

Public Abstract

First Name:Anna

Middle Name:C

Last Name:Krause

Adviser's First Name:W. Thomas

Adviser's Last Name:McKenney

Co-Adviser's First Name:

Co-Adviser's Last Name:

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In a dim room, with only a weak fire keeping out the cold December wind, a poor student sits alone, slowly, painfully working himself into a frenzy of grief over the loss of his young wife, Lenore.

This is the image in my mind when I read Edgar Allan Poe's masterpiece, "The Raven." Such an elegantly dramatic image, told in such vivid, musical language, seems made to be an opera, and yet in all my research I could not find evidence that anyone had adapted it in such a way before. Setting this iconic American text as an opera is something I have dreamed of doing for years.

This is the story of a man's descent into madness over the course of a single evening. The rapidity with which he loses his mind indicates that his beloved Lenore can't have been gone long--perhaps a few weeks, or a couple of months at most.

A Raven appears at his window. She has learned to mimic the word "nevermore," perhaps from a previous owner, and she repeats this word when the man lets her into his room. At first he is glad for the company, but his thoughts return to the absent Lenore, and the Raven's single word begins to take on a new meaning. Is she taunting him? He hopes briefly for peace and reunion with Lenore after his own death, but in the end the Raven's relentless jeer is too much for him to bear.