

Repetition in mourning and melancholia: a clinical and literary case

Long before Freud elaborated on the concept of repetition and repetition compulsion, he presented us with a staggering example of it: In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud recounts the dream of the burning child, where a father dreams of his dead child burning, only to wake up next to his son's deathbed that had been indeed set ablaze by a fallen candle. While Freud does not proceed to discuss how the dream repeats the father's reality, it already anticipates the "demonic character" of repetition compulsion, which he will introduce two decades later in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. "If we take into account observations such as these," he writes in 1920, "based upon behaviour in the transference and upon the life-histories of men and women, we shall find courage to assume that there really does exist in the mind a compulsion to repeat which overrides the pleasure principle. Now, too, we shall be inclined to relate to this compulsion the dreams which occur in traumatic neuroses and the impulse which leads children to play." This lecture will explore this dual function of repetition: as a manifestation of unresolved trauma on the one hand and as a creative, playful process of working-through on the other, using clinical material and a literary example. More specifically, the clinical case of a woman caught up in the throes of repetition following a series of traumatic losses will be discussed, using three dreams that she reported at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of her treatment. Apart from theoretical and clinical material, the presentation will examine Odysseus Elytis's poetry collection "The Monogram" as well as Federico Garcia Lorca's "Lament for Ignacio Sanchez Mejias" as examples of working-through trauma. Finally, Freud's essay on "Mourning and Melancholia" will be central in our attempt both to understand unresolved trauma and to examine some of the ways it expresses itself creatively.

dr Yianna Ioannou, PhD
Assistant Professor of Clinical Psychology
Department of Social Sciences
School of Humanities and Social Sciences
University of Nicosia
Clinical Supervisor
Center for Therapy, Training and Research
University of Nicosia
<https://www.unic.ac.cy/ioannou-yianna>

dr Marinos Pourgouris
Associate Professor of Literary Theory and Modern Greek Studies
Department of Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies
University of Cyprus
Odysseus Elytis Endowed Visiting Professor of Modern Hellenic Studies, Department of Classics, Rutgers University.
<https://www.ucy.ac.cy/directory/en/profile/mpourgou>