

91

Edgar Allen Poe *Top 100 Americans*

Edgar Allan Poe (born Edgar Poe; January 19, 1809 – October 7, 1849) was an American author, poet, editor, and literary critic, considered part of the American Romantic Movement. Best known for his tales of mystery and the macabre, Poe was one of the earliest American practitioners of the short story, and is generally considered the inventor of the detective fiction genre. He is further credited with contributing to the emerging genre of science fiction. He was the first well-known American writer to try to earn a living through writing alone, resulting in a financially difficult life and career.

Born in Boston, Poe was the second child of two actors. His father abandoned the family in 1810, and his mother died the following year. Thus orphaned, the child was taken in by John and Frances Allan, of Richmond, Virginia. Although they never formally adopted him, Poe was with them well into young adulthood. Tension developed later as John Allan and Edgar repeatedly clashed over debts, including those incurred by gambling, and the cost of secondary education for the young man. Poe attended the University of Virginia for one semester but left due to lack of money. Poe quarreled with Allan over the funds for his education and enlisted in the Army in 1827 under an assumed name. It was at this time his publishing career began, albeit humbly, with an anonymous collection of poems, *Tamerlane and Other Poems* (1827), credited only to "a Bostonian". With the death of Frances Allan in 1829, Poe and Allan reached a temporary rapprochement. Later failing as an officer's cadet at West Point and declaring a firm wish to be a poet and writer, Poe parted ways with John Allan.

Poe switched his focus to prose and spent the next several years working for literary journals and periodicals, becoming known for his own style of literary criticism. His work forced him to move among several cities, including Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York City. In Baltimore in 1835, he married Virginia Clemm, his 13-year-old cousin. In January 1845 Poe published his poem, "The Raven", to instant success. His wife died of tuberculosis two years after its publication. For years, he had been planning to produce his own journal, *The Penn* (later renamed *The Stylus*), though he died before it could be produced. On October 7, 1849, at age 40, Poe died in Baltimore; the cause of his death is unknown and has been variously attributed to alcohol, brain congestion, cholera, drugs, heart disease, rabies, suicide, tuberculosis, and other agents.

Poe and his works influenced literature in the United States and around the world, as well as in specialized fields, such as cosmology and cryptography. Poe and his work appear throughout popular culture in literature, music, films, and television. A number of his homes are dedicated museums today. The Mystery Writers of America present an annual award known as the Edgar Award for distinguished work in the mystery genre.