

Edgar Allan Poe's Critical Writings

"The Philosophy of Composition"

In this essay Poe gives a fascinating account of how he went about writing his famous poem, "The Raven." Essentially, he is opposing the romantic idea that the poet is just an instrument responding intuitively to inspiration. He intends to show that a poem, like any other work of art, is made up of materials deliberately chosen to communicate a specific effect or idea. He is stressing how the creative intelligence of the poet must enter into the writing. Below, I have listed the 14 elements in composing his poem (or at least claimed he did). Please give a brief explanation of each term, drawn f\out of Poe's longer discussion. Each member of the group should certainly attempt to answer.

1. *Extent*
2. Choice of an *effect* to be conveyed
3. *Tone*
4. *Pivot* for the whole structure
5. *Nature* of his chosen refrain
6. *Character of the word* chosen as refrain
7. *Pretext* for continuous use of "Nevermore"
8. *Topic*
9. Achieving *variation* while combining two ideas of sad lover and Raven
10. *Beginning of actual writing of the poem*
11. Object of his *versification*
12. *Locale*
13. Working toward the *denouement* of the poem
14. *Necessity* of complexity (or adaptation) and *suggestiveness*

"The Fall of the House of Usher"

1. What effect does Poe achieve in giving the very detailed description of the manor house and its surroundings?
2. The "house" of Usher refers to both the Usher family and the mansion. In what ways do the latter reflect the condition of the former?
3. If the gloomy tarn before the house is seen as a symbol, what does it stand for then?
4. Is there anything in Poe's using of symbolism that reminds you of Nathaniel Hawthorne?