



0. ANNABEL LEE - Story Preface

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"Annabel Lee"—one of Poe's most-famous poems—has striking parallels to a legend known to people in Charleston, South Carolina. Did Poe know the legend? Was Poe actually part of the story? Poe left no notes, which would answer such questions, for the poem which was published after his untimely death in 1849.

While Virginia's health was failing, Poe looked for a house in the country. Clearer air would help his wife to breathe better.

The writer found a cottage in The Bronx, then a different place than it is today. Their home still stands, although its surroundings are no longer trees and open spaces.

Even though Poe had become widely known - especially after "The Raven" - he earned very little for his efforts. He was reportedly paid a mere \$9 or \$10 for his famous poem and, without copyright protections, he could not capitalize-on the countless "Raven" reprints.

As Virginia neared the end of her life, newspapers - like the *Saturday Evening Post* - began to publish accounts of the couple's near-destitute condition. Articles did not always include accurate facts:

It is said that Edgar A. Poe is lying dangerously with brain fever, and that his wife is in the last stages of consumption - they are without money and without friends.

When Virginia died - on January 30, 1847 - she was 24 years old. Poe, who had become despondent and alcohol-drinking during his wife's five-year illness, was shattered.

Edgar refused to look at his wife's face after she passed away. He wanted to remember her as a living, not a dead, person. (Ironically, the only-known picture of Virginia - depicted as a living being - was reportedly painted immediately after her death.)

Although he began drinking more heavily, after losing Virginia, Poe continued to write. In the spring of 1849, he created a story which may (or may not) be connected (in whole or in part) to a South-Carolina legend.

A young woman from a prominent Charleston family, named Annabel Lee, fell in love with a sailor from Virginia. Stationed in the port town, the navy man wanted to marry the Southern belle.

Because Annabel Lee's father did not approve of her suitor, forbidding his daughter to even see him, the couple met in a local cemetery. Life was at least bearable for awhile ... until the wary father followed his daughter to the cemetery. Confirming his suspicions, the father punished Annabel Lee by locking her inside her bedroom.

Not long thereafter, Annabel Lee was bitten by a yellow-fever-carrying mosquito. Infected with the wretched illness, she did not survive.

When the young sailor - then back in Virginia - learned of Annabel Lee's death, he returned to Charleston. Turned-away by the same man who prevented him from ever being with his daughter - or even realizing which grave in the family plot belonged to Annabel Lee since they were all "freshly" dug - the young man grieved over the entire plot.

Poe's "Annabel Lee" has striking parallels to the Charleston legend. No one can be sure, however, whether he'd even heard the story while stationed at Ft. Moultrie (on Charleston's Sullivan's Island) during his years of Army service.

On the other hand, according to local Charleston lore - and a reported journal kept by the dead-girl's sister - Poe himself was the military man who fell in love with Annabel Lee Ravenel (during 1827-28). This version of

the story claims that the future writer of the poem was the person turned-away by the prominent Mr. Ravenel.

Poe did not leave notes for "Annabel Lee," thereby depriving us of origin clues. In light of that, perhaps it's best to experience his words of love and loss without attempting to determine his mind set (or influences) when the poem was written: *

*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 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
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.*

*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.*

"Annabel Lee" was published after something *really* awful had happened to the poet himself.

* It was Poe, after all, who said of poetry, in general: "... under the sun there neither exists nor *can* exist any work more thoroughly dignified - more supremely noble than this very poem - this poem *per se* - this poem which is a poem and nothing more, this poem written solely for the poem's sake." (See *The Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, Volume VI at page 9, quoting from "The Poetic Principle.")

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/ANNABEL-LEE-The-Raven>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/ANNABEL-LEE-The-Raven>

Questions 2 Ponder

Are Poems Written "Solely for the Poem's Sake?"

When he published "The Raven," in early 1845, Edgar Allan Poe received very little for his efforts. He reportedly

received around \$9 of \$10 for the published work which remains famous in the 21st century.

If Poe were alive today, and writing works like “The Raven” and “Annabel Lee,” what do you think he could be earning?

What did Poe mean when he said that a poem is “written solely for the poem's sake?” Was he insinuating that earning no money for producing brilliant work is acceptable? Explain your answer.

If Poe was, in fact, suggesting that producing brilliant work without pay was acceptable to him, would that differ from 21st-century views? In what way?

Media Stream



Annabel Lee by Mirella Black

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Edgar and Virginia Poe - Cottage

Poe cottage, in The Bronx, as it appeared in the 19th century. Online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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Victorian Cottage - The Bronx in 1899

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