

American Literature & Culture
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Mod 05 Lecture Number 28
Edgar Allen Poe Annabel Lee (Lecture 22)

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(Professor – student conversation starts)

Professor: Good morning. We are going to do Annabel Lee, Poe's, Edgar Allan Poe's Annabel Lee. I would like you begin with, take a moment, take a moment and tell me what you know about, what do you know about Edgar Allan Poe? Take a moment, just don't answer right away. Take a moment. Note down your points. What do you know about Edgar Allan Poe?

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Professor: Who was he?

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Student: American poet, short story writer

Professor: Ok and he belonged to the so-called Romantic Period, Romantic Age in America. Ok, so one, a couple of points we need to remember about Romanticism, the Age of Romanticism, and as you know, as in the case of British Romanticism,

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Professor: American Romanticism too was highly subjective. What is subjective? Concerned with the individual, Ok and it was a response to the preceding age, the Neo Classicism, good. Ok, so response to the preceding age of Neo Classicism, we are talking about American Romanticism. As in British Romanticism, English Romanticism, American Romanticism to was pre-occupied with emotional intensity and foregrounding the individual and the subjective. Again the concern was that common man was apt, was an apt choke to be the hero. Ok, think Wordsworth. Yeah Lucy poems, also Michael, so there are number of, handful of poems and they were, you know, if you have, if you remember your Lyrical Ballads then you know that it was, poetry was all about spontaneous

Student: Overflow

Professor: Overflow of emotions, so same principles have to be applied to Romanticism in America also with particular reference to Poe. Ok, there were other romantics too. I am not going to; I mean you know Walt Whitman. Ok and he was the supreme romantic American writer but we are talking about Poe here and all the things, all the features that you might be familiar with in association with British Romanticism, they apply to Poe's poems. Also nature was a place of refuge. Ok, so nature and the benevolent aspects of nature, not that nature which was read in tooth and claw.

So you are familiar with all these expressions I know but I am just recapping them for you. You also know that the Romantics valued nature and the individual more as compared to the social order, the social structure and the American Romantics valued spiritual intuition and self reliant individuality. Think Emerson, you have been already introduced to Emerson also. And what were his great essays? Self-Reliance, and the American Scholar, Ok so again two

key principles, self reliance and the individual. Ok and what are the key principles of American Scholar? American scholar has to be break away from?

Student: Tradition

Professor: Good, from tradition, from shadows of his predecessor. Think original that is the idea. Nayantara, you want to say something?

Student: No

Professor: Again pathetic fallacy was an important, integral part. When man suffers, nature suffers as well. Pragnya, are you aware of pathetic fallacy? Can you explain it to me in one word?

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Student: Man and nature (())

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Professor: Exactly, so nature is not a passive observer but actively participates with human beings, engages with human, individuals, Ok, sympathetic to people. , the Romantics proposed certain realistic techniques also and one important key element was the local color. Now what do you understand by the local color?

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Student: Is it an extension of the common man hero?

Professor: Good, yeah.

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Professor: So local color means giving a touch of the local region, Ok the region there, so you know Hardy's Wessex novels, yeah, you know Wordsworth's which lake district? Aren't you familiar with these terms, Ok Lake District of Wordsworth Ok, Hardy's region, Faulkner's Provincialism, Ok so Provincial territories so writers being preoccupied or engaged in conversation, discourse with their immediate surroundings. So they are not thinking global. They are thinking local. And also, when you think local you become, what does your work reflect; the sound, the smell, and the sight of the local. So you have local people, their

language, their concerns, am I making myself clear? Ok that is what local color means?
Wordworth's rustics, Ok

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Student: That was feature of American Literature and (())

Professor: That is British to begin with in origin

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Professor: Ok but then American also, please?

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Student: Most of the books we read, like when they talk, like the writers stress on their dialect

Professor: O'Neil for example

Student: Yeah

Professor: Yeah

Student: And even Twain

Professor: Yeah

Student: Mark Twain

Professor: Twain, yeah good.

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Professor: Can you apply that to Hemingway? Is he a writer of the local color? So, may be you know, yeah, yeah, there may be exceptions, Ok. Yeah, can you apply that to Dreiser? Not

necessarily. So, yes you have Twain, you have Faulkner, you have Flannery O'Connor Ok, they are the writers of local color but don't fall in that dangerous habit of making sweeping statements, yes. Again celebration, what are the key features? Let me repeat it for you. Celebration of the individual, that is at the heart, expression of deep spontaneous emotions, emphasis on creativity and the sublime, think Longinus. You have done literary criticism and Longinus, so you know sublimity is integral part of it and celebration of nature and the individual, so one key writer of this period was Ralph Waldo Emerson.

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Student: Sublime?

Professor: Nature individualism

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Professor: deep spontaneous and deep emotions and celebration of nature and sublime, sublimity, sublimity not necessary of the higher order but to find nobility in , in the commonest of all creatures. So coming back to Emerson, it was Emerson who ushered in American Romanticism. We credit him for growth of his, and spontaneous growth of Romanticism in America. We know that he is associated with the theory, the philosophy of Transcendentalism along with Thoreau. And other writers, key writers of this period are Walt Whitman and also Emily Dickinson, great poets.

Now Emerson's Nature, his essay, it bears testimony to his romantic world view and expresses several of his ideas on individualism, what is, so foregrounding individualism in American literature, that is a key Emersonian trait. So Nature is perceptible only to the eye and heart of the child, you know that's what the British Romantics believed in and that's what the American Romantics believed in, such as Emerson, that nature is perceptible only to the eye and heart of the child and someone who has retained the spirit of infancy. What does it mean?

Student: Innocence

Professor: Innocence, yeah, so nature has to celebrate innocence. So literature should foreground innocence in it. So according to Emerson, the whole of nature is the metaphor of the human mind, the relation between mind and matter is not fancified by some poets but stands in the Will of God. So nature is akin to God. Now these concepts might look quite simple in a classroom discussion but they are loaded with meaning. They are very deep. So nature is God, nature is child. The basic idea is innocence, celebration of innocence and purity.

Again look at Thoreau's Walden, seminal work of Transcendentalist writers published in 1854 where it is template of sorts for an authentic life that can be lived only if one leads a simple life away, shorn of all materialistic pleasures. And what Thoreau preached and practiced was that the writer should become one with nature, deeply ecological, I mean I can call it, I can call him the Father of Modern Eco Criticism. You also have someone like Nathaniel Hawthorne, Ok and you are already familiar with The Scarlet Letter. Now he too drew upon the theories of Emerson and Thoreau, and also Enlighten, German Enlightenment Philosophy as well as Coleridge's view on fancy and imagination where Coleridge stresses upon fancy or imagination?

Student: Imagination

Professor: Yeah and for Hawthorne also. So those were the influences on all the American writers, the German Romantics, the German practitioners of the so-called Enlightenment, philosophy and also Coleridge and his imagination and remember Coleridge too was heavily influenced by the German ideas of enlightenment along with Herman Melville, Hawthorne derided the twin concepts of industrialization and mechanism, commercial materialistic American society. Industrialization, commercialism, materialism and as we have already seen in *The Scarlet Letter*, he too was obsessed with the theory, with the themes of sin, guilt, redemption; sin, guilt and redemption.

Now coming to Edgar Allan Poe, he lived between 1809 to 1849, relatively brief life, forty years. Are you aware of his biographical details? He was a poet, he was a short story writer and he was an occasional critic. Major works, you know *Raven*, of course *Raven* doesn't need any, *Raven*, *R a v e n*, *The Tell-Tale Heart*, *The Fall of the House of Usher*, *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*

Student: *The Purloined Letter*

Professor: *The Purloined Letter*. Now tell me what do you know of Poe now against this background? You know *Raven* and you know *The Purloined Letter*.

Student: Gothic themes

Professor: Good

Student: Horror

Professor: Yes

Student: Mystery

Professor: Mystery, Gothic in nature, horror. So he is the father of all these, this genre

Student: I am not sure but (())

Professor: *The Purloined Letter*?

Student: Yeah

Professor: Yeah, yeah, So he is the one who started it all. And of course in, we

R : (()) of the dead (()) in his poems

Student: Yeah, a lost lover, a dead lover.

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Student: Even in (())

Professor: Why did he write that?

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Professor: Why did he write about lost loves and dead women, he lost?

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Student: I think, (()) has most emotional, emotional value and that is the reason as for as (())

Student: Yeah

Student: He evokes most emotions, lost

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Professor: The theme of lost love, especially for a lost woman, Ok, love for a woman who is dead, a dead woman, a beautiful woman, Ok, nothing is as tragic as compared to this. Ok. The, see his own life, you need to know that Poe is one writer, in order to appreciate his poetry better; you need to know something about his life, Ok. Generally we have rubbished, this yeah, the theories of affective and?

Student: Intentional

Professor: Intentional fallacies, yeah. The idea where is that, writer's biography should not be important to understand or appreciate his art. But in post work or pose literature, it is very important to understand where he came from. So his father died when, he lost his father or he just walked out on, yeah; so he grew up fatherless. His mother was extremely poor and he had to be given to a foster home. And he grew up in a foster home where he had a very loving, affectionate mother, Ok but a distant cold father, Ok.

And when that mother died, and he was pretty young at that time when his foster mother died, so he lost two mothers in quick succession which was terrible and that must have affected so when you talk about Gothic, horror, tragedies, losing women you love Ok in quick succession, you have to look at where he is coming from. And then a father who doesn't want him, biological father has already abandoned. Ok but the foster father also doesn't want you. So he was sent away to college, some prestigious college there in United States but he gambled away whatever he was given, his allowances and all.

And when he turned back to his father, he was heavily in debt, he was very young in his early twenties and he turned to his father, he refused to help him. And he said, go fend for yourself, I don't want you back anymore, Ok so that left him like penniless but he was, you know all those intellectual germs had already started to grow. So he was interested in literature and he had read a lot in his university years, so he wanted to write something, to create. So he went into journalism, short story writers like most writers do, you know, that apprenticeship kind of work. But that doesn't bring you money.

He spent his entire life in debt. There was hardly, I mean, it may come as a surprise that a writer of this stature you know, who is a seminal author of American Literature but he had a very tragic life himself. He fell in love with a cousin of his, who was, and there was a huge age difference between them. She was also a minor, yeah, but they decided to get married and they had a fairly happy married life for a few years. But then she died as well, of tuberculosis. And after that he was shattered.

So he was already in a kind who could never cope with losses and tragedies. So once the woman he loved and married and she died, after that it was a, you know, a rapid downhill for him. So he gambled, heavy drinker and he lost whatever he had. This entire output, Ok is a

result; much of it is a result of that period. When he was with his wife, he was happy and there was some literature that came out of him. But then after her death, I mean he must have been in a state. So this, he is one of the writers whose personal life like mirrors whatever he has, this is true even in the case of Charles Dickens.

But Dickens is always full of pessimism. He was a wise man, a practical man. He made a success of his life, Ok. So it's like typical, you know, rags to riches story but in this case, it is the complete opposite. His foster father was quite rich, quite wealthy. He could have remained in touch with his father but they just severed ties and then and once that, those ties broke off, he could never bounce back, financially. But in spite of all his worries, he has left behind very rich quality and amount of work. So he also talks about philosophy of composition.

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Student: Was he popular when he was alive, were his works popular?

Professor: Yeah, his short stories did well. They used to get published

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Professor: in all these magazines, Ok, that's how you earn a living. He was, but you know, could never earn enough to pay off his debts and live happily, live respectable life. It is also said that he was murdered at the end, yeah. So there is lot of mystery surrounding his death. There are various schools of thought about how did Edgar Allan Poe die. You know whatever he wrote and if you look at his own life, it's a very rich area of research, Ok, interesting life. So in his philosophy of composition, he explains the process of writing Raven and he explains that, instead of working in a fine frenzy of ecstatic intuition, poet chooses a consistent emotional atmosphere.

So emotional atmosphere to work in, this is important. This is the key element, that emotional atmosphere that takes primacy over versification and characters. Atmosphere, remember these words, this is the takeaway on Poe, the environment, the atmosphere. And how, if you contextualize the entire oeuvre of Poe in Romantic movement, see how he fits the bill completely. Any questions, any comments, anything you know about Poe that you would like to share? And then you have already told me, he was fond of portraying Gothic life, aristocratic Gothic life and also hypersensitive people. His life and poetry is all about writings are all about, Hypersensitive people.

Student: The Tell-Tale Heart

Professor: Good

Student: The description is so

Professor: Emotional

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Student: Yeah, no it's the senses it heightens senses. Like he feels the heart and he can hear

Professor: Exactly, Ok. So we are talking about the poetic principle

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Professor: where he says, as you have told, Ashwin has already told us, the death of the beautiful woman is the most poetic topic in the world. It is the most heart-rending romantic topic in the world, death of a beautiful woman; this is taken from The Poetic Principle. If you have the essay with you, you can look at it. If you don't have, I am just quoting from the essay, The Poetic Principle by Poe

In speaking of the Poetic Principle, I have no design to be either thorough or profound.

Do you have it? While discussing, very much at random, the essentiality of what we call Poetry, my principal purpose will be to cite for consideration some few of those minor

English or American poems which best suit my own taste, or which upon my own fancy have left the most definite impression. By “minor poems” I mean, of course, poems of little length. So he is not going to talk to you about

Professor: Paradise lost, Ok

And here in the beginning permit me to say a few words in regard to a somewhat peculiar principle, which, whether rightfully or wrongfully, has always had its influence in my own critical estimate of the poem. I hold that a long poem does not exist. I maintain that the phrase, “a long poem,” is simply a flat contradiction in terms. I need scarcely observe that a poem deserves its title only inasmuch as it excites, by elevating the soul. The value of the poem is in the ratio of this elevating excitement. But all excitements are, so called at all, cannot be sustained throughout a composition of any great length. After the lapse of half an hour, at the very utmost, it flags—fails—a revulsion ensues—and then the poem is, in effect, and in fact, no longer such.

What is he saying?

Student: Emotions are expressed the strongest when

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Student: expressed in

Student: Articulated in shorter lines rather than long

Professor: Brevity

Student: Yes

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Professor: So, if you are writing poems that run into volumes, it is an exercise in intellect, not in emotion. So emotions are best expressed when they are expressed briefly. Yeah so length matters. Are you with me? Do you agree with Poe?

Student: Yes

Professor: Why? If you have the time and inclination to write lengthy volumes then how does the question of emotions come up to begin with? You know you are; it's an intellectual effort, an exercise. There cannot be emotions involved. Spontaneous, so look at all the greatest poems of Wordsworth. What's the running length? Think Michael, think Lucy. Shorter poems, We Are Seven, Daffodils, Solitary Reaper, all of us are familiar with these poems here. The emotions strike us more but when you look at Shelley's Adonaïs, do you think it is an exercise in emotion or intellect?

Student: Intellect

Professor: More intellect, yeah. It's a lengthy; it's a long poem, Ok. But Keats's Ode to the Nightingale, Grecian Urn, they are all emotion, yes.

It is clear that a poem may be improperly brief. Undue brevity degenerates into mere epigrammatism.

The way Pope used to write.

A very short poem, while now and then producing a brilliant or vivid, never produces a profound or enduring, effect. There must be the steady pressing down of the stamp upon the wax.

And here let me speak briefly on the topic of rhythm. Contenting myself with the certainty that Music, in its various modes of meter, rhythm, and rhyme, is of so vast a moment in Poetry as never to be wisely rejected—is so vitally important an adjunct, that he is simply silly who declines its assistance—I will not now pause to maintain its absolute essentiality. It is in Music, perhaps, that the soul most nearly attains the great end for which, when inspired by the Poetic Sentiment, it struggles—the creation of supernal Beauty. It may be, indeed, that here this sublime end is, now and then, attained in fact. We are often made to feel, with a shivering delight, that from an earthly harp are stricken notes which cannot have been unfamiliar to the angels.

What is he talking about; the music of the poem, the rhyme, the meter, yeah and especially in poems of moderate length. I am reading all this, I am trying to sensitize you with all these issues and his theories of creative writing because all this is in, in order to understand and appreciate the poem better, Ok. Now look at the poem. Look at the text. I have given you the background. I have given you the theory. Now look at the text. Rukma let's have you read the first two stanzas.

Student: Oh yeah

Professor: Ashwin, can you read the first two stanzas?

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Student: Annabel Lee

BY EDGAR ALLAN POE

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 winged seraphs of Heaven
Coveted her and me.

Professor: alright.

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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.

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Look at the meter. Isn't it beautiful; and simplicity of it and the romantic element in it? So it's a poem about people. It's a poem about people, yeah, kingdom by a sea. In a kingdom by the sea, it can be any kingdom by the sea. Ok and this is the fair maiden. Now compare it with anything else that you have read.

Student: Fairy tale

Professor: yeah?

Student: Fairy tale

Professor: Fairy tale setting, Ok.

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Student: But more darker.

Professor: Darker, yeah because after all

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I was a child and she was a child,
and look at the italics,
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 winged 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;

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Professor: And it is worth noting that his beloved wife died of tuberculosis and you know, respiratory troubles, yes.

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Professor: 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.

What kind of a

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Professor: scene is created for you?

Student: Taking away

Professor: Taking away

Student: Yeah, sad love

Professor: Yeah sad love and leaving behind, it's all, typical Romeo Juliet story, right. They loved each other and they lost each other. And again, the meter, the emotion, Ok. Do you find the Gothicness here, the Gothic touch?

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Student: Somebody bore her away

Professor: Bore her away.

Student: and sepulchre

Professor: Yes and sepulchre, forever.

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Professor: I mean think Wuthering Heights. Are you familiar with Wuthering Heights?

Student: yes

Professor: What does Heathcliff do once she dies, once Catherine dies and she is buried? What does he do? Mourn her, he is angry with everyone but what else, he does something else?

Student: (())

Professor: He actually does that, yeah. He opens her tomb, yeah in order to lie beside her. Through his eyes, she is still the way she died, that Catherine of his. Although, now, in actual, in reality she is a rotting skeleton, Ok, so the Gothic element in the writers of this period. See all these writers, we may rubbish biographical fallacies and all but there was; there is something that can be said about that, so unless you know where the writer is coming from, you wouldn't understand the background. It may look, Ok, if you just obliterate all the biographical details here, it may still come across as a pure, romantic motion story. But if know what he had been through. Again Brontë sisters, who was, which Brontë wrote Jane Eyre

Student: Emily

Professor: No Emily is Wuthering

Student: Charlotte

Professor: Charlotte, yes, so Charlotte Bronte, Jane Eyre and Emily Bronte Wuthering Heights and why so much of sorrow, tragedy, deaths.

Student: I think their brother and father

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Student: died of consumption.

Professor: Exactly, their mother died of consumption.

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Professor: Their, they had a sister who too died of consumption. And out of their several siblings, only few survived. And they had a brother who ended up as an alcoholic, a failed painter. He was dark, brooding and always angry with the world and he became the model for Student: Mr. Rochester and also

Professor: Mr. Rochester and also Heathcliff because see they were all unmarried, these 3 sisters, Agnes Gray, the third sister, wrote the novel Agnes Gray?

Student: Anne Bronte

Professor: Anne Bronte? Yes, so they are three, they never married, they died young. They were all in their thirties. Are you aware of that?

Student: Yes

Professor: Are you aware of that? The Bronte sisters died pretty young, yeah output they had left behind. So, and, they grew up, their father was a parish priest. And it was also a time of some kind of a plague in their county. So every day there would be deaths around them. And the father had to preside, you know, had to do the rites, the rituals of the dead. So the sisters grew up among them and you know, there would be scenes of funeral and coffins and graveyards, so, so much visible and prominent in their own works, because that's what they grew up with.

OK and their brother, he repeatedly tried to make a success of himself, he would become a storywriter and he tried his hand in this and that, and painting and writing and a variety of trades and would always fail, Ok. They were very close to their brother but they knew, in end, he became, because they had no access to any other man. That's what they saw, that's all they saw, their brother and their father, so those men became; those dark brooding silent men became the role models.

Edgar Allan Poe had a different kind of a life, Ok. He had been widely exposed to excellent education, wealthy friends, gambling friends, the drunkards, the low life so he had a variety of, he had seen society in all its forms. Ok.

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Professor: 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;
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Professor: Do you require any explanation here? It's very clear, Ok

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Professor: 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;
Now, can you connect this

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Professor: to the Gothic readings, the novels that you must have read?

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Yes, so you know, even Wuthering Heights is a

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Professor: is a supreme example of Gothic novel, Gothic horror, mysteries and romances of course.

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Professor: 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.

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Professor: Now I would like you take a moment and apply the poetic principle, do you have access to the poetic principle? Right now. Can you apply some of the principles to this poem? Do this exercise.

(Professor – student conversation ends)