

Setting ~ dark, dreary December night ~ midnight or later
~ alone in his room/chamber by a dying fire

The Raven

[First published in 1845]

typical Poe narrator ~ un-named
& 1st person POV

Alliteration -
rep. of similar
consonant
sounds

Once upon a midnight dreary while I pondered weak and weary A
Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore, B
While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping C
As of some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door. B
'Tis some visitor,' I muttered, tapping at my chamber door - B
Only this, and nothing more.' B (6)

- end rhyme
- slant rhyme = close but not exact
- internal rhyme = within the line

repetition

Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak December, D
And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon the floor. B
Eagerly I wished the morrow; - vainly I had sought to borrow E
From my books surcease of sorrow - sorrow for the lost Lenore - B
For the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels named Lenore - B
Nameless here for evermore. B (12)

Lenore is dead/
in Heaven.

reading to
take his
mind off
losing Lenore

And the silken sad uncertain rustling of each purple curtain F
Thrilled me - filled me with fantastic terrors never felt before; B
So that now, to still the beating of my heart, I stood repeating C
'Tis some visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door - B
Some late visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door; - B
This it is, and nothing more.' B (18)

Assonance -
repetition of
similar vowel
sounds

Supernatural -
curtains moving for
no reason

Presently my soul grew stronger; hesitating then no longer,
'Sir,' said I, 'or Madam, truly your forgiveness I implore;
But the fact is I was napping, and so gently you came rapping,
And so faintly you came tapping, tapping at my chamber door,
That I scarce was sure I heard you' - here I opened wide the door; -
Darkness there, and nothing more. (24)

no one at
the door,
even though
he heard
knocking

Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there wondering, fearing,
Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before
But the silence was unbroken, and the darkness gave no token,
And the only word there spoken was the whispered word, 'Lenore!'
This I whispered, and an echo murmured back the word, 'Lenore!'
Merely this and nothing more. (30)

Supernatural
element ~ he
wants it to
be Lenore's
ghost

Back into the chamber turning, all my soul within me burning,
Soon again I heard a tapping somewhat louder than before.
'Surely,' said I, 'surely that is something at my window lattice;
Let me see then, what thereat is, and this mystery explore -
Let my heart be still a moment and this mystery explore; -
'Tis the wind and nothing more!' (36)

allusion -
reference to
something in
the past or
in literature

Open here I flung the shutter, when, with many a flirt and flutter,
In there stepped a stately raven of the saintly days of yore.
Not the least obeisance made he; not a minute stopped or stayed he;
But, with mien of lord or lady, perched above my chamber door -
Perched upon a bust of Pallas just above my chamber door -
Perched, and sat, and nothing more. (42)

Pallas Athena - goddess
of wisdom
(Classical allusion from
mythology)

perhaps symbolizes the bird is wise

The bird makes him smile.

Then this ebony bird beguiling my sad fancy into smiling,
By the grave and stern decorum of the countenance it wore,
'Though thy crest be shorn and shaven, thou,' I said, 'art sure no craven.
Ghastly grim and ancient raven wandering from the nightly shore -
Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night's Plutonian shore!'

Classical allusion - Pluto - god of the underworld

- refers to spirits roaming at night, freed from the underworld

The bird talks.

Quoth the raven, 'Nevermore.' (48)
Much I marvelled this ungainly fowl to hear discourse so plainly,
Though its answer little meaning - little relevancy bore:
For we cannot help agreeing that no living human being
Ever yet was blessed with seeing bird above his chamber door -
Bird or beast above the sculptured bust above his chamber door,
With such name as 'Nevermore.' (54)

- irony = his answer actually is VERY relevant

Narrator thinks the bird will leave him but

But the raven, sitting lonely on the placid bust, spoke only,
That one word, as if his soul in that one word he did outpour.
Nothing further then he uttered - not a feather then he fluttered -
Till I scarcely more than muttered 'Other friends have flown before -
On the morrow he will leave me, as my hopes have flown before.'
Then the bird said, 'Nevermore.' (60)

Some sad person must have taught the bird to speak.

Startled at the stillness broken by reply so aptly spoken,
'Doubtless,' said I, 'what it utters is its only stock and store,
Caught from some unhappy master whom unmerciful disaster
Followed fast and followed faster till his songs one burden bore -
Till the dirges of his hope that melancholy burden bore
Of "Never-nevermore." (66)

- Sad & depressing

Thinking what the bird means when he talks.

But the raven still beguiling all my sad soul into smiling,
Straight I wheeled a cushioned seat in front of bird and bust and door;
Then, upon the velvet sinking, I betook myself to linking
Fancy unto fancy, thinking what this ominous bird of yore -
What this grim, ungainly, ghastly, gaunt, and ominous bird of yore
Meant in croaking 'Nevermore.' (72)

< imagery - bird is staring at his heart

starts to think of Lenore again

This I sat engaged in guessing, but no syllable expressing
To the fowl whose fiery eyes now burned into my bosom's core;
This and more I sat divining, with my head at ease reclining
On the cushion's velvet lining that the lamp-light gloated o'er,
But whose velvet violet lining with the lamp-light gloating o'er,
(She) shall press, ah, nevermore! (78)

Shift

religious references Seraphim = angels

Then, methought, the air grew denser, perfumed from an unseen censer
Swung by Seraphim whose foot-falls tinkled on the tufted floor.
'Wretch,' I cried, 'thy God hath lent thee - by these angels he has sent thee
Respite - respite and nepenthe from thy memories of Lenore!
Quaff, oh quaff this kind nepenthe, and forget this lost Lenore!'
Quoth the raven, 'Nevermore.' (84)

God sent the bird -
respite = rest/relief
nepenthe = potion to forget
quaff = drink

> Did God send the bird to help me forget her? Bird says "nevermore!"

Now, the narrator thinks Satan sent the bird.

Prophet - someone who can tell the future

tempest = storm

Biblical allusion - Jeremiah 8:22

Will I ever have relief from my sorrow?

'Prophet!' said I, 'thing of evil! - prophet still, if bird or devil! - Whether tempter sent, or whether tempest tossed thee here ashore, Desolate yet all undaunted, on this desert land enchanted - On this home by horror haunted - tell me truly, I implore - Is there - is there balm in Gilead? - tell me - tell me, I implore!' Quoth the raven, 'Nevermore.' (90)

'Prophet!' said I, 'thing of evil! - prophet still, if bird or devil! - By that Heaven that bends above us - by that God we both adore - Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within the distant Aidenn, It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels named Lenore - Clasp a rare and radiant maiden, whom the angels named Lenore?' Quoth the raven, 'Nevermore.' (96)

repetition
Biblical allusion - Aidenn/Eden/Heaven

Will I get to be with Lenore in Heaven?
The bird implies the narrator isn't going to Heaven!

Tells the bird to leave!

imagery →

'Be that word our sign of parting, bird or fiend!' I shrieked upstarting - 'Get thee back into the tempest and the Night's Plutonian shore! Leave no black plume as a token of that lie thy soul hath spoken! Leave my loneliness unbroken! - quit the bust above my door! Take thy beak from out my heart, and take thy form from off my door!' Quoth the raven, 'Nevermore.' (102)

And the raven, never flitting, still is sitting, still is sitting
On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;
And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon's that is dreaming,
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! (108)

metaphor - compares bird to a demon

Bird never leaves and narrator lives in sorrow forever!