



Edgar Allan Poe — Life and Strife

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Abstract: This article explores and reviews the life and work of the great novelist, the prose writer Edgar Allan Poe. It identifies the genre and theory of his literary writing as a major component of the American writer's psychological short stories.

Keywords: Definition, conclusion, the development of the genre, Edifying novels, share of psychologism, reality, human mental phenomena, author's narrative, gothic musings, and literary theory.

“Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary...”

Edgar Allan Poe

Edgar Allan Poe is known far and wide for his dark, gothic musings. His work is acknowledged now as classic and exceptionally authentic. Much of his writing is centered around death, sorrow, mourning, loss and other such depressing themes. Having spent years with his work, those of us familiar with the tragic, macabre tales he spun have likely asked this question. His life is the clearest answer. Though clearly talented as a writer and devoted to his craft, his life was nothing short of a tragedy — progressing through phases of immense loss, sorrow and solitude to an untimely end.

Born Edgar Poe to English actor parents in Boston back in 1809; he was exposed, as an infant, to abandonment when his father left him and his mother behind the year after his birth. Just a year later, his mother succumbed to pulmonary tuberculosis — leaving him an orphan. He was taken in by a Scottish merchant named John Allan and named Edgar Allan Poe

Poe went on to register at the University of Virginia in 1826 where he accrued significant gambling debts, much to the displeasure of his foster father. He'd left his sweetheart, Elmira Royster, behind to study at the university and may have reacted poorly to news of her having married in his absence. He dropped out within a year. With looming debts he decided to travel to Boston, where he took up odd jobs to make ends meet — writing for a newspaper under the pseudonym “Henri Le Rennet.”

Poe was quite poor in 1827. Despite his efforts, work as a writer was sparse and he was driven to consider an unlikely means of supporting himself — joining the Army. At a mere 18 years of age, he enlisted using the false name of “Edgar A. Perry.” He served at Fort Independence in Boston Harbor and released his first book of poetry that year, though the book went largely unnoticed.

When Poe's foster mother passed away, he traveled to West Point to become a cadet. It was the year of 1830 that saw his foster father remarrying. The situation progressed poorly, with Poe engaging in many disputes with his foster father over the man's various illegitimate children. John Allan had had enough and chose to completely disown Poe at this time. Poe was court-martialed not long thereafter.

Poe managed to find his way into an assistant editorial role for the Southern Literary Messenger, a Richmond-based periodical, in 1835. This stroke of luck was cut short, though, when he was fired from the position on the grounds of alleged drunkenness mere weeks after starting. Poe then turned his attention to marrying his cousin Virginia who, at the age of only 13, was 13 years his junior. Despite the age gap, their union must have given him hope enough to tame his drinking habits as he was hired once again as assistant editor at the Southern Literary Messenger, where he worked until 1837.

It was January of 1842 when Virginia began to succumb to tuberculosis, the same illness that had claimed Poe's mother. Poe was clearly affected by this grim turn of events and took up drinking once again. In their cottage home in Fordham, New York (now, the Bronx), Virginia died from the illness, just 5 years after her first symptoms. 2 years went by as Poe lost himself in ever-worsening depression. He is reputed to have developed quite a drinking problem throughout this period; much worse than before. On the 3rd of October, Poe raged along the streets of Baltimore — in fear of his life and weak of constitution. He died in the Washington Medical College 4 days later. However, each and every medical record, even his own death certificate, have been conveniently lost.

Despite the terrible struggles and difficulties he faced in life, Poe's legacy lives on to this day. A major inspiration in romanticism, macabre storytelling, short story writing and even cryptography, he is not likely to be forgotten any time soon. This goes for his impressive body of written works such as the following classics: It is the ghost of Poe's lingering influence that colors much of the world's wealth of macabre and gothic writing. It is the many ghosts he himself felt haunted by that colored his own life in such intense gray scale.

EDGAR ALLAN POE'S WRITING STYLE-GENRES

The genre for which Edger Allan Poe is best known for is the **Gothic genre**. His works adhere to the conventions of the genre. Therefore, it appeals to the public state. His gothic fiction deals with the **recurring themes of death**. It also includes the physical signs of death, concerns of early burial; effects of decomposition; mourning, and the reanimation of death.

His works are considered to belong to the genre of dark Romanticism. This genre started as a reaction to transcendentalism, which is highly disliked, Poe. He called the followers of the movement of transcendentalism as "**Frog-Pondian**." He also ridiculed their writings by calling it "metaphor – run mad" elapsing into "mysticism for mysticism's sake" or "obscurity for obscurity's sake." In reality, Poe does not like transcendentalism but the sophists and pretenders among the transcendentalists.

Apart from horror fiction, Edger Allan Poe also wrote **hoaxes, humour tales, and satires**. To add comic effect in his works, he used **absurd indulgence** and **irony**. He uses the **comic effect** to free the readers from the conventionality of culture. The first-ever story that Poe published was "Metzengerstein." This story is also his first horror story; however, it was initially intended as comedy ridiculing the popular genre.

He also reestablishes the genre of science fiction through his writing that responds to the newly emerging technologies. For example, the story "The Balloon-Hoax" is about the hot air balloon that emerged in his time.

Edger Allan Poe's works are based on themes that were according to the tastes of the mass-market. To satisfy the taste of the masses, he also included the elements of pseudo-sciences like physiognomy and phrenology in his works.

LITERARY THEORY

The critical literary theories presented by Poe in his criticism are reflected in his writings. One of the best critical essays he wrote is "The Poetic Principle." Though Poe believed that the meaning of the literary work should not be on the surface, it must be deep and undercurrent, he does not like allegory and didacticism.

For him, the works which have their meaning on the surface do not belong to art. Moreover, qualitative work must be brief and focused on one exact effect. Lastly, he also held that the writers should sensibly analyze every idea and sentiment. Poe's essay "The Philosophy of Composition" deals with the method of writing in his masterpiece poem "The Raven." In the essay, Poe claims that he had strictly adhered to this method.

Poe was proud of his logic, and he handled his logic very carefully to impress the public with his stories. He was highly praised for his problem disentanglement, thought-reading, and cryptography that he credited to characters C. Auguste Dupin and William Legard. It was these characters that made him write detective stories and science fiction.

The duality in his personality is also reflected in his art. He wrote weird and angelic poetry. His poetry has the utmost rhythm and appealing words. Similarly, his prose has suggestiveness and extravagant beauty with the superficial recklessness of persuasive motivation. However, he also wrote about the dark psychology or the plans of inexorable plots in dry and hardstyle. The duality of his mind, temper, and art are blended into a unity of structure, tone, and movement in his masterpieces. These masterpieces are the most effective and overwhelmed with various elements.

Poe also **focuses on the precision of meter, structure, and language**. As a critic, he formulated his own principles for the short story. He searched for the **ancient unities in the plot**: the unity of action, plot, and magnitude. He added mood and effects to these units. However, he was not very harsh in his principles. Though he praised brief and focused works, he also admired long works, morals, and allegories provided that they are not presented crudely. He also praised the originality in the work that was totally different from his; he was a surprisingly generous critic of minor writers

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