

# Literature symbols in "the raven" by edgar allan poe essay

[Literature](#), [American Literature](#)



Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven" (1844) is often discussed by many critics and readers as one of the most mysterious and 'dark' poems of the 19th century because of its rich gloomy symbolism. "The Raven" is the poetic narrative which represents the sad story of the young man who spends his days in despair because of losing his beloved Lenore. To accentuate the narrator's sufferings, Poe uses a lot of symbols which are closely associated with the ideas of death, sorrow, and grief.

In spite of the fact that there are many symbols of different types in Poe's "The Raven", such symbols of darkness and depression as December, the raven, the Night's Plutonian shore, and the repetition of the word 'Nevermore' are most vivid to represent the idea of the narrator's despair because they serve to emphasize the threatening darkness and the atmosphere of loss surrounding the poem's melancholic narrator.

Poe's approach to using the symbols of darkness in "The Raven" can be discussed as rather powerful and intriguing because all the mentioned symbols are colored with the emotional descriptions presented in such words as "weak," "bleak," "dying," or "ghost" (Poe 1-8). Thus, the first significant symbol which appears in the poem is the symbol of December. People are inclined to associate December with the beginning of winter as the 'dead' season.

Poe uses the dark symbol of December while presenting the settings for describing the narrator's sorrow because of losing the beloved woman. As a result, the symbol of the "bleak December" is effective to emphasize the narrator's 'weak' state of depression during the days of noting 'dying'

embers and their 'ghosts' and focusing on "fantastic terrors" (Poe 1, 7-8, 14).

If the symbol of December is used to demonstrate the gloomy settings for the narrator's sorrow associated with the death, the author's use of the word 'darkness' provides the readers with the more obvious understanding of the narrator's loneliness and preoccupation with depressing thoughts. Having opened the door to know who was tapping, the narrator can see only darkness and "nothing more" (Poe 24).

Focusing on these symbols, Carlson notes that the poem's setting "in December, at midnight, in the midst of a tempest, in a small chamber that is the only spot of light amid overwhelming darkness, suggests that the threat of nothingness is real" (Carlson 98). Symbols of December and darkness accentuate the narrator's loneliness in his chamber where he can be accompanied only with his depressing thoughts and sorrow.

The raven as the main symbol of the poem appears only in the seventh stanza of the poem when the narrator is exhausted because of impossibility to solve the mystery of tapping at the door, and the focus on this bird adds the new meaning to the narrator's sufferings and melancholic thoughts. The raven is described in the poem with the help of such words as "ebony," "grim," "ungainly, ghastly, gaunt, and ominous," and "bird or devil" (Poe 43-46, 71, 85). Moreover, the raven's eyes are of the "demon's that is dreaming" (Poe 105).

These words are associated in the readers' mind with blackness, the bad, and evil. That is why the black raven appearing in the narrator's chamber can only foreshadow the dramatic future for the character which is full of sufferings and even possible death. On the other hand, the symbol of the raven is the answer to the narrator's questions about the possibility to recreate his relations with Lenore.

Thus, in his work, Abu-Melhim states that " the Raven represents the harsh reality of what we can never recreate" (Abu-Melhim 117). From this point, the raven as the symbol of death and grief is also used to stress on the character's inability to avoid his fate of losing his beloved Lenore and even losing his own life in depression and despair.

The symbol of the raven is closely associated with the dark symbol of the Night's Plutonian shore the understanding of which is possible only with references to the role of Pluto in classical mythology. Pluto is the god of underworld that is why the Night's Plutonian shore is the symbol of the afterlife which is closely connected with the symbol of the raven in the poem because the raven is discussed as coming from that shore.

The poem's narrator tries to learn what name the raven has in the mystic world of the Night's Plutonian shore, and he hears only " Nevermore" (Poe 46-48). The symbol of the Night's Plutonian shore seems to explain the role of the symbol of the raven in the poem and to accentuate the idea of darkness because the narrator is sure that the raven came from the underworld, and his place is there (Poe 98).

The presence of these symbols in their combination serves to make the atmosphere of death in the poem more obvious and thrilling. If the darkness was presented in the first poem's stanzas only in the form of melancholic descriptions and symbols of depression and despair, the symbols of the raven and the Night's Plutonian shore make the poem more mystic and dramatic while evoking the close associations with death.

The raven also plays such an important role in the poem as the Prophet, and the raven has the right to provide answers to the narrator's questions about his fate and his beloved Lenore. The raven's only answer to all the character's questions is 'Nevermore.' This word is repeated in the poem many times in order to accentuate the darkness, which is associated with the observed reality in contrast to the narrator's hopes and desires.

The answer 'Nevermore' said by the raven as "the thing of evil" is directly connected with the narrator's chances to see Lenore one more time, and this word creates the atmosphere of the lost hopes and absolute despair which intensifies the whole impression of darkness and shadow (Poe 91).

Carlson pays attention to the fact that "the shadow of the bird of darkness is a symbolic bit of larger darkness threatening to blot out the brightness briefly glimpsed in Lenore" (Carlson 98). Thus, the reader understands that the symbol of the raven and the bird's word are used to accentuate the gloomy fate of the narrator and the threat of death.

To emphasize the idea of darkness as reflecting the narrator's thoughts and feelings in the poem "The Raven," Edgar Allan Poe uses many vivid symbols

which produce strong associations with death and despair. These important symbols are December, the raven, the Night's Plutonian shore, and the word 'Nevermore' as the bird's answer to the narrator's questions. To make these symbols more effective and striking, Poe uses many emotionally-colored words in order to accentuate the depth of the used dramatic symbols.

Abu-Melhim, Abdel-Rahman. "Explicating Poe's Raven from a Psycho-Linguistic Perspective". *Studies in Literature and Language* 7. 3 (2013): 113-118. Print.

Carlson, Eric. *A Companion to Poe Studies*. USA: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1996. Print.

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