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POE

The Raven

Illustrated by GUSTAVE DORÉ

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THE RAVEN

BY EDGAR ALLAN POE



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A TOP FIVE CLASSIC

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Introduction.

FEW POEMS—or any other literary works, for that matter—have ever generated the kind of immediate and overwhelming response that Edgar Allan Poe’s poetic masterpiece “The Raven” achieved in late January 1845. Poe went from a literary critic and short-story writer of moderate renown to an international celebrity and household name almost overnight.

Though its initial publication is credited to the January 29, 1845, issue of the New York *Evening Mirror*, it was more or less published simultaneously in the *Mirror* and a New York–based monthly, the *American Review*, from February 1845. Poe had in fact sold “The Raven” to the *Review*’s editor, George H. Colton, first (for nine dollars), and then allowed the *Mirror* to publish the poem “in advance” of the *Review* (though the February issue of the *Review* may have already come out by January 29). The *Mirror*’s editor, Nathaniel P. Willis included a short preface to “The Raven,” in which he wrote:

We are permitted to copy (in advance of publication) from the 2d No. of the *American Review*, the following remarkable poem by Edgar Poe. In our opinion, it is the most effective single example of “fugitive poetry” ever published in this country, and unsurpassed in English poetry for subtle conception, masterly ingenuity of versification, and consistent sustaining of imaginative lift...

Willis also revealed Poe as the author of the poem, who had simply been identified (for reasons unclear) as “Quarles” in the *Review*’s edition. In any case, the nearly concurrent release of “The Raven” in the two periodicals, combined with the work’s obvious appeal, only helped spread the poem’s—and poet’s—fame.

Poe set out to write a poem to “suit at once the popular and the critical taste” (for Poe’s 1846 essay on his writing process with “The Raven,” see “The Philosophy of Composition” in *Edgar Allan Poe: Complete Tales & Poems*). He borrowed the idea of a talking raven from Charles Dickens’s *Barnaby Rudge* and selected a frequently recurring theme in his work—the death of a loved one. Having lost both his parents before the age of three, watched as death claimed the mother of a close friend at school, and suffered through three years of his wife’s five-year battle against tuberculosis, Poe

knew a few things about loss. In earlier stories like “Ligeia,” “Morella,” and “Berenice,” and the poems “Tamerlane,” “The Sleeper,” and “Lenore,” Poe used the bereaved lover as narrator of each work, the lost loved one the fulcrum upon which the drama rests. Poe thought this notion of Beauty’s passing would be the most powerful and most universal.

“The Raven” would apply this melancholy motif to a distinct story and combine a musical rhythm with a strong, repetitive rhyme scheme to create an unforgettable effect. In “The Raven” Poe not only uses the same rhyme in the last three lines of each six-line stanza throughout the poem, he employs rhymes within the first and third lines of each of the eighteen stanzas. He also makes liberal use of alliteration, and in hammering away at his chorus of “Nevermore,” Poe creates the most memorable refrain in literature. As Poe wrote of this chant-like refrain in his “Philosophy of Composition”: “The pleasure is deduced solely from the sense of identity—of repetition.” (Or, as Prince later put it, “There’s joy in repetition.”)

Though “The Raven” made Poe world-famous, it wouldn’t make him a rich man. Copyright laws being virtually nonexistent in the 1840s, “The Raven” was endlessly copied, reprinted, and sold without the author earning a cent. Poe was, however, able to have his *Raven and Other Poems* released later in 1845, and his newfound notoriety did lead to many other opportunities—lectures, poetry readings, and other outlets for publishing his future poems, short stories, and essays. His fame also brought him into regular contact with other poets and authors he admired. But his struggle to earn a living as a writer continued, despite the success of “The Raven.” His itinerant career as an editor, author, and critic—which led him from Boston to Baltimore, Richmond, Philadelphia, and New York—ended when he died of mysterious causes on October 7, 1849, in Baltimore. He was just forty years old, but his work would survive for nearly two centuries after his passing and shows no signs of ever fading away.



The steel-plate engravings reproduced in this Top Five Classics edition of *The Raven* were created by the renowned French illustrator, painter, and sculptor Gustave Doré from 1882 to 1883 for the U.S. publisher Harper & Brothers. Sadly, after completing the illustrations, Doré died at the age of fifty-one in late January 1883 after a brief illness. His engravings were published posthumously in Harper’s 1884 edition of *The Raven*.

Doré’s artwork accompanies the text of “The Raven” in the first section of this ebook, “[The Raven \(Illustrated\)](#),” and the [second section](#) features the text alone. The final portion includes a short but detailed [biography of Poe](#). I hope you enjoy this illustrated edition of Poe’s masterwork, “The Raven.”

Alex Lubertozi
Copublisher

THE RAVEN.

