

Richardson, "Who Killed Annabel Lee?"

Introduction

Introduction about teaching

Responding to other scholars writing about teaching: other scholars are asking the question, in a class where students write about literature, how can teachers help students engage with research but also use their own ideas (278-282)?

Thesis about teaching: The students who came up with the following new interpretation of Poe's "Annabel Lee" engaged with research but also used their own ideas (282).

Method: Analyzing a teaching experience (282).

Introduction about "Annabel Lee"

Students responding to other scholars writing about "Annabel Lee": scholars accept "the 'story' of the poem at face value—that Annabel Lee and the narrator were truly lovers, that Annabel Lee died of 'a chill,' that the angels ('her highborn kinsmen') bore her away, that the narrator clings to her memory by sleeping in her tomb" (283).

Students' method:

- Analogies between the poem and other stories and experiences (285-6).
- Class-based interpretation: The "highborn kinsmen" are AL's high-class human relatives (higher class than the narrator), not angels. The "angels" are instead a metaphor for these relatives (286). (This is the reverse of the traditional interpretation that "highborn kinsmen" is a metaphor for the "angels.")
- Psychoanalytic interpretation (popular psychology): sexually-motivated insanity (287).
- Literary context: comparison to Poe's gothic stories (289).

Students' theses about "Annabel Lee":

1. **The narrator killed Annabel Lee** (286)
2. **Annabel Lee's relatives killed her or let her die** (286)

Foote, "Speed That Kills"

Introduction

Topic: Chopin's "Story of an Hour," technology (85)

Responding to other critics: other critics have a strong emphasis on feminist interpretation, but not on technology; this essay will focus on the role of technology in the story (85).

Method: reading in historical context

Background: people concerned about new technologies at this time (85-86)

Thesis: "'The Story of an Hour' can be read as a precursor to... more technophobic works" (86), i.e., the **story critiques technology** (just more mildly than some later writing did).

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Analysis of Evidence

Evidence: text from the story, literary context (Poe’s gothic stories)

- I. Theory 1: The narrator killed Annabel Lee.
 - A. Theory 1a: The narrator killed AL because is insane (286).
 1. Narrators repetitive insistence that the “angels” killed her sounds like an excuse (287).
 2. The narrator shows his insanity by sleeping with a corpse (287).
 - B. Theory 1b: AL died because she left her rich family to marry the poor narrator, who could not afford the health care that would have prevented her death (286).
- II. Theory 2: The “highborn kinsmen” killed AL by vengefully taking her away from the narrator while she was still alive. Her broken heart, added to her illness, killed her (287-8).
 - A. The text does not actually say she is dead before they take her away (287-8).
 - B. The “sepulchre” is either a metaphor for a place apart from the narrator, or her relatives literally buried her alive (288).
- III. These themes (unreliable narrator, insanity, revenge, burying people alive) are all present in Poe’s gothic short stories, making it plausible that they are present in a poem by the same author (289-290).

Conclusion

Endorsement of students’ theses: “I find myself persuaded” by some of the students’ points (290).

Significance: Application of the lessons of this teaching experience to other courses in which composition students write about literature (290-292).

Foote, “Speed That Kills”

Analysis of Evidence

Evidence: text from the story, historical context

- I. Story critiques railway
Danger of death on a train (86)
Train commutes take husbands’ time away from their wives; this may contribute to problems in the marriage in this story (86-87).
Louise’s reaction to husband’s death is specifically because he (apparently) died quickly and far away—possible because of the train (87).
- II. Story critiques telegraph
Telegram relays the name of a dead person faster than a person could deliver it, and does not give the context a person would give. Possibly a different man of the same name died, but the telegram makes possible the misunderstanding that leads to Louise’s reaction (87-88).
- III. Story critiques increasing speed of life—Louise processes all this in an hour (88).

Conclusion

More detailed restatement of thesis: “**This is a cautionary tale about a world that is speeding up...** This story would have unfolded very differently without the technologies of the railroad and telegraph” (88).

Significance: this kind of historical context can help us to better understand feminist stories. “Chopin shows us that even such ‘timeless’ issues as male and female relations can only be fully understood within the time and place in which they occur” (88).