

Mila University Center
Course: English Literature (First Year BA)
Lesson Five: Analysis of “Annabel Lee” by Edgar Allan Poe
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Analysis of “Annabel Lee” by Edgar Allan Poe

Annabel Lee

BY 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
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—
With a love that the wingèd seraphs of 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
My beautiful Annabel Lee;
So that her highborn kinsmen came
And bore her away from me,
To shut her up in a sepulchre
In this kingdom by the sea.

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,
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
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;
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—
In her tomb by the sounding sea

I. Summary :

This ballad explores the theme of mourning the death of a beautiful woman named Annabel Lee. The speaker of this poem laments the loss of his lover with whom he was in love since he was a child. He has a strong love for her that he believes that angels, out of jealousy, killed her. It has been argued that this story is inspired by Edgar Allan Poe's real life events as he secretly married his cousin Virginia Clemm who was only thirteen years old. His wife died of tuberculosis at the age of twenty-four. Hence, it can be assumed that Virginia Clemm is the inspiration for the poem "Annabel Lee".

II. Structure of the poem: this is a rhyming ballad that consists of six stanzas. Each stanza has different number of lines. The overall rhyme scheme is ababcb dbefbf abgbhbib fbabjb ebbekb Ibmbnbb.

III. Poem Analysis:

A) Stanza one and two analysis:

- The first stanza introduces the setting of the story although it is vague. However, the indication that the events took place "many and many a year ago" suggests that the events occurred in the far past.
- The stanza also introduces Annabel Lee, a maiden who loved the speaker; this is seen in his hyperbolic words in lines five and six "And this maiden she lived with no other thought/Than to love and be loved by me".
- The speaker's statement of "whom you may know" in line four indicates that this woman was famous in her kingdom, perhaps of her beauty. This argument makes the previous statements of Annabel's great love for the speaker questionable. It can be suggested that the love of the speaker for Annabel Lee can be an unrequited and obsessive love. In that, perhaps, because of her beauty, our speaker was not the only one who was in love with Annabel Lee as he appears as though he wants to believe that she loved him insanely.
- An indication that his love for Annabel Lee is an obsession love is his constant repetition of her name throughout the poem.
- Stanza two describes how strong their love was that even seraphs (angels) from heaven desired such love.

- The tone of the speaker in these two stanzas is happy and romantic. This appears in his choice of positive words such as “love” which is repeated, “child” which symbolizes joy and innocence, “seraphs of heaven” which symbolize peace and happiness” although they are perceived in a negative way by the speaker in this poem.

B)Stanzas three and four:

- The first shift/turn of events occurs in stanza three as the speaker moves from describing his past love for Annabel Lee to demonstrating how she died.
- The tone of the speaker, as such, changes from peaceful and romantic in the first two stanzas to become angry in the stanzas three and four.
- The speaker’s angry tone occurs in his use of negative words and phrases such as “chilling”, “bore her away”, “sepulchre”, “shut her up”, “not half so happy”, “envying”, “killing”.
- In stanza three, we learn that the speaker blames Annabel’s death on the angels who coveted him and Annabel.
- The speaker believes that the angels, out of jealousy, have sent a “chilling” wind to kill Annabel Lee. At this stage, it is not confirmed that she died and we might assume that Annabel became merely ill because of the cold wind.
- The speaker’s angry tone of referring to her kinsmen who have come to take Annabel from him indicates some sort of relationship conflict that perhaps her kinsmen have been against their relationship.
- We come to learn about her death in the following stanza (four) and that the wind eventually killed Annabel Lee: “that the wind came out of the cloud by night”,/ “chilling and killing my Annabel Lee.” The speaker personifies the wind in these two lines as he gives it human characteristic of coming out and killing his beloved.

C)Stanzas Five and Six:

- The last two stanzas mark a return to a peaceful and romantic tone as the speaker shifts to emphasizing the strength of their love that neither Angels in heaven nor demons under the sea can ever “dissever” his soul from hers.

- This stanza shows the everlasting love of the speaker and Annabel Lee and that their love survives after her death and nothing can ever tear them apart.
- The last stanza indicates further the eternal love of the speaker and Annabel Lee as he can see her in dreams that the moon brings and feel her eyes on him when the stars come out. There is another personification in this stanza as the speaker gives a human characteristic of “bringing” and “rising” to the moon and the stars.

IV. Central theme of poem:

The apparent theme of this poem is the everlasting love of the speaker and Annabel Lee. Their love is challenged by Annabel Lee’s death but it proves to survive as the speaker believes that their souls are intertwined.

V. Mood: the general mood of the poem depressed and sorrowful.