



Whispers Of Lost Love: The Representation of Grief in Edgar Allan Poe's Poems: *The Raven, Lenore, and Annabel Lee*

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Abstract: *This thesis delves into the emotional landscape of grief and attempts to analyse the difference in human response to the death of a beloved in Edgar Allan Poe's renowned poems: The Raven, Lenore, and Annabel Lee. It aims to explore how through Poe's characters, the stages of grief are represented, and their experiences universalized. The characters in The Raven, Lenore, and Annabel Lee serve as mirrors reflecting Poe's complex relationship with grief, love, and bereavement. In choosing Poe's works, this thesis examines how grief is portrayed in the varying reactions of individuals faced with the death of a beloved, emphasizing the uniqueness of each person's response to loss. This study ultimately seeks to illuminate the profound expressions of sorrow within Poe's poetry, providing a deep understanding of the complexities of love, loss, and the enduring impact of grief on the human soul.*

Key Words: *death, love and grief, stages of grief.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

The name Edgar Allan Poe is synonymous with the tales of horror and the macabre. Known for his dark twist on Romanticism, Poe shot to fame with *The Raven*, a poem popular for the musicality in its refrain "Nevermore". A firm believer in the "art for art's sake" movement, he drew inspiration from the great romantic poets: William Wordsworth, John Keats, and especially William Blake, whose influence is reflected in Poe's works. A writer, an editor, and a critic, his works gained much appreciation in Europe than in the United States. Poe suffered a lot with poverty, as he tried to live off of his writing, which was not critically acclaimed until after his death, in 1849. Poe's poetry bleeds of his own sorrows and woeful life, with cries of desperation and a longing for happiness. Poe takes his grief and turns it into art, leaving us enthralled and in mourning like his grieving lover.

This research presents an analysis of the variations in the human response to losing their beloved by perusing the poems of Edgar Allan Poe: *The Raven, Lenore, and Annabel Lee*. Although these poems are all ballads of a grief-stricken lover in mourning, they all have certain nuances that set them apart from each other. This scholar carefully measures these nuances against each other, by evaluating the different stages of grief represented by each character in Poe's poetry. This evaluation is aided by the use of the Five-stage grief model, introduced by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross.

2. Objectives of study:

- To explore the varying human responses to the death of a beloved through Edgar Allan Poe's selected works
- To analyse the stages of grief represented through Poe's characters in his poetry

3. LITERATURE REVIEW:

For this research, various dissertations and scholarly articles focusing on Edgar Allen Poe's works were consulted. These sources provided insights into Poe's unique style, thematic elements, and his recurrent exploration of grief and loss in his poetry. In-depth analyses of "The Raven," "Lenore," and "Annabel Lee" were reviewed to understand the existing interpretations and critical perspectives on these specific works. Works on the stages of grief were also read to discern how the differences in the grieving process are represented through the poet's characters.



4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

An approach of comparative literary analysis will be used in the course of research. This approach will make it possible to examine how various characters from the selected Edgar Allan Poe poems symbolize various stages of mourning. A thorough literature review will be carried out to fit theories and models concerning grief and sorrow. This will offer a theoretical framework for comprehending the various stages of mourning and how they appear in the selected works. The three poems that will be examined, "The Raven," "Lenore," and "Annabel Lee," were chosen for analysis due to their thematic significance to loss and mourning. The chosen poems by Edgar Allan Poe will serve as the main source of data. The substance of these texts about the stages of grief as portrayed by the characters will be examined.

5. DISCUSSION:

The Raven

The Raven is the most remarkable work of the eccentric genius, with its musical refrain "nevermore" that resonates with the anguish of grieving lovers even today. The poem introduces us to a young scholar distinctly remembering the dreary night of the darkest month of the year when he was desperately wishing to forget the grief of losing his beloved Lenore. Engrossed in volumes of ancient texts, he is startled out of his reverie by a tapping sound. The sound makes him anxious, but he calls his weak heart, reasoning: "'Tis some visitor," I muttered, "tapping at my chamber door/ Only this and nothing more." (Lines 5-6)

As he stands there peering into the darkness, we catch the first glimpses of grief. The whispered "Lenore?", upon finding nothing but darkness on opening the door, brings forth his subconscious desire for his love Lenore to greet him, to come back, as if she never left. He is in denial, the first stage of grief, as he refuses to accept the death of his beloved. As Dr. Kübler-Ross states: "In this stage, the world becomes meaningless and overwhelming. Life makes no sense. We go numb. We wonder how we can go on, if we can go on, why we should go on. We try to find a way to simply get through each day." We see glimpses of this stage in the speaker as he tries to bury himself in his work, tirelessly reading to forget his woes.

The pivotal point of the poem comes when "The Raven" enters his room. He perches upon a bust of Pallas above the door and gazes at his host, whose attention is soon riveted upon him. Often touted as the messenger from the spirit land, the 'raven' of ancient lore was depicted as a symbol of vice, of evil and an omen of death. Here, it is the embodiment of grief, and the conversation between the raven and the speaker visualises the struggle to escape from this unending grief. The lover is drawn towards the mysterious creature, seeking answers and believing it to be a prophet. The repeated questioning to find a means to end his sorrow represents his bargaining with his grief.

"Respite—respite and nepenthe from thy memories of Lenore;/ Quaff, oh quaff this kind nepenthe and forget this lost Lenore!"/ Quoth the Raven "Nevermore." (Lines 82-84): The desperation to even accept the illusory medicine 'nepenthe' from Greece, just to forget her and his sorrow, the fragile hope of seeing her again, to just hold her once are all reflections of his bargaining with his pain. This affirms Dr Kübler-Ross' belief that "We will do anything not to feel the pain of this loss."

"Quoth the Raven "Nevermore." (Line 48) This line sets up the stack of dominoes of repetition and seamless rhythm that fall to create the masterpiece that is *The Raven*. The raven only answers in the refrain "nevermore", compelling the speaker to lash out, ordering it to leave: "Be that word our sign of parting, bird or fiend!" I shrieked, upstarting" (Line 97). The speaker is furious with this creature, commanding him to leave, to take this pain away, and to be rid of this haunting refrain "nevermore."

The speaker may express his grief in different stages, and there is no particular order in which they appear for various individuals. Dr Kübler-Ross notes "that these stages are not linear, and some people may not experience any of them. Others might only undergo a few stages rather than all five." With the speaker, we do not know where his bargaining ends or his anger begins, but it is certain that there is an undertone of depression throughout the poem.

"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!" (Lines 100-102). At last, he is struck by the finality of his loss, how he will never hold his love again and this grief will never leave him. He pleads the raven to end his misery, to erase the grief it has caused, but alas, the speaker's fate is sealed. His soul shall eternally remain in the veil of melancholy and its curtain "shall be lifted- nevermore!"

Lenore

Lenore, a reworking of Poe's earlier poem "*A Pæan*" was published in 1843. The poem is structured as a conversation between the speaker and Lenore's bereaved fiancé, a character named Guy de Vere. The poem opens with a dramatic exclamation by the speaker, on the loss of a saintly soul, with the heavenly name Lenore. The speaker accosts Guy de



Vere, who has not yet shed a tear and implores him to grieve properly and weep for his loss: “And, Guy De Vere, hast thou no tear? --weep now or nevermore!” (Line 3)

The speaker calls for a funeral anthem to be sung for Lenore, a lament to grieve her passing. Opposing this, Guy de Vere wishes for a dirge, a jubilant song of praise to be sung in honour of his young queen, who shall rule even in the afterlife. 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. (Lines 5-8). Guy de Vere is an unusual character, showing no apparent traces of sorrow. On the contrary, he is indifferent towards the funeral rites and the traditional process of mourning. The poem provides a new perspective on the grieving process of an individual.

The first indication of his grief is visible when he lashes out at the speaker, berating the “mourning crowd” for their duplicity. He is affronted by their displays of sorrow for his beloved Lenore, by their laments, when in reality, they shunned her for her pride. This outburst is indicative of the second stage of grief, i.e., anger. The Five-Stage Grief model explains that “Anger is a necessary stage of the healing process. The more you truly feel it, the more it will begin to dissipate and the more you will heal.” Guy de Vere’s anger towards the crowd expresses his grief on losing Lenore. Through his anger, his emotions find an outlet, which ultimately helps in the healing process.

Another stage represented through Guy de Vere’s character is that of acceptance. According to the Five-Stage Grief model, “Acceptance is often confused with the notion of being “all right” with what has happened. This is not the case. This stage is about accepting the reality that our loved one is physically gone and recognizing that this new reality is the permanent reality.” The sight of Lenore, described as a fair and light-haired young queen sleeping peacefully does not evoke sorrow in Guy de Vere, rather he seems to be at peace himself. He is only affected by the speaker’s efforts to persuade him to mourn in the traditional sense.

“Avaunt!”, remarks Guy de Vere, dismissing the crowd and his grief. He shall not mourn, as he believes his beloved to be free from this damned world. “Let no bell toll!” is a defiance of the speaker’s address earlier, “Let the bell toll!”; it is a refusal to mourn, by the duplicitous society. He lives for the hope of meeting her once again, rejoicing in knowing that she’ll forever be at peace, on “a golden throne, beside the King of Heaven.” (Line 26) The stages that are represented through Guy de Vere’s character are those of anger and acceptance as he is content in knowing that one day, he will reunite with his love.

Annabel Lee

The last poem of Poe’s literary career, *Annabel Lee* is perhaps the most beautiful and haunting ode towards a beloved. The poem presents the perspective of a lover, years after losing his beloved. The opening lines paint the poem as a fairy tale of a faraway kingdom, where his beloved Annabel Lee lived.

The speaker fondly remembers their childhood, reliving his memories in this enchanted kingdom by the sea. He glorifies their love, immortalising it in the lines: “But we loved with a love that was more than love—/ I and my Annabel Lee;/ With a love that the winged seraphs of heaven/ Coveted her and me” (Lines 9-12). A love so beautiful that it made even the angels of Heaven envious, so powerful that they felt compelled to take it away. The obsession with proving that their love was greater than everyone else’s ties in with his delusion of accusing the angels of their separation. He speaks of her death as a tragedy, something that was orchestrated; hence, he cannot move past it. His love for her prevents him from doing so.

This poem sheds light on yet another perspective of grief. Grief is found in the unwavering accusations of the bereaved lover, in the quiet consolation of knowing their souls shall never part, and lastly, in the ache and desperation to simply hold his beloved once more. He is alive, but his existence has turned into a parallel of the existence she led; “And this maiden she lived with no other thought/ Than to love and be loved by me.” (Lines 5-6) Through a parallel, we see a stark difference as her existence was consumed by their love while his is riddled with melancholy.

“To shut her up in a sepulchre/ In this kingdom by the sea” (Lines 19-20). These lines indicate that Annabel Lee now lies in a large tomb, confined in a place he cannot visit. He further reiterates that the envious angels caused this separation. The speaker repeatedly emphasizes the strength of their love, a love that transcends this mortal realm as he states: 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 (Lines 31-34) He believes that no one can separate his and Annabel Lee’s souls as they are forever intertwined. Even if he cannot visit her physically, he shall meet her in his dreams and find her twinkling eyes among the stars. The poem ends on a dark note, with the broken-hearted speaker lying by the grave of his lover every night. The last lines of the poem echo the melancholy of the speaker, destined to mourn his lover.

The poem highlights the relapses in the grieving process; the harsh truth of slipping back into depression right on the brink of acceptance. A true sign of acceptance is being able to speak about their beloved freely, without breaking down. The speaker remembers his lover adoringly, calling her his Annabel Lee, his darling, his life, and his bride. The last lines of the poem however allow us to read in between the lines of this tale of undying love and uncover the dark side



of his reality. He is shown as visiting the grave of his lover and lying alongside her every night. These lines allow us a peek under the mask of exaggerated professions of his undying love, and we find a man tormented by the grief of his beloved's death.

7. CONCLUSION :

In conclusion, this research paper has achieved its objectives of exploring the varying human responses to the death of a beloved through selected works of Edgar Allan Poe, analysing the stages of grief represented through his characters in the poems: *The Raven*, *Lenore*, and *Annabel Lee*. The analysis of the stages of grief as represented through Poe's characters in his poetry has allowed for a nuanced understanding of how these stages manifest in literature. In summary, this research paper emphasizes the enduring relevance of Poe's works in illuminating the multifaceted nature of human responses to loss and the profound emotional journey that is the experience of grief.

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