

The concept of death in edgar allan poe's poems

[Literature](#), [Poem](#)



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Chapter 03

Analysis

" Works of art or literature profoundly reveal their creator's psychology"

Marle Bonaparte

In this chapter, the detailed analysis would focus on the aspect on different attitudes adopted by Edgar Allan Poe to portray his conception of death in selected poems. Poe himself sees death in various experiences and his transformation of death from one poem to another is noteworthy. The bedrock of analysis would be The Raven, Annabel Lee, Lenore, The City in the Sea, Eldorado, and The Conqueror Worm.

Although the theme in these poems is the same, the attitudes and the nature of description are entirely different in all of them. The chapter is allocated to three subtitles, man's attitude towards death of the beloved, man's description of death and the third corresponds to the reasons behind these attitudes adopted based on Poe's biography.

Man's attitude towards the death of the beloved:

The Raven

The poem follows an unnamed narrator who is also a lamenting lover of his dead beloved Lenore. Lenore is thought to be the deceased wife of Poe and holds the central element in this poem. The narrative poem begins on a dreary night of December, where the lover is seen as tired and weak.

Remembering his dead beloved he experiences ennui and tries to overcome this by diverting his attention to an old book. As the narrator is seen feeling at unease and weak, he hears a tapping on his chamber door. He consoles himself that a visitor may have tapped the door to seek asylum and nothing else.

*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 someone gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.
"Tis some visitor," I muttered, "tapping at my chamber door;
Only this and nothing more."*

(The Raven 112)

Since the beginning of the poem, reader can feel the ambience of death surrounding the narrator. The use of "I" in the poem indicates unnamed narrator being fearful and irritated as he describes the sound in rather negative term "rapping". According to TheFreeDictionary, the word corresponds to a series of rapid audible blows in order to attract attention. This rapping sound generated which is described is making the narrator aware of his surroundings more and he begins to fear for himself.

Narrator also uses "gentle" which portrays yet another descriptive aspect, the gentle tap made the narrator aware of his situation and was able to respond to it. The narrator also shows his irritated nature: "Tis some visitor," I muttered, "tapping at my chamber door / Only this and nothing more."

Narrator now moves on to remembering his lost beloved Lenore. He can be evidently seen to showcase his unconscious through a moment of flashback, a specific time that he is reliving again in that chamber. The use of words "dying embers" showcases a trigger generated in the narrator about his lost Lenore. It is said that "we unconsciously tend to run away from our distressing thoughts and painful experiences by believing and convincing ourselves to forget them."

These repressed thoughts and experiences remain in our unconscious in a dormant phase, and as soon as similar situation occurs, these recurring experiences surfaces. The past has surfaced again when the narrator moves into flashback, feeling sorrow for having lost his beloved forever:

*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.*

(The Raven 112-113)

Here, narrator uses "bleak December" to signify cold, and consequently death. The very first line creates a conception of death as cold and unwavering in the reader's eyes. Nothing lives in the winter, for those who live goes into hibernation till the winter surpasses. December is the month of winter. This symbolizes death as cold, unforgiving and larger in magnitude.

The cold of winter wipes out the warmth effortlessly as the narrator explains it as "dying ember".

This dying ember generated the flashback of his beloved and this in turn instils the narrator to think about his beloved's death. He calls her the "fair maiden" whom the angels took away, leaving narrator sorrowful and mournful in attribute. To surpass his sorrow, he sought refuge in books: "Eagerly I wished the morrow; - vainly I had sought to borrow / From my books surcease of sorrow-sorrow for the lost Lenore.

Now narrator moves to open the door, fearing, grieving, and contemplating that it might be Lenore that seeks entrance in his chamber. The depiction of this fear is uncanny as narrator shows his inner fear which enthralls in him terrible yet fantastic horrors that he has never felt before. This uncanny attitude towards death is evident of the nature of Poe. Poe regards death as an inevitable concept in this narrative poem.

The horrors that the narrator faces are portrayed through the musical effect of silken purple curtain, sad, uncertain rustling of purple curtain, narrator is now terrified of this sound and reassures himself that it might be some visitor who seeks entrance at his chamber door. From the initial concept of death as an inevitable phenomena, the transformation has made death generating fear inside narrator. The narrator is now fearful of the ambience around him as it generates the flashback of his lost love.

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
"T is some visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door,
Some late visitor entreating entrance at my chamber door:
This it is and nothing more."*

(The Raven 113)

The narrator's state is been showcased as he tries to forgo his fear and establishes himself adamantly for the visitor. He converses with the person on the other side of the door. Narrator, completely unknown of the visitor, tries to communicate his thoughts by saying that he was nearly napping, and the visitor's tapping was so distinct and clear that he was able to hear it, therefore, asks for their apology for he was napping and opens the door wide. However, the narrator meets nothing but darkness on the other side.

*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.*

(The Raven 113-114)

The narrator now resonates with his fear again, wondering, fearing " dreaming dreams no mortals ever dared to dream before. In absolute fear, the only word that narrator could think of was of Lenore and as he speaks it, it

reverberates back to him. This can also be subjected as his inner loneliness, the narrator, weak from his mourning of his beloved feels alone and forgotten, and as he hears the tapping, thinks of his lost love coming back to him. According to Freud, the fear of death dominates us more often than we know. This fear of death allowed the narrator to recollect his memories of Lenore and call her out when he opens the door.

Later a loud tapping is again heard and when he checks again finds a stately Raven of saintly days of yore entering his chamber. It sought bust of Pallas just above his chamber door to settle on and gave no attention to the narrator. The Raven plays a crucial role in this poem. This Raven not only acts as a simple animal doing its bidding but acts as a pivot to unleash the emotions narrator carries with him.

Now the conception of death has yet again transformed. Death has now materialized in the form of The Raven. The raven is first and foremost, considered a bird of evil. This bird has long since been associated with different mythologies. In Norse mythology, for instance, Raven signifies as a messenger. Odin's two ravens, Hugin and Munin, Thought and Memory; flew across the world to collect news of the day and report back to Odin. It is also associated to be a harbinger of death and doom, with strong associations with storms and floods.

Narrator now fascinated and excited of the entrance of the Raven "ebony bird beguiling my sad fancy into smiling" (Raven 43) asks the creature of its name. The raven surprises the speaker by saying "Nevermore". Narrator curious to know more starts inquiring the Raven of its whereabouts. He

thinks for a minute as to what can he ask from the bird when his mind starts to wander back to his lost Lenore. The speaker feels the air becoming dense around him and scented with perfume from some heavenly being Seraphim. According to Christian angelology, Seraphim mean "burning ones" or in other words, nobles. They are also known as "ones of love".

Here the narrator believes Raven to be a messenger, a prophet which could predict if he could meet his beloved Lenore in Heaven to which he replies "Nevermore". A constant to and fro is showcased between the narrator and the Raven. By saying nevermore, the Raven suggests that the narrator would never be able to let go of his beloved's memories and they would haunt him till the end of times. Narrator, enraged, calls the raven "thing of evil", "devil", and commands the devil to return to the "Night's Plutonian shore".

Pluto is the god of the underworld; Hades. It is presumed that the Raven has the knowledge of the dead and therefore its response "Nevermore" is deemed relevant. Through this, narrator realizes that death is the ultimate end to everything and he will never meet with his beloved again. This makes him even more melancholic and depressed and commands the raven to leave his chamber, 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!"

*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!

These lines clearly indicate the perception of the narrator. Despite the constant name calling and ordering the Raven to leave his chambers, the creature doesn't move. This can be linked back to Death itself. No matter how one individual tries to make it go away, the course of nature undertaken by death would never shift from its original path. The Raven does not move as is "still sitting on the bust of Pallas just above my chamber door". The repetition of the word "Nevermore" adds to the mood of the poem.

Nevermore is a negative word, which means never again, which evokes emotions of helplessness and despair, sadness and melancholy; all the attributes concerning the death of someone. In this poem, this word evokes emotion concerning the death of a beloved.

According to Freud's theory on death, the speaker attitude towards the death of his beloved is unconsciously portrayed. The speaker travels in flashbacks, remembering the past encounters with his love and reliving those emotions unconsciously. He could not sever his dependence from his lover's memories. Even if he tries to keep himself occupied with reading old volumes of books, he still somehow, retracts back to her memory that is infused in his unconscious forever. As a result, his attitude towards the raven and his answers are the manifestation of his unconscious mind's needs. "Unconscious motivations and needs have a role in determining our behavior".