

---

## MYTHS IN EDGAR ALLAN POE'S "THE RAVEN"

**Imron Wakhid Harits** | **Ulfah Rizkyanita Sari**  
imronwakhidharits@gmail.com | ulfahrizkyanita\_sari@yahoo.com  
University of Palacky Olomouc, Czech Republic | Universitas Trunojoyo Madura, Indonesia

**Received:** 1 January 2016. **Revised:** 28 February 2016. **Accepted:** 3 March 2016

---

### ABSTRACT

This study is aimed to describe myths which appear in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven" and to figure out the way that is used by Edgar Allan Poe to show the myths in the poem and convey the meaning of the poem itself. Archetype theory from Canadian critic Northrop Frye is used in this study in order to analyze the myths in "The Raven" poem. Furthermore, to clarify the myths in the poem itself, this study uses a qualitative research as a method to collect, select, code, and analyze the data. In the research finding "The Raven" poem by Edgar Allan Poe contains three types of archetype imagery, they are apocalyptic, demonic, and analogical imagery (analogy of innocence and analogy of experience). This poem also contains the four types of cyclical symbolism of archetype, they are divine world, human world, animal world, and mineral world. It is also found that this poem has a structure of sparagmos due to the dark myth and the confusion world that cover the theme of poem. Finally, this poem is divided into six phases of winter which is related to the literary genre of irony and satire that explain more about the sorrowfulness of the author, Edgar Allan Poe because his lover, Lenore leaves him.

**Keywords:** myth, archetype, The Raven.

**How to Cite:** Harits, Imron Wakhid & Ulfah Rizkyanita Sari. 2016. Myths in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven". *Language Circle: Journal of Language and Literature*, X/2.

---

### INTRODUCTION

The notion of archetypal is dealt with very old culture and heritage, C.G Jung called primordial images (Abrams, p.10). It is a typical of long experiences of the ancient that reappear in the form of some elements such as image, character, narrative design, theme, or other literary phenomenon such as in the poem. Further, Archetypal and myth connect the human lives from the past, the present, and the future. If archetypal dealt with historical and ancient experiences that reappear in the present in the forms of some elements, the myth is the whole of expression of the human feeling. Thus, the myth is not only symbolic or metaphoric,

but above all, the myth is all elemental aspects of human nature. It explores mind, characters, hopes, joys, sorrows, and aspirations. Wheelwright in Al Mahdi defines myth as the expression of a profound sense of togetherness of feeling and of action and of wholeness of living (p.11). The next, Myth and archetypal according to C.G. Jung are also "collective unconsciousness" because the myth and archetypal are as the symbolism of communication between the former and the latter. There are dreams and the fantasies as a result of human past experiences and somehow the dreams and fantasies come to the realm of

unconsciousness symbolism and mythology that they never visited previously.

The depiction of “The Raven” poem as a metaphysical and supernatural poem lead to the speaker’s love, the use of paradox, symbols and rigidity of expression frequently. This poem describes the supernatural experiences of the speaker who is visited by a mysterious raven in a mysterious night. Sometimes, the story is called a myth when an entire story is symbolic. Whereas a symbolic story may be personal or private, a myth relates to a communal, cultural, or group experience that aims at providing explanations or interpretations of nature, the universe, and humanity (Hirschberg, Stuart and Terry, 2004: 75). Therefore, this poem is chosen as the source of data of this study. Furthermore, myths become the one of important aspects in society’s life around the world. There are many cultures, histories, and stories that are created in the society due to the myths. Myths have many values which become the basic needs of human being and their life in their society, such as religion, cultural, and social values. Human can use a myth as their orientation and their escort when they are in the society in order to make socialization and communication.

The analyze of myths in the poem due to the position of myths itself in a human’s life are very important since myths satisfy a basic need to organize, explain, and humanize events or conditions that might otherwise remain mysterious. For this reason, myths are often associated with religion and other elements such as literature because they attempt to explain aspects of life that are complex and not easily understood. Myths also embody the cultural and social values of the civilizations in

which they are created (Hirschberg, Stuart and Terry, 2004: 76). This study uses an archetype theory from Northrop Frye to analyzing the poem since Frye’s archetype has clear division to his archetype into the cycle of four seasons. Moreover, the archetype of Frye is the most suitable theory to analyze myth and mystery in supernatural poem like “The Raven” poem by Edgar Allan Poe. Kennedy and Gioia (2007: 642) state that an important concept in understanding myth is the archetype, a basic image, character, situation, or symbol that appears so often in literature and legend that it creates a deep universal response.

## **DISCUSSION**

Frye’s theory of myth and Archetypal are not merely to explore the surface elements in literature, particularly poem. But, the use of Frye’s theory enables to explore much more detailed elements in the poems and its relation with the historical background and cultural heritages. Symbolism, metaphor, imagery, structure are not only shown in the poem, but such elements have the cultural connection as a result of human lives experiences as well.

### **Poe’s “The Raven” Imagery**

From my books surcease of sorrow—  
sorrow for the lost Lenore—  
Darkness there and nothing more.  
(S. 2, 4:L. 4, 6)

The word “sorrow” in the line symbolizes Poe’s world of pain. It explains the miserable of Poe due to the lost Lenore. While the word “darkness” draws the existent hell of Poe who is trapped in his suffering and his nightmare of the lost Lenore and the tricky raven.

Deep into that darkness peering, long I  
stood there wondering, fearing,  
(S. 5:L. 1)

The confusion world of Poe creates in that line through the words "peering", and "wondering". They show Poe's confusion toward the visit of mysterious raven in his midnight, whereas the word "fearing" describes the dark world and nightmare that cover him in this poem. The nightmare which is the silence and stillness becomes unbroken and make him very fear.

Then this ebony bird beguiling my sad  
fancy into smiling,  
Ghastly grim and ancient Raven  
wandering from the Nightly shore—  
Quoth the Raven "Nevermore."  
(S. 8:L. 1, 4, 6)

Those lines contain the word "beguiling" which symbolizes the bondage world of Poe. Through this word, Poe wants to describe his mind and soul that are beguiled by the tricky raven. While, the words "ghastly", "grim", "ancient", and "nightly" draws the nightmare of Poe and the dark world where the tricky raven comes from. Then, the word "nevermore" adds the pain of Poe due to the only answer from the raven that makes Poe feels more suffer and painful.

In there stepped a stately Raven of the  
saintly days of yore;  
(S. 7:L. 2)

The atmosphere of paradise or Eden is described by the words "stately" and "saintly" in that line. They draw the physical characteristic of the heaven that always full of state and saint. Those words symbolize the world that is wanted by Poe and considered about the raven at first.

On the morrow *he* will leave me, as my  
Hopes have flown before."

This and more I sat divining, with my  
head at ease reclining  
(S. 10, 13:L. 5, 3)

"Hopes", "divining", and "ease" are the words that also symbolize and represent the word and atmosphere of paradise or Eden. The word "Hopes" represents Poe's big hopes in his life. Poe's hopes of a miracle from God to bring Lenore come back to his side, however, it is just a hopes that have flown away and left Poe like Lenore.

All of the words or dictions that are included into the analogy of innocence are the imageries that are used by Poe to represent the apocalyptic world of his poem. Those worlds represent and symbolize the counterpart of paradise or Eden and power of God, Goddess, and Angels that Poe thinks can bring him hope or anything to cure his misery, such as the words "nepenthe", "Prophet", "Seraphim", "Pallas", "balm of Gilead", etc. They become Poe's symbolizing of his belief that God always exist in human's life and soul in every condition.

Analogy of experience imagery is the ordinary imagery that doesn't need a further explanation. In this poem, there are many imageries that don't need a further explanation and represent the theme and atmosphere of this poem, such as "demon", "ghost", "chamber door", "visitor", "December", "books", "silken purple curtain", "my heart", "raven", "grave", "bird", "fiend", "feather", "beast", etc. Those words explain and describe the atmosphere of darkness, nightmare, pain, confusion, bondage, scapegoat which are put by Poe in his poem entitled "The Raven".

## Symbol

Perched upon a bust of Pallas just above  
my chamber door—

Tell me what thy lordly name is on the  
Night's Plutonian shore!"

Is there—is there balm in Gilead?—tell  
me—tell me, I implore!"

(S. 7, 8, 15:L. 5, 5, 5)

Those lines present and symbolize the divine world because they contain the words that refer to the God or life of God. The words "Pallas" and "Night's Plutonian" clearly present God and angel who Poe believes have a power to change his life and cure his pain. Moreover, "balm in Gilead" refers to the holy land and medicine that is stated in the Bible becomes the traditional medicine and cures the pain.

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I  
pondered, weak and weary,

"'Tis some visiter," I muttered, "tapping  
at my chamber door—

(S. 1:L. 1, 5)

Those lines contain the words "I" and "visiter" which represent the human world. The word "I" represents Poe himself who becomes the speaker and main point in this poem that full of misery and pain. Furthermore, the word "visiter" reflects the human being as the other characters whom Poe puts to strengthen the meaning of the poem.

Though its answer little meaning—little  
relevancy bore;

For we cannot help agreeing that no  
living human being

(S. 9:L. 2-3)

The words "bore", "living" and "human being" are contained in those lines. Those words also represent the human world that covers the poem. Poe wants to share his miserable in this poem by drawing himself

as bore and cannot live happily as a human being because his lover left him alone.

In there stepped a stately Raven of the  
saintly days of yore;

Bird or beast upon the sculptured bust  
above his chamber door,

(S. 7, 9:L. 2, 5)

The words "Raven" and "beast" in those lines describe the animal that also included and explained in this poem. This poem mainly talks about the visit of mysterious raven to Poe's chamber at midnight which adds and increase Poe's misery and sorrow. Therefore, Poe also draws this animal as an evil one with the word "beast".

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I  
pondered, weak and weary,

As of some one gently rapping, rapping  
at my chamber door.

Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the  
bleak December;

(S. 1, 2:L. 1, 4, 1)

The words "midnight", "chamber", and "December" describe the mineral world of this poem. The words "midnight" and "December" symbolize the decline of Poe's life. This fact is strengthened by word "chamber" which represent the miserable Poe who pent up in the dark and definite place.

### **Structure**

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I  
pondered, weak and weary,

(S. 1:L.1)

Strongly, in "The Raven" poem, Edgar Allan Poe shows his pain and miserable due to the losing of his lover Lenore. In the first line, Poe begins his story with the word "midnight" that represented his dark world. It shows the world of Poe which are miserable and painful. Midnight is not only

has a meaning of the time, but also symbolizes the end of life or death and the end of light. Therefore, it seems that Poe wants to explain his sorrowful like his end of life. After left of Lenore, his light has been broken and his life lost its soul. Poe's darkness life continues in the next line.

Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak December;

(S. 2:L. 1)

The word "bleak December" in that line is continuing the darkness life of Poe. Deal with the word "midnight", the "bleak December" represents the end of the year that dark and full of shadow. Moreover, December is a month where winter has its power to take over the world and the creature's life with its white color. No one can live in winter as Poe's soul which dies also in that month. Poe clearly chooses December in his poem to represent his feeling to Lenore who left him. He uses the savageness of December to symbolize his sorrow life.

Eagerly I wished the morrow;—vainly I had sought to borrow

(S. 2:L. 3)

The fact that he can't to realize his desire to get Lenore back makes Poe despondent. He reflects his feeling to forget his pain because of Lenore by the word "morrow". This word shows that Poe wants to surrender and skip over his memories of Lenore. However, the words "vainly" and "sought" make Poe's effort didn't work. Poe's effort to forget and loss his sorrow of Lenore becomes useless due to his love to Lenore. Though, there is no word which expresses his love to Lenore, however from the lines that shows how his misery and painful after left by Lenore explain that Poe is very love his woman, Lenore.

From my books surcease of sorrow—  
sorrow for the lost Lenore—

(S. 2:L. 4)

Poe's despair continues in this line where Poe clearly explains that he can't loss his misery of the lost Lenore. "From my books surcease of sorrow" is the continuance words from the previous line that means Poe vainly dismissing his sorrow and painful of loss his Lenore. The word "my books surcease" pointing out to Poe's soul and mind which he puts his bitter memories of Lenore that he can throws it from his life. Poe, unconsciously, fated to give away his feeling and thinking for his sorrow of the lost Lenore.

In there stepped a stately Raven of the  
saintly days of yore;

Perched upon a bust of Pallas just above  
my chamber door—

(S.7:L. 2, 5)

In his confusion, Poe tries to find out who is actually tapping at his chamber door. Therefore, he opens the shutter hesitantly where there is "a stately Raven" that steps in "a bust of Pallas". It creates a deeper confusion of Poe. He is very surprised and flirted what actually the aim of the raven's coming is and where it comes from. In this line, Poe wants to bring the atmosphere of knavery by drawing the raven stepped in the bust of Pallas. Pallas is Greek goddess of wisdom that also called by Pallas of Athena. While in almost all of world's tribes mythology, raven is the symbol of a bad thing, rascal or trickster, the eyes of sinners, the evil bird, the bird from the dark, and in line with the witching activity as the zeal of witch hunters. In this poem, Poe shares the bad thing from the raven that wants to trick him by steps it in Pallas head. The raven steps in Pallas head in order to affirm Poe

that it brings a peacefulness and cure for Poe's misery.

Quoth the Raven "Nevermore."

(S. 8:L. 6)

Nevertheless, over the many question of Poe, the raven answers just only the word "Nevermore. It adds the confusion of Poe. Surprisingly, the bird can speak and answer Poe's question. Unfortunately, its answer only one word that makes Poe more confuse and finally angry to the raven because at the first, he thinks that the raven's coming can less his sorrow of Lenore. On the other hand, the raven's answer of his question adds his sorrow and makes him going to be insane.

"Be that word our sign of parting, bird or fiend!" I shrieked, upstarting—

"Get thee back into the tempest and the Night's Plutonian shore!

(S. 17:L. 1, 2)

Those lines explain the anger of Poe to the raven which he thinks was tricked him. He is very mad and commands the raven from his bust of Pallas on his chamber door. He expels the raven to get back into the tempest and the Night's Plutonian shore without any token in his chamber even in his life. He is quietly mad to the tricky raven.

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

(S. 18:L. 3-5)

The tricky raven brings Poe into anger and madness. Poe who is in misery and pain for the lost of Lenore becomes more suffer because of the trick of the raven. He feels confuse, anger, and finally going to insane. The line "And my soul from out that shadow

that lies floating on the floor" describes the loss of Poe's soul into the raven's shadow. Apart from that, Poe also loss his mind and enters the sorrow world through the raven's eyes which seems as a demon's eye that Poe ever dreams before.

Based on those analyzes, the structure of "The Raven" poem by Edgar Allan Poe is sparagmos due to the absent of heroism and effective action that can help Poe from his misery. Poe also can to lose his sorrow of the lost Lenore and in this poem, he fated to defeat on her painful and loneliness. Moreover, in this poem, the confusion of Poe and the anarchy of the Raven cover the atmosphere of this poem. Finally, this poem can be included to irony and satire genre of Frye's archetype because sparagmos is the basis theme of irony and satire.

### **Phases**

In the previous subchapter stated that the genre of "The Raven" poem is irony and satire based on its structure. It means that the phases which are going to be used in this subchapter are the phases of winter because winter related to the irony and satire. Each mythoi or season has six phases, includes the winter (irony and satire). The six phases of winter (irony and satire) are:

### **World of Shock and Horror**

And the silken, sad, uncertain rustling of  
each purple curtain

Thrilled me—filled me with fantastic  
terrors never felt before;

(S. 3:L. 1-2)

Strongly, Poe describes his fear and shock when there is a tapping at his chamber door in the midnight. Horror atmosphere cover this situation because the time was late and there is no sign of the visitor's

arrival such as shoe's sound, people's call, etc. There just a tapping and rapping at his chamber door. This atmosphere developed by the purple color of the silken curtain. Purple color represents the dark, dreary, hallucinations, etc. The purple color usually refers to something bad because the color of purple is not pleasant or bright.

On this home by Horror haunted—tell me truly, I implore—

“Get thee back into the tempest and the Night's Plutonian shore!

(S. 15, 17:L. 4, 2)

In those lines, Poe explains his chamber which becomes a horror place after the arrival of the raven that haunted him. In the word “home by Horror” Poe clearly describes his horror place by emphasizing on the word “Horror” which Poe puts the “H” letter in capital. Moreover, the shock and horror world of Poe is also represented by the second line. This poem, actually is the outpouring of Poe's sorrow and misery for the lost of Lenore. Poe reflects his shocked of losing Lenore and his effort to forget her with all of his memories. The word “tempest” and “Night's Plutonian shore” represent the darkness world of Poe after Lenore left him alone. These words also explain the darkness of the mysterious raven which visits Poe in the midnight in

bleak December. The visit of the raven adds the miserable, painful, and sorrowfulness of Poe's life due to the lost of Lenore.

## CONCLUSION

The myths in this poem finally are found and described by the components of the archetype that are imagery, symbol, structure, and phases. First, the archetype imagery helps to find and describe the imagery in this poem which is related to the myth, such as apocalyptic, demonic, and analogical imagery (analogy of innocence and analogy of experience. Second, the archetype theory also helps to find out the cyclical symbol inside the poem. Based on the analyzing, it is found that the poem only contains the four type of cyclical symbol of archetype that are divine world, human world, animal world, and mineral world. Third, the structure of the poem is sparagmos due to the dark myth and the confusion world of the author, Edgar Allan Poe. The last is the myths also described by the phases of the poem, that are the myths of the raven itself, midnight, December, winter, Pallas of Athena, Seraphim, Night's Plutonian shore, nepenthe, balm in Gilead, and the purple color.

## REFERENCES

- Al Mahdi, Imam Abdullah Yahya. Myth and Archetype: Their Application in the Waste land. Al- Nasser University. Retrieved from [www.al-edu.com](http://www.al-edu.com)
- Behme, H. 2007. Edgar Allan Poe: “The Raven”. Retrieved March 12, 2013, from <http://www.heise.de/ix/raven/Literature/Lore/TheRaven.html>
- Belsey, Catherine. 1992. *Critical Practice*. London and New York: Routledge
- Bogdan, Robert C. and Sari Knopp Biklen. 1982. *Qualitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theory and Methods*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc.

- Denham, Robert D. 1999. Northrop Frye and Critical Method: Theory of Myths. Retrieved May 12, 2013, from <http://fryeblog.blog.lib.mcmaster.ca/critical-method/theory-of-myths.html>
- DiYanni, Robert. 2000. *Literature: Reading Fiction, Poetry, and Drama, Compact Edition*. United States of America: The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc.
- Eagleton, Terry. 2008. *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. United States of America: the University of Minnesota Press.
- Frye, Northrop. 1957. *Anatomy of Criticism*. Pdf. Retrieved May 10, 2013, from <http://www.worldoffiles.net/getfile/62cb032ah32i0/FRYE+Northrop+Anatomy+of+Criticism.pdf.html>
- Herring, David. 2008. Northrop Frye's Theory of Archetypes: Overview. Retrieved May 12, 2013, from <http://edweb.tusd.k12.az.us/dherring/ap/consider/frye/indexfryeov.htm>
- Hirschberg, Stuart and Terry Hirschberg. 2004. *Discovering the Many Worlds of Literature: Literature for Composition*. New York: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Kennedy, X. J. & Dana Gioia. 2007. *Literature: An Introduction To Fiction, Poetry, Drama, And Writing, Compact Edition*. New York: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Kennedy, X. J. 1979. *Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, and Drama, Second Edition*. Canada: Little, Brown & Company (Canada) Limited.
- Madran, Cumhur Yilmaz. 2004. *An Archetypal Analysis Of E.M. Forster's Fiction*. Thesis. Middle East Technical University. Pdf. Retrieved May 12, 2013, from <http://tfarland.files.wordpress.com/2012/08/archetypal-analysis-of-forsters-fiction.pdf>