

AP English

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Analysis of Annabel Lee

“Annabel Lee” is the last complete work of poetry written by Edgar Allan Poe before his death in October of 1849. Following the gothic and romantic themes that are present in many of Poe’s most famous works, “Annabel Lee” is the story of a young romance told from the point of view of a man remembering his beautiful and deceased love, Annabel Lee. Many have speculated about who if anyone is the inspiration for Annabel. It can be strongly argued that Annabel is simply a woman out of Poe’s imagination as he wrote countless pieces that follow the theme of females in love and death. On the other hand, although it cannot be fully confirmed it is argued that the most likely source is Virginia Clemm, Poe’s young wife, and first love, who died soon before the poem was published. “Annabel Lee” is one of Edgar Allan Poe’s most famous works of poetry, it helped to define the genre of Gothic literature and inspired many others to investigate similar topics and themes of love and loss.

“Annabel Lee” is a melancholy piece that explores themes of death and tells a beautiful story of remembrance. The most prominent purpose of the poem is to tell the story of Annabel Lee. The narrator looks to ensure that although his love is gone she will be remembered and their story of love will not go without telling. The love in “Annabel Lee” is so great that the “wingéd seraphs in Heaven coveted” Annabel Lee. In the opinion of the speaker, this love is a love that belongs in a grand piece of literature and that is his purpose for telling it. For the point of view of

Poe, the purpose of the poem was to explore one of his favorite subject: The death of a beautiful woman, while getting to further his experience in composing gothic works. The poem encompasses many of the themes that are traditionally attributed to gothic literature such as love and death. The title, "Annabel Lee", is the name of the woman that the poem centers around, the woman who is worshiped by the speaker of the poem. Although the poem is about Annabel the reader receives fairly little concrete facts about who she is as a person aside from her name, something that is known before the poem even begins, the name Annabel Lee is an example of synecdoche as a name becomes representative of a person as a whole as the speaker progresses in his story. This simple replacement of a person for their name implies the shallow understanding that the speaker has of his beloved and furthers the impression of his obsession with this woman rather than a true connection. The passage "...neither the angels in Heaven above, Nor the demons down under the sea, can ever dissever my soul from the soul of Annabel Lee" (30-32) shows the level of attachment the narrator believes that he has to Annabel. The poem holds a variable tone that is fairly reliant on the reader's own interpretation of the significance of the relationship. The reader has no knowledge of how Annabel felt about her relationship with the narrator. This means that if the reader had the impression that Annabel did not reciprocate the feelings of the narrator, the tone becomes negative and eerie. On the other hand, if the reader interprets the relationship as a great love that was cut short the tone is much more positive and romantic. Because of this, it is hard to tie the tone to one specific word but regardless of reader interpretation, there is a tone of remembrance and sadness that prevails throughout the work. The main purpose of the purpose, theme, title, and tone of the poem all combine in order to establish

the work as a great piece of gothic literature that tells the story of a romance that deserves to be preserved for the rest of time.

The speaker of the poem is a young man who is deeply in love with Annabel Lee. He is at once both reverent and slightly obsequious, leaving the reader with the feeling that the narrator was truly head over heels in love with Annabel but also not completely well off because of it. This combination gives a slight uneasiness to the tone that furthers the gothic themes already present in the work. The frequent use of “my Annabel” throughout the poem in lines 10, 16, and 26 shows the possessive and attached nature of the speaker and gives insight into the high levels of emotions that accompany every line from start to finish. The speaker is having a conversation with another unspecified person, it can be inferred from the first stanza of the poem wherein the narrator says “... a maiden there lived whom you may know” (Poe 4), that the receiver of the poem is not well known by the speaker. There is not much known about the setting in which the speaker is talking to the receiver of the story. The only thing that is suggested is that they are in “this kingdom by the sea” (8) where the great romance of the speaker and Annabel occurred. There are no other indications of the time or area of the world in which the story takes place although it is not unreasonable to presume that it is a time and a place similar to that which Poe experienced during his life. Although there is little information about the physical aspects of the setting much more can be gotten out of the poem of the feeling of the setting. Details throughout the poem such as, “a wind blew out of a cloud, chilling” (15) and “nor the demons down under the sea” (31) give the eerie, cold and dark feeling of the “kingdom by the sea” (8) and add to the gothic aspects of the poem. The basic premise of the story being told by the speaker holds many

of the staple themes that identify not only just gothic literature but also of gothic poems and is pivotal in developing the significance of the poem as a historical work.

“Annabel Lee” follows a varying form pattern. It strays from the traditional strictly structured poems such as villanelles and sonnets but does not stray completely from aspects of structured poetry. Poe uses a mixture of anapest and iamb stressing patterns throughout the poem, one of the more frequently used is a combination of anapests’ with a concluding iamb such as in “but we loved, with a love, that was more than love” (9). This pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables that goes through the majority of the work gives the story a haunting song like feeling that is reminiscent of the gothic style that the is an important part of the poem. The stressed syllable is most often seen at the end of a stressing pattern regardless of the number of syllables but that too does not hold true throughout the entirety as in line 26 when in “chilling and killing my Annabel Lee” it is chill and kill that receive the stress rather than “ing”. These departures from the general structure allow for emphasis on certain areas of the poem as the song-like rhythm of the poem is interrupted and draws the reader's attention. The poem is separated into six stanzas which vary in length from six to eight lines. Each stanza holds a different subject starting with the introduction, moving into the story of their love, the story of her death, the reason for her death, the “but” with their love surviving, and concluding with a description of present actions. Aside from the meter, repetition is used within “Annabel Lee” to draw emphasis to certain ideas within the story. The line “In a kingdom by the sea” is repeated in each of the first 4 stanzas. This emphasizes the importance of the setting to the story and ensures that the gothic elements that are brought to the poem stay at the forefront of the reader’s attention. The other repetitive element of the poem is the phrase “beautiful Annabel Lee” and

simply the name “Annabel Lee”. This name repetition has a similar impression as the title but its recurrence throughout each and every stanza of the poem retains the obsessive nature of the narrator and continually reinforces the main subject matter of the work. The choices Poe makes in regards to internal and external structure allow for emphasis to be placed on specific aspects of the work and further the story of love and death as well as gothic themes.

“Annabel Lee” consists of 41 lines, making it a fairly short work in comparison with many of Poe’s other pieces. Because of this, the diction of the piece is particularly important as each word holds a larger percentage of the entire work. The use of “maiden” (3) in the first stanza is an important word choice, for the time period the term maiden would refer to a young, unmarried, innocent woman. This gives a slight bit of information not only into the age of Annabel but also into the kind of girl she was and shows that she was a well brought up and respected young woman. The recurring sound of “ee” is present in the word choice for the end of each and every even-numbered line. This ending sound that is the most prominent through the duration of the poem gives an added feeling of unease that supports the gothic aspects of the work. Imagery is not a focus of the poem in a traditional sense in which the descriptive words appeal to the senses, in “Annabel Lee” the feelings that are experienced by the reader are created through the overall tone of the poem in conjunction with the gothic theming of the work. For example, the “kingdom by the sea” (2) would initially appear to be a grand, bright, fantastical image in the mind of the reader, in this instance the gothic tone that is established greatly shifts that image to be one that is dark, cold, and stormy. Any imagery that is found in the poem is done through a method of suggestion, certain words and combinations of statements combine in the imagination of the reader and allow for that experience to appeal to the senses in a unique

way for each person who experiences the poem. One of the only significant symbols in “Annabel Lee” is the sea, being cold and vast and barren it represents the feelings of the speaker about the death of his beloved. In the description of the relation between the young lovers the narrator states that “we loved with a love that was more than love” (9) this is a light example of overstatement that is used in order to express the unique grandeur of the relationship and show the point of view of the young man in regards to their connection. All of these staples of traditional poetry are artfully used by Poe to create a piece that encompasses the defining aspects of gothic literature while telling a story of love and loss.

Many classical elements of poetry were utilized in the composition of “Annabel Lee”. Throughout the composition of “Annabel Lee”, Edgar Allan Poe makes many literary decisions that combine to create a classic example of gothic literature while illustrating a story of love and death, a staple of his style as a poet.

Annabel Lee – Edgar Allan Poe

It was many and many a year ago,||
In a kingdom by the sea,||
That a maiden there lived whom you may know
By the name of Annabel Lee; —||
And this maiden she lived with no other thought 5
Than to love and be loved by me. ||

I was a child and she was a child,
In this kingdom by the sea;||
But we loved with a love that was more than love —
I and my Annabel Lee — 10
With a love that the wingéd seraphs in Heaven
Coveted her and me.||

And this was the reason that, long ago,
In this kingdom by the sea,
A wind blew out of a cloud, chilling 15
My beautiful Annabel Lee;
So that her high-born kinsmen came
And bore her away from me,
To shut her up in a sepulchre,
In this kingdom by the sea. || 20

The angels, not half so happy in Heaven,
Went envying her and me —
Yes! — that was the reason (as all men know,
In this kingdom by the sea)
That the wind came out of the cloud by night, 25
Chilling and killing my Annabel Lee.||

But our love it was stronger by far than the love
Of those who were older than we —
Of many far wiser than we —
And neither the angels in Heaven above, 30
Nor the demons down under the sea,
Can ever dissever my soul from the soul
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee: — ||

For the moon never beams, without bringing me dreams
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee; 35
And the stars never rise, but I feel the bright eyes
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee: —
And so, all the night-tide, I lie down by the side
Of my darling — my darling — my life and my bride,
In her sepulchre there by the sea — 40
In her tomb by the sounding sea.||

Annabel Lee – Edgar Allan Poe

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B By the name of Annabel Lee; —
N And this maiden she lived with no other thought 5
B Than to love and be loved by me.
- C I was a child and *she* was a child,
B In this kingdom by the sea;
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B I and my Annabel Lee — 10
E With a love that the wingéd seraphs in Heaven
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