Poe initially arranged to publish "The Raven" in the February 1845 issue of the American Review, but his friend Nathaniel P. Willis obtained an advance copy of the American Review and published the poem under Poe's name in the New York Evening Mirror, January 29, 1845. In his headnote to the poem, Willis remarked, "It will stick to the memory of everybody who reads it." In the American Review, according to the magazine's policy, "The Raven" appeared pseudonymously—by "Quarles"—but since Willis had already identified the work as Poe's, news of his authorship spread quickly. Magazines and newspapers across the United States and Great Britain soon reprinted "The Raven," and, as Willis predicted, the poem did indeed stick. Everywhere, it seemed, people thrilled at its incantatory power. The word "Nevermore" was on everyone's lips. Poe's nickname became "Raven," and, for a time, he was the darling of New York literary society, invited to the most fashionable soirées and lionized by the leading literary women of the day. If ever a poem was designed for oral recitation, it is "The Raven." Its insistent meter and its rhyme and internal rhyme scheme of unusual complexity also lent it to parody, of which many examples were soon forthcoming: "The Owl," by Sarles; "The Veto," by Snarles; "A Vision," also by Sarles; "The Craven," by Pohl; "The Whippoorwill"; and "The Turkey." "'The Raven' has had a great run,' Thomas," Poe boasted in a letter of May 4, 1845, to his friend F. W. Thomas, "but I wrote it for the express purpose of running—just as I did the 'Gold-Bug,' you know. The bird beat the bug, though, all hollow." (Collected Letters of Edgar Allan Poe, ed. John Ward Ostrom, Burton R. Pollin, and Jeffrey A. Savoye, 2 vols. [New York: Gordian Press, 2008], I, 503).

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.

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 entreating entrance at my chamber door—
Some late visiter entreating 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,
“The Room Where ‘The Raven’ Was Written,” from William F. Gill, The Life of Edgar Allan Poe (New York: C. T. Dillingham, 1877). After Poe moved to New York in 1844, he rented rooms in a farmhouse near 84th St. from Mr. and Mrs. Patrick Henry Brennan. As Poe wrote “The Raven,” so the story goes, he tossed the manuscript pages on the floor, and the Brennans’ teenage daughter Martha gathered and arranged them for him.

The speaker of the poem is a scholar and antiquarian. In “The Philosophy of Composition,” Poe’s mock-serious essay about how he composed his widely popular poem, he refers more explicitly to the speaker as a “student.”

In “The Philosophy of Composition,” Poe says he deliberately chose the chamber of the bereaved lover as his setting for “The Raven” because “a close circumscription of space is absolutely necessary to the effect of insulated incident:—it has the force of a frame to a picture. It has an indisputable moral power in keeping concentrated the attention, and, of course, must not be confounded with mere unity of place” (Essays and Reviews, ed. G. R. Thompson [New York: Library of America, 1984], 21).

Poe may have taken the name from “Lenore” (1773), a ballad by the popular German lyric poet Gottfried August Bürger, which Karl von Holtei had adapted for the stage as Lenore (1829). Bürger’s poem exerted an enormous influence on Romantic literature and ballad writing of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Of course, Poe had earlier used the name in “Lenore” (1843), yet another of his poems that concerns itself with the death of a beautiful woman.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s “Lady Geraldine’s Courtship” (1844) inspired some of the poem’s imagery and more significantly gave Poe his metrical structure:

With a murmurous stir, uncertain, in the air, the purple curtain
Swelleth in and swelleth out around her motionless pale brows;
While the gliding of the river sends a rippling noise for ever,
Through the open casement whitened by the moonlight’s slant repose.

In his January 11, 1845, Broadway Journal review of Barrett Browning’s Drama of Exile and Other Poems, Poe calls “Lady Geraldine’s Courtship” a “palpable imitation of Tennyson’s ‘Locksley Hall.’” Poe’s dedication of The Raven and Other Poems to Barrett Browning, Mabbott says, is “a tacit recognition of his own similar debt to her” (Thomas Ollive Mabbott, ed., Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe, 3
That I scarce was sure I heard you—it here I opened wide the
door;

Darkness there and nothing more. 7

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 stillness gave no token,

And the only word there spoken was the whispered word, "Lenore?"

This I whispered, and an echo murmured back the word, "Lenore!"

Merely this and nothing more.

Back into the chamber turning, all my soul within me burning,

Soon again I heard a tapping somewhat louder than before.

"Surely," said I, "surely that is something at my window lattice;

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!" 8
Edward Hopper, “Quoth the Raven, ‘Nevermore,’” ca. 1900–1906, pen and black ink on paper. Hopper (1882–1967), an American realist painter best known for his depictions of lonely cityscapes, was also an accomplished printmaker and etcher.

John Tenniel, illustration from The Poetical Works of Edgar Allan Poe, 1858. Sir John Tenniel (1820–1914) was an English artist best known for his illustrations for Lewis Carroll’s Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland. He was also the principal political cartoonist for Punch magazine for more than fifty years.
D. G. Rossetti, The Raven, ca. 1848. Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–1882), an English poet, illustrator, and painter, was an admirer of Poe’s work. His enjoyment of Poe’s verse is evident in both his art and his poetry. “The Blessed Damozel,” one of Rossetti’s most well-known poems, written when he was just eighteen years old, can be read as a response to “The Raven.” Whereas Poe addressed the grief of the lover left behind when a partner has died, Rossetti reversed the perspective, expressing the yearnings of the deceased in heaven.
Joseph Ferdinand Keppler, *The Raven*, illustration from *Puck Magazine*, vol. 27, August 13, 1890. Keppler (1838–1894), the founder and illustrator of *Puck*, a weekly humor magazine, shows just how well known "The Raven" had become by the last decade of the nineteenth century. Keppler caricatures President Benjamin Harrison, emphasizing his diminutive stature and suggesting that he cannot fill the hat of his grandfather, President William Henry Harrison. On a bust of Pallas perches a raven with the face of Secretary of State James G. Blaine. Harrison and Blaine disagreed over the proposed McKinley Tariff, which raised duties on imports to protect domestic industries from foreign competition.

Udo J. Keppler, *Nevermore* (cover for *Puck Magazine*, November 7, 1900). Keppler, cartoonist and son of Joseph Ferdinand Keppler, the founder of *Puck Magazine*, depicts William Jennings Bryan, the 1900 Democratic presidential nominee, after he has just lost the election to William McKinley for the second time. As he had in 1896, Bryan campaigned on a Free-Silver platform, arguing that the United States should abandon the gold standard. The Raven’s prediction, that Bryan would nevermore run for the presidency, did not come true. Bryan ran again in 1908, losing the election to William Howard Taft.
The raven has been a cultural icon for thousands of years, since at least the Paleolithic era, when people drew images of crows and ravens on cave walls. The French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss accounts for the raven’s mythic status by pointing to the fact that it is a carrion-eating animal and therefore functions as a “mediator” between life and death. In poetry and prose, the raven has a long and distinguished literary pedigree, dating back to Greek and Roman culture. In Book II of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, for example, the raven, once a white bird, was turned black by Apollo for delivering an unwelcome message about his beloved’s unfaithfulness. In John Gay’s fabliau “The Farmer’s Wife and the Raven” (1727), the sight and sound of a raven prompt the farmer’s wife to scream:

That raven on yon left hand oak
(Curse on his ill-betiding croak)
Bodes me no good.

In Poe’s own words, the raven functions as a “bird of ill omen.” In a more particular way, Poe’s stately raven seems to have been inspired by the talking raven in Charles Dickens’s *Barnaby Rudge* (1841), a novel that Poe reviewed in *Graham’s Magazine*. In the Dickens novel, Barnaby and his pet raven, Grip, wander in and out of a story set amid the 1780 Gordon Riots in London. In Chapter 5, prompted by a sudden noise, Varden asks, “What was that—him tapping at the door?” Barnaby’s mother replies, “It was in the street, I think. Hark! Yes. There again! ‘Tis some one knocking softly at the shutter.”

In ancient Greek religion, Pallas Athene is the goddess of wisdom, war strategy, handicraft, and all the arts. Poe tells us he “made the bird alight on the bust of Pallas . . . for the effect of contrast between the marble and the plumage . . . the bust of Pallas being chosen, first, as most in keeping with the scholarship of the lover; and, secondly, for the sonorosity of the word, Pallas, itself” (*Essays*, 22). Something Poe does not mention in “The Philosophy of Composition” is that the raven was traditionally associated with Athene. According to one fable, Athene hates the raven because of its powers of augury, so the raven makes sacrifices to Athene to appease her.

Mabbott notes in his edition that helmeted busts of the goddess of wisdom were popular mid-nineteenth century furnishings. In an April 1846 letter to Poe, Elizabeth Barrett Browning writes: “Your ‘Raven’ has produced a sensation, a ‘fit horror,’ here in England. Some of my friends are taken by the fear of it and some by the music. I hear of persons haunted by the ‘Nevermore,’ and one acquaintance of mine who has the misfortune of possessing a ‘bust of Pallas’ . . .

Open here I flung the shutter, when, with many a flirt and flutter,
In there stepped a stately Raven of the saintly days of yore;
Not the least obeisance made he; not a minute stopped or stayed he;
But, with mien of lord or lady, perched above my chamber door—
Perched upon a bust of Pallas9 just above my chamber door—
Perched, and sat, and nothing more.

Then this ebony bird beguiling my sad fancy into smiling,
By the grave and stern decorum of the countenance it wore,
“Though thy crest be shorn and shaven, thou,” I said, “art sure no craven,
Ghastly grim and ancient Raven wandering from the Nightly shore” —
Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night’s Plutonian 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 living human being
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."
Then the bird said “Nevermore.””

Startled 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 till his songs one burden bore—
las’ never can bear to look at it in the twilight” (Walker, ed., Edgar Allan Poe, 144).


12 Pertaining to the god Pluto, the ruler of the underworld, the adjective Plutonian means infernal and demonic, but it can also mean dark or gloomy.

13 In “The Philosophy of Composition,” Poe explains how he searched for “a key-note in the construction of the poem—some pivot upon which the whole structure might turn.” That pivot, he determined, would be the refrain. In poetry, the chief pleasure of the refrain has everything to do with “the sense of identity—of repetition.” But he “resolved to diversify, and so vastly heighten, the effect, by adhering, in general, to the monotone of sound, while I continually varied that of thought: that is to say, I determined to produce continuously novel effects, by the variation of the application of the refrain—the refrain itself remaining, for the most part, unvaried.” Having resolved these important points, he determined that the refrain must be “brief” but “sonorous and susceptible of protracted emphasis” (Essays, 17–18).

Till the dirges\textsuperscript{16} of his Hope that melancholy burden bore
Of ‘Never—nevermore.’

But the Raven still beguiling my sad fancy 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 lamp-light gloated o’er,
But whose velvet-violet lining with the lamp-light gloating o’er,
\textit{She} shall press, ah, nevermore!

Then, methought, the air grew denser, perfumed from an unseen
censer
Swung by seraphim\textsuperscript{17} whose foot-falls tinkled on the tufted floor\textsuperscript{18}
“Wretch,” I cried, “thy God hath lent thee—by these angels he
hath sent thee
Respite—respite and nepenthe,\textsuperscript{19} from thy memories of Lenore;
Quaff, oh quaff this kind nepenthe and forget this lost Lenore!”
Quoth the Raven “Nevermore.”\textsuperscript{20}

“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 Gilead?\textsuperscript{21}—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 Aidenn,22
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.”


22 Poe had first used the word “Aidenn” in “The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion” (1839). Derived from the Arabic “And,” it means Eden or Heaven.
“It will be observed that the words ‘from out my heart,’” Poe says, “involve the first metaphorical expression in the poem... The reader begins now to regard the Raven as emblematical—but it is not until the very last line of the very last stanza, that the intention of making him emblematical of Mournful and Never-ending Remembrance is permitted distinctly to be seen” (Essays, 25).

The success of “The Raven” made Poe a popular guest in New York’s literary salons, where he gave readings of his poem. On January 7, 1846, one acquaintance wrote: “I meet Mr. Poe very often at the receptions. He is the observed of all observers. His stories are thought wonderful, and to hear him repeat the Raven, which he does very quietly, is an event in one’s life. People seem to think there is something uncanny about him, and the strangest stories are told, and, what is more, believed, about his mesmeric experiences, at the mention of which he always smiles. His smile is captivating!... Everybody wants to know him; but only a very few people seem to get well acquainted with him” (quoted in Sarah Helen Whitman, “Introductory Letter,” in Eugene L. Didier, The Life and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe [New York: W. J. Widdleton, 1879], 13).

“Be that word our sign of parting, bird or fiend!” I shrieked, upwards—
“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 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!”

23
24