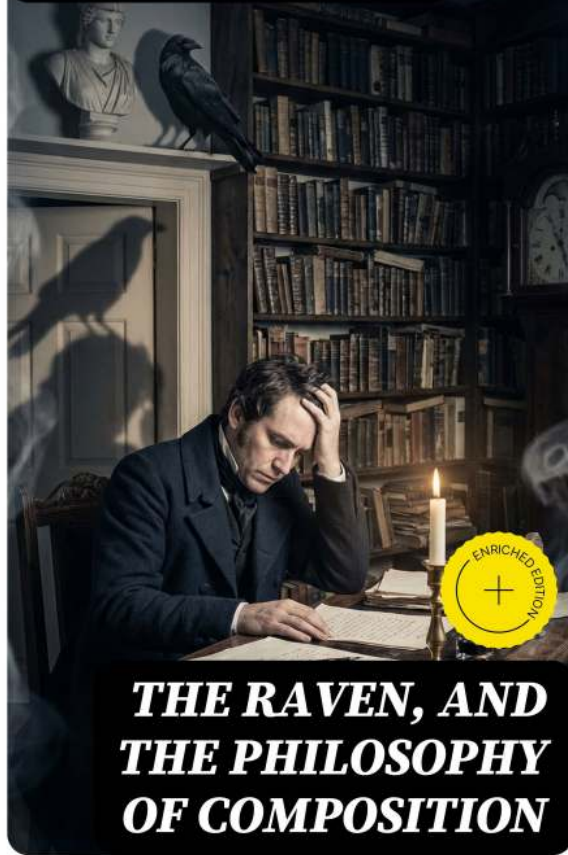


EDGAR ALLAN POE



***THE RAVEN, AND
THE PHILOSOPHY
OF COMPOSITION***

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OF COMPOSITION**

Edgar Allan Poe

The Raven, and The Philosophy of Composition

Enriched edition.

Introduction, Studies and Commentaries by Isaac Lowry

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This volume brings together *The Raven* and *The Philosophy of Composition* by Edgar Allan Poe, framed by a concise foreword. Its purpose is straightforward: to present one of the most celebrated poems in American literature alongside the author's own account of the principles and procedures that shaped it. By pairing a finished lyric with a reflective essay, the collection offers readers a compact view of artistic result and stated method. The scope is deliberately focused, favoring depth over breadth, so that the poem's atmosphere, structure, and cultural impact can be considered in light of Poe's enduring claims about craft and effect.

Although Poe wrote across several forms—poems, short stories, reviews, and essays—this selection concentrates on two distinct text types: a narrative poem and a critical essay on poetics. The foreword orients the reader to this pairing and situates it within the broader arc of Poe's career without attempting an exhaustive survey. Readers thus encounter a lyric dramatization of grief and wonder, followed by an argument about how such a lyric might be deliberately constructed. The arrangement underscores the tension and dialogue between imaginative literature and literary criticism, two genres that Poe cultivated with unusual rigor and lasting influence.

The *Raven* appeared in 1845 and quickly established Poe's reputation with a wide readership. Its popularity

spread rapidly through print and performance, making the poem a recognizable cultural presence. In 1846, Poe published *The Philosophy of Composition*, an essay that takes the poem as a case study in the disciplined pursuit of a predetermined effect. The documents are historically contiguous and mutually illuminating: the poem presents an achieved design, while the essay outlines a theory of design. Together they allow readers to contemplate the reciprocal relations between practice and poetics in a single author's voice.

At its surface, the poem portrays a solitary speaker visited at midnight by a mysterious bird whose presence unsettles memory and reason. Within that framework, Poe constructs a pattern of sound and recurrence that intensifies the emotional pitch. The poem is notable for its musicality, including metrical regularity, a prominent refrain, internal rhyme, and echoing consonance. Its stanzas achieve a hypnotic momentum that draws attention to both voice and silence. The atmosphere is claustrophobic yet theatrical, inviting the reader to listen as much as to visualize. This sonic architecture is central to the poem's distinctive and memorable identity.

The essay that accompanies it advances a view of composition grounded in calculation and sequence. Poe describes beginning with a controlling effect, choosing a length suited to a single sitting, determining a refrain, and building imagery and incident accordingly. Whether read as literal procedure or as a carefully staged demonstration of critical principles, the essay insists that artistry can be reasoned as well as felt. It presents the poem not as an

accident of inspiration but as the outcome of deliberate choices. Readers thus gain a framework for attending to design features that might otherwise be absorbed unconsciously.

Viewed together, the poem and essay foreground themes that recur throughout Poe's writing: beauty entwined with loss, the psychology of obsession, and the pursuit of a single, pervasive mood. The speaker's vigil dramatizes the mind's struggle to reconcile longing with the limits of knowledge, while the essay articulates a method for sustaining such a mood through pattern and proportion. Symbol and sound act in concert to fix attention, enabling a lyric exploration of grief that is at once intimate and ceremonially staged. The result is an art that treats emotion not as chaos but as a structured, apprehensible experience.

Poe's stylistic hallmark, often termed unity of effect, is visible in both works. Every conspicuous feature—meter, rhyme, refrain, imagery, even punctuation—serves the governing design. The poem favors intensity over expansiveness, choosing a compact sequence that can be apprehended in one sustained encounter. The essay rationalizes that preference, proposing limits on length and a hierarchy of means for securing attention. Together they model an approach in which sound organizes sense, and narrative elements are subordinated to mood. The insistence on coherence, control, and recurrence distinguishes Poe's lyric craft and explains its powerful afterlife in both popular and scholarly reception.

Historically, this pairing is significant because it entwines art with its commentary. Few authors have supplied a widely

read work alongside a contemporaneous essay explaining its intended machinery. That doubleness has invited generations of readers to test theory against practice, listening for the operation of stated principles in a living poem. It has also encouraged a practical discourse of craft, in which terms like effect, refrain, and prosodic patterning are approached as tools rather than abstractions. By presenting poem and essay together, this volume honors an intellectual ambition that regards criticism as an extension of creative labor.

As readers attend to formal detail, several features reward notice. The poem's meter, often classified as trochaic, establishes a forward-falling cadence that mirrors the speaker's compulsive return to a single thought. Internal rhyme and patterned repetition tighten that cadence into a near-incantatory movement. Stanzaic design, with its delayed rhymes and recurring end-sounds, produces expectation and release. Diction is simple yet ceremonious, favoring common words arranged for maximum resonance. The cumulative effect is not merely musical ornament but structural necessity: sound carries meaning, and arrangement creates pressure, directing the reader's attention to the narrowing horizons of the scene.

Readers may approach the collection in either order. Some will prefer to encounter the poem without mediation and return to the essay afterward, hearing it as an articulation of patterns already felt. Others will find it valuable to read the essay first as a set of listening instructions. The foreword briefly situates both works and clarifies their publication context, inviting an informed but

undirected experience. Whatever the path, the juxtaposition emphasizes that appreciation and analysis are not adversaries. Feeling generated by rhythm and image can coexist with, and even be heightened by, an understanding of the choices that produce them.

While this volume focuses on a single poem and a companion essay, it inevitably gestures to Poe's broader achievement. His tales helped define the short story as a modern form; his criticism advanced rigorous standards of technique and effect; his poetry pursued musical intensity and concentrated emotion. The same commitment to design that animates these pages runs through his larger body of work, from studies of ratiocination to explorations of terror and beauty. That continuity has secured Poe an enduring place in literary history and ensured that discussions of craft and genre regularly return to his formulations.

In bringing these texts together, the collection offers a compact laboratory for studying how art is made, experienced, and remembered. The poem presents a night-bound chamber where language becomes instrument; the essay supplies a daylight account of how that instrument is tuned. Between them lies the reader's encounter, in which interpretation and listening form a single act. If the poem has become emblematic of a certain American gothic sensibility, the essay remains a touchstone for thinking about process. Their combined presence here invites renewed attention to precision, atmosphere, and the durable power of a carefully organized imagination.