

THE AUTOMYNORCAGRAMMATICAL RAVEN

HOWARD W. BERGERSON
Sweet Home, Oregon

Midnight intombed December's naked icebound gulf.
Haggard, tired, I nodded, toiling over my books.
Eldritch daguerreotyped dank editions cluttered even my bed;
Exhaustion reigned.
Suddenly, now, a knocking, echoing door I cognized:
"Eminent Boreas, open up no door!
Go, uninvited lonely frigid haunt!
Avaunt, grim guest -- and roar!"

Distinctly, too, I remember
Embers dwindling into numinous orange death.
Delving elaborately, desiring tomorrow overmuch,
I labored -- ineffectually numbing grief.
Outre volumes eloquently retrogressed my yearning --
Brooding on olden knowledge sorrowfully evoked Lenore!
Death's Regent, inscrutable, tragically called her --
Damsel a Godhead Unspeakable elected, rare radiant, evermore!

Overhearing the yawning purple effluent drapes
Discreetly and nebulously kissing,
Electrified, delusively in terror, I overassessed nocturnal susurruses.
Curtain language utterances? The threshold's eerie rappings ensued! --
Darkness engendered visitations ethereal!
Nonetheless, my yellowed but ember-lit door
(Eddying xanthic hues and ushered shadows teeming!)
I opened not -- really expecting itinerant guests not evermore.

Dredging strength up, drumming determination eclipsed,
Nor lamely yielding, nor obeying weakness anew,
Knowing no occult caller knocked, I negotiated gently:
"Evident caller, honored one, I've napped -- grown dreamy -- over-
looking obvious rappings."
I careened outside, gazed nonplussed in zigzag, everchanging directions.
Elusive music in night's emptiness nascent tempests bore.
Only rifted escarpments and shivering openness proved evident.
Newcomers unheralded probed no open door!

Out over ruinous gapings of umbral Night
I noticed voices, I thought -- ephemeral, distant, lilting ones now --
Enunciating "Lenore." Yet, fearfully rigid, I gazed.
I'd definitely heard an unearthly nuance
Tremble across voids abysmal.

Understanding narrowed! Terrors, goblin riding, inundated me galore!
 Uncannily, echoes spoke, too, a name!
 Did reason o'ercloud afore?

Returning, distraught, inside,
 Soon then I noted continued tappings louder yet --
 Tympanic obligatos ominous, I readily each magnified,
 Envisioning menacing but exalted ranks enveloping me:
 "But explanation requires something!
 Dark windows in nival dwellings -- lattices -- improvising noises galore
 In namings, tappings! Onomatopoeia?
 Nothing -- understandably -- more?"

I nimbly opened up shutters -- opened rationality also,
 Not giving extravagant dubieties even a thought.
 Hopping dignifiedly -- even ludicrously vain --
 In, now, galumphed, eyes lustering, a black old raven.
 Aloft this ebon luminary yawed -- doorframes
 Evidently serve invading ravens, if nests galore
 Tumble out midnight's outrageous riotous reach of wind,
 Ousting vultures even -- ravens more.

Unceremoniousness calms heartache. I laughed aloud:
 "Black old raven, exiting December's inkiest night, ebon feathers
 fluttering,
 Establish courtly tenure unconditionally -- announce, lofty lord, your
 name!
 Utter, mysterious bird, incomprehensible names! -- given good rebi,
 I'll explore!"
 Full obligingly uninhibited, the raven,
 Employing vocal organs loudly, unsettling my ears,
 Spake, exclaimed, lilted, opined,
 Quoth, uttered even, "Nevermore!"

The lamplight's yellow radiance enshrouded the raven.
 Ornithic genius rarely exists;
 Substantiated, such excellence dazzled me:
 "Ye, yclept elegantly, answered -- reciting nobly --
 Inspired nonsense, gifted bird!
 Roost overhead on door,"
 I nodded genially; "oddball nuns of long-vanished days
 Even named knaves 'Nevermore!'"

One weirdly lamenting, ego denting, ghastly, ever so old raven
 Reserving one word for utterance!
 Largely limited, yet enviable vocabulary
 Oozing knowledge epicureans deplore!
 "Likely enough, nightmarish old ravens eventually depart,
 Empathies abandoning."
 The hollow sounding raven, emptily gargling echoes,
 Now trebled inanely, "Nevermore!"

Startled categorically, reeling under this astounding bird,
 "Likely enough, this reply aptly given," I concluded,
 "Acquired laboriously, like yoga,
 Comprises all lexicological loot ever delivered him.
 Even ravens distill a master's sadness,
 Emitting loquaciously agonies galore.
 Obviously delirious, his erstwhile almoner
 Doggedly ululated, 'Nevermore!'"

Smiles -- perhaps evanescent amusement -- kindling,
 A bird luxuriantly ebon ejecting lorn exotic cries
 Teases even dullards. Reclining and reasoning esoterically,
 Reviewing arcane dialectics, I argued necessitously
 This enigmatic, villianous, eccentric raven's meaning,
 Oft repeated eloquently o'er.
 "Vaunted egotistical raven, have elsewhither's avians raptorial
 Inveighed, 'Nevermore'?"

Guessing thus -- hushed, expressionlessly, yielding audible words not,
 I nuzzled gorgeous pillows umbilically, rich purple lining embracing.
 Exultant, foul, fiery, luciferous, unholy eyes now the dread raven
 aimed piercingly --
 Eyes starkly depraved!
 I snuggled, cushioned, reclining, emptily enduring the lamplight's
 yearning avidity.
 Neither doing nor expiring. But uprisen Lenore --
 Oh unclasable shade! -- longingly, yea, knew I
She shall irradiate -- nevermore!

Gratifying ears, lungs engorging, came tinklings ribboned in fragrance!
 I expected divinities delivering ease long unfelt!
 "Sneak," I vituperated, "ethereal Lenore you'd irreverently nullify,
 Threatening every revered remembrance of rapture I own!
 Vile emissary -- raven angels secretively sent,
 Exacerbating sadness sore --
 Embitterer, drink nectarous oblivion!"
 Croaked the ugly raven, "Nevermore!"

"Archfiendish leerer!
 Seer unholy! --
 Sent up rockshafts, rifts, upwhirling storms, enchanted sands, --
 Charismatically usurping -- ravaging this abode,
 Is nostalgic love's assuagement nicknamed Gilead? --
 Unutterable assuagement galore?
 Elucidate! Unbosom thyself!"
 The evil raven answered, "Nevermore!"

"Confess, evil seer, the Hereafter exists!
 This heart remorseful eventually shall hold omniabsent Lenore!
 Deity Supreme even evil ravens intuit -- evil ravens adore!
 Peculiarly prescient individual, now glowering strangely -- eyeing noth-
 ingness, -- seer unholy! --
 Eternity's Damozel Divine acknowledge,

Repudiating kind nepenthe's eventless sleep!
 Seer -- evil nonetheless -- grant Eternity's numinous Damozel exists.-
 Remote, ethereal, divine!
 Verily, I sadly implore!"
 The avian troll imprecated orally, "Nevermore!"

"Satanic emissary, that horrible edict represents excommunication!
 Adieu! Leave now on night's elemental tempest! --
 Hurtling endlessly! -- liquidating Evil's syrinx sheerly!
 Midst yearning (yes, excruciating loneliness), liar of winter's empti-
 ness -- depart!
 Begone up that egress, mephistophelian bird!
 (Enter, radiant Lenore, invisibly!)"
 The detestably ogreish old raven -- eyes demoniacally dreaming --
 Yawped inimically, "Nevermore!"

Glow xanthic and nauseous, thou horrendous illumining chandelier!
 High up, ensconced still, always nictitating dourly,
 Umbral shadow hurl earthward, raven!
 Ever deepening shadow,
 Hover -- as down on waters Stygian!
 Thus escape evades me. Imagination's necrotic gore
 I've obviated,
 Prayerfully expecting new ecstatic dawns -- nevermore!

The underlying structure of an Automynorcagram, described in detail in my article in the August 1975 Word Ways, is simple: the initial letters of the words in the poem, taken in order, spell out the words of the poem. Thus, the seven words of the first line yield the initial letters MIDNIGH, which nearly spells out the first word of the poem. Obviously, only part of the poem can be duplicated in this fashion -- in this one, the last letter in the poem subsequently used as the initial letter of a word in the poem is the N in not, the third word in the last line of the third stanza.

This process, of course, automatically iterates. The incomplete poem formed by the initial letters of the original yields, through its initial letters, an even-more-incomplete poem: in The Raven, this poem proceeds only to the N in the word exhaustion in the fourth line of the first stanza. The next two partial poems in this infinite regress are "Midnight intombed Decembe-" and "Mid-". Were one to write a whole book in automynorcagrammatical form, yet higher-order duplication would appear.