

The Death of Beauty in Edgar Allan Poe's Poetry

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Abstract

In "The Philosophy of Composition" Poe writes that the death of a beautiful woman is the most poetical subject in the world. This perverse and personal opinion is the outcome of tragedies in his life. Poe was deeply attached to various beautiful women who died young, leaving him obsessed with his need of woman and fear of death and annihilation. The study traces the nature of Poe's relation with woman and his notion of her death as reflected in his aesthetic theory and poetry. The poems chosen in this study are notable for their tone of sorrow after the death of a beautiful beloved which becomes a predominant motif in Poe's literary output.

"رحيل الجمال في شعر ادكر الن بو"

في مقالته المشهورة "فلسفة الكتابة" يرى ادكر الن بو ان موت امرأة جميلة يعتبر موضوعاً شعرياً ثراً، و ربما يكون هذا الرأي الغريب نوعاً ما انعكاساً لمحطات مأساوية في حياة الشاعر نفسه. ففي حياة "بو" نساء جميلات متن مبكراً، تاركات "بو" مهوساً بحاجته للمرأة ومسكوناً بخوف من الفناء. وتتميز القصائد المختارة في هذه الدراسة بنبرتها الحزينة بعد رحيل الحبيبة الجميلة، والذي اصبح موضوعاً رئيسية في المنجز الشعري "البو".

*Thou wast that all to me, love,
 For which my soul did pine-
 A green isle in the sea, love,
 A fountain and a shrine,
 And wreathed with fairy fruits and flowers,
 And all the flowers were mine . . .*

Edgar Allan Poe

Numerous attempts have been made to disclose Edgar Allan Poe's (1809- 49) reason for linking woman and death. But what is of real importance are those features of his work that would mould the responsive reader's notion of woman, features that would transform her into a means for transporting Poe and his readers to the anguish of decease and bereavement, and would confine woman to "a death- oriented function."¹

Scholars, however, justify Poe's concern with dead women by listing the deaths that happened during his lifetime, trying to illustrate how they inspired him. Poe's mother, Elizabeth Arnold Poe (1787- 1811), was deserted by her husband, David Poe, in 1810. This besides her being infected with tuberculosis, her pregnancy and her hard work as an actress on the stage brought her early death while Poe was three. Prior to her death she suffered severely.

All the while her little son and her baby daughter were with her, hearing her cough and moan, witnessing her tears at the knowledge that she must soon leave them . . . on the aware, sensitive mind of her intelligent three- year old son, the sights and sounds of the sickroom . . . the mother's despair and anguish, the gradual change in the familiar face, must have left their unforgettable marks.²

Losing his mother's love early in life, Poe developed an urgent want of woman's affection. This explains his later ideal love for the mother of his schoolfellow Robert Stanard. Mrs. Jane Stith Stanard (1793- 1824) was a woman of impressive beauty and classic features, and was exceptional in her affection and benevolence. "Her house was an exceedingly delightful one, bathed in sunshine from the great garden beyond. By the young poet . . . [Mrs. Stanard] seems always to have been remembered as a person who radiated light."³ In her Poe had experienced the chivalrous archetype of a boy's first love; he worshipped her inspiring beauty and saw in her the incarnation of motherly affection, care and tenderness. Ramij Lall writes:

In the course of time, she represented to Poe not only the mother he had lost but the ideal of romantic womanhood which he had been reading about in books. He saw in her the purity and spirituality of Dante's Beatrice, the beauty of Helen of Troy, and the aggregate of all the virtues which had inspired poets.⁴

Mrs. Stanard read Poe's verses and offered her useful criticism and support. He identified himself with her, both estranged from their surroundings. They were "types of those super- sensitive natures whose higher inner processes take place in that holy land of sensibility, the western border of which . . . often marches with the kingdom of insanity."⁵ So Mrs. Stanard was going insane and died in the thirty- first year of her age. For the fifteen- year old boy and later for the mature poet she symbolized the unattainable ideal and inspired Poe to write his great poem "To Helen," in which she is depicted as all majesty, nobility and brightness:

*Lo! in yon brilliant window niche
How statue- like I see thee stand,
The agate lamp within thy hand!*
(SW, p. 68)⁶

About the time of Mrs. Stanard's death the health of Poe's foster mother, Mrs. Frances Keeling Allan (1784- 1829), was declining. She was one of the biggest loves in Poe's life; the bonds of indebtedness and sincere attachment which tied him to her were firm. Mrs. Allan was an orphan herself which enabled her to share with Poe mutual understanding, besides she considered him the son she never actually had. When she died, however, Poe was abroad to arrive only after her being buried, leaving him to face an inimical world alone. Mrs. Allen died aware of the troublesome relation between Poe and her husband Mr. John Allan (1780- 1834). Her last wish was that Mr. Allan should never abandon their adopted son, yet the relation between father and son continued to deteriorate, forcing Poe to seek a new home.

In August 1829 Poe had gone to live with his aunt Mrs. Maria Poe Clemm where he first met his cousin and wife to be Virginia Maria Clemm (1822- 47). Virginia was a cheerful school girl, buxom, with violet eyes and dark hair. Poe used to call her 'Sis' and 'Sissie,' and "the child like and helpless affection, one of complete trust on her part, and of protection and solicitude on Poe's, now began."⁷ Poe married Virginia in 1835; she was about thirteen while he was twenty- seven. David Rogers mentions that the differences in their ages seem to the modern readers as absurd, but in America's " pre- war South it was common for girls to marry when they were very young, a practice that was more often than not the rule in Europe at that time."⁸ Also the marriage was a sort of family arrangement in which Poe secured a home with his aunt Mrs. Clemm and her daughter. On her part, Mrs. Clemm loved Poe who was of her own blood; she needed his guardian and aid. Still, from a different perspective, Poe

was troubled in his heart by the fact that Virginia was his full cousin, and by her extreme youth. He was troubled and yet attracted. . . . The relations with Virginia lie very close to the core of his inner mystery. . . . It was not the charming and simple affair that those in love with convention would have us believe. About it was the haunted gray twilight of near incest that troubled his deepest dreams.⁹

Virginia was disfigured by an ashen face, an early sign of tuberculosis which she later developed and died of. Her ordeal, slightly red yet pale complexion, the wide liquid eyes, and her more 'ethereal' characteristics were recreated time and again in Poe's literary work. She became part of Poe's adversity and the model of his heroine. According to C.C. Burr, "'many times, after the death of his beloved wife, . . . [Poe was] found at the dead hour of a winter-night, sitting beside her tomb almost frozen in the snow, where he had wandered from his bed weeping and wailing.'"¹⁰ At home he was unable to sleep and went mad in the dark lonely nights that Mrs. Clemm had to keep vigil by his beside.

Poe took a main part in aggravating his own anguish. As in his personal life, so in his literary work, gloom and torment fascinated him. In "The Philosophy of Composition," Poe explains his philosophy of 'Beauty:'

When, indeed, men speak of Beauty, they mean, precisely, not a quality, as is supposed, but an effect- they refer, in short, just to that intense and pure elevation of *soul-* not of intellect, or of heart- upon which I have commented, and which is experienced of contemplating 'the beautiful.'

(*SW*, p. 483)

In other words, according to Poe, the merit of what is contemplated is in its impact on the observer, and the subject takes an entire precedence over its

object. In Poe's work the exaltation of 'Beauty' is inevitably linked with melancholy through the portrayal of "the death . . . of a beautiful woman" (SW, p. 487), delivered via "the lips . . . of a bereaved lover" (SW, p. 486). Poe believes that extreme and lofty 'Beauty' bears a shade of melancholy because it "gives the poet a glimpse of a higher, powerful existence of perfection that is faraway and unattainable, at least for the time being."¹¹ Poe wallowed in his "most poetic topic in the world" (SW, p. 486) by tackling the death of a beautiful woman repeatedly.

The death of beauty is the subject of "The Sleeper;" which is an elegy originally entitled "Irene." The poem is delivered by the afflicted lover over the death of his beautiful beloved. It opens in the month of June, when the lover contemplates his beloved moonlit tomb, situated in the deep valley which may rightly represent the all- embracing valley of death: "At midnight, in the month of June, / I stand beneath the mystic moon" (SW, p. 73). The lover feels that the "golden rim" of the moon is distilling a thrilling, wet and mysterious fragrance. The perfume falls in drops upon the mountain top, secretly rolling into the valley and drawing his beloved Irene into a state of eternal sleep:

*An opiate vapour, dewy, dim,
Exhales from out her golden rim,
And, softly dripping, drop by drop,
Upon the quiet mountain top,
Steals drowsily and musically
Into the universal valley.*

(SW, p. 73)

The lover continues describing the gloomy scene as the rosemary nods in lovable loyalty at Irene's grave, while the lily, symbolizing purity, shakes

above a mysterious lake. The grave itself is wrapped in fog while quietly decaying:

*The rosemary nods upon the grave;
The lily lolls upon the wave;
Wrapping the fog about its breast;
The ruin moulders into rest . . .*
(SW, p. 73)

The still lake is compared to the river Lethe which is crossed over by the souls of the dead. The lake is sleeping soundly and would not be awakened for the world. The lover mentions that all beauty sleeps in the valley and that Irene sleeps there too with all her destinies getting obscure to him, i.e., "Irene is dead, and her future course of life would be determined by the supreme powers of the world:"¹²

*Looking like Lethe, see! the lake
A conscious slumber seems to take,
And would not, for the world, awake.
All Beauty sleeps! - and lo! where lies
Irene, with her destinies!*
(SW, p.73)

The lover wonders whether truly his beloved tomb lattice opens at night, admitting the merry wanton breezes in. This image reveals his frightful notion of death being mingled with his grief. It is noteworthy to mention that as in this poem, so in Poe's other love poems the setting is at night - time, suggesting mystery and evil:

*Oh, lady bright! can it be right-
This window open to the night?
The wanton airs, from the tree- top,
Laughingly through the lattice drop-*
(SW, p. 73)

The lover's anxious imagination continues visualizing death as he describes the unseen breezes magically passing in and out of the beloved's bed-chamber in the tomb. They sway her 'curtain canopy' regularly and frightfully:

*The bodiless airs, a wizard rout,
Flit through thy chamber in and out,
And wave the curtain canopy
So fitfully- so fearfully. . .
(SW, p. 73)*

The horrified and grim image of death extends as Irene's soul is depicted lying placidly in the coffin, while over the floor and down the wall of the tomb shadows like ghosts keep rising and falling:

*Above the closed and fringed lid
'Neath which thy slumb'ring soul lies hid,
That, o'er the floor and down the wall,
Like ghosts the shadows rise and fall!
(SW, p. 73)*

The love wonders whether Irene is not frightened in her dead bed, and what possibly could she be dreaming about. In her new dwelling place she seems to have come from an exotic land across the remote seas. She is a cause of amazement to the trees growing around her burial place:

*Oh, lady dear, hast thou no fear?
Why and what art thou dreaming here?
Sure thou art come o'er far- off seas,
A wonder to these garden trees!
(SW, pp. 73-74)*

The lover gradually comes to realize that it is death which grants Irene her exotic appearance; her pale complexion, strange dress, profound stillness, and

long hair. It was believed that the hair retains the spark of life and continues to grow after death:

*Strange is thy pallor! strange they dress!
Strange above all, thy length of tress,
And this all solemn silentness!*
(SW, p. 74)

After fully comprehending Irene's new situation, that she is dead, the lover wants her lasting sleep to be deep. He wants her to remain secure in sacred heaven:

*The lady sleeps! Oh, may her sleep,
Which is enduring, so be deep!
Heaven have her in its sacred keep!*
(SW, p. 74)

He also wants Irene's burial place to be changed from the present deserted holy valley to her family's holier burial vault. She would be then buried with her ancestors in a more glorious and more melancholic place: "This chamber changed for one more holy, / This bed for one more melancholy" (SW, p. 74). The lover prays that Irene remains sleeping with her eyes closed so she may not see the roving ghosts:

*I pray to God that she may lie
Forever with unopened eye,
While the pale sheeted ghosts go by!*
(SW, p. 74)

The lover's complete surrender to the notion of Irene's death is apparent as he wants the worms to creep gently over her body: "Softly may the worms about her creep" (SW, p. 74). He repeats his desire that Irene be buried in her family vault, at the dark and ancient forest. This vault had often flung open its wooden

gates to receive the funeral procession of Irene's ancestors:

*Far in the forest, dim and old,
For her may some tall vault unfold -
Some vault that oft hath flung its black
And winged panels fluttering back,
Triumphant, o'er the crested palls,
Of her grand family funerals-
(SW, p. 74)*

During her lifetime, Irene scorned all that was dim and unpleasant. Therefore, at tombs she "hath thro, / In childhood, many an idle stone" (SW, p74). She was oblivious that the dead could be groaning inside their tombs. The innocence of this lady is 'thrilling to think' about. "It may also cause enough to pity her, and so the exclamation on the part of the poet 'poor child of sin:'"¹³

*Some tomb from out whose sounding door
She ne'er shall force an echo more,
Thrilling to think, poor child of sin!
It was the dead who groand within.
(SW, p. 74)*

In this respect, Kenneth Silverman believes that

Poe "nourished himself on a young woman's death, in the sense that art was for him a form of mourning a revisitation of his past and of what he had lost, as if trying to make them right. Since nothing could, he returned to the subject of 'the one and only . . . beloved' again and again."¹⁴

The mourning for the death of the beautiful beloved takes the form of celebration in Poe's next poem, "Lenore," in which the dead beloved is believed to be released from earthly bonds and mortals' cruelty. The poem begins with a priest bemoaning Lenore's premature death, describing her spiritless body as a broken golden bowl: "Ah, broken is the golden bowl! the

spirit flown forever" (SW, p. 75). He wants the funeral bells to peal out as Lenore's pure spirit is crossing the Stygian river, the river that flows between the world of the living and that of the dead: "Let the bell toll!- a saintly soul floats on the Stygian river" (SW, p. 75). The priest tells Guy de Vere, Lenore's lover, to shed tears of mourning on her death now or nevermore, and to look at his beloved body lying on a desolate and stiff bier: "And, Guy de Vere, hast *thou* no tear? - weep now or never more!/ See! on yon drear and rigid bier low lies thy love, Lenore" (SW, p. 75). The priest wants the burial rites to take place and the dirge to be sung for the most graceful woman who died young:

*Come! let the burial rite be read- the funeral song be
sung!-
An anthem for the queenliest dead that ever died so young-
A dirge for her the doubly dead in that she died so young.
(SW, p. 75)*

Guy de Vere replies that the priest and Lenore's relatives loved her for her wealth and detested her for her pride. When Lenore fell ill and died, they were pleased: "'Wretches! ye loved her for her wealth and hated her for her pride,/ 'And when she fell in feeble health, ye blessed her- that she died'" (SW, p. 75). Guy de Vere denies that a ritual is done and a dirge is sung while Lenore is surrounded by those who loathed, envied, defamed and thus brought her early death:

*'How shall the ritual, then, be read? - the requiem how be sung
'By you – by yours, the evil eye, - by yours, the slanderous
tongue
'That did to death the innocent that died, and died so young?'
(SW, p. 75)*

The priest admits that he and others were sinners, yet demands that Guy de Vere should not go wild by grief. He believes that hymns should be sung

and reach God that Lenore may not feel dishonored: "*Peccavimus*; but rave not thus! and let a Sabbath song/ Go up to God so solemnly the dead may feel no wrong" (SW, p. 75). The priest believes that Lenore has already gone to the other world, expecting that prayers would follow her: "The sweet Lenore hath 'gone before,' with Hope, that flew beside" (SW, p. 75). He tells Guy de Vere that the cause of his wild grief is that Lenore was his future wife, but now his fair beloved lies dead with marks of life upon her hair and death upon her eyes:

*Leaving thee wild for the dear child that should have been thy
bride-
For her, the fair and debonair, that now so lowly lies,
The life upon her yellow hair but not within her eyes-
The life still there, upon her hair- the death upon her eyes.
(SW, p. 75)*

According to Edward H. Davidson, "Poe's poems and tales are ritual incantations to the erotically desirable young woman who is forever white, aloof, reserved, virginal, bridal whether she lies on the wedding bed or the funeral bier."¹⁵ Guy de Vere, however, insists that the priest and Lenore's relatives should leave the funeral as Lenore's pure soul has flown away, leaving behind hostile people, affliction and moan:

*'Avaunt! – avaunt! from fiends below, the indignant ghost is
riven-
'From hell unto a high estate far up within the Heaven-
'From grief and groan, to a golden throne, beside the King of
Heaven.'*
(SW, p. 75)

He wants no funeral bells be rung lest her saintly soul, amid its sacred happiness, get troubled by the notes floating up from the cursed earth. Guy de Vere feels his heart becoming light and he starts praising God through a song

of thanksgiving which was sung in ancient times:

*Let no bell toll then! – lest her soul, amid its hallowed mirth,
Should catch the note as it doth float up from the damned
Earth!-
And! – to- night my heart is light! No dirge will I upraise,
But waft the angel on her flight with a Paen of old days!
(SW, p. 75)*

Guy de Vere's belief that Lenore's spirit has soared to a superior world reflects Poe's conviction that "the best attitude for an elegiac poem is triumph."¹⁶

In contrast to Guy de Vere's reconciliation with death, Poe's "The Raven" presents a susceptible and worried sensibility, tormented by the fear of death and nihilism. "The Raven" is about a distressed student mourning the death of his beloved Lenore, while the growth of his consciousness becomes the main thread that runs throughout the poem. This is rendered in an account of a weird incident that befell the student one windy December night.

The setting of the poem is the student's room where his attempt to heal his sorrow by night- long study was unavailing. He was fatigued and drowsy when he heard a tender rapping at his chamber door. The noise aroused his fear and as he went to open the door, he convinced himself that it could be nothing but a visitor. This establishes the atmosphere of suspense that pervades the poem:

*Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and
weary,
Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore –
While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,
As of some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door*

*'T is some visiter, 'I muttered, 'tapping at my chamber door-
Only this and nothing more.'*

(SW, p. 77)

Originally, at that stormy night, the student linked every movement, even his motivations, to the spirit of the dead Lenore. He was alert to every motion in his chamber that his books would not divert his mind from the ghost- like embers falling on the chamber floor and the rustling of the purple curtains:

*And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon the
floor.*

.....
.....*Vainly I had sought to borrow
From my books surcease of sorrow- sorrow for the lost Lenore-*

.....
*And the silken, sad, uncertain rustling of each purple curtain
Thrilled me- filled me with fantastic terrors never felt before . . .*

(SW, p. 77)

The hesitant student went to open the door and was faced by the empty darkness of night. He remained frozen with fear and all horrible visions came to his mind. Believing it was the spirit of Lenore, though not without fear, he broke the silence and whispered her name, to which the faint echo of his voice came in reply:

*Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there wondering,
fearing,*

*Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream
before;*

*But the silence was unbroken, and the stillness gave no token,
And the only word there spoken was the whispered word,
'Lenore!'*

*This I whispered and an echo murmured back the word 'Lenore!'
Merely this and nothing more.*

(SW, p. 77)

The tapping was resumed and the student headed towards the window

believing it was the work of the wind. He opened it to find "a stately Raven of the saintly days of yore" (SW, p. 78). The black bird, like a mourner, flew into the room and perched above the bust of Pallas, the Greek goddess of wisdom and enlightenment, which was located on the top of the student's chamber door. Discovering the source of tapping gave the student a feeling of relief, besides; "the grave and stern decorum of the countenance . . . [the Raven] wore" (SW, p. 78) drove the student's "sad face into smiling" (SW, p. 78). He amusingly asked the Raven about its name and to which, unexpectedly, the Raven replied 'Nevermore.' As Davidson writes, the student felt "such surprise to have a black embodiment of reality when he had hoped for a visitation of a ghost."¹⁷

The student sat speculating on the true essence of the Raven which fiery eyes were penetrating into his bosom. He leant his head against the velvet back of a chair which Lenore used to sit on, in the lamp light. He reflected that she would press the cushioned velvet of the chair nevermore. This shows that the Raven's 'Nevermore' had immediately cast a spell on the student's already sad thoughts:

*This I sat engaged in guessing, but no syllable expressing
To the fowl whose fiery eyes now burned into my bosom's core;
This and more I sat divining, with my head reclining
On the cushion's velvet lining that the lamp- light gloated o'er,
But whose velvet violet lining with the lamp- light gloated o'er,
She shall press, ah, nevermore!*

(SW, p. 79)

The delirious heavy- hearted student felt that the air in his chamber was getting denser and perfumed. Probably, he thought; an angel, whose footsteps fell smoothly on his tufted carpet, had brought a burning censer. He encouraged himself to breathe in the perfume which God had sent that he

may forget his Lenore. To this the Raven repeated his ominous word 'Nevermore:'

*Then, methought, the air grew denser, perfumed from an unseen
censer
Swung by Seraphim whose foot-falls tinkled on the tufted floor.
'Wretch,' I cried, 'thy God hath lent thee- by these angels he
hath sent thee
Respite- respite and nepenthe from thy memories of Lenore;
Quaff, oh quaff this kind nepenthe and forget this lost Lenore!'
Quoth the Raven 'Nevermore.'*

(SW, p. 79)

This made the student ask the Raven whether he was a bird or a devil. He believed it to be an object of evil because it had made a devilish and hurtful prophecy. He wondered whether the bird was a tempter, drawing him to evil; or whether it was merely a bird, driven to his chamber by the violent storm. The student could not resist the temptation of asking the Raven about a possible balm in Hades, from where he believed the Raven had come, that would allay his grief. Yet soon came the Raven's relentless reply 'Nevermore:'

*'Prophet!' said I, 'thing of evil! prophet still, if bird or devil!-
Whether Tempter sent, or whether tempest tossed thee here
ashore,
Desolate yet all undaunted, on this desert land enchanted-
On this home by Horror haunted- tell me truly, I implore-
Is there- is there balm in Gilead? - tell me- tell me, I implore!'
Quoth the Raven 'Nevermore.'*

(SW, p. 79)

The student believed that the Raven had the gift of prophecy whether it was a real bird or a devil. He asked the Raven in the name of Heaven and in the name of God whom they both worshiped whether his suffering soul would meet that of Lenore's in paradise, but the Raven kept its 'Nevermore:'

'Prophet!' said I, 'thing of evil! – prophet still, if bird or devil!

*By that Heaven that bends above us – by that God we both
adore-*

*Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within the distant Aidenn,
It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore.'
Quoth the Raven 'Nevermore.'*

(SW, p. 80)

The student had put into his questions his utmost fear that Lenore is lost forever in annihilation and death, and that he would maintain in a state of death- in- life. This baffled him as he descended into despair and irrationality. The stormy night, the Raven and the bust of Pallas were real objects which lost their reliability under the effect of the bizarre and the appalling on the student's mind. The poem concludes with the Raven perching on the bust of Pallas while its eyes were those of a fiend occupied in its own dreams. The lamp- light falling from above cast the Raven's shadow on the floor, and the student felt that his soul laid permanently in that shadow, i.e., the Raven will fly out nevermore and that the student was destined to lasting grief:

*And the Raven, never flitting, still is sitting, still is sitting
On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;
And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon's that is dreaming,
And the lamp- light o'er him streaming throws his shadow on
the floor;
And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor
Shall be lifted - nevermore!*

(SW, p. 80)

The Raven stands for the imagination that mounts to extra comprehension of the delusion of reality¹⁸. Poe called it the 'soul,' yet it was the imagination that "from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor/ Shall be lifted – nevermore." Further, in "The Philosophy of Composition" Poe writes that it is "until the very last line of the very last stanza that the intention of making . . . [the Raven] emblematic of *Mournful and Never- ending Remembrance* is permitted distinctly to be seen" (SW, p. 492).

Moving to a relatively less cheerless poem, "Annabel Lee" exalts spiritual love that outlives death. In this respect, Poe writes in "The Poetic Principle," that "love – the true, the divine Eros – the Uranian, as distinguished from the Dionaeon Venus – is unquestionably the purest and truest of all poetic themes" (SW, p. 511). "Uranian" refers to eternal spiritual love as opposed to "Dionaeon" which is finite earthly love. The poem starts by the poet mentioning that "it was many and many a year ago,/ In a kingdom by the sea" (SW, p. 89) when he was in love with a maiden whose name is Annabel Lee. He makes emphasis that they were both children when they first fell in love: "I was a child and *she* was a child" (SW, p.89). Their love gave them mutual fulfillment as the poet asserts that his beloved "lived with no other thought/ Than to love and be loved by me" (SW, p. 89). He describes their love as genuine and honest that even, "the winged seraphs of heaven/ Coveted her and me" (SW, p. 89). The covetous angels sent a chilling wind to kill Annabel Lee who is a sufferer of a vengeful force in the universe which brought her death. Poe is suggesting here "the presence of an evil or malevolent influence or force in nature that is bent on causing Man's, or the poet's, victimization:"¹⁹

*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 . . .
(SW, p. 89)*

The poet mentions that the intense love that bound him to his beloved exceeded that of those who were wiser and older than them. It was so strong that neither angels nor demons could ever separate their fondly tied souls.

The poem is a glorification of the love of children and a recollection of William Wordsworth's "Immortality Ode" "in which the consciousness of the child is exalted over that of the adult:"²⁰

*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 . . .
(SW, pp. 89 – 90)*

As just mentioned above, the poet himself is a victim to the universal destructive force which put an end to his imaginative power by causing the death of his beloved. But because of his loyalty; and to preserve the source of his inspiration, the poet keeps Annabel Lee's memory and she becomes a living dead. After her death, he spends the nights lying beside her tomb by the roaring sea. He glimpses his beloved in the silvery moon light, and visualizes her glittering eyes in the rising stars:

*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 the sepulcher there by the sea –
In her tomb by the sounding sea.
(SW, p. 90)*

On a different level, this stanza reveals that Annabel Lee or any beloved woman has the strength to transcend death, up lift and exalt man's soul and save him from the vile spirits that bring destruction and death. For this power

of woman to function, it needs man's faithfulness and sweet remembrance of his departed beloved.²¹

"Annabel Lee" is like "The Raven" in the sense that both poems are presented from the point of view of a bereaved lover. But, in "Annabel Lee" the poet

remains willingly connected to . . . [his beloved] in spite of her physical absence. In "The Raven," on the other hand, the bird is there as an ever present reminder of the *barriers* currently separating the poet from the lost Lenore; Lenore's memory eventually becomes less a permanent symbol of idealized beauty and love than a constant source of pain and personal negation.²²

Whether the memory of the beloved is a source of pain or a symbol of love, both are but two sides of Edgar Allan Poe's romantic and tormented soul, ever occupied with the loss of beauty and love. The death of beautiful young women took an effective part in Poe's life and became a motif in his poetry. His love lyrics are concise, intensively passionate and mostly dealing with the irretrievable emotions. His sensitive soul loathed death which is division, a trespasser and an annihilator of beauty. When death comes untimely, as it did to Poe's young adored ones, it becomes strikingly painful.

The constant lack of female role in Poe's life motivated him to create a type of ethereal beauty that epitomized all the women he was emotionally attached to and lost. Poe's notion of optimal female grace and elegance and his unending love and inconsolable woe could be, after all, an echo of his impression of the mother he never really came to know; a perfect heavenly creature that dwelled in his creative mind.

Notes

¹Beth Ann Bassein, *Women and Death: Linkages in Western Thought and Literature* (Westport,CT: Greenwood, 1984), p. 49.

²Ibid., p. 48.

³Hervey Allen, *Israfel: The Life and Times of Edgar Allan Poe* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1934), p. 88.

⁴Ramij Lall, *Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Study* (New Delhi: Rama Brothers, 2005), p. 38.

⁵Allen, p. 89.

⁶All page numbers when referring to Poe's poems and critical essays in this study are from Edgar Allan Poe, *Selected Writings of Edgar Allan Poe* (London: Penguin, 1947), abbreviated to *SW*.

⁷Allen, p. 204.

⁸David Rogers, *Tales and Poetry of Edgar Allan Poe* (New York: Monarch, 1965), p.7.

⁹Allen, pp. 291- 292.

¹⁰Quoted in Ibid., p. 583.

¹¹Tanya Mahir Noraldeen, "The Theme of love and Death in Edgar Allan Poe's Poetry and Prose" (Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Baghdad, 2004), p. 27.

¹²Ramji, pp. 53- 54.

¹³ K. P. Saradhi, ed., *Edgar Allan Poe: Poems and Tales* (Agra: Lakshmi Narain Agarwal, n.d.), p. 65.

¹⁴Kevin J. Heyes, *The Cambridge Companion to Edgar Allan Poe*

(Cambridge: Cambridge, 2002), p. 149.

¹⁵Edward H. Davidson, *Poe: A Critical Study* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1957), p. 111. ¹⁵

¹⁶Noraldeen, p. 27.

¹⁷Davidson, p. 87.

¹⁸ See *Ibid.*, p.91.

¹⁹Noraldeen, p. 30.

²⁰Rogers, p. 72.

²¹See Noraldeen, p. 31.

²²Tony Magistrale, *Student Companions to Classic Writers* (London: Greenwood, 2001), p. 46.

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