
Stylistic Devices In The Raven

Poetry is a huge cog in today's literary world. Poetry is used to express any feeling the poet could possibly think to portray. Language is huge in poetry and without proper use of it a poem may not be as strong as others. Poetry is a form of art, and a poet uses language as a painter would use color to portray their art. Edgar Allen Poe is one of the greatest poets in history because his mastery of literary elements such as allusion, allegory, symbolism, and figurative language.

"The Raven" by Edgar Allen Poe is a fascinating poem in which he displays excellent use of language. There are many symbols in this poem which help the reader understand the change in the speaker's feelings. The first symbol mentioned in the poem is about the long lost Lenore. While the reader does not learn much about Lenore, the reader learns that the loss of this woman is the cause of the speaker's grief. The speaker gives no indication of the relation to this woman, but whether she was his sister, mother, lover, or just a good friend, the speaker does clearly indicate his sorrow in the loss of Lenore. The speaker indicates he is constantly reminded of Lenore, "From my books surcease of sorrow—sorrow for the lost Lenore—" (Poe line 10). This symbol helps the reader understand the initial feelings the speaker is feeling and this gives the reader something to build on as the poem progresses. In line 47, Poe mentions "The Night's Plutonian Shore," and this symbol is one in which the reader must do their research or be quite educated to understand. Poe's poetry thrives on the use of darkness and this phrase is spot on with Poe's philosophy. To truly understand this phrase the reader has to analyze word for word starting with "night's." Night represents darkness in this case and with the raven flying through the speaker's chamber window during the night, the raven metaphorically came out of the darkness. In my source "Overview: 'The Raven'" the author gives the reader a deeper look into the word plutonian, "In the suggestion that the bird has come from the 'Plutonian shore,' Poe calls upon the myth of Pluto, the God of the Underworld, the land of the dead in Greek mythology" ("Overview: 'The Raven'"). So now the readers know Poe is talking about the bird coming seemingly out of the darkness of the underworld through his window. The reader can conclude that the biggest symbol in this poem is the raven. While the other symbols in this story are memorable, we can have no doubt that the raven leaves a lasting impression on the reader. The raven is a great choice by Poe as the bird is dark, which is a common occurrence in Poe's work. Although, the reader can understand that the emphasis that Poe puts on the bird is what embeds the image of the raven in the reader's head. Poe's choice of the raven was a difficult one as he had to choose between the dark raven, or the nocturnal owl. In an interview with Susan Archer Weiss Poe confessed, "The owl is the traditional bird of wisdom for this goddess; secondly, Susan Archer Weiss states that Poe told her he originally had decided to use the nocturnal owl for his prophetic bird" (Lees "An Early Model for Poe's 'The Raven'").

Another literary element used in many of Poe's work is allusion. In "The Raven," Poe makes many allusions, mostly Biblical and mythological. While the narrator is believed to have a religious come up, it is also believed he is still at war with himself and God, "But with all his religious schooling, the speaker is hardly at peace with either himself or with the larger forces of his universe" (Dhahir "Literary Contexts in Poetry: Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Raven'"). The first reference made is in line 40 and 41, when Poe mentions the raven perching on the bust of Pallas hanging above his door, "But, with mien of lord or lady, perched above my chamber

door—Perched upon a bust of Pallas just above my chamber door—” (Poe lines 40-41). The bust of Pallas is a reference to Athena Pallas, the Greek Goddess of Wisdom. This reference is great because it inspires the idea that the raven, while only speaking one word, is wise. The speaker takes notice in this also as he realizes the bird’s wisdom and begins to worry as the raven keeps repeating the wise word “nevermore.” Another mythological reference is the “Night’s Plutonian Shore.” While we have already dove into this discussion it is another strong allusion the Poe uses to connect the bird to the darkness that Poe’s writings are associated with. The first Biblical reference made in this poem is in line 80 when the speaker realizes the bird is not there to give him news of his next life, only that he will be with Lenore “nevermore”. “Swung by Seraphim whose foot-falls tinkled on the tufted floor” (Poe line 80). Seraphim are six-foot tall winged creatures whose duty in the Bible was to praise God by flying around and repeating the word “holy” over and over. Much like the raven sits above the speaker and repeats the words “nevermore” over and over. The connection between the raven and the Seraphim is huge because while their actions match closely, they are complete opposites. The Seraphim are tall, holy, and their sole purpose is to praise God, while the raven is small in comparison and a dark creature referred to as coming from the underworld. While the two creatures function the same their purposes differ.

The narrator in this poem has a seemingly complex relationship with raven. The narrator starts the poem full of sorrow, sulking over his lost Lenore, but as the story progresses his feelings change. When the raven first enters his chamber, he is almost fascinated by it. He looks at the raven as if it was royalty, “But, with the mien of lord or lady, perched above my chamber door” (Poe line 40). Although, as the narrator begins to ask the raven questions, he finds that the raven may not have come to give him the company he was seeking. The raven’s one word responses begin to bewilder the narrator. As he finally questions whether or not he will ever see Lenore again, the raven’s response leaves the narrator hysterical. The narrator begins to beg the bird to leave, “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!” (Poe lines 100-101). This change in feeling is supposed to instill a feeling of pain, or pity for the speaker into the reader, and Poe does an excellent job of doing so.

Poe’s success in the literary world is in large part due to his mastery of the literary elements. While it took many years after his death, Poe’s was finally realized to be the literary genius he is known as today. Poe’s poetry and his help in the evolution is what has defined his legacy. “The Raven” is one of Poe’s most notable works and as the reader analyzes the poem they can see the literary elements such as symbolism, allusion, allegory, diction, and many different elements that make Poe’s work so fascinating.