



Annotated Poe

Content Overview – What Does That Mean?

WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

Students will click on highlighted words or phrases below to find out more about that item.

Highlighted phrase: The **Raven**

The **raven**, *Corvus corax*, is a glossy black scavenging bird about 26 in. (66 cm) long, with a call resembling a guttural croak. Long the subject of superstition and legend, the raven can be tamed and taught to mimic human speech. – From The Columbia Encyclopedia, Sixth Edition. 2001.

Go here to see what a raven might look like. <http://www.otterside.com/htmlfiles/crow5.htm#raven1>

Highlighted phrase: Once upon a midnight **dreary**,

Dreary is an adjective describing a sad, discouraged, cheerless, or listless feeling.

Highlighted phrase: while I **pondered**, weak and weary,

To **ponder** is to think long and carefully about something with the hope of finding an answer or result.

Highlighted phrase: Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the **bleak** December;

Bleak is an adjective describing something that is grim, depressing, and cold.

Highlighted phrase: And each separate dying **ember** wrought its ghost upon the floor.

An **ember** is a glowing piece of wood or coal, usually left over from a fire.

Highlighted phrase: Eagerly I wished the **morrow**;

The word **morrow** is a shortened form of "tomorrow."

Highlighted phrase: From my books **surcease of sorrow**

Surcease is a verb meaning to stop or cease. The narrator is trying to use his books as a way to escape and stop the sorrow he feels for "the lost Lenore."

Highlighted phrase: Some late visiter **entreating** entrance at my chamber door; --

To **entreat** someone means to ask them to do something, usually begging or pleadingly.

Highlighted phrase: Sir," said I, "or Madam, truly your forgiveness I **implore**;

Implore means to appeal or beg to someone with great energy, meaning, and interest.

Highlighted phrase: And the only word there spoken was the whispered word, "**Lenore**?"

"**Lenore**" is associated with the names "Helen," "Ellen," and "Eleanor." As Poe biographer Thomas Ollive Mabbott notes, the name is "generally supposed to mean 'light' or 'bright.'" It can also be traced to the Greek name Leona, meaning "like a lion." If you want to know more about the meaning and relevance of the name to Poe, click the *Where is he coming from?* tab.

Highlighted phrase: "Surely," said I, "surely that is something at my **window lattice**;

A **window lattice** is the framework of crossed metal or wood in a window. Lattices are usually in a crisscross pattern, like the example below, but they can also be decorative.

Highlighted phrase: **Let me see, then, what thereat is**, and this mystery explore --

"**Let me see, then, what thereat is**" is Poe's poetic way of saying "Let me see what is there."

Highlighted phrase: In there stepped a **stately** Raven of the saintly days of yore;

The word **stately** is an adjective that means having a grand, lofty, even imposing look.

Highlighted phrase: Not the least obeisance made he;

Obeisance refers to a show of respect or submission, like a bow or salute. In other words, the narrator is saying the Raven, unlike a typical gentleman visitor in the early 1800's, did not bow or show the least bit of respect before he entered.

Highlighted phrase: But, with mien of lord or lady, perched above my chamber door --

The word **mien** is a noun that means someone or something's appearance. It usually reflects or reveals an inner state of mind. So the Raven's "mien of lord or lady" would mean it had the look of dignified, maybe even imposing royalty.

Highlighted phrase: Perched upon a bust of Pallas just above my chamber door --

A **bust** is sculpture of the head, usually made with white stone or marble. **Pallas** is another name for Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom, practical arts, and warfare. The bust of Pallas might look something like the example below:

Highlighted phrase: Then this ebony bird beguiling my sad fancy into smiling,
By the grave and stern decorum of the countenance it wore,

Ebony is an adjective meaning dark, usually black. **Beguiling** means to deceive or fool someone, but it can also mean to distract or divert someone's attention away from something else. **Decorum** is a noun describing behavior that suits the circumstances or situation. Finally, **countenance** is a person's look or appearance, especially in the face.

Using all these definitions, these two lines might be rewritten as: The black bird made me smile, fooling me out of my sad state of mind with the grave, stern look on his face that fit the situation so perfectly.

Highlighted phrase: "Though thy crest be shorn and shaven, thou," I said, "art sure no craven,

Craven is another word for coward.

Highlighted phrase: Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night's Plutonian shore!"

Pluto, also called Hades, is the Greek god of the underworld. In Greek mythology, the underworld had a series of rivers that souls had to cross to reach the realm of the dead. The narrator is implying that, judging from how it looks, the bird must have come from the underworld or some other hellish place.

Highlighted phrase: Much I marvelled this ungainly fowl to hear discourse so plainly,

The word **ungainly** is an adjective that means having an awkward or ugly appearance.

Highlighted phrase: But the Raven, sitting lonely on the placid bust,

Placid is an adjective that means calm, still, and complacent.

Highlighted phrase: Startled at the stillness broken by reply so aptly spoken,

Aptly is another way to say appropriately. The narrator is surprised by the bird's appropriate response to his claim that the Raven will leave tomorrow like all his other friends.

Highlighted phrase: Caught from some unhappy master whom unmerciful Disaster

The word **Disaster** (with a capital D) refers to an evil influence from a planet or star. For centuries, people have used planets and stars to try to predict the fate of a person. When the stars seemed to be acting as a negative influence on a person's life, it was termed "Disaster." The narrator believes that the Raven was taught to say "Nevermore" by a previous owner, who had taught the bird the phrase by saying it over and over himself in response to his own "Disaster."

Highlighted phrase: Till the dirges of his Hope that melancholy burden bore

In Christianity, **Hope** (with a capital H) is the virtue of a difficult but not impossible search for a future good with God's help.

Highlighted phrase: Till the dirges of his Hope that melancholy burden bore

Melancholy is a mood of gloom, dejection, and inner reflection.

Highlighted phrase: But the Raven still beguiling my sad fancy into smiling,

Beguiling means to deceive or fool someone, but it can also mean to distract or divert someone's attention away from something else.

Highlighted phrase: Fancy unto fancy

The noun **fancy** is another word for thoughts, especially very imaginative ones. When the narrator is "linking fancy unto fancy," he is trying to connect his thoughts to puzzle out the mystery of the Raven's appearance.

Highlighted phrase: Fancy unto fancy, thinking what this ominous bird of yore --

The narrator describes the Raven as **ominous**, meaning scary and threatening. It also may refer to the bird as an omen, a sign of things still to come. **Yore** refers to a time in the past, usually long ago. In this case, the Raven would be considered a bad or evil omen from the ancient past.

Highlighted phrase: What this grim, ungainly, **ghastly**, gaunt and ominous bird of yore

The adjective **ghastly** refers to something that is horrible or frightening.

Highlighted phrase: To the fowl whose fiery eyes now burned into **my bosom's core**;

Bosom refers to a person's chest. In Romanic or Gothic poetry, bosom usually implies the deepest feelings of a person's soul as well. Poe reinforces this idea by emphasizing that the Raven's gaze penetrated not only into the narrator's heart, but to its very core.

Highlighted phrase: This and more I sat **divining**, with my head at ease reclining

Divining means to think or guess about something perplexing. The narrator is still trying to figure out what the Raven's presence means.

Highlighted phrase: On the cushion's velvet lining that **the lamp-light gloated o'er**,

To **gloat** means to stare or glare at something with a triumphant, even malicious feeling. The lamp-light "gloated" at the cushion – in other words, illuminated it in a harsh, cruel way. Click on the *How did he do that?* tab to learn about *personification*, the poetic technique Poe uses here.

Highlighted phrase: Then, methought, the air grew denser, **perfumed from an unseen censer Swung by Seraphim whose foot-falls tinkled on the tufted floor.**

A **censer** is a container that is filled with incense and used in religious ceremonies. **Seraphim** are the highest order, or type, of angels. **Tufted** describes something sitting or growing in clusters, like a tuft of grass. The narrator feels the air thicken as if a group of angels walking lightly across the room were swinging incense.

Highlighted phrase: Respite -- **respite and nepenthe**, from thy memories of Lenore;

Respite means to temporarily rest or pause; here, it is used as a command to stop. **Nepenthe** was a potion used by the ancients to soothe pain and forget sorrow. Suddenly overcome by the ominous Raven and the dense feeling of the room and his memories, the narrator cries out for a release from the emotion and tension.

Highlighted phrase: **Quaff**, oh quaff this kind nepenthe and forget this lost Lenore!"

The word **quaff** is a verb that means to drink heartily -- even greedily -- in one large, quick draught.

Highlighted phrase: "**Prophet!**" said I, "thing of evil! -- prophet still, if bird or devil! --

A **prophet** is someone (or something, in this case) who reveals truths and predicts the future, usually based on divine inspiration.

Highlighted phrase: **Whether Tempter sent, or whether tempest tossed thee here ashore,**

In Christianity, the devil was often referred to as "the **Tempter**" because he tried to lure or entice people to evil. A **tempest** is a very violent storm with high winds and torrential downpours. The narrator is wondering whether the Raven was sent by the devil, simply thrown into his house by a natural storm, or spirited to him by an act of God. To learn more about these possibilities, click the *Where is he coming from?* tab.

Highlighted phrase: Is there -- **is there balm in Gilead?** --

A **balm** is an ointment used to heal wounds and soothe pain. In the Old Testament, the "balm of Gilead" referred both to a powerful healing ointment from the land of Gilead and, metaphorically, to the power of God to heal and save the soul. The phrase used here is paraphrased from Jeremiah 8:21 – "Is there no Balm in Gilead?" The narrator is madly asking the Raven if he will ever have relief from his feelings of grief.

Highlighted phrase: Tell this soul with sorrow laden if, within the distant **Aidenn**,

Aidenn is a poetic spelling of Eden, the biblical garden of paradise. The narrator is asking if when he dies, and goes to heaven or paradise, whether he will see his beloved Lenore again.

Highlighted phrase: "Be that word our sign in parting, bird or **fiend!**" I shrieked, upstarting --

Fiend is a noun that means demon, often referring to the devil.

Highlighted phrase: Leave no black **plume** as a token of that lie thy soul hath spoken!

A **plume** is a single feather of a bird. When the poem says, "Leave no black plume," the narrator is demanding that the Raven should leave none of its black feathers to remind him of its awful presence.

Highlighted phrase: On the **pallid** bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;

Pallid is another word for pale or dull. It can also imply a severe lack of intensity, almost to the point of death. Busts are often made of a white stone, like marble, so a "pallid bust" would be describing the pale stone.

