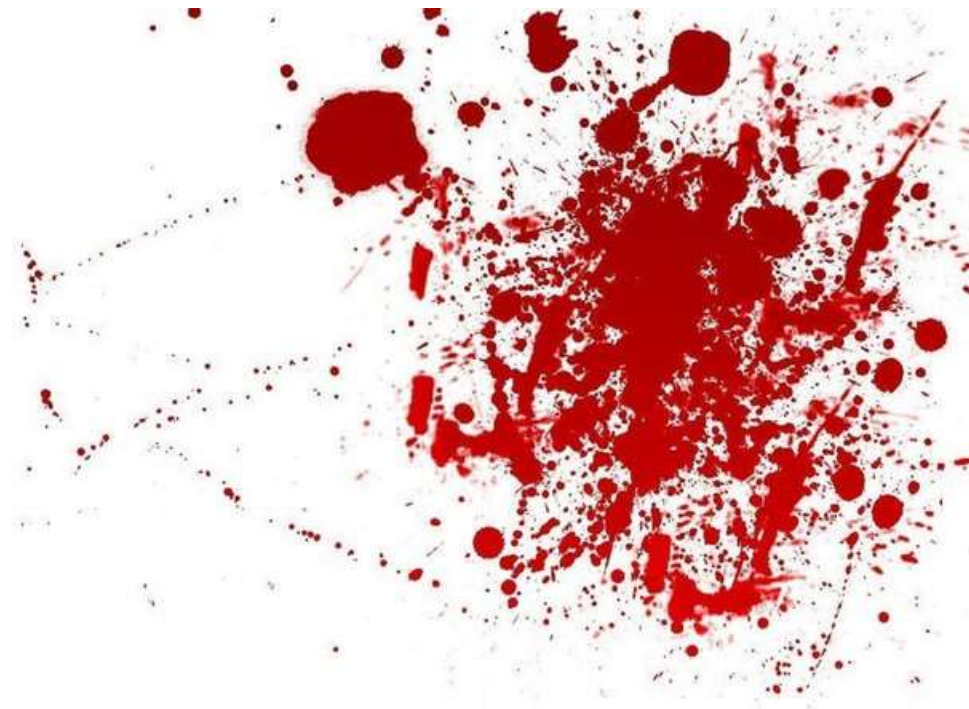


19th Century Fiction

Edgar Allan Poe's "Philosophy of Composition"



Edgar Allan Poe (1809 - 1849)



“The Raven” (1845)



“The Philosophy of Composition” (1846)

Three remarks before we start

- Denouement is of utter importance
- Effect is the goal
- Poets lie

The Process

1. Extent

- Unity of effect
- One sitting
- Brevity must be in direct ratio of the intensity of the effect
- A certain duration is necessary
- 108 lines

11. Effect

- Impression has to be universally appreciable
- Beauty
- Beauty is the excitement or pleasurable elevation of the soul

III. Tone

- Sadness (Melancholy)
- Excites the sensitive soul to tears

IV. Point of reference

- Refrain
- Brief
- Variation
- One word

Choosing the Word

- -O- and -R-
- Combination of sound and melancholy
- “Nevermore”

V. Pretext for the Word

- Why would someone repeat this word?
- Raven (bird of ill omen) is the solution

VI. Topic

- “Of all melancholy topics what, according to the universal understanding of mankind, is the most melancholy?”
- “Death”

- “And when is this most melancholy of topics most poetical?”
- “The death of a beautiful woman is unquestionably the most poetical topic in the world”

VII. Building to a climax

- Starting with the climax
- What is the ultimate question?

“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,

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.”

Everything should lead to that question

VIII. Place, time and situation

- Not a forest but a chamber (why?)
- Bad weather (why?)
- Tapping at the door (why?)
- The raven stands on the bust of Pallas (why?)

IX. Concluding Two Stanzas

Their suggestiveness pervade all the narrative which has preceded them.

First metaphorical expression:

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!

**The Raven is emblematical of Mournful and never
ending Remembrance**