

# THE RAVEN

*A Flight through an Archetypal Force Field*

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# CONTENTS

<i>About the Author</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	x
<i>Introduction</i>	xiii
<b>PART ONE Avian Lore</b>	
1 The Common Raven <i>Corvus Corax</i>	1
2 Avian Natural History	45
3 The Collective Avian Archetype	63
4 Raven Mythology	75
<b>PART TWO The Raven Archetype</b>	
5 To Fly or Not to Fly – that is the Question	125
6 Flightlessness and Gigantism	133
7 The Number Seven Archetype	139
8 The Three Aspect of the Number Seven Archetype	147
9 Penguin	153
10 The Four Aspect of Number Seven Archetype	167
11 The Mind of Seven	175
12 The Rebbe	179
13 Shekinah – the Sacred Feminine	185
14 The Messianic Age	193
15 The Sacred Candle and the Menorah	205
16 The Number Eight Archetype	213
17 The Shylock Stereotype	219
18 The Hanukkah Festival	237
19 The Number Nine Archetype	245
20 Exodus from the Homeland	257
21 Flight Modes	275
22 Raven – Bird of Ill-Omen	283
23 Walker Between Worlds	301
24 Imprisonment	311
25 Hannah Arendt	323
26 Adolf Eichmann	329

27	Wotan – Hitler’s God	337
28	Alumina – The Clay Archetype	355
29	The Irish Potato Famine	367
30	The Emergence of the Beast	389
31	Prometheus and Raven – The Light-Bearers	413
32	The Romantic Era	421
33	Plutonium – Archetype of the Underworld	427
34	The Passage of Souls	437
35	Plutonium in the Underworld	447
36	Chernobyl	461
37	Plutonium and Red	477
38	Cuprum Metallicum	487
39	Other Redheads	495
40	Count Dracula	503
41	Gaia’s Champion	519
42	A Raven Happening	527
43	Covid-19 Thoughts	541
44	Survival of the Fittest	551
45	Whitby Jet	557
46	Little Apple of Death	569

**PART THREE Edgar Allan Poe**

47	Active Imagination and Gothic Romanticism	585
48	The Raven – Edgar Allan Poe	595
49	Infancy, Childhood and Early Education	603
50	University and Army	615
51	New York and Baltimore	621
52	William Wilson	643
53	Southern Literary Messenger	651
54	Tomahawk Man – Alcoholism	665
55	The Fall of the House of Usher	673
56	Tuberculosis and the Red Death	695

**PART FOUR Raven and the Enneagram**

57	Enneagram Wisdom	709
58	Ennea-Type Five	719
59	Ennea-Type Four	737
60	‘The Crow’	755

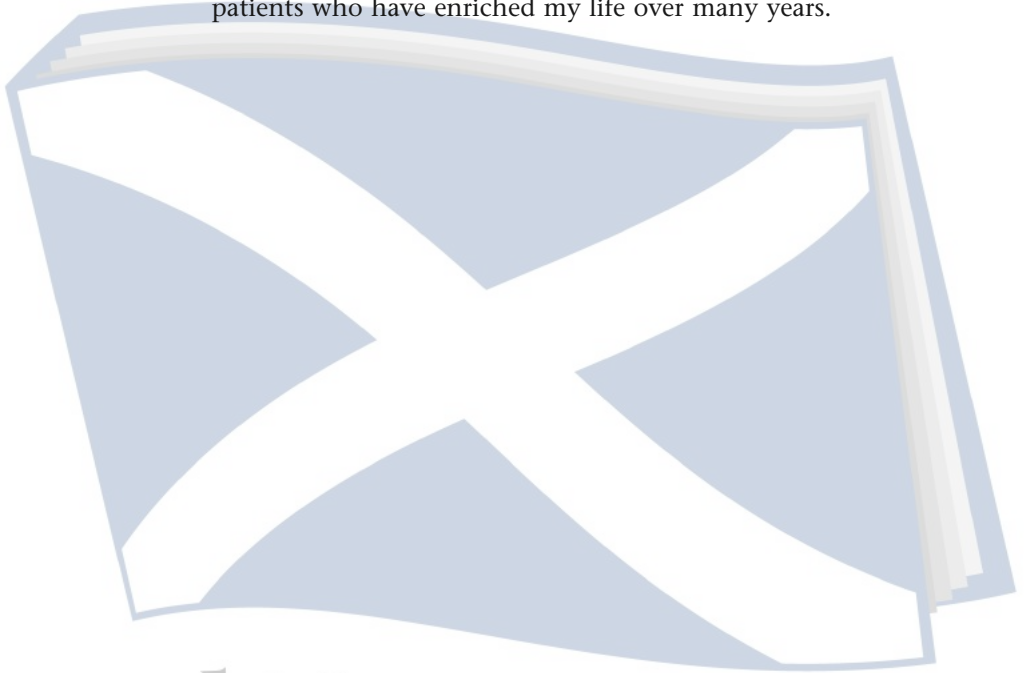
**PART FIVE Raven Keynotes and Rubrics**

61	Raven Proving	775
62	Characteristics Collated from the Main Text	787

	<i>Index</i>	807
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## DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to all my Jewish and Irish friends, colleagues and patients who have enriched my life over many years.



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## AVIAN NATURAL HISTORY

Earnest consideration of the natural history of birds is indispensable to gleaning insight into the characteristic attributes and proclivities of the collective avian archetype. This study demands the same intuitive thinking called for in the study of archetypal remedy pictures and in case analysis. Integral to the process is bringing together anthropomorphic interpretations of the wide-ranging morphology and instinctive behaviours innate to this unique and diverse class of vertebrates.



**Figure 2.1** Deinonychus – ‘terrible claw’  
(Image credit: Natural History Museum)

### Evolution from theropod dinosaurs

The Aves, or birds, represent the ultimate form evolved from the *theropod dinosaurs*, which first appeared in the late Triassic period – 230 million-years-ago. These *highly predatory carnivores* were the most diverse group of

saurischian (lizard-hipped) dinosaurs and ranged in size from the crow-sized *Microaptor* to the gigantic *Tyrannosaurus rex*: a ferocious carnivore demonised in popular film and fiction. They also included in their number, the fearsome *Deinonychus*, a 3.4-metre-long, 75 kg killer-dinosaur which, judging from emerging evidence, like wolves and killer whales, hunted in packs – either through temporary or long-term cooperative behaviour. This highly active, agile, dromaeosaurid theropod lived during the early Cretaceous period – about 110 million-years-ago. Its appellation: *Deinonychus*, Greek for ‘terrible claw’, alludes to an unusually large, sickle-shaped talon on the second toe of each hind foot, used to penetrate and pinion struggling prey. Fossil remains of dromaeosaurids reveal that they were covered with highly modified reptilian scales in the form of feathers, which were significantly longer on the hands, arms and tail. These can be legitimately likened to the future flight feathers, *remiges*, and tail feathers, *rectrices*, of modern birds. The insulating effect of such overall feathering suggests that these dinosaurs were probably warm-blooded. The dromaeosaurids shared many morphological features with *Archaeopteryx*, which was originally thought to be the oldest known bird.

All theropod dinosaurs so far discovered were, like birds and humans, bipedal, and characterised by markedly reduced forelimbs – specialised for diverse tasks – hollow bones and three-toed extremities. Convincing fossil evidence exists for the assumption that birds evolved within this dinosaur family.

In 1861, the first of a number of exquisitely preserved and superbly detailed fossils of the primitive, bird-like dinosaur, *Archaeopteryx*, from the Late Jurassic period – 150 million-years-ago – came to light in Bavaria in Southern Germany. The quarry where the fossils were found was famed for its extremely fine-grained limestone, much-prized by lithographers. So fine was the grain that it captured the structure of this unique half-bird/half-reptile in minutest detail. Most notably, the fossil bore clear impressions of advanced flight feathers, very similar in structure to those of modern-day birds. This transitional form between non-avian dinosaurs and true birds probably attained the size of a raven and had short, broad, rounded wings and a comparatively long tail with rather broad tail feathers. Though it remains uncertain whether *Archaeopteryx* could take off from the ground or achieve the full, flapping flight of modern birds, its aerodynamic and asymmetrical feather-configuration, complete with vanes and interlinking barbules, points to far greater manoeuvrability in the air than gliding would have required. It is most probable that *Archaeopteryx* would have climbed by means of its clawed limbs to a vantage point in a tree and from there have launched itself into flight. In the late 19th century, this airborne

denizen of the Jurassic became known as one of the 'missing links' supporting the theory of evolution. Though no longer regarded as the direct ancestor of modern birds, it does demonstrate the transition from dinosaur to bird, how flight evolved and how the first bird might have looked. It still retained classic reptilian features: teeth, clawed-fingers and a long lizard-like tail.



**Figure 2.2** Fossil of complete Archaeopteryx  
(Image credit: Wikipedia)

## Adaptations for flight

- **Lightness**

The evolutionary drive towards mastery of flight in certain theropods necessitated reduction in overall size and modification of various anatomical elements to lessen weight and provide muscular and skeletal strength to efficiently operate the evolving wings. In shedding weight, the theropods from which birds would evolve went through a continuous and protracted phase of size reduction associated with other quite rapid evolutionary changes. The first structure to be sacrificed was the dinosaur's long, bony,



## ACTIVE IMAGINATION AND GOTHIC ROMANTICISM

Creative writing is a form of meditation: a communion between the conscious and the unconscious minds; its depth and intensity varying from moment to moment, from hour to hour, from day to day, from subject to subject. There are times when the author enters a euphoric, even ecstatic zone – free-flowing, unimpeded, self-energised, where nothing other than the contemplated imagery and its associated content exist. The winged mind, like the raven, exults in wheeling and soaring in the updrafts of thought, feeling and emotion. But, as much as the thermals of inspiration lift the consciousness to avian vantage points, opening unimaginable vistas, so, profound introspection transports the mind like a bat into the dark and complex caves of the unconscious, even to their most remote and obscure reaches. There lie caged or coiled energies, long repressed, unresolved, unrealised or denied; buried resources that need to be fathomed and given expression. On occasion, they filter spontaneously to the surface in the form of uncharacteristic behaviour, unsolicited imaginings and longings, inexplicable anxiety or fear, or strange, mystifying dreams. Sometimes, jarring events or strong emotions may for a moment unkennel these hidden forces, which pertain to the dynamics of the psyche and the personal unconscious: the storehouse of experience and memory unique to the individual. Beyond, yet continuous with this level of the unconscious, lies the collective unconscious: a repository of archetypal knowledge and imagery, innate and shared by all; a universal font of wisdom and revelation. When an author invokes his or her creative muse, these are the dimensions they fathom – as does the homeopathic physician when prescribing an archetype in potency.

In ancient Hellas, it was the custom to consult the Delphic oracle in times of dilemma or indecision. Here, the high priestess of the temple of Apollo – the Pythia, or Pythoness – in response to the supplicant's plea or query would enter a meditative trance, stilling her conscious mind and

becoming totally receptive to whatever flowed through her. The inspiring power, bestowing directive wisdom through the mediumship of the priestess, was Apollo, the Archer God himself, whose totem is Raven. The divine message or guidance was invariably delivered in cryptic or parable form that required analysis and deciphering. This demanded the conscious engagement and deductive reasoning of the supplicant.

Along these lines, Carl Gustav Jung evolved a method of self-analysis that he termed *active imagination*, to permit constructive dialogue between the conscious and unconscious minds, as occurs freely when dreaming. Active imagination enables the 'seeker', as in ancient times, to consult the 'pythoness,' but now at the sacred oracle within one's own psyche. In conducting this meditative technique, the aspirant adopts both the role of pythoness and supplicant, alternating between total receptivity or 'witnessing' – allowing the unconscious to speak freely without conscious input, interference or judgement – and conscious engagement and inquiry into the imagery and thoughts flowing from the unconscious source. The process may be initiated by visualising some scene e.g. from a recent dream or current happening, making it as clear as possible in the mind and then giving it full rein to go where it will; or starting by means of relevant dialogue with an imagined person or around the topic of some object or symbol of interest, permitting the inner voice licence to speak freely and at length before giving answer and thus pursuing the dialogue, back and forth, through layers of understanding and perception. With full immersion in the exchange, what commences with sight or sound, soon, to a varying degree, loses both and resolves into a deeper 'dialogue' of 'feeling' and 'knowing' beyond vision and words – meaningful interaction at a deeper, soul level, free from the preferences and prejudices of the ego-self and the moral criticism and judgement of the superego.

The highest objective of the exercise is to achieve ego-free communion between the soul and the Universal Consciousness. The rationalisations, deceptions and denials of the ego-self and the restrictions and inhibitions of the moralistic superego need to be circumvented and eventually transcended, permitting free flow of energy and imagery between the deep unconscious and the awake, alert and aware, untrammelled mind. At once, it is apparent that this process is consonant with the eternal drive of the Id – the vital force – towards expression and fulfilment and with Hering's Law of the Progression of Cure, '*from within outward*'. Like a well-chosen homeopathic remedy, successful application of active imagination proves a curative influence as it works towards the release of buried pains, bottled emotions and rejected aspects of the personality consigned to the Shadow of the psyche. The soul is empowered against its perennial adversary the

ego-self and is progressively prepared for the final psychic confrontation or cataclysm – ‘*War with the Wolf*’ – the personal Ragnarök, when the beast principle at the centre of the psychic labyrinth is finally overthrown and the soul merges with its Divine Essence. This unburdening of the Shadow, this purging of the psyche, brings about the integration and harmonising of all psychic components, the conjugation of opposites and attainment of the Holy Grail of the soul-hero’s quest: Self-realisation!

This is a path all must follow and an objective all must attain. The Cosmos is attentive to both the journey and its goal, which, in essence, is the Great Mother Goddess taking her beloved into her timeless embrace. In that blessed moment, all paradox resolves, and the soul perceives the supreme conjugation of opposites: discovering that the inexorable will and unconditional love of the Cosmos are indivisible – Skadi and Sigyn are One!

Active imagination is part and parcel of creative writing. For the author, it is a means of achieving communion with deeper levels of consciousness, personal and collective. The personal unconscious is a fertile source of inspiration, founded not only on the experience of a lifetime, but many lifetimes. As much as we resent suffering and consider it a violation of the comfort and happiness we feel entitled to, suffering unerringly etches and sculpts the soul to fashion a masterpiece. A life wanting tragedy and triumph remains insipid and commonplace. To be significant, life must have peaks and valleys and create the essential tension between right and wrong that tests freedom of choice and self-determination. Many a tortuous and tormented stream flows into the well of creative inspiration. The genuine artist intuits this truth, and many have courted ‘*all that fortune, death and danger dare*’ to access imaginative heights and plumb infernal depths. Fiction can certainly be contrived from empathetic and vicarious observation, but true colour requires echoes and reverberations from repositories of personal experience. Emotional anguish catalyses the creative mind, enabling it to touch the core of others through the poignancy and pathos of art. It is natural that many authors’ most significant work is in some measure autobiographical.

In bringing to light repressed and unresolved images from the Shadow of the psyche, creative writing functions like active imagination and is a curative activity. Other creative and artistic endeavours, such as dance, music, painting, sculpting, poetry, acting, photography, fashion design, cuisine, ceramics and other arts and crafts, act similarly – their efficacy dependent on the intensity, depth and duration of the creative focus. Whatever the means, the activity is a flowing from within outwards and a salutary, external expression of the inner self. The soul must radiate; it is

intelligence: the ability to distinguish between the real and the unreal – between the everlasting and the transient – and unfalteringly hold the distinction in the mind or memory's eye. While it would pain Odin to lose Huginn – masculine intellect – he would be aghast to lose Muninn – feminine wisdom! This is the danger that threatens the creative mind when combining flights into the unconscious with injudicious intake of alcohol and the use of psychotropic substances – the risk of losing contact with both reality and Reality! *The ravens of the mind may take flight and fail to return!*

The Romantic era was an artistic, literary, musical and intellectual movement that originated in Europe towards the end of the 18th century and flourished between 1800 and 1890. Romanticism rejected the order, rationality, elegant formalism and artificiality of Classicism and rebelled against Enlightenment's scientific reductionism, materialism and philosophy centred on the pre-eminence of reason. In contrast, Romanticism exalted the individual over the collective, subjective awareness over objective analysis, emotion over reason and intuition over intellect. Introspective contemplation of human emotions, moods, feelings and creative potential took precedence over scientific investigation of the outer world. The grandeur and beauty of the natural world was deemed sublime and inspirational in contrast to the mundane grossness of human invention. Imagination was vaunted as a portal to transcendence and spiritual illumination. The passions and conflicts of the hero figure, particularly the exceptionally gifted artist or creative genius, took centre stage: an emancipated, supremely individual, pioneer spirit unfettered by the techniques and restrictions imposed by formal training or tradition, but often an anguished soul, prey to powerful emotions and singularly subject to adversity, tragedy and inner torment. These divergent standpoints – this freedom from convention – and the intensely emotional heroes and heroines that triumphed and succumbed on the Romantic stage – all belong to the realm of Raven!

Romanticism focused on the individual, the subjective, the personal, the imaginative, the spontaneous, the irrational, the exotic, the visionary and the transcendental. Out of this fertile mix, Dark Romanticism emerged, a literary genre, which, in its most eerie form, became known as Gothic. This development was attended by a fascination for folklore; the medieval period; remote, wild landscapes; the mysterious and the occult; the mystical and the supernatural; the weird and the macabre; the monstrous and the morbid; the demonic and the diabolical. Like the colour red, these lurid ingredients all attract Raven and the dark Wolf.

Certain devices are part and parcel of blood-curdling stories of the imagination that shred the nerves, make the flesh creep, chill the blood and

evoke revulsion or horror. Often an oppressive atmosphere and a creepy setting are conjured, transporting the spectator into a world disturbingly divorced from the normal, fraught with supernatural influences, mysterious happenings and cliff-edge suspense.

- *Nightmares – terrifying, hideous, ominous, perverse – persisting into the following day* – such nightmares provided Robert Louis Stevenson with the plot of the Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde and Mary Shelley, the story of Frankenstein.
- *Bad weather – dark, heavy clouds, wind, rain, sleet, snow.*
- *Thunderstorms – thunder and lightning.*
- *Full moon, sickle moon, dark moon.*
- *Twilight – sinister shadows.*
- *Dark.*
- *Monsters.*
- *Ghosts, demons, visitations.*
- *Visions: grotesque, macabre, horrible – the colours black and red.*
- *Bloodshot eyes, slavering fangs, lolling tongue – the mark of rabies – features of the Beast.*
- *Vermin, rats, mice; creeping things, worms, maggots, insects, especially cockroaches.*
- *Snakes, spiders, scorpions, toads.*
- *Wolves, dogs, cats, bats – especially when black.*
- *Raven, crow, owl.*
- *Fire and water.*
- *Evil.*
- *Possession.*
- *Transformation, shapeshifting.*
- *Disfigurement, corruption, decomposition, decay, disintegration.*
- *Slime, ooze, mould.*
- *Omens, prophecy, clairvoyance, necromancy.*
- *Ancestral curses.*
- *Forebodings of doom.*
- *Out-of-body experiences.*
- *Sense of unreality, dream-like state, detached.*
- *Trance-like states, catalepsy.*
- *Disembodied voices.*
- *Ominous sounds – creaking, scraping, grating, dripping, shuffling, sighing, sobbing, groaning, growling, snarling.*
- *Razors, knives, pointed objects, scissors, screwdrivers, bodkins – especially, bloodstained and encrusted.*

- *Gallows, noose.*
- *Rent garments – especially, soiled and blood-smearred.*
- *Blood, mutilation, murder.*
- *Perilous heights; stifling confines.*
- *Incarceration, imprisonment – buried alive!*
- *Poverty, privation; hunger, malnutrition, starvation; sordid, wretched conditions.*
- *Chronic, wasting disease – consumption – ghastly, bloodless pallor, creeping enervation, racking cough, haemorrhage, slow asphyxiation.*
- *Plague and pestilence.*
- *Ancient, derelict, eerie buildings and ruins – mansions, chateaux, castles – many doors, rooms, passageways, staircases, tunnels, vaults, dungeons.*
- *Graveyards, graves, corpses, skeletons, skulls, coffins, funerals, tombs.*

To ponder these images with heedful note is enough to 'put toys of desperation into every mind' and arouse unquiet feelings and fancies that refute all avowals of nonchalance about the mysterious and the paranormal. Few are immune to the intrusion of some chilling or sombre thought when faced with such an unwholesome litany. These conceptions of Gothic fiction are common to our own dark fancies and are evidenced in our fears, our dreams and our imaginings – eccentricities that most often denote us and illustrate the psychic struggle between soul and ego-self. What particularly strikes a chord is that these entries are all paralleled by well-known rubrics in the repertory and all are substantiated in the *materia medica*, which is an archive of the workings of the human mind. The line between fiction and fact blurs, myth and reality merge; important dynamics in the Shadow aspect of the unconscious are disclosed; and the presence of the Beast is sensed. When the protective shell of atheistic disdain, scientific conceit and intellectual pride is stripped away by the buffets, jars and dislocations of life, we discover that all psyches have a Gothic dimension where demons dwell, where Wolves lurk, and Ravens fly. The clearest proof of this truth is the testimony of homeopathic pathogenetic trials.

All that the Gothic represents – its conventions; its mysterious imagination; its melodrama; its medievalism; its decaying, ruined architecture; its desolate, windswept landscapes; its tortured heroes; its diabolic villains; its beautiful, innocent, tormented heroines; its supernatural happenings; its shapeshifting, monstrous creatures; and its themes of suspense, horror, terror, the grotesque, the macabre, madness and death – all repose in the timeless records of the collective unconscious. In creating a narrative, the mind of the author or poet intuitively explores these rich depths and brings to light images, themes and archetypal profiles archived from human

thought, imagination and experience down the ages. Affinity is the attractive force that arouses a corresponding and appropriate response within the universal matrix. The writer, the characters and the story are as inextricably entangled as singer and song. The singular propensities and eccentricities of the artist determine and colour the material that emerges into consciousness at the bidding of the creative urge.



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## THE RAVEN – EDGAR ALLAN POE

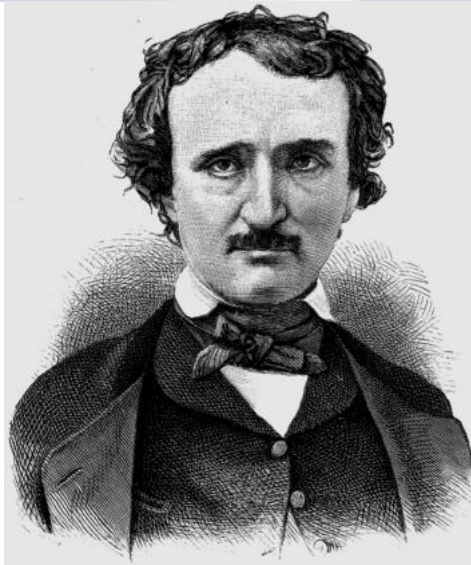


Figure 48.1 Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849)

(Image credit: iStock)

Such was true of Edgar Allen Poe (1809–1849) when he wrote his famous narrative poem: *The Raven*<sup>1</sup>; first made public: January 29, 1845. He brought to the work a dark fascination for the macabre and the mysterious; an unstable, emotional temperament, swinging between euphoric ‘insanity’ and anguished ‘sanity’, heavy abuse of alcohol and the dreaded certainty that he would shortly lose his dearly beloved wife and first cousin, Virginia, who was suffering from pulmonary tuberculosis. She died two years after its publication in January 1847. Her loss increased the innate emotional instability and erratic behaviour that coloured his life. Biographers have conjectured that the common theme of the ‘death of a beautiful woman’ found in his work stemmed from the frequent ‘loss’ of women in his life, including Virginia.



The first two stanzas of *The Raven* provide the Gothic setting – a bleak and dreary midnight in December – and introduce the narrator – a young student, who sits ‘weak and weary’ beside the dying embers of a fire, attempting to allay his grief for the loss of his beloved – ‘a rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore’ – by reading late into the night. He is nodding off when he is startled by a tapping sound, which he at first imagines comes from his chamber door.

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,  
As of some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber 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 sought 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.

Filled ‘with fantastic terrors never felt before’ he opens wide the door, but there is nothing there, only the blackness of the night. The tapping grows louder, and he realises that it is coming from his window. ‘All my soul within me burning’, he opens the shutters and ‘with many a flirt and flutter, in there stepped a stately Raven’ – which, without ‘obeisance’ – ‘with mien of lord or lady, perched upon a bust of Pallas (Athene) just above my chamber door.’

The ‘grave and stern decorum of the countenance it wore’ – a comic charade of his own misery, clad in plumage black and sombre – permits a brief smile to light his sad features. He addresses the Raven, asking ‘Ghastly grim and ancient Raven wandering from the nightly shore, tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night’s Plutonian shore!’

The Raven answers but a single word: “Nevermore” – ‘as if his soul in that one word he did outpour.’

In a melancholy undertone, the young man remarks to himself that this unexpected ‘friend’, the Raven, will soon fly out of his life as ‘other friends have flown before’ and as have all his hopes.

As if in answer, the bird responds: “Nevermore.”

The scholar concludes that this must be the only word the Raven knows, learnt perhaps from some ‘unhappy master, whom unmerciful Disaster followed fast and followed faster till his songs one burden bore’ of “Never – Nevermore.”