


Annabel Lee

Annabel Lee

by Edgar Allan Poe	
	
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"**Annabel Lee**" is the last complete poem^[1] composed by American author Edgar Allan Poe. Like many of Poe's poems, it explores the theme of the death of a beautiful woman.^[2] The narrator, who fell in love with Annabel Lee when they were young, has a love for her so strong that even angels are envious. He retains his love for her even after her death. There has been debate over who, if anyone, was the inspiration for "Annabel Lee". Though many women have been suggested, Poe's wife Virginia Eliza Clemm Poe is one of the more credible candidates. Written in 1849, it was not published until shortly after Poe's death that same year.

Synopsis

The poem's narrator describes his love for Annabel Lee, which began many years ago in a so-called "kingdom by the sea". Though they were young, their love for one another burned with such an intensity that angels became envious. It is for that reason that the narrator believes the seraphim caused her death. Even so, their love is strong enough that it extends beyond the grave and the narrator believes their two souls are still entwined. Every night, he dreams of Annabel Lee and sees the brightness of her eyes in the stars. He admits that every night he lies down by her side in her tomb by the sea.

Analysis

Like many other Poe poems including "The Raven", "Ulalume", and "To One in Paradise", "Annabel Lee" follows Poe's favorite theme: the death of a beautiful woman, which Poe called "the most poetical topic in the world".^[3] Like women in many other works by Poe, she is struck with illness and marries young.^[4] The poem focuses on an ideal love which is unusually strong. In fact, the narrator's actions show that he not only loves Annabel Lee, but he worships her, something he can only do after her death.^[5] The narrator admits that he and Annabel Lee were children when they fell in love, but his explanation that angels murdered her is in itself childish, suggesting he has not matured much since then.^[6] His repetition of this assertion suggests he is trying to rationalize his own excessive

feelings of loss.

Unlike "The Raven", in which the narrator believes he will "nevermore" be reunited with his love, "Annabel Lee" says the two will be together again, as not even demons "can ever dissever" their souls.

Poetic structure

"Annabel Lee" consists of six stanzas, three with six lines, one with seven, and two with eight, with the rhyme pattern differing slightly in each one. Though it is not technically a ballad, Poe referred to it as one.^[7] Like a ballad, the poem uses repetition of words and phrases purposely to create its mournful effect. The name Annabel Lee emphasizes the letter "L", a frequent device in Poe's female characters such as "Eulalie", "Lenore", and "Ulalume".^[8]

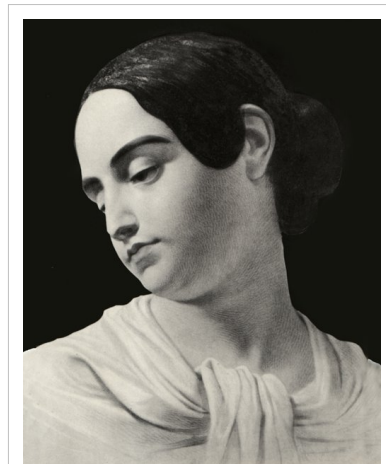
There is debate on the last line of the poem. The Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore, Maryland has identified 11 versions of "Annabel Lee" that were published between 1849 and 1850.^[9] However, the biggest variation is in the final line:

Original manuscript: *In her tomb by the side of the sea*

Alternative version: *In her tomb by the sounding sea*

Inspiration

It is unclear to whom the eponymous character Annabel Lee is referring.^[10] Biographers and critics often suggest Poe's frequent use of the "death of a beautiful woman" theme stems from the repeated loss of women throughout his own life, including his mother Eliza Poe and his foster mother Frances Allan.^[11] Biographers often interpret that "Annabel Lee" was written for Poe's wife Virginia, who had died two years prior, as was suggested by poet Frances Sargent Osgood, though Osgood is herself a candidate for the poem's inspiration. A strong case can be made for Poe's wife Virginia: She was the one he loved as a child, the only one who had been his bride, and the only one who had died.^[12] Autobiographical readings of the poem have also been used to support the theory that Virginia and Poe never consummated their marriage, as "Annabel Lee" was a "maiden".^[13] Critics, including T.O. Mabbott, believed that Annabel Lee was merely the product of Poe's gloomy imagination and that Annabel Lee was no real person in particular. A childhood sweetheart of Poe's named Sarah Elmira Royster believed the poem was written with her in mind^[14] and that Poe himself said so.^[15] Sarah Helen Whitman and Sarah Anna Lewis also claimed to have inspired the poem.^[16]



Poe's wife Virginia is often assumed to be the inspiration for "Annabel Lee".

Local legend in Charleston, South Carolina tells the story of a sailor who met a woman named Annabel Lee. Her father disapproved of the pairing and the two met privately in a graveyard before the sailor's time stationed in Charleston was up. While away, he heard of Annabel's death from yellow fever, but her father would not allow him at the funeral. Because he did not know her exact burial location, he instead kept vigil in the cemetery where they had often secretly met. There is no evidence that Edgar Allan Poe had heard of this legend, but locals insist it was his inspiration, especially considering Poe was briefly stationed in Charleston while in the army in 1827.^[17]

Publication history and reception

"Annabel Lee" was likely composed in May 1849. Poe took steps to ensure the poem would be seen in print. He gave a copy to Rufus Wilmot Griswold, his literary executor and personal rival, gave another copy to John Thompson to repay a \$5 debt, and sold a copy to *Sartain's Union Magazine* for publication. Though *Sartain's* was the first authorized printing in January 1850, Griswold was the first to publish it on October 9, 1849, two days after Poe's death as part of his obituary of Poe in the *New York Daily Tribune*. Thompson had it published in the *Southern Literary Messenger* in November 1849.

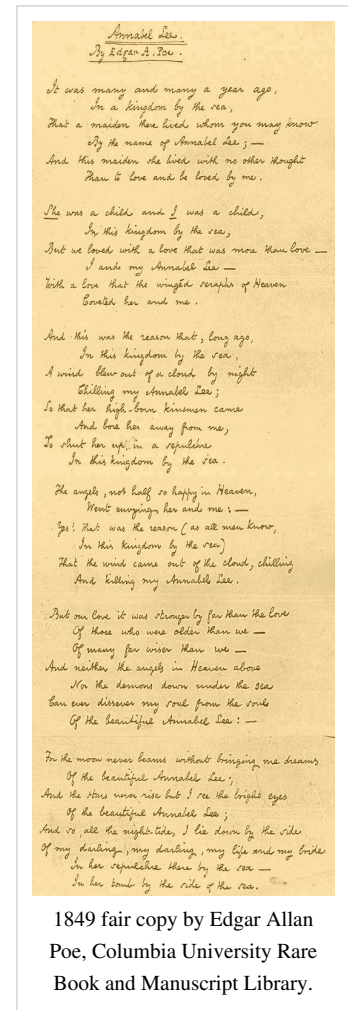
"Annabel Lee" was an inspiration for Vladimir Nabokov, especially for his novel *Lolita* (1955), in which the narrator, as a child, falls in love with the terminally ill Annabel Leigh "in a princedom by the sea". Originally, Nabokov titled the novel *The Kingdom by the Sea*.^[18] Nabokov would later use this as the title of the *Lolita* "doppelganger novel" in *Look at the Harlequins!*.

Adaptations

- Stevie Nicks recorded a version of this poem on her 2011 album, *In Your Dreams*.

References

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External links

- Publication history (<http://www.eapoe.org/works/info/pp097.htm>) at the Edgar Allan Poe Society (<http://www.eapoe.org>)
 - Audio – hear the poem read (http://www.reelyredd.com/0706annabel_lee.htm)
 - " Annabelle Lee (<http://www.victorianweb.org/mt/parlorsongs/1.html>)" [*sic*], a 19th-century musical version by Henry Leslie, sung by Derek B. Scott
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