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November 10, 2015

The Deconstructive Approach Towards "Annabel Lee" by Edgar Allan Poe

Abstract

The paper aims to have deconstructive approach towards Edgar Allan Poe's Annabel Lee. The analysis of one of the best works of the most outstanding representative of Romanticism focuses on the purposes of the poem and the influences by which it was created. In addition, referring to well-known poststructuralists Jacques Derrida and Ferdinand de Saussure, the deep meaning within Poe's last poem is examined.

Introduction

Romanticism, as any theory, influenced literature in its own unique way. One of the many principals of Romanticism is appreciating love through expressing feelings and trusting intuition. With a pen and a paper romantic poets tried to describe a feeling that is beyond description. "Annabel Lee" remains one of the most significant and recognisable masterpieces of romantic poet Edgar Allan Poe. The reason why this particular work outstands from his other poems is that it was written one month before his mysterious death. Nowadays it is known as his last complete poem. 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". (Meyers, 243)

The poems' narrator describes his enthralled love to Annabel Lee, who is eventually taken away by envious angels. However, it remains unknown to whom the character of Annabel Lee is referring. Biographers and critics often suggest Poe's frequent use of the "death of a beautiful woman" theme grows from the repeated loss of women throughout his own life, including his mother Eliza Poe and his foster mother Frances Allan. It is widely believed that "Annabel Lee" was written for Poe's wife Virginia, who had died two years before the creation of the poem. She was the one he loved as a child, the only one who had been his bride, and the only one who had died, being his lover. "Annabel Lee" is only one of more than 50 Poe's poems, however still remains one of his best works and most considerable representations of the era of Romanticism.

Methodology

According to Derrida "deconstruction does not settle for methodical procedures". Despite the fact that deconstruction does not include a clear-cut strategy or methodology, various methods to collect and generate data were used during analysing Poe's poem. Sources such as books and websites were used to find and examine "Annabel Lee". Also biographical articles were analysed to find the connection between Poe's life and the poem.

The process of analysing data included a few steps. The identification of the binary oppositions by which the poem is structured, demonstration of their hierarchical organization and the application of TPCAST. Also to deconstruct a poem from various sides, theories of Derrida and Saussure were also used.

Data Analysis and Discussion

T: Title - At the first sight, the title "Annabel Lee" suggests that Annabel might have been someone the author knew very well or missed. From prior knowledge of Edgar Allan

Poe he could be referring to his wife, Virginia. She was only 13 years old, which is reflected in the lines:

I was a child and she was a child,

In this kingdom by the sea;

However, local legend in Charleston, South Carolina could be also an inspiration for Poe's poem. It tells the story of a sailor who met a woman named Annabel Lee. Her father disapproved of their love and the two met privately in a graveyard before the sailor's time stationed in Charleston was over. 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. (Crawford)

P: Paraphrase - The poem focuses on a girl named Annabel Lee that was loved very deeply by the narrator:

And this maiden she lived with no other thought

Than to love and be loved by me.

She loved him as well. Annabel lived by the water in a place that Edgar refers to as a “kingdom”. She was younger than the author but they loved each other so much that angels were jealous of their love:

But we loved with a love that was more than love -

I and my Annabel Lee -

With a love that the wingéd seraphs of Heaven

Coveted her and me.

As a result of the angels being jealous they sent the wind to kill Annabel. Nevertheless, they loved each other so much that not even her death could separate them. The author dreams of Annabel all the time and lies by her tomb at night by the beautiful sea.

C: Connotation - The rhyme Poe uses creates a wavelike pattern, much like the sea he writes about. He uses a lot of synonyms to bring attention to the words he wants to repeat. For example, the word "beautiful" is repeated through the poem to show emphasis of how beautiful Annabel Lee was. The personification of the wind in the poem exists as a way for Poe to describe the greater illustration of how angels took away the narrator's lover. In addition, the figures of the angels are appeared to be a great metaphor for the life consequences that took away the woman, who stands behind Annabel Lee, if the poem is autobiographical. The setting of the poem also is put in contrast: "kingdom by the sea" is a metaphor for narrator and Annabel's Lee life together, which was interrupted by her death.

A: Attitude - The tone and mood of the poem can be defined as somber, yet light hearted. The narrator's attitude toward Annabel Lee and her death is clearly a nostalgic one. Despite the fact that he continues to miss her and sleep in her tomb, the tone of the poem is pretty much tender, as the whole poem emphasizes love. At the same time, the attitude remains to be depressing and full of mythical quality. The death of Annabel Lee and narrator's struggles next to her tomb bring a dark attitude to the poem, which is very common for Edgar Allan Poe's works.

S: Shift - At the beginning, the tone and the whole impression of the poem happens to be soft and light due to the praising of the great love between the narrator and Annabel Lee. Their love started in "the kingdom by the sea", and grew up to be extremely strong.

However, the main shift happens when envious angels decided to murder Annabel Lee with the wind. From now on, the narrator suffers from the loss of his dearest love and the mood of the poem shifts from a light loving tone to a dark depressing description of the suffers. Furthermore, This willful torture is best displayed in the last stanza when it is revealed that the narrator sleeps in Annabel Lee's tomb.

T: Tittle - As the poem was read and examined, the tittle is now obviously reffering to narrator's love of the life named Annabel Lee. The significance of the title is that it is only her name and no other words to let the author show how valuable she was to him.

T: Theme - Like many of Poe's poems, this one explores the theme of the death of a beautiful woman. Poe's life was full of loses, including his biological and stepmother, and his younge wife. Also, the theme of the love and feelings over reason is one of the main concerns of Romantic poets. Poe is considered to present a Depressive Romanticism, which can be senn in *Annabel Lee*. Unlike many Poe's poems, this one focuses on the infinity of love and on how boundless this feeling could be. The emphasizing of the higher inner feeling is noticed throughout the whole poem. Therefore, the main theme of *Annabel Lee* is that love is stronger than anything on earth, even death.

Language and Power

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.

Language might either empower the speaker or weaken him, depends on the quality of author's work. According to Swiss linguist Saussure, language is made up of signs and every sign has two sides. Saussure's "theory of the sign" defined a sign being made up of both signifier and signified. The part of the sign Saussure calls the "concept" or "meaning" he named, "signified". (Saussure, 54) Saussurian concept of a sign can be applied to various works of literature to determine the signifier and the signified, or in other words, the object and what it describes. Below are some signifiers and signified nested within the poem.

Signifier	Signified #1	Signified #2
1.Kingdom	A state or government having a king or queen as its head. Poe could possibly meant the actual kingdom by the sea, where the narrator and Annabel Lee lived and met. However, in his poem, there are no signs of other people, which can meant that this kingdom belongs only to lovers.	The spiritual sovereignty of God or Christ.The heart of Jesus' teachings centers around the theme of the kingdom of God. This expression is found in sixty-one separate sayings in the Synoptic Gospels.(Bible Study Tools, par.1) "The kingdom by the sea" can be understood as the kingdom of God which is seen as God's rule in the human heart.
2.Maiden	A girl or young unmarried	An instrument resembling

	woman. In the poem, "maiden" can literary mean a young Annabel Lee, referring to her innocence and beauty.	the guillotine, formerly used in Scotland for beheading criminals. It can be a metaphor for danger, sorrow, and even death, which Annabel Lee had to face. Her death brought sorrow and sober to the narrator.
3.Seraphs	A member of the highest order of angels, often represented as a child's head with wings above, below, and on each side. Can represent innocence, protection and wisdom. The forces of the higher power.	Ones of the celestial beings hovering above God's throne in Isaiah's vision. Dangerous power, granted by strong force such as Heaven.
4.Night	The period between sunset and sunrise.	Darkness, danger, depression. The night covered the kingdom before Annabel Lee's death.
5.Wind	Air in natural motion, as that moving horizontally.	Destructive, powerful force, which is able to take away the life.
6.Soul	<p>The spiritual part of humans regarded in its moral aspect, or as believed to survive death and be subject to happiness or misery in a life to come. In the lines:</p> <p><i>Nor the demons down under the sea</i></p> <p><i>Can ever dissever my soul from the soul</i></p> <p>The "soul" represents spiritual connection between the narrator and Annabel Lee</p>	

	even after her death. Nothing can separate them from each other.	
7.Demons	An evil spirit; devil or fiend. Danger and sin. The evil force that tried to separate souls of lovers.	
8.Sea	Infinity, stream of consciousness, endless love, deep and unpredictable feelings. Narrators love to Annabel Lee as deep and infinite as the waters of the sea. Also, it is dangerous and unpredictable, like waves, due to her sudden death.	
9.Tomb	An excavation in earth or rock for the burial of a corpse; grave.	The place where soul is buried. The metaphor for Afterlife. The body lies in the ground, when the soul still lives.
10.Love	Deep feeling between narrator and Annabel Lee. The strongest state of mind that keeps them together. A metaphor for happiness, the friendship of souls and higher truth.	

Binary oppositions

Derrida first uses the term *différance* in his work "Cogito et histoire de la folie". The idea of binary oppositions is a reflection of Derrida's *Différance*. Derrida suggests that opposites are already united and they depend on each other integrally. As for example, no presence without absence. Derrida re-emphasizes the point of Saussure related to sign, and stated that

meaning isn't in the signifier itself, but that it only exists in a connection, in relation to other things. One of the most significant binary oppositions in *Annabel Lee* are simple and appeared to be evil versus virtue.

The figures of angels play one of the most controversial roles in Poe's *Annabel Lee*. The term "angel" has also been expanded to various appearances of spirits found in many other religious traditions. They are believed to be the guardians of human souls, with their power granted by God. In art they are often shown in light colors with bird-like wings on their back, a halo and forms of glowing light.

As angels are the representation of holy forces in various world religions they are often shown to be the ones who bring balance and virtue. For example, in Islam one of the angel's main tasks is granting humans abundant wealth and curing their illness.

In *Annabel Lee* the holiness of angels emphasized in the third stanza:

*My beautiful Annabel Lee;
So that her highborn kinsmen came
And bore her away from me*

The author glorifies Annabel to a such great extent that he compares her innocence and pureness with angel's, stating that they are her relatives. For narrator, Annabel Lee is a clear representation of Virtue and Beauty. Therefore, the phrase "her highborn kinsmen" puts Annabel and angels side by side, making both a reflection of holy qualities.

However, in the poem the vision of holy guardians and the follower of virtue fades away. The angels in the poem play completely opposite role and appeared to be not saviours, but the murderers of the young women:

*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*

In the first line of the stanza, "the angels, not half so happy in Heaven", Poe refers to sinful angels, which in Christianity called "fallen angels". Fallen angels are the binary opposites of ordinary angels that people think of. The term "fallen angel" does not appear in the Bible, but it is used of angels who sinned and has been cast out of heaven. However, the angels in Poe's poem are not cast out yet. In the line "Went envying her and me" one can examine that angels have succumbed to one of the Seven sins: envy. They were so jealous of narrator's and Annabel's love, that they "bore her away" and "shut her up in a sepulchre".

One of the most famous fallen angels is Lucifer himself, the incarnation of the pure vice and darkness. According to christian religion, all fallen angels are influenced by him and commit deeds in his honor. Demons were also mentioned in the poem:

*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;*

The author point out that both demons and angels have the same aim, which is to kill and separate Annabel from his lover. As the angels are willing to do the same sinful deeds as the habitats of the Hell, they can be with no doubt the embodiment of the evil forces, even though their place is in the Heaven.

The idea of the evil in the incarnation of the fallen angels and the virtue in the picture of good angels reflects Derrida's Différance. Without one, another cannot exist. As they are binary oppositions, they balance the scales and equalize each other.

Conclusion

One of the most primary tasks of deconstructionist is to find, analyze and determine the various meaning behind author's works. The deconstruction of Edgar Allan Poe's *Annabel Lee* approaches the otherness of the text. Poe's works are considered to be one of the most influential pieces of the Romantic Era. His creations influenced the whole genre of mystery and a lot of well-known and recognized authors, such as Nabokov, Kafka and Julio Cortazar. The poem *Annabel Lee* is one of the most mysterious ones from his works, due to it was written the last. It is known that Poe made sure that the poem would be published. Unfortunately he did not have a chance to witness it, as he died a month after the poem's "birth". The lack of information Poe gave about his masterpiece lefts a lot of questions open, therefore it can be seen as a perfect example of work to deconstruct and apply theories of Derrida and Saussure.

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