Puritan ideals have influenced America since the moment of its inception. This influence has permeated the pages of America’s literature and social schemes throughout the centuries. At times this influence appears to be burdened by the complexity of its duality, which can be viewed in terms of light and dark. In fact, many core Puritan texts, like Michael Wigglesworth’s *The Day of Doom*, are centralized along this theme. The theme prevails even after the era of Puritan writing. Edgar Allen Poe’s poem *Annabel Lee* reflects a similar type of duality pertaining to light and dark. In both poems, light and dark not only embody their literal functions; when light and dark co-exist like how they are presented in the poems, supernatural implications occur, which help to distinguish the difference between fantasy and reality.

Although used sparsely – appearing only three times in the reprinted stanzas of *The Day of Doom* and once in *Annabel Lee* – the term “bright” is used in both poems. In Wigglesworth’s poem, the term appears towards the beginning, while the opposite is true in Poe’s poem. The placement could be a physical representation of a main concept presented in both texts: in the beginning, light exists, and amidst conflict, the light will eventually triumph. The scarcity of the phrase does not mean the rest of the stanzas are dominated by darkness, however. Both Wigglesworth and Poe employ alternative imagery for the term bright, including but not limited to lamps and heavenly bodies. The reader is brought to a greater appreciation of the light through an examination of what happens in the absence of light, or the conflict between light and
dark. Bright is only used when the authors wish to stress the importance of a particular moment.

Wigglesworth’s *The Day of Doom* provides epic battles where light and dark are in their conflict. The holy paradox is most aptly highlighted in opening stanzas of the poem. Wigglesworth describes that the night was “still…serene and bright” (1) until “…God began to pour / Destruction the world upon / in a tempestuous shower” (22-4). The depiction of nocturnal serenity, in the presence of some form of gentle light, is interrupted by a torrential storm, possibly one with thunder and lightening. The fact that God’s judgment comes at night demonstrates a marvelous exposé on what kind of power light possesses. Light does not fear the dark, and dares to violate its presence.

Further division exists between light and dark in these stanzas. “The best of men” described by Wigglesworth flock to lamps, sources of light, as the destruction is occurring (11). The rest, dubbed “unwise,” “closed their eyes…through sloth and frailty slumberéd” (Wigglesworth 12-4). By keeping their eyes closed, the unwise cannot view the light. Wigglesworth notes that the dark even gives them a false sense of security (30). The light, however, functions as a method of achieving salvation or winning God’s favor. God is depicted as the ultimate light source, one that “shines more bright / then doth the noon-day sun” (Wigglesworth 43-4). The unwise predestined for damnation, who are not members of the Elite, are led to believe that the world would be better had they “ne’re had seen / the sun, or not been born” (1463-4). The non-Elite are untouched by God’s light, and no amount of light can save them.
Another interesting way that Wigglesworth outlines this conflict is by associating light and dark with animals. The most note-worthy animals mentioned in the poem are lambs, sheep, goats and serpents. The former two animals represent the light, while the latter two represent darkness. The sheep and the lambs who stand “at Christ’s right hand” (Wigglesworth 169) bask in his “glory bright” (121). By doing so, these animals come to represent “His holy martyrs,” worthy of salvation. These animals are also reminiscent of the Passover Lamb, whose pure, bright fleece becomes a garment of luminosity to conceal the sins of those who are forgiven. Similarly, the goats dwell “at Christ’s left hand” (209). Goats, along with the serpent that is also mentioned later in the poem, have traditionally represented Satan, or Lucifer. Lucifer’s name literally translates to “the light bearer,” which is significant to the poem. Wigglesworth charges Lucifer with leading Christ’s flock to sin “‘gainst light” (223), thus adding to the tension between the two forces. Satan’s followers are doomed to spend eternity “where death and darkness dwell” (1660), while the followers of Christ remain with him in heaven forever (1791-2).

Like *The Day of Doom*, implied and explicit images of light and dark conflict are woven into the fabric of *Annabel Lee*. In the beginning of the poem, Poe pairs “the kingdom by the sea” (2) with the opening lines of “It was many and many a year ago” (1), which mimics the classic fairy tale beginning of “once upon a time.” The first line of the second stanza reinforces that fairy tale opening with the repetition of the word “child” (7). By starting his stanzas in such a way, Poe prepares the reader for an enjoyable experience and invokes a dreamlike atmosphere. The fictional kingdom
by the sea is an idyllic and bright land of enchantment where the narrator and Annabel Lee fell in love as children.

Poe stresses brightness in the last stanza, the term itself making its first and only appearance. Well after the death of Annabel Lee, the narrator notes how “the moon never beams, without bringing me dreams” (Poe 34) and “the stars never rise, but I feel the bright eyes / Of my beautiful ANNABEL LEE” (36-7). By associating the occurrence of moonbeams with dreams and the radiance of Annabel Lee’s eyes with star light, Poe is emphasizing the conflict of nature: even in darkness, light will prevail. This concept could be structurally emphasized through Poe’s use of anaphora, repeating the term “my” four times and “darling” twice in the stanza (39). The dashes between each of the phrases in this line could be a dramatic pause employed by narrator to stress that even though Annabel Lee is gone, a part of her will always be with him.

The moon beams and the stars, both emitters of soft light, also function as a tomb for Annabel Lee, shining down on him from the sepulcher of the night sky. The narrator views the whole scenario of the jealous angels stealing his love away as a non-negotiable fact. However, the narrator appears to be aware of the distinction between fantasy and reality, if only for this one lucid moment. He is willing to confront the “night” to “lie down by the side” of Annabel Lee’s tomb (Poe 38). In this way, the narrator remains in his bright kingdom of love, for both his soul and Annabel Lee’s are one.
The rest of the poem, however, seems to be shrouded in darkness as a direct result of the conflict waged by the two forces of nature. Ironically, the conflict stems from a realm of dazzling light – heaven. Trouble initially begins in stanza two, when “the winged seraphs of heaven” (Poe 11), who, as members of the highest order of angels, are supposed to be bringers of God’s light, become envious of the narrator’s relationship with Annabel Lee. Their metaphorical turning away from the light, similar to the goats of Wigglesworth’s poem, introduces a more ominous tone in the poem. The wind blowing out of “a cloud” as opposed to just the sky infuses a sense of foreboding in the dark envy of the angels (Poe 15). The cloud, in this case, has shut out Heaven’s light. When the light is absent in this portion of the poem, the lovers become victims of forces beyond their control, much like the damned in Wigglesworth’s poem have no control over their destinies.

The overall didactic message of both poems is apparent: when light is rejected, darkness is the result. For Wigglesworth’s time period, anyone who did not share in the glorious light of God was doomed to spend eternity in suffering. For poor Annabel Lee, the darkness that overcame the angels who stole her life will forever be etched into the memory of her lover. Light and dark may always be engaged in spiritual warfare, but our poets would like us as readers to look on the bright side of things (pun intended). Both present horrible circumstances – Judgment Day and the loss of a loved one – but both also demonstrate that there is hope through this natural conflict. Both poems end in light. After all, there must be darkness in order for the light to come.
Works Cited
