

THE ATMOSPHERE

Edgar Allan Poe's *The Raven* is 108 lines long, and is written in trochaic octameter, therefore having 16 syllables per line, less the last line of each stanza, which is trochaic, but having only seven lines. Poe has only seven syllables in these lines to place emphasis on "more," the last sound of each stanza, ending each stanza with a strong syllable and producing a parallel structure. The rhyme scheme takes the form of AA/B/CC/CB/B/B. The first line of each stanza has internal rhyming, for example, "And the silken sad uncertain (A) rustling of each purple curtain (A)." This line also has consonance, with the "s" sounds, as well as assonance with the "ur" sounds. In addition, the line is quite onomatopoeic, that is, the "s" sounds provide an auditory stimulation similar to that of rustling cloth. Poe uses alliteration in writing, "doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before." Assonance, consonance, and alliteration pervade *The Raven*, creating a melodic and rhythmical facet of the poem. The second, fourth, fifth, and final line of every stanza end with the "ore" sound, with such words as implore, nevermore, Lenore, lore, and yore. Every stanza contains 6 lines, there are no perturbations from this pattern. The poem is nearly acatalectic- a few of the deviate from the octameter, such as line 62, which contains a mere 15 syllables.

The atmosphere created by Poe especially appeals to the readers senses- the narrator apprises the reader that it is during the month of December, and that the narrator is sitting alone next to a fire, attempting, vainly, to dull the pain of his lost Lenore by reading a

book. Poe uses auditory imagery- "gently rapping, rapping." The rhythm produced with the repetition of "rapping" produces an imagined sound of a knock at the chamber door with each syllable. Visual imagery is provided when the narrator tells of "each separate dying ember wrought its ghost upon the floor." The word choice augments the atmosphere by providing an image of light- colors and movement- from the floating embers as they die, leaving ashes on the floor. The increasingly distraught reactions of the narrator to the stimuli in his chamber show that the narrator fears the physical- a sound of knocking on his door, the rustling of his curtains, things he imagines when peering out of his door... but ultimately the narrator's attitude is revealed when he states, "tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night's Plutonian shore!" Using the name of the underworld to describe the darkness of the night shows that the narrator feels as though he lives in underworld. This contrasts the lines when the narrator speaks of Lenore; here he uses the words "rare and radiant" and speaks of angels, things associated with heaven.

A few instances of enjambment occur, such as from lines 9 to 10, "vainly I had tried to borrow/ From my books surcease of sorrow," or lines 51 to 52, "For we cannot help agreeing that no sublunary being/ Ever yet was blessed with seeing bird above his chamber door." Poe has some slight deviations from conventional syntax, only for the purpose of proper rhyme scheme- the rearrangement of words does not detract from the writing, especially with the well worked rhyming. The first line of the poem, in fact, has a slight variation of sentence structure, written as "Once upon a midnight dreary," instead of, "Once upon a dreary midnight." Again, this does not have a negative effect- as the

prefatory paragraph states, the unusual rhyming style of *The Raven* sets the poem on a different level than classical poetry. "Melody, measure, and sound" no longer arises from alliteration alone, but instead from "the studious use of similar sounds in unusual places." Words such as *ember, terror, sorrow, darkness, and mystery* create a dark atmosphere, and the narrator's level of distraughtness.