



# 中华女子学院 2009届普高本科毕业生 优秀论文集 (一)

教务处制

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# 试论爱伦·坡的女性观

陈国群

**摘要:**埃德加·爱伦·坡在美国文学史上是一位颇受争议的人物。在 20 余年的文学生涯中，坡在很多领域，特别是诗歌方面，都取得了极大成功。在《写作的哲学》中，坡首次提出了“美女之死”这一主题。他断言“美女之死”是世界上最富诗意的诗歌主题，认为“美女之死”是最高美的感受，而女性，作为男性生命中不可或缺的一部分，对男性有着强烈的感情作用。在创作实践中，这一主题贯穿于他的大多数作品中，作品中采用了很多与个人生活相关联的理想女性形象，包括《乌鸦》、《安娜贝尔·李》、《为了安妮》、《致海伦》等多首诗歌。

本文拟结合坡的文学创作理论分析其诗歌中的理想女性形象所具有的特有作用，在此基础上探讨他的女性观。

**关键字:**“美女之死” 理想女性形象 特有作用 女性观

**Abstract:** Edgar Allan Poe is one of the most controversial literary figures in American literary history. In about 20 years of his literary career, Poe has made great successes in different fields, especially in poetry. In his essay *The Philosophy of Composition*, Poe firstly prompts the idea of “death of beauty”. He declares that “death of beauty” is the most poetical topic in the world and the highest beautiful sensation. And women, an indispensable part of men’s life, have strong emotional influence on men. In practice, of all his renowned works which adopt lots of ideal feminine images related to his personal life, many of them are dealing with this topic, including poems like *The Raven*, *Annabel Lee*, *For Annie*, *To Helen* and so on.

By exerting his literary composition theory to analyze the unique functions of the ideal feminine images in Poe’s poetry, the thesis is aimed at addressing his views on women.

**Key Words:** “Death of Beauty” Ideal Feminine Images Unique Functions Views on Women

## 1. Introduction

Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) is one of the greatest writers in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century American literature. But the fact is that he had an uneven journey both in his daily and literary life. For all his life, Poe was struggling with poverty, misfortune, miseries and adversities, let alone betrayal from friends. The most tragic part of his life might be that he faced so many losses of the women he loved, either by death or by rumor. Therefore life, love and women's death become the recurring themes in his works.

Meanwhile, as a productive and versatile writer, Allan Poe engaged in the creation of poetry, fiction and literary criticism. The diversity of his works is truly amazing. But the sad fact is that he is a writer whose statue is always in dispute, who has remained one of the most controversial figures in the history. He was famous in Europe long before he was fully recognized and appreciated by his native country. Beginning as a poet before twenty, Poe produced many beautiful and lyrical poems which are closely related with ideal women images. As a critic, in *The Philosophy of Composition*, Poe firstly prompted the idea of "death of beauty" and declared that the death of a beautiful woman is the most poetical topic in the world. At the same time, he put forward the theory of "pure poetry" and "single effect". For his entire life, Poe was seeking for a style of his own, in which he succeeded. It is just the unique style that has made him remain a legend of America, even an icon of world literature. Poe has his very own system of aesthetic views too; though to some degree, he was quite isolated from his contemporaries.

The vision of ideal feminine images appears throughout Poe's works. In most of his poems, he tends to idealize the divinity and fragility of women. The fair, affectionate, vulnerable and motherly tender women are the incarnation of beauty and through lamenting over their deaths, Poe expresses the central theme of the pursuit of Beauty.

<sup>1</sup> Under his pen, the beautiful women are dying, spreading an exquisite fragrance all around and ascending to heaven. Relying absolutely on women's love, and because of their deaths, the men characters live a vacuous life, thus finding solace or being forgotten. In their mind, the women, who are romantic, tender and affectionate, are all angels. And the poet himself is in the world of ideality and dream, living in a utopian fancy and paradise.

By analyzing the ideal feminine images in his "death of beauty" poems and his composition theory, the thesis intends to explore Poe's views on women. First of all, this thesis will focus on Poe's literary

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<sup>1</sup> Li Yun, "On Feminine Ideal in Allan Poe's works of "Death of beauty" (MA thesis, Ocean University of China, June 2008), 2.

composition theory and aesthetic factor exerted in his poetry. Next, the thesis will pay attention to the important women figures in Poe's life, who had greatly affected his life and writing style. Elizabeth Poe, Poe's natural mother, who died when Poe was not even three years old, sowed the seed of "death of beauty" in his young heart. This childhood loss resulted in Poe's lifelong feeling of instability and lifelong search for maternal love. Few women images served this function in Poe's latter life. And the next step of the thesis will turn to the characterization of the female images in his "death of beauty" poems specifically. These women images are fragile, romantic, beautiful and mysterious. They always show up in the dreamland and they are depicted to be sent to heaven. Then this study will put forward the several unique functions of the ideal feminine images in Poe's poetry. We all know that the first woman a man usually meets is his mother. Women are endowed with the mighty motherly love who provide their children with nurturing and health-recovering power. They also possess the capacity of consolation and protection. When the man grows up, he will need to find a lover. The love of a woman can really change a man. The speakers in Poe's poetry all have their expectations of the beauty of women. A beautiful woman always has a pair of beautiful eyes which are the symbol of Beauty. At last, the study will conclude Poe's views on women based on the above analyses.

## 2. Poe's Literary Composition Theory and Aestheticism

Quite different from his contemporaries, Poe stood out as a single case for critics on poetry creation. In his opinion, there are two objectives of poetry, that is, excitement and beauty which are closely related to each other. Beauty, according to Poe, exists only in an eternal intuition of men's spirit. And the strongest excitement of poetry is from the contemplation and observation of beauty.<sup>2</sup> It can be found in his literary essays that his ideas on poetry are quite identical with the principles of aestheticism movement whose slogan is the famous "art for art's sake." Coordinating with his "pure poetry" theory, Poe lays his emphasis on imagination and fancy, on effect and unity and his interests in originality and musicality in his poetry creation. Poe holds that a poem is written for "elevating the soul, the value of the poem is in the ratio of this elevating excitement" and "Beauty is the sole legitimate province of the poem".<sup>3</sup> These points coordinate with the view expressed in his *The Poetic Principle*, the chief aim of poetry is beauty, namely to produce a feeling of beauty in the reader. Beauty aims at "an everlasting excitement of the soul",

<sup>2</sup> Pan Lei, "Poe's Aesthetic Perspectives of Beauty in Art, Life and Death (MA thesis, Hua Zhong University, April 2006), 5.

<sup>3</sup> Davidson, E. H. eds. *Selected Writings of Edgar Allan Poe*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1956), 455.

and “beauty of whatever kind, in its supreme development, invariably excites the sensitive soul to tears. Thus melancholy is the most legitimate of all the poetic tones”. Poe concludes that “the death of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world”.<sup>4</sup> *The Philosophy of Composition* reinforces Poe’s philosophy of beauty.

When, indeed, man speak of Beauty, they mean, precisely, not a quality, as is supposed, but an effect—hey refer, in short, just to that intense and pure elevation of soul---not of intellect, or of heartt—upon which I have commented, and which is experienced in consequence of contemplating ‘the beautiful’.<sup>5</sup>

Thus the value of what is viewed lies solely in the response induced in the observer, and the subject takes complete precedence over its object. Instead, the inspiration for the experience of Beauty in all its melancholy extremity is “the death... of a beautiful woman” and appropriately, “equally it is beyond doubt that the lips best suited for such topic are those of a bereaved lover”.<sup>6</sup> The woman must die in order to gain the aesthetic effect, to enlarge the experience of the narrator, and most important to fulfill Poe’s ideal feminine viewpoint. In his poetry, the loss of a beautiful and beloved woman is the recurrent theme. His poems on the subject include *Lenore*, *Sonnet—To Zante*, *To One in Paradise*, *Deep in Earth*, *The Raven*, *Ulalume* and *Annabel Lee*.

Then why is Poe so fond of the theme “death of beauty”? The unique composition theory, the unusual aesthetic view and the peculiar life experience contribute to the enthusiasm for the theme. Firstly, Poe’s understanding of beauty is extraordinary. The beauty on his mind is not sensory perception, but a sacred, unreal, pure and everlasting thing. And death of beauty is the best way to express this beauty. In addition, Poe pursues the unity of expression and effect and the theory, “the unity of effect” impenetrates his whole writing process. The fact is that a melancholy tone produces the best effect on the reader. So this is the way to achieve the expected effect of literary composition in Poe’s eyes. What’s more, the peculiar life experience fosters Poe to form a pessimistic view towards life. We know that he lives in an age of upswing of western capitalism. But beneath the prosperous society, there appeared the deep social and economic crises. People at the time universally felt the unbearable depression. Another fact is that Poe was from South America which was defeated by the North in the Civil War. Poe felt that he had lost the spiritual support concerning the decay of the South. What make it worse are the misfortunes in his daily

<sup>4</sup> Edgar Allen Poe *The Poetic Principle*. (The Norton Anthology of American Literature), 1434.

<sup>5</sup> Davidson 463.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 458.



and career life. He despised the reality and longed for the future, the things that wouldn't come true. How to get away from the loneliness and realize his hope for the future becomes an existing problem posed to him. In his opinion, one can surpass the hardship and possess the eternity only through death.

### 3. The Ideal Feminine Images in Poe's Poetry

As a sensitive man, Poe had encountered lots of women in his life and inevitably they all had varying influences on him. From the beginning to the end of his life, women played a significant role in cultivating both his personality and composition theories. In life, some of them gave him courage to live on; in literature, Poe got inspiration from some of them.

Towards the major females in his life, Poe always showed his admiration or love without any preservation. He didn't consider them to be accessory or inferior as most of the males in his times did; on the contrary, he felt great attachment to them. This point is manifested in his poetry creation. The women in his poetry all have great emotional influence on the male story-tellers. Different from his cotemporary writers, he gave fair comments in the publication to the women writers of his time when he was the editor. He also showed his respect even to the women he didn't quite like. Therefore, Poe was quite distinctive in a society which always held a despising and unjust attitude towards women. Although he was an advanced thinker and man, he suffered the most unjust treatment from the society and destiny. He faced so many deaths of his beloved woman. It is easy to apprehend that women to Poe meant more tragedies than happiness. This fact definitely had a strong influence on shaping his idea of "death of beauty", though he might not be aware of it. Nobody else could understand better what the unreachable beauty is, for Poe has been pursuing it desperately for all his life. Expressing his sorrow and missing in his literary creation, Poe came out with the idea "death of beauty" to reflect his life experience. The ideal feminine images in his poetry seem to be more reachable than the cruel reality. So that is part of the reason why Poe had depicted so many ideal women in his poems. What's more, these feminine ideals all have some common features which, to some extent, reflect Poe's life experience.

#### 3.1 The Fragile, Romantic, Beautiful and Mysterious Ideal Women

For the most beautiful and melancholy topic---lost love, Poe's ideal female in his poetry often appears pale and flimsy, beautiful and elegant, unidentified and mysterious.

*The Sleeper* portrays a mysterious state existing somewhere between life and death. The speaker in the poem has lost his beloved one and over her grave, he prays in these chilling lines: "Strange is thy



pallor! strange thy dress! / Strange, above all, thy length of tress.”<sup>7</sup> The lover is pale. She has long hair which is a symbol of beauty and she wears white dress which symbolizes the pureness of her body and soul. “An opiate vapor, dewy, dim, / Exhales from out her golden rim,”<sup>8</sup> shows that she is quite beautiful, elegant and mysterious.

In the poem *To Helen*, Helen is depicted as a gentle, classic and elegant guiding lady who is like a statue. She stands besides the shore with a classic face leading the weary wanderer to the native port and the glory of Greece. With some resemblance to the Statue of Liberty in New York, Helen is really dignified. Helen is a beautiful name and an embodiment of beautiful woman.

When we turn to the poem *Annabel Lee*, we know that Annabel is so romantic because “And this maiden she lived with no other thought / than to love and be loved by me”.<sup>9</sup> She is so fragile that “That the wind came out of the cloud by night, / Chilling and killing my Annabel LEE”.<sup>10</sup> The speaker loves her back with a passionate heart. He thinks that they can never be separated and their love can’t be surpassed.

In the Poem *The Raven*, the narrator’s lover is “the rare and radiant maiden whom the angles name Lenore”<sup>11</sup> and she is a sainted maiden. Lenore, this name, only appears in this poem for a few times. All we can sense from the poem are the sadness and depression of the speaker. Lenore, the name, also has been used in other poems as the main character, such as *Al Aaraaf*. So we can see that Lenore is more like a symbol rather than some real person.

All these women we have discussed above are full of mystery because the speakers never tell us their complete background information. Therefore, the identity is never known by us. Poe used his own imagination and the subconscious and his idea of pursuing the ideal beauty to present those women in his poetry.

### 3.2 The Ideal Women in Dreamland

Poe was very fond of utilizing the dreamland which can give him the unity of effect he wants. Firstly, dreamland gives us a sense of mystery and romance. The dreams one has reflect his or her inner world and thoughts. But dreams can’t be predicted and controlled. Dreams always seem so illusory. The speakers in Poe’s poems express their love and missing to their lovers in dreamland in the way he likes. In *The Raven*, “Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there wondering, fearing, / Doubting, dreaming

<sup>7</sup> Edgar Allan Poe, *The Complete Poetry of Edgar Allan Poe—The Sleeper* (New America Library, 1996), 72.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 71.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 116.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 116.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 92.

dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before”<sup>12</sup> gives us the sense that the narrator is trying to use dreams to convey his fear and doubting of Lenore’s death.

Furthermore, dreamland can relieve the pain in reality. In dreamland, one can do whatever he or she wants differing from the reality. The things you can’t do anything about them turn out to be feasible in dreamland. We all know that Poe encountered so many difficulties and losses in his life. that he couldn’t do anything about the cruel fact that most of the women he pursued were beyond his reach. It seems only in dreamland could he face the “Death of Beauty” and knew how to face it. By virtue of the intermediary dreamland, Poe realized his life regrets and then fulfilled his obligations. In *Annabel Lee*, “For the moon never beams, without bringing me dreams / Of the beautiful ANNABEL LEE”<sup>13</sup> revealsto to us the picture that the speaker dreams all the time of the beautiful lover. Dreams deliver his missing and love to Annabel Lee despite the fact that she has already been dead. We can know from these lines that the love between the speaker and Annabel Lee is so strong that nothing could separate or dismiss them.

In addition, dreams are embodiment of hope and beauty. The poem, *Dreams*, is the incarnation of Poe’s view towards dreamland. Poe wrote:

Oh! that my young life were a lasting dream!  
My spirit not awak’ning till the beam  
Of an Eternity should bring the morrow.  
Yes! tho’ that long dream were of hopeless sorrow,  
’T were better than the cold reality of waking life,  
...  
I have been happy, tho’ but in a dream.  
I have been happy-and I love the theme:  
Dreams! in their vivid coloring of life,  
As in that fleeting, shadowy, misty strife  
Of semblance with reality which brings  
To the delirious eye, more lovely things  
Of Paradise and Love- and all our own!  
Than young Hope in his sunniest hour hath known.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.93.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.117.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.35.

Dream is usually bounded with happiness, hope and beauty and it is always better than the harsh reality in Poe's opinion. Poe also wrote some other poems concerning dream, such as *A Dream Within a Dream*, *A Dream*, *Dream-Land* and so on. It seems that he is obsessed with this topic because dreamland can give him all that he wants.

### 3.3 The Ideal Women Sent to Heaven

When we examine the women revealed in Poe's poetry, it is not difficult to find out that those women are romantic, elegant and innocent just like Heaven's angels. Most of the mysterious women in his poems like Annabel Lee, Lenore, Israfel are sent to Heaven. This phenomenon is due to Poe's life undergoing and the unique aesthetic taste. As a matter of fact, Heaven is a place hard to reach. This point corresponds to Poe's pursuing of women in his life. It seems that there is a natural wide gap between them. The beauty and the Heaven are both hard to reach and chase. But if the lover was placed in Heaven, then it would be easier to touch them all. For Poe, the beauty should be remote, obscure and visional. Poe opposes to the view "literary should serve the people" held by his contemporaries. He claims that poetry should deviate from the reality. Reader can experience the classic oriental and western beauty from the poetry. The beauty of the poetry Poe presents to us is a sacred beauty which is tightly connected with the heaven and this beauty doesn't belong to the earth. The speakers in the poetry love their ladies and place their lovers in a very high and holy place—the heaven. They admire these women because these ladies are just like the angels.

In the poem *To One in Paradise*, the speaker claims that the lover's love to him is more than the enchanting of the heaven. Compared to the heaven, the love is a temptation. Annabel Lee is sent to heaven too. The love between them is envied by the angels, so the angels take her away from the speaker. *The Raven* keeps telling the speaker that Lenore is never more flesh because she is sent to heaven. Lots of Poe's poems contain this image, the heaven. Which symbolizes purity, the peace and eternity. That is what the speakers want in terms of their lovers.

### 4. The Unique Functions of the Ideal Feminine Images

Poe tends to idealize the divinity and fragility of woman, which may result from his consideration of his delicate wife Virginia and the early deaths of the other intimate women in his life. For the most beautiful and melancholy topic—lost love in Poe's poetry, the ideal feminine images are always presented with vagueness and lack of individual identity, as if they did not belong to the real world. These

women images serve chiefly as inspiration and the melancholy experience of beauty for the bereaved narrator, who surrender themselves totally to the memory of their dead beloved.<sup>15</sup> The most noteworthy feature of these ideal feminine images, however, is that her significance depends on her relation to the male narrator other than on her own right. She is the incarnation of the Beauty that Poe and his narrator long for. It is through the lament over her death that the narrator expresses implicitly the central theme of the pursuit of Beauty. And the most significant trait of his ideal is her role as emotional catalyst for the male character.

The fair, affectionate, vulnerable and motherly tender women are the incarnation of Beauty. The ideal feminine images in Poe's poetry exert great emotional influence on the male characters. These images have some extraordinary functions.

#### **4.1 Women Endowed with Mighty Motherly Love**

An important feature shared by Poe's ideal feminine images in poetry is their mighty motherly love, which is affected by Poe's life experience. With a careful examination of the women he created in his poetry, we can find that most of them bear some motherly features. Poe's subsequent behavior, particularly his persistent need to be closely associated with some women who could play the role of mother to him, were, to some extent, all resulted from this childhood loss, whether it be Francis Allan (the first Mrs. Allan, his foster-mother); Mrs. Stanard, mother of his friend, Richard; Mrs. Clemm, aunt and mother-in-law; Virginia, wife-mother; Mrs. Shew, his physician-nurse; Mrs. Whitman, the poetess he tried unsuccessfully to marry; Mrs. "Annie" Richmond, the married woman he deeply loved but could not have for a wife; or Elmira Royster Shelton, former childhood sweetheart and later a widow he was planning to marry before he died. Of all these tender women, Mrs. Clemm is perhaps altogether the most important woman in Poe's life. She is the woman who fulfilled the maternal role in Poe's life, which his own mother and step-mother could never achieve. Ever since Poe moved in her house, Mrs. Clemm looked after and cared for Poe with devotion and loyalty until the end of his life. We can see Poe's gratitude to Maria by reading part of his heart—the moving poem *To My Mother*. The mighty motherly love can be divided into two aspects: the powerful nursing and health-recovering ability, and the capacity of consolation and protection.

##### **4.1.1 The Powerful Nursing and Health-recovering Ability**

As we all know that the most divine responsibility and wish of a mother is to nurture her child.

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<sup>15</sup> Li Yun 40.

Nursing power is part of a woman's nature and a responsible mother totally has the ability to foster a child well. Poe lost his mother at a very young age; therefore, he thirsted for such kind of love in all his life. This point is quite obviously revealed in his poetry. In the poem *To My Mother*, the narrator proclaims that:

Because I feel that, in the Heavens above,  
The angels, whispering to one another,  
Can find, among their burning terms of love,  
None so devotional as that of 'mother'.<sup>16</sup>

That is quite true because a mother devotes most of her energy, time and love to her child. Furthermore, a mother can recover a child's weary heart and wounded scars. She can help her child to remain healthy. In Poe's life, lots of women healed his wounds which were either caused by the uneven career life, the rumors or criticism. *To Helen* is a poem which fully presents this extraordinary function of motherly love. The ideal feminine image in this poem uses her power to make "The weary, way-worn wander bore / To his own native shore".<sup>17</sup> The wanderer returns to the safe harbor. What's more, this weary wanderer also finds out that the ideal beauty of this woman heals his soul and makes it calm. It seems that "the agate lamp"<sup>18</sup> in her hands is the lighthouse for the wanderer and it emits the brightest light from the "Holy-Land".<sup>19</sup>

#### 4.1.2 The Capacity of Consolation and Protection

Mother is our innate friend and protector. Every mother has the special trait to protect her child against any harm from the outside world and the same case can be applied to the animal mother. Whenever a child is unhappy and weary, he or she can always turn to his or her mother for consolation because mother is always willing and waiting to help them. Several women images play such a role in Poe's life, and likewise he shows his admiration and love for them.

*For Annie* may be regarded as stereotypical in expressing the feminine maternity. Annie is not only depicted as the combination of "truth" and "beauty", her maternal role to the narrator is also unforgettable when she covers the narrator with warm blanket, bids him good night and piously "prayed to the angels"<sup>20</sup> to bless and protect him. Annie also consoles the speaker at the same time. We can find the evidence in lines like:

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 111.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 66.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 66.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 66.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 111.

She tenderly kissed me,  
 She fondly caressed,  
 And then I fell gently to sleep on her breast-  
 Deeply to sleep  
 From the heaven of her breast.<sup>21</sup>

These lines reveal the motherly tenderness which gives the wanted consolation and protection.

#### 4.2 The Changing Ability of Women's Love

Poe thinks that the love of woman is the source of happiness, safety and life. A man's life journey begins with his birth. Mother is the first woman he knows at the first sight, so the love of a mother can really affect a child's personal development and the formation of his habitation. If a child was well nurtured and got passionate love from the mother, then he or she would have a better future life and mental health. Poe loved his mother, although she died when he was very young. He had admitted his debt to his mother publicly. But actually the lack of motherly love in his early years affected him a lot. He kept looking for this tender and great motherly love later. Then he was taken in but never formally adopted by Richmond tobacco magnate John Allan. There he became a child of a mother again. As for his foster mother, he also loved her dearly. In one of his letters, he sent his "dearest love to Ma," and hoped "she will not let my wayward disposition wear away the love she used to have for me".<sup>22</sup> Poe also accused himself of neglecting of his foster mother during the two years of his Army service. Edgar Poe left New York early in 1831 and sought a refuge in the only home open to him, that of Mrs. Clemm. Mrs. Clemm was another mother for Poe. There he fell in love with his little cousin—Virginia. A letter from Poe to Mrs. Clemm, written on August 29, 1835, which appeared for the first time in a biography, makes it clear that Edgar Poe loved his little cousin not only with the affection of a brother, but also with the passionate devotion of a lover and a prospective husband. "My dearest Aunty: . . . I love; you know I love Virginia passionately devotedly. I cannot express in word the fervent devotion I feel towards my dear little cousin. . . ."<sup>23</sup> He showed his love consistently and finally they got married. In their marriage life, Poe was unquestionably of an affectionate disposition; of which he gave the best kind of proof when he labored cheerfully for the maintenance of his aunt and cousin. By seizing every opportunity he possessed, Poe supplied Virginia with the comforts and luxuries of life. In the intervening years from the first serious

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.113.

<sup>22</sup> Sova, Dawn B. *The Essential Reference to His life and Work*. (New York: Checkmark Books An imprint of Facts On File, Inc., 2001.), 127.

<sup>23</sup> Sova 77.

evidence of Virginia's illness, she had become an invalid, and her increasingly fragile health and the destruction of her body by tuberculosis sent Poe into deep depression. He lived in daily fear of her death, and the pain of watching her body waste away stayed with him until his own death. After the death of Virginia, he indulged himself in alcohol and depression. Life was always torturing him, which seemed so unfair to this talented and loving man. The love of women changed Poe in his life. This point is also shown in his poems.

In the Poem *Eulalie*——*A Song*, the speaker says that:

I dwelt alone In a world of moan,  
And my soul was a stagnant tide,  
Till the fair and gentle Eulalie became my blushing bride-  
Till the yellow-haired young Eulalie became my smiling bride. . .  
Now Doubt-now Pain Come never again,  
For her soul gives me sigh for sigh,  
And all day long Shines, bright and strong,  
Astarte within the sky,  
While ever to her dear Eulalie upturns her matron eye---  
While ever to her young Eulalie upturns her violet eye.<sup>24</sup>

We can see that after the marriage with Eulalie, the speaker who once lived in a lonely and painful state becomes fresh and happy, and he gets rid of all the pain and unhappiness. Eulalie changes radically the narrator. Woman's beauty and tenderness are two of the most important feminine traits that masculine writers would like to pay attention to. As for the sweet feminine love, we have Annabel Lee and Annie. In the beginning of *Annabel Lee*, the narrator informs that many years ago in a kingdom, he was in love with a maiden named Annabel Lee. Their lives were very simple: "She lived with no other thought / Than to love and be loved by me".<sup>25</sup> Obviously Annabel Lee and the speaker are so envied by the angels in the heaven that Annabel is chilled and her body is taken away by her "highborn kinsmen".<sup>26</sup> Although Annabel Lee seems to be devoured by the destructive power from above, her capacity in the love for her lover can exceed anything else and anyone else. At last, she has transcended death actually and become the guiding star to her lover. While her lover always

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.99.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.116.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.116.



Lie down by the side  
 Of my darling-my darling- my wife and my bride,  
 In the sepulcher there by the sea  
 In her tomb by the sounding sea.<sup>27</sup>

*For Annie* is written for Annie Richmond. The tender and melodious poem describes Poe's gratitude in recovering from the severe illness that ensued when he attempted suicide by overdoing on laudanum in November 1848. It speaks of Poe's conquest at last of "the fever called 'Living'," <sup>28</sup> and the cessation of "The moaning and groaning, / The sighing and sobbing" <sup>29</sup> that had tortured him. A little more than halfway through the poem, the speaker has "A dream of the truth / And the beauty of Annie" <sup>30</sup> in which the Annie of the poem is tenderly maternal, comforting Poe with a gentle and protective embrace:

She tenderly kissed me,  
 She fondly caressed,  
 And then I fell gently  
 To sleep on her breast  
 Deeply to sleep  
 From the heaven of her breast.<sup>31</sup>

From his suffering state at the beginning of the poem, the speaker develops a "brighter" heart "than all of the many stars of the heaven / For it sparkles with Annie". <sup>32</sup> He recovers because of the loving care that Annie has provided him.

### 4.3 The Mysterious and Colorful Eyes

In poetry, Poe holds a nearly crazy attitude towards expressing the heroine's eyes. It is generally acknowledged that the expression of a person's eyes stands for that person's individuality and psychic interiority.

In Poe's poetry, heroines have different eyes with various colors. Their mysterious and colorful eyes serve not only a function as the symbolical carrier of Beauty, but also as a transmitting of hope. Light eyes are Poe's favorite depiction about them. The bride "Eulalie" has violet eyes. *To One in Paradise* is an elegy for a grey-eyed beloved. Annabel Lee, Annie, the beloved in *To*——Isabel in *Fairy Land* and the

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.116.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.111.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.111.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.113.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.113.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.114.

bride in *Song* are all described as having glowing or bright eyes, often sparkling like stars. But the most extreme of Poe's emphasis of lovers' eyes occurs in *To Helen*, in which the last two long stanzas deal basically with the enchanting impression upon the speaker of the lover's eyes that are "saved" after all "expired". The eyes "likening to the heavenly star", "the divine light in thine eyes" and "those crystalline, celestial spheres"<sup>33</sup> clearly indicate their unearthly nature. And "Only thine eyes remained"<sup>34</sup> may be interpreted as that when the physical features are reduced to the original nudity, only the eyes, the window of the poetic soul, are remained. In the concluding line, the light of eyes are even said outshining daylight: "I see them still-two sweetly scintillant, / Venuses, unextinguished by the sun".<sup>35</sup> Daylight in Poe's code is related to the rational intellect of this world. The one outshines daylight definitely alludes to something other than this world—the supreme Beauty above this world. The eyes fill us with hope.

## 5. Poe's Views on Women

Edgar Allan Poe endures much controversial opinions on his views on women. Looking into Poe's life experience and literary composition, we can easily tap into Poe's inner world where his views on women can be discovered.

As a matter of fact, the theme "death of beauty" is employed in almost all of his works. For his symbolical use of woman, Poe is often accused of woman discrimination and using women as tools. Through all his works, he depicts only the speakers closely related with women. He keeps telling us what the story-tellers' reaction to the death of the beauty. To some extent, the feminine images are only used as a tool served to elevating the whole unity of the poem. The feminine images must die for the purpose of expanding the activity space of the speakers. He ignores the importance of personality of the women in his poetry. So even his faithful admirer Baudelaire once asserted Poe was "completely anti-feminine." But if we know Poe's unique conception of death-departure from this suffering world and exalting into that world of pure Beauty, we will understand that those passive, vulnerable, dying or dead women are, instead of being discriminated and murdered, highly eulogized and adored. They are the derivatives of Poe's feminine ideal that embodies his fantastic imagination and carries his whole life's pursuit of the supernal Beauty.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.109.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.109.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.109.