"The Raven" by Edgar Allan Poe. Originally published, 1845.

A critical edition, edited by Chelsea Lowe

as an assignment for American Lit 1, ETSU, Fall 2012.

THE RAVEN.¹

BY ——— QUARLES.²

[The following lines from a correspondent—besides the deep quaint strain of the sentiment, and the curious introduction of some ludicrous touches amidst the serious and impressive, as was doubtless intended by the author—appear to us one of the most felicitous specimens of unique rhyming which has for some time met our eye. The resources of English rhythm for varieties of melody, measure, and sound, producing corresponding diversities of effect, have been thoroughly studied, much more perceived, by very few poets in the language. While the classic tongues, especially the Greek, possess, by power of accent, several advantages for versification over our own, chiefly through greater abundance of spondaic feet, we have other and very great advantages of sound by the modern usage of rhyme. Alliteration is nearly the only effect of that kind which the ancients had in common with us. It will be seen that much of the melody of “The Raven” arises from alliteration, and the studious use of similar sounds in unusual places. In regard to its measure, it may be noted that if all the verses were like the second, they might properly be placed merely in short lines, producing a not uncommon form; but the presence in all the others of one line—mostly the second in the verse—which flows continuously, with only an aspirate pause in the middle, like that before the short line in the Sapphic Adonic, while the fifth has at the middle pause no similarity of sound with any part beside, gives the versification an entirely different effect. We could wish the capacities of our noble language, in prosody, were better understood.—ED. AM. REV.]

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary,
Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore,
While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,

¹ The edition of "The Raven" from the February 1845 issue of The American Review: A Whig Journal of Politics, Literature, Art and Science is considered as the first text of the poem because it was the first to be set in type directly from Poe's manuscript. "The Raven" was first published in Poe's name in the January 29, 1845 issue of the New York newspaper Evening Mirror, and the version was likely taken from printed proofs from The American Review. Although the date on The American Review was February, it was printed and distributed in January because magazines are usually released a month or so prior to the publication date. The introductory paragraph is likely written by Poe. (eapoe.org)

² Poe first published "The Raven" under this pseudonym in the February 1845 issue of The American Review. It's considered to reference English poet Francis Quarles. (eapoe.org)
As of some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber's door.
"Tis some visiter," I muttered, "tapping at my chamber door—

Only this, and nothing more."

Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak December,
And each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon the floor.
Eagerly I wished the morrow;—vainly I had tried to borrow
From my books surcease of sorrow—sorrow for the lost Lenore—
For the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore—

Nameless here for evermore.

And the silken sad uncertain rustling of each purple curtain
Thrilled me—filled me with fantastic terrors never felt before;
So that now, to still the beating of my heart, I stood repeating
"Tis some visiter entreat ing entrance at my chamber door—
Some late visiter entreat ing entrance at my chamber door;—

This it is, and nothing more."

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.

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!"

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3 Instead of a literal meaning, the "chamber" can symbolize the inside of the narrator's mind (Fisher xxv).
4 19th century slang for a shadow created by dying embers. It can also suggest that supernatural elements are at work in the chamber (Fisher xxv, 24).
5 Tomorrow
6 Temporary or final end
7 Pleading
8 To beg
This I whispered, and an echo murmured back the word, “Lenore!”

Merely this, and nothing more.

Then into the chamber turning, all my soul within me burning,
Soon I heard again a tapping somewhat louder than before.
“Surely,” said I, “surely that is something at my window lattice⁹;
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!”

Open here I flung the shutter, when, with many a flirt and flutter,
In there stepped a stately raven of the saintly days of yore¹⁰;
Not the least obeisance¹¹ made he; not an instant stopped or stayed he;
But, with mien¹² of lord or lady, perched above my chamber door—
Perched upon a bust of Pallas¹³ just above my chamber door—

Perched, and sat, and nothing more.

Then this ebony bird beguiling¹⁴ my sad fancy into smiling,
By the grave and stern decorum¹⁵ of the countenance¹⁶ it wore,
“Though thy crest be shorn and shaven, thou,” I said, “art sure no craven¹⁷,
Ghastly grim and ancient raven wandering from the Nightly shore—

Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night’s Plutonian¹⁸ shore!”

Quoth the raven, “Nevermore.”

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 sublunary¹⁹ being

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⁹ Framework consisting of crossed strips of wood or metal
¹⁰ History of long ago, or time long past
¹¹ Bow
¹² Appearance
¹³ Another name for Athena, who is the Greek goddess of wisdom (Norton 638)
¹⁴ Convincing or leading on through deceiving and deception
¹⁵ Orderliness
¹⁶ Expression
¹⁷ Defeated, or lacking of courage
¹⁸ Reference to the Greek god Pluto, who is ruler of the underworld. Also known as Hades. (Fisher 25)
Ever yet was blessed with seeing bird above his chamber door—
Bird or beast upon the sculptured bust above his chamber door,
                   With such name as “Nevermore.”

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 farther 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.”
                   Quoth the raven, “Nevermore.”

Wondering 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—so, when Hope he would adjure,\(^{20}\)
                     Stern Despair returned, instead of the sweet Hope he dared adjure—
                   That sad answer, “Nevermore!”

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.”

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 lamplight gloated o’er,
But whose velvet violet lining with the lamplight gloating o’er,
                        She shall press, ah, nevermore !

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\(^{19}\) Earthly
\(^{20}\) Advise
Then, methought, the air grew denser, perfumed from an unseen censer.  
Swung by angels whose faint foot-falls tinkled on the tufted floor.  
“Wretch,” I cried, “thy God hath lent thee—by these angels he hath sent thee  
Respite—respite and Nepenthe22 from thy memories of Lenore!  
Let me quaff23 this kind Nepenthe and forget this lost Lenore!”  
Quoth the raven, “Nevermore.”

“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 Gilead24 ?—tell me—tell me, I implore!”  
Quoth the raven, “Nevermore.”

“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 Aidenn25,  
It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore—  
Clasp a rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore.”  
Quoth the raven, “Nevermore.”

“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.”

And the raven, never flitting, still is sitting, still is sitting

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21 Used for burning incense  
22 Drug that causes forgetfulness in order to end suffering (Fisher 26)  
23 Drink  
24 Referencing lines in Jeremiah 8:22 from the Bible: “Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there?” Gilead is east of the Jordan River. It contains evergreens, which are a source of resins used for medicine. (Norton 640)  
25 The Garden of Eden
On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;
And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon 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!

BIography of Edgar Allan Poe

Edgar Allan Poe was born in Boston on January 19, 1809 to David Poe Jr. and Elizabeth Arnold Hopkins. He lost his parents at an early age, after which he went to a foster family: John and Frances Allan. At first, Poe was very successful with school but he soon developed problems with his foster father. After leaving school and being discharged from the military, he published his book Poems in 1831. Poe attempted to make a living as a writer, and he worked as an editor for several publications including New York's Evening Mirror. In 1836, he married his cousin, Virginia Clemm. He first published "The Raven" in the February 1845 issue of The American Review. Despite "The Raven"s popularity, Poe didn't earn enough money from it. Soon after, he became an editor for the Broadway Journal, although it ceased publication a year later in 1846. Virginia died from tuberculosis in 1847. During his remaining years, Poe gave several lectures and courted the poet Sarah Helen Whitman (she would later break off their engagement). Poe began a lecture tour in 1849, and on his way to New York (he had previously been in Richmond), he stops in Baltimore. It was there on October 3, 1849 that Poe was found on the street, nearly unconscious. He died a few days later on October 7.

Editor's Note

Chelsea Lowe is majoring in Digital Media at ETSU, and her illustrative work is often inspired by quirkier and darker stories - including those by Edgar Allan Poe.
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Bibliography

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- eapoe.org. The Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore. I referenced their notes about the original publication information for "The Raven", which are found at the end of this web page:
  http://www.eapoe.org/works/poems/ravena.htm