me the way you get to like people you're close to. You will. It's all over for you here, so come on out. You don't want your people in any trouble, do you?" (Oates, as cited in Jones 6).

Eventually Arnold after threatening Connie with her family convinces her to come out, for the first time Connie feels that she lived her life in a wrong way and she was sure that, she is never going to see her family, her house, and even her bedroom:

She felt her pounding heart. Her hand seemed to enclose it. She thought for the first time in her life that it was nothing that was hers, that belonged to her, but just a pounding, living thing inside this body that wasn't really hers either. "You don't want them to get hurt," Arnold Friend went on. "Now, get up, honey. Get up all by yourself." She stood (Oates, as cited in Jones 7).

At the end of the story, it is cleared that, the family relationships are much more important than it looks like. If Connie had a secure attachment with her family and her mother never compared her to her sister, she would never have looked for love, emotion, or attachments outside her family. Each and every style that Connie went through, whether with her mother, Arnold, or even her friends, is a key that leads Connie to her ultimate fate.

## Conclusion

This study elaborated the different styles of attachment theory and how it affects individuals' behaviours and connection with each other. These attachment styles appear as a result of a particular incident, experience, or trauma that they went through at a certain point in their life, changing the course of their life to better or worse.

The first author, Edgar Allan Poe's "Ligeia", the narrator's obsession with Ligeia caused him an avoidant and disorganised attachment. As a result, he lived in his imagination ignoring his reality, and he also mixed between his actual life and imaginations of Ligeia.

The second author, Joyce Carol Oates, "Where Are You Going? Where Have You Been?" clarifies the impact of caregiver's behaviour with their children. Connie's mother constantly compared Connie to her older sister, this comparison led to an ambivalent attachment and made Connie to look for care from someone else, which led to her down fall eventually.

As explained, attachment to memories or imaginations even being attached to someone is not always a positive relation, for it has a bad impact at some situations. Examining these two stories through the framework of attachment theory elaborates the importance of understanding attachment styles, in order to understand individual's behaviour and reactions towards a particular incident.

## References

- Ashour, Ahmad. "Ligeia by Edgar Allan Poe." Slide Share. 2021. Ligeia by edgar Allan poe | PPT (slideshare.net). 30 July 2024.
- Cherniak Aaron D., et al. "Attachment Theory and Religion." *Current name in Psychology* 40. August (2021):126-127. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2352250X2030172X>. 18 October 2023.
- Crouch, Miriam. Attachment: "What is it and Why is it so Important." *Kairaranga* 16.2 (2015): 18-23. [EJ1240567.pdf](https://www.ed.gov/eo-12812) (ed.gov). 22 April 2024.
- "Edgar Allan Poe: Complete Tales and Poems." Maplewood. 2013. [edgar\\_allan\\_poe\\_\\_complete\\_tales\\_-\\_edgar\\_allan\\_poe.pdf](https://www.ed.gov/eo-12812). 20 June 2024.
- Gentzler, Amy and Kathryn Kerns. "Adult Attachment and Memory of Emotional Reactions to Negative and Positive Events." *Cognition & Emotion*. (2010): 20-42. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02699930500200407](https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02699930500200407). 22 April 2024.
- Gutierrez, Ada Gracia. "An Analysis of Poe's "Ligeia" as a Gothic Tale." University of Zaragoza. 2019. 1-31.

- Jones, Susanne. Attachment Theory. University of Minnesota: Twin Cities, December 2015, 1-2.
- Karunaratne, Rotumba A. I. C., "Parents or Peers? (In)congruence Effect of Adolescents' Attachment to Parents and Peers on Self-Esteem." *Europe's Journal of Psychology*. 19.2 (2023): 207-209. <https://ejop.psychopen.eu/index.php/ejop/article/view/7355/7355.pdf>. 18 October 2023.
- Morelli, Gilda. "The Evolution of Attachment Theory and Cultures of Human Attachment in Infancy and Early Childhood." *The Oxford Handbook of Human Development Culture*. (January 2015): 149-164. [https://www.bc.edu/content/dam/bc1/schools/lsoc/faculty%20&%20research/Publications/Morelli/Morelli\\_AttachmentReconsidered\\_2015](https://www.bc.edu/content/dam/bc1/schools/lsoc/faculty%20&%20research/Publications/Morelli/Morelli_AttachmentReconsidered_2015). 16 October 2023.
- Oates, Joyce Carol. "Where Are You Going? Where Have You Been?". 1991. Published by Rayvon Jones. n.d. *Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been | PDF | Nature* (scribd.com). 24 June 2024.
- Perasso, Giulia. "Strange Situation Procedure (SSP)." *Encyclopedia of Sexual Psychology and Behavior: University of Milano-Bicocca, Milan, Italy*. (January 2023): 1-3. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-08956-5\\_128-1](http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-08956-5_128-1). 4 March 2024.
- Rainsford, Sue. "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been? Characters." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 13 Nov 2018. *Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been? Character Analysis | LitCharts*. 30 Jul 2024.
- Sincero, Sarah Mae. "Bowlby Attachment Theory." *Explorable*. (2012): n.pag. <https://explorable.com/bowlby-attachment-theory>. 29 January 2024.
- Tahirovic, Senija and Mersiha Jusic. "Earliest Memories, Positive Emotional Memories of Warmth and Safeness, and Attachment Style in Adolescent." *Epiphany* 9.1 (2016): 149. <http://dx.doi.org/10.21533/epiphany.v9i1.211>. 22 April 2024.
- Tao, Hongyu. "The Influence of Attachment Style on Memory Retrieval." *Chongqing Normal University: China*. 24 July 2024.
- Tearle, Oliver. "A Summary and Analysis of Joyce Carol Oates' 'Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?'" *Loughborough University: England*. 2024. <https://interestingliterature.com/2022/11/joyce-carol-oates-where-are-you-going-where-have-you-been-summary-analysis/>.
- Teran, Adriana. Neal Adolph Akatsuka. "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been? Summary." *GradeSaver*, 3 August 2015. <https://www.gradesaver.com/where-are-you-going-where-have-you-been/study-guide/summary>. 10 June 2024.
- Vygotsky, Lev Semenovich. "Imagination and Creativity in Childhood." *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology* 42.1 (2004): 7-97. [https://lhc.ucsd.edu/mca/Mail/xmcamail.2007\\_08.dir/att-0149/LSV\\_\\_1967\\_2004\\_.\\_Imagination\\_and\\_creativity\\_in\\_childhood.pdf](https://lhc.ucsd.edu/mca/Mail/xmcamail.2007_08.dir/att-0149/LSV__1967_2004_._Imagination_and_creativity_in_childhood.pdf).
- Wylie, Mary Skyes, and Lynn Turner. "The Adult Attachment Interview & How It Changed Attachment Research History." *Psychotherapy Network*. 3 March 2014. <https://www.psychotherapynetworker.org/article/adult-attachment-interview-how-it-changed-attachment-research-history/>. 21 March 2024.