THE HETEROLITERAL RAVEN

A. ROSS ECKLER
Morristown, New Jersey

On a midnight, cool and foggy, as I pondered, light and groggy,
Ancient books and musty ledgers, not remembered any more,
As I nodded, all but napping, there I sensed a muffled tapping,
Very much a hushful rapping, just behind my attic door.
"'Tis a guest, mayhap," I muttered, "knocking at my attic door --
I can't judge it's any more."

Ah, so well I can remember, it was in the wan December,
As I saw the dying ember flash red light upon the floor;
Wishing for a sunny morrow, in my writings could I borrow
Any successe of my sorrow? -- pain so keen for my Lenore?
Ah, so fair, so cheerful vision, called to heaven, my Lenore,
Away from us forevermore.

But a flutter, so uncertain, of my deep-red wall of curtain
Woke in me fantastic horror, cutting deeply to my core;
Shall it end, this crazy tumble of my heart? -- I then did mumble,
"'Tis a visitor, and humble, knocking at my attic door --
'Tis a person, caught by darkness, who raps on my attic door.
That is all -- none might say more."

In a while, my will much stronger,
I soon faltered no bit longer;
I simply murmured, "this long wait one must deplore,
But you had been softly napping; much too feeble was your tapping,
Very faint you fell to rapping, well upon my attic door.
Then I was not sure I heard you -- here I opened attic door;
Night saw I but no sight more.

In my author hall way peering, stood I long there, dumber fearing;
Much in doubt, I soon had visions that nobody saw before;
It was quiet, all unbroken; magic lull gave not a token;
Was the word that I had spoken, rubric of the maid Lenare?
This, a whisper, and it echoed, murmur, like a kiss, "Lenore".
This alone -- but no bit more.

Back in chamber, slow returning, all my soul within me burning,
Yet again the sound I noted -- was it louder than before? --
I now cried, "A noisy rat is out behind my birch wood lattice;
Soon I shall detect if that is true -- a puzzle fast explore;
Ah, my heart, do rest a trifle and this puzzle fast explore --
It's a wind, but no bit more."
Plucky, I unlatched my shutter, and, with saucy flirt and flutter, 
In flew quick a lofty Raven, of a long- lost day before. 
Such a lordly snub he paid me! proud, with beak up, not afraid, he 
Sprang with grace of duke or lady onto rim of attic door; 
Sat upon a bust of Pallas, on the rim of attic door; 

Haughty pride -- but no bit more. 

Such a dusky crow beguiling my dour fancy to be smiling 
By its glum and stiff decorum, by the pious face it wore, 
"Bald your pate is, cut or shaven; you," I spake, "you aren't so craven, 
Old, repugnant owlish raven, fowl dispatched from windy shore: 
Quick, reveal thy public nomen, quick, yet from a dim-lit shore!" 
It crowed flatly, "Nevermore." 

Full I marveled how ungainly, crested fowl did talk so plainly, 
Though I saw no wit or meaning, or a hint of avian lore; 
But we may not duck agreeing how a child or adult being 
Has no luck of truly seeing fowl perched full on attic door 
Naming self a "Nevermore." 

But yon bird, aloof but lonely, sat upon my door, said only 
That glum word -- a grieving soul in that glum word he did outpour. 
In a lull, I heard no utter; pinions flat, I saw no flutter; 
I then said -- my voice a mutter -- "No dear soul did stay before; 
In the dawn he will be missing -- hope did flee away before --" 
It now did say "Nevermore." 

I, aghast by calm thus broken with reply so fitly spoken, 
Glumly said, "The word it mumbled is a summit of its lore. 
Caught from his unlucky master who, alas, knew much Disaster, 
Gloom sensed quickly, ever-faster, no bird songs he can outpour -- 
All is gloom, is melancholy; but one lay he can outpour, 
A dirge so wailful: 'Nevermore!'" 

As yon bird yet was beguiling my dour fancy to be smiling, 
Drew I up my chair of velvet, facing bust and fowl at door; 
In my cushion's velvet sinking, warmly occupied by linking 
Daydream unto daydream, thinking deeply, I perused my core: 
What could this fowl mean, I quavered, looking deep within my core, 
As it crowed that "Nevermore"? 

I was occupied by guessing what or why, no fact expressing 
To my bird, whose burning eyes now glared on me atop my door; 
This and more I sat divining, as my head now sat reclining 
Fast upon a soft red lining, that yon lamp does light up more, 
Lining on my chair so ruddy, that yon lamp does light up more -- 
Will she warm it? Nevermore! 

I breathed in: the air got denser, balm of spice from pallid censer 
Hid by seraphim of Heaven, softly pacing o'er my floor. 
"Dance," I called, "Thy God has lent you -- he's by pungent odor 
sent you
Respite -- balm which may prevent you pining for thy maid, Lenore! 
Quaff, oh quaff this cup so magic, shun all hints of thy Lenore!"
   It crowed flatly, "Nevermore."

"Pithy augur -- thing of evil! -- augur yet, if beast or devil!
From a Tempter did you flee, or did a storm place you at shore?
I see you are cool, undaunted by this cubby so enchanted,
By this dreadful spot, all haunted; for me croak thy cunning lore --
Can I yet find balm of Gilead? -- oh, divulge thy cunning lore!"
   It crowed flatly, "Nevermore."

"Pithy augur -- thing of evil! -- augur yet, if beast or devil!
By our Heaven up on high, or by that God we must adore,
Will, perhaps, I, sorrow-laden, if placed in the land of Aidenn,
Hug a bright and holy maiden who I honor as Lenore:

Hug, ecstatic, my lost maiden who I honor as Lenore?
   It crowed flatly, "Nevermore."

"Such a word's a sign of parting, fowl debased!" I howled, upstarting:
"Go, return, fly through a whirlwind to a rocky dim-lit shore!
Quill or plume, I shun all token -- gaudy lies thy soul hath spoken --
I ask quiet, all unbroken; fly now, quit my attic door!
Take your beak from in my heart; so fly now, quit my attic door!"
   It crowed flatly, "Nevermore."

I can see that bird now sitting by the lamp -- no upward flitting --
Perched on pallid bust of Pallas right above my attic door,
His two eyes now ruddy, gleaming just like Satan's, wholly dreaming
By the lamp which, softly beaming, throws dim shafts upon my floor:
And my soul, pinned fast in shadow flung across my attic floor,
Can rise up, ah, nevermore!

In this adaptation of Edgar Allan Poe's famous poem, "The Raven",
each consecutive pair of words has no letters in common. Adaptations
using other literary constraints have already appeared in the November
1975 and May 1976 issues of Word Ways.