

Romanticism and New Criticism as Critical Perspectives on Edgar Allan Poe's Annabel Lee

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ABSTRACT

Annabel Lee is a masterpiece of Edgar Allan Poe who suffers from a lot of miseries during his life and finally he overcame all of them and found his poetic talent and expressed whole of them in his sad poems. The best subject-matter for him was death of beautiful woman because of death of his mother in his youth. This study analyzes his Annabel Lee poem from two different critical school, Romanticism and New Criticism. Romantic critics have a special notice on the biography and imagination, thus New Critics study a piece of art regardless of author's intention and interest; and finds its meaning by companion of words, images, and signs which are using in the text.

Keywords: Edgar Allan Poe, Annabel Lee, New Criticism, Romanticism.

1. Introduction

1.1. Edgar Allan Poe

Edgar Allan Poe was born on January of 1809 in Boston by actors parents who used to payed roles in theater. Elizabeth Arnold Hopkins, Poe's mother, was from an English family and David Poe, Poe' s father, was an Irishman; but he by entering the theatrical performances forgot his family and actually a kind of self-alienation. David Poe was not only an alcoholic but also an irresponsible and reckless one. When Edgar was still a little boy, his parents separated from each by a lot of rash struggles. Soon his mother became seriously sick and at the end of 1811, she died in Richmond. After the death of mother, Edgar adopted to a well-known and wealthy family, John Allan; and that's why that Edgar Poe became Edgar Allan Poe. Edgar grew up with John

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Allan and his wife, who didn't have any child, in Richmond. When he was six year-old, by his foster family, he moved to England. In England, Edgar began his schooling for five years and after returning to Richmond he was admitted by local school. At age seventeen, Edgar was entered to Virginia's University and in that time his youth happiness met its end. At university, he met sons of rich people, whose life style were different from him, but because he was an adult and liked to be equal to his friends, he started gambling like them. Gambling didn't bring him money, and made him addicted to it. No longer he understood that he became a irresponsible person who instead of gambling, used to drink alcohol. After all, he leaved his foster parents and moved to Boston. There, in 1827, he found new opportunity and published his first book as "Tamerlane and Other Poems by Bostonian". In 1829 he moved to Baltimore and his second book was published under the title of "Al Aaraaf, Tamberlane, and Minor Poems". In New York, 1831, he found publisher who collected his book entitle "Poems by Edgar A. Poe, Second Edition. Of course he has a lot of masterpieces, but another principal poetic works that he has, is "The Raven and Othet Poems" which was written in 1845, by Edgar Allan Poe. And finally at age fourty, on October of 1849 he leaved his misfortunate, and pitiful life.

2. Discussion

2.1. Romanticism

In defining Romanticism precisely, it is better to quote the words of Julian Wolfreys in her "Romanticism is a literary term that refers to the literary, artistic and general culture of the first half of nineteenth century. Romanticism is distinguished by its general embrace of the emotions and nature, particularly in response to a growing sense of materialism and to such moments of violence and upheaval as the French Revolution in 1789. In addition to rejecting the forms and conventions often associated with classicism and neoclassicism, romanticists sought value in spontaneity, subjective experience and original expression" (Wolfreys et all, 2006).

"Romantic poetry is a progressive, universal poetry...It tries to mix and fuse poetry and prose, inspiration and criticism...Other kinds of poetry are finished and are now capable of being fully analyzed. The romantic kind of poetry is still in the state of becoming; that, in fact, is its real essence...It can be exhausted by no theory...It alone is infinite, just as it alone is free; and it recognizes as its first commandment that the will of the poet can tolerate no law above itself. The romantic kind of poetry is... poetry itself" (Athenaeum Fragment 116, in Schlegel, 31–32).

Marshall Brown notes some specific notion about a vital new Romantic criticism "turns its attention to hermeneutics and interpretation: how do readers grasp what authors are saying?" (Habib, 2005, p.410).

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In Romantic era the use of poetry elements, especially irony, was from metaphysical viewpoint and the bourgeois' affair and concerns are demonstrating itself in all area of society not only in economical, political, and social life but also in literature, art, beauty, science, and philosophy. The most influential device for creating or organizing what they have in their mind was imagination, which is a unifying and unique power in Romantic idea, one can reconcile the other abilities and understandings of human being such as reason and emotion. It is necessary to note that Romanticism always substitute Enlightenment "reason" by sensation, imagination, spontaneity, ability and genius.

M. A. R. Habib in his " Modern Literary Criticism and Theory", 2005, noted that:
" The ideals of Romanticism included an intense focus on human subjectivity and its expression, an exaltation of nature, which was seen as a vast repository of symbols, of childhood and spontaneity, of primitive forms of society, of human passion and emotion, of the poet, of the sublime, and of imagination as a more comprehensive and inclusive faculty than reason."

2.1.1. Analyzing Annabel Lee from Romanticism perspective

Annabel Lee is a poem by a well-known and great poet, Edgar Allan Poe. By brief looking at the Poe's life, it's obvious that this poem is about a woman who beloved by him. Her real name was Virginia, the real wife of Poe, and now in this poem he named her Annabel Lee. Virginia was his thirteen years old cousin, whom with her mother, Mrs Clemm lived with Poe. Poe fall in love with Virginia and decides to get marry her. It's a kind of strange marriage because they have fourteen years old distance in their age, not only this distance never makes their heart to be away from each other, but also it causes a big love as Poe himself mentions that their love was an exceptional love in that era. Their love was in such a way that the poet declares angels and demons make envy for them and their deep love, and that's the cause of death of Virginia indeed. This poem was written in 1849, celebrates the poet's love for Virginia who died on January 30, in 1847. Poe married her eleven years before, in 1836. Poe lost his mother in his childhood and he had been looking for solace and comfort from woman which everyone can easily receives from own's mother. During his life, Poe always sought female followship and intimacy; and required the warmth of house and family. Unfortunately this happiness didn't stabilize and in 1842 Virginia became seriously ill. Her disease was very worse and according to biographer, she suffered from bronchitis. In 1846, her condition became risky and dangerous and Virginia was beyond human aid. And finally she died in 1847 and leaved Poe in this world with a large grief and loneliness. Virginia's death was another misery which befell Poe.

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2.1.2. Subject-Matter of Annabel Lee from Romanticism perspective

The subject matter of "Annabel Lee" is eternal and everlasting love of Poe for his wife, Virginia. In this poem Poe represents his love to Virginia so deeply that it made the angels in God's heaven to be envy of them. He thinks that the reason of his beloved's death was the envy of heaven's angels. But by her death, Poe claims that neither demons down to hell nor angels up to heaven can separate their soul from each other. He declares that every night, when the moon is shining in the sky, Poe dreams his beautiful beloved wife, Annabel Lee. And when the stars begin to appear, he sees the bright eyes of pretty Annabel Lee in them. Poe declares that all night he sleeps side by side of his life, his bride, his darling Annabel Lee, whose body lies buried in a shrine next to the sea.

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 (Poe, 1998).

In the poem the line of "in this kingdom by the sea" is a refrain which is repeated. This is so fanciful but maybe Poe by using this refrain wants to describe the world in which he and his wife, Virginia, lived is like "kingdom by the sea". The most obvious element and feature of "Annabel Lee" is its force of emotion. This intensity is more noticeable in some lines among the poem which Poe refers to his love to Annabel Lee and her love for him as an exceptional one. Their love had such an intensity which the heavenly angels became jealous of them and their special love. The fancifulness of "Annabel Lee" is considered again when Poe claims that neither evils in hell nor angels in heaven can make separation between their souls. He uses some imaginary picture when he says that by rising moon in the sky he dreams pretty Annabel Lee and by rising stars, he sees the bright and beautiful eyes of his darling. By using a lovely conceit, Poe sleeps all nights side by side Virginia who is lied buried in a close to the sea shrine, closed his emotion arousal poem. His favorite poetic theme is the death of beautiful woman. He uses his past memories of didn't have a lovely mother, and this lead his pen in writing poem and picture the present situation.

2.2. New Criticism

New Criticism is one group of formalism, which is dominated literary school of criticism in 20th century, and it, New Criticism has crucial importance and significance up to now. They concentrate on the formal aspects of a text and the way of working of each small entity in the text. Every word, every element, every component, and every image remains as a special sign which has contribution and donation to the unified theme. Details are called symbolic, allegorical

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or figurative depicting of unified theme or idea, because details are small relevant parts of central subject-matter. In other words, it is a kind of unity in which every segment reflects the whole and the whole is related to each small part or detail. New Criticism is always used in analyzing poems, especially lyric poetry. New Criticism called themselves as the first one in understanding a piece of art in criticism. New Criticism generally concentrates on meaning as well as the formal aspects of a text. In their idea, literature always refers to phenomenon in external, in real world or experiences of human being. It never questions the reality of external world and doesn't represent language as an expertise. There are a lot of famous philosophers of this critical school such as John Crowe Ransom, Austin Warren, Cleanth Brooks, William K. Wimsatt, and Monroe C. Beardsley. In this research attempt is made to have a critical view from New Criticism aspect on the poem of Annabel Lee from viewpoint of William K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley.

2.2.1. William K. Wimsatt and M. C. Beardsley

The famous critic Wimsatt and the philosopher Beardsley publicize two unique and influential papers, "The Intentional Fallacy" (1946) and "The Affective Fallacy" (1949), that express the attitude of New Criticism. Wimsatt and Beardsley declares about their attitude toward poetry as: "A poem can be only through its meaning – since its medium is words – yet it is, simply is, in the sense that we have no excuse for inquiring what part is intended or meant...In this respect poetry differs from practical messages, which are successful if and only if we correctly infer the intention" (Habib, 2005, p.623).

By looking at literary theory meaning, it's effective to find the direct meaning of these two words. Affective Fallacy, the first one, is a "term coined by W. K. Wimsatt and M. C. Beardsley which identifies the mistaken analysis of a text in terms of its emotional or affective results, thereby misunderstanding the difference between what a text is and what it does" (Wolfreys, 2006, p.5). Secondly, Intentional Fallacy "describes critical methods that seek to interpret a literary work by reference to the author's intentions. W. K. Wimsatt and M. C. Beardsley argued that this position was untenable since (a) the author's intentions could never be satisfactorily recovered; and (b) the work could only be read and judged in its own terms without reference to extra textual information" (Wolfreys, 2006, p.57).

"According to them as a poem comes out of its author's mind or once it published, it's no longer belongs to its author or to whom this piece of writing refers to but now it belongs to the public: It is embodied in language, the peculiar possession of the public, and it is about the human being, an object of public knowledge" (Habib, 2005, p.623).

"The most influential recent statement of intentionalism, according to the authors of this essay, is I. A. Richards' fourfold characterization of meaning as "sense," "feeling," "tone," and

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“intention.” The passwords of the intentional school are Romantic words such as “spontaneity,” “sincerity,” “authenticity,” and “originality.” These need to be replaced, say the authors, with terms of analysis such as “integrity,” “relevance,” “unity,” and “function,” terms which they claim to be more precise” (Habib, 2005, p.624).

When one reads a piece of art in an interpretation look, the author's notify is to ignore the English language and focus on the private proof or evidence of public from external to internal one. In other words, one reads the poem thorough intention of the poet's private appeal, despite of what the words express, what the language sign signify by themselves.

Wimsatt and Beardsley decline attitudes of critics like I. A. Richards and some philosophers as Charles L. Stevenson to make distinction between emotion from denotative meaning, to discern what a word is signifying and what a word or sign means. They argue that there is no proof about the effect of a word on a person and how the passion and affect of a person suggest the meaning and what the word offers as its meaning. In other words, depicting the influence of a poem is equivalent to depicting of its meaning. Wimsatt and Beardsley afraid of the "doctrine of emotive meaning, as separated from cognitive meaning, results in affective relativism and potentially endless license: on reading a given line of poetry, a reader could feel a certain emotion regardless of the cognitive quality of the line's context; there is no linguistic rule to stabilize or systematize emotional responses, and therefore there can be no parallel between cognitive meaning and emotional suggestion" (Habib, 2005, P. 625).

2.2.2. Analyzing Annabel Lee from New Criticism perspective

In order to read the poem of Annabel Lee from New Criticism outlook, it is necessary to studying it regardless of its author's intention and interest. According to New Criticism, especially those characteristics which mentioned above from W. K. Wimsatt and M. C. Beardsley , a piece of art must read by itself. Some lines of Annabel Lee is here as:

That the wind came out of the cloud by night,
Chilling and killing my Annabel Lee.

By reading these passionate lines, it is usual that reader feels sadness, but as New Criticism declares it must not influence him in such a way that he prefer the intention of its author. Wimsatt and Beardsley in "Intentional Fallacy" represent that when a piece of art is released from its author's mind, from that time on it belongs to public not its author. So, a real reader, by their notions, is one who just finds the relationship between words and searches the meaning of a poem through the sign which every word signified; not in the biography and intentions of author.

3. Conclusion

Annabel Lee is a poem by Edgar Allan Poe who, from Romanticism view, says this poem for his darling, Virginia. Virginia was her thirteen years old cousin, who beloved by Poe and at end they got married. Romanticism analyzes the poem regarding to the sensation and fancies which is used by author. For them, poem is full of imagination and a real reader is one who analyzes poem by imagination which is in. From New Criticism perspective, this poem should not read by attention to author's intentions and interests. They believe that a piece of art should be understood by finding the relationship between the words and signs and what they signified. So in analyzing a poem these two schools perspectives are really different from each other.

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