THE MANGLED RAVEN

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Editor's Note: The following introduction to the Automynorcagrammatical Raven is taken from a letter from JAL to Howard Berge-son, himself the contributor of a similar construction to Word Ways in November 1975. In an Automynorcagram, the initial letters of the successive words repeat the original message.

I sha'n't say much about this. I'd never heard of an automynorcagram - and I hope I'll never hear of one again! - and I just don't see the point of writing under such a crippling restriction, when the restriction adds nothing positive of value; to me it seems just wasted ef-fort. Mind you, I admire your wonderful skill, especially the way in which you have managed to keep to the original stanza by stanza. I wasn't able to match this. I read only the first couple of stanzas of your version, just to get the general idea, then put it aside and got on with my own version. Mine turned out to be shorter, perhaps more di-recit and easily understandable, but less poetic and a whole lot further away from the original. Both versions seem a bit silly here and there to me. Of course, not having done anything of the sort before, I paid no attention while writing the opening few stanzas, to the letters I was using, and so simply could not say what I wanted to say later on. However, such as it is, I pass it on to you. Do what you like with it ...

Night in gloomy house. Trouble-filled, I nurse
Ghost-lingering likeness of one maiden yet.
Heaven or Underworld snaps every trump.
Reading old useless books, loom eerie fancies
I languidly let enter, dream, ignore
New unlocated rapping sounds, ere get
Hint of some true late idler. Nevermore!

Gold embers rustle into numberless
gleams. Lamp, inglenook, kingly ease. New ember
Scintillating, spluttering over floor.
O nobly ends my Aidenn in December!
Ever numb, yearning, enfolding trauma,
Hope ends, actions vainglorious efface
No oracle, ribs utter, "Nevermore!"

Dungeonlike evil rappings! Wind -- or rain,
Limp-hanging draperies shiver, neatly aligned
Pale-purple silk embodies -- visitor?
(Evading Reason's yielding toe-hold, rude
Upperarms mangle, press ...) Raps ebb again,
Dully, in Night's ghost-terrain of Lenore.
Does Utter Silence end life evermore?

Snapping severe bolts open: "O kind Sir"
(looking outside) "or Madam -- enter, enter!
Rest. I entreat -- freely apologise.
Now come in, enter, Sir! I let a noise
Graduate unattended. I deplore
Leaving you long excluded, turning eyes."
Naught there, e'en raps. Darkness reigned evermore.

At midnight I grow nervous, oftentimes
Repulsing every new experience.
With utter nothingness ("Lenore?"") outside,
Came ambient terrors -- evidence denied
Revealed a purpose! Pure-browed Innocence,
Now gone, Shadow of Underworld near door?
Sound, echoing, reverberates evermore.

Gravitating eventually to
Hearthrug, I numbly try oblivious
Fancies, sleep-cossetting old memories,
Ere tomblike rappings untomb e'en Lenore!
Analyse the environment I do,
Lattice excluding raindrops, now excess?
Vexed, even rain may oft rap evermore.

Get open lattice-window. Dourly enters
My backroom ebon Raven. Stately Raven,
Unruffled, steps through lattice easily,
Inspires no trepidation, openly
Nests upon marble bust. (Excelsior!)
Resembles living ebony, scarce stirs,
Glowers luciferously evermore.

A marble statuette -- (Lightheartedly:)
A marble Pallas! "Is Night's Gloomy Lord
Erebus named or Old King Kohl?" I nicker.
"Give, Lord, your Erebusian appellation.
Such evident nocturnal evil we
Elaborately misconstrued before."
Egged, Raven sourly croaks in, "Nevermore!"

Though I lay laughing (and - the impious notion! --
Glimpsed serene Pallas laughing under this
Tongued Erebusian Raven) I now grew
Overly vapid, e'en ridiculous,
Found laughter out of reason on Night's ocean
By lost Youth's evershut necrotic door;
Stifled my yawns, as I do evermore.
Named Nevermore, it'll ne'ermore depart?
Else cannot ever marble bust endow!
"Rudely exasperating visitor,
Enrooted Raven, nervily upstart
My bones. You even are retiring now
Into Night's gulf? Each new friend (or Lenore)
Disintegrates, intoning "Nevermore!"

Gritted the Raven, acid-tongued, upon
Marble Athene, bunching over Pallas,
Eternally explicit, "Nevermore!"
Did some adversity-condemned cohabiter
Teach it once "Nevermore", some victim as
Infernal Night flowered Lucifer-eyed on,
Reserving it one urn song evermore?

Fastidiously flung at cushioned ease,
Night-garbed on ornate rich Aragonese
Chaise-longue, languidly eying Raven, I
Babbled subliminally under these
Thought-bubbles, even ruminating nigh
Ethereal vaults, ere Raven's malice or
Resurgent Evil dirged up "Nevermore!"

Gloom entering: "O nevermore Lenore
I'll know ere empty velvet-violet
Impressionable lining renders all
Personal presences (it now gives shell
Wholly invisible) new density!
O ruthless Raven, anguishly I'll net
Life in my pallid hands, ah, nevermore!"

Ghastly! It now grew dimmer, royal and
Perfume-rich exhalations reeling in,
Eminently suggesting Seraphim,
Heavenly incense, valedictory
Effusions, rising nebulosity ...
"Easy amnesia towards Lenore,
Young Angel love?" -- Imp grated, "Nevermore!"

"Embittered Devil, prophet availing little!
Enraging prophet, using Raven's prattle!
Let evermore such incarnations languish!
Kindly enlighten me, balm-bird or devil,
Is everlasting solace vowed in store?
Is taste of rue eternal, venomed anguish?
Do I not gain remission evermore?"

"Avaunt, Satanic Owl! Night's Solitaire!
Youth into Everlastingness -- Lenore!
Demon in night-veil, ghastly thing of evil,
Hope of Lenore doth reign unceasing, Devil!"
Empty unbidden Prophet -- peace! Earth's rare
And radiant maid shall mean all!" -- "Nevermore!"
"Gone? Lost?" -- Ends prophet Raven: "Evermore!"

"Sardonic Swartback! Rout a presence so
Empalled, bust-shaming bird, and ghost austere
Into Night's dim unworld! Lenore, Lenore!
Youth into nothingness, nonentity,
Invisibility! Go hence, tarred seer!
Go hence, obtrusive seer, to Timbuktu!
E'en rise!" -- Raven an icy "Nevermore!"

On floor lies ebon nebula of Raven,
Eternal darkness over Earthdom spread.
(Untimely tombed?) This evil Raven's shade
Is lying ever now, covering even
Each new-awakened day, lying instead
For ever, ever -- vilely -- evermore!
Room mourns on. Raven ends shade nevermore.

SATIRE: VERITAS

All advance orders for this long palindrome by David Stephens
have now been filled at $4 apiece; because of higher-than-anti­
cipated publishing costs, it is necessary to charge $5 for future
orders in order to break even. Two errors i.n the palindrome
should be corrected: on the first line of page 5, 'mood-madder'
should be 'moon-madder)', and on page 54 'Monetgo' should be
'Montego'.

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ALAN F. Somervil

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