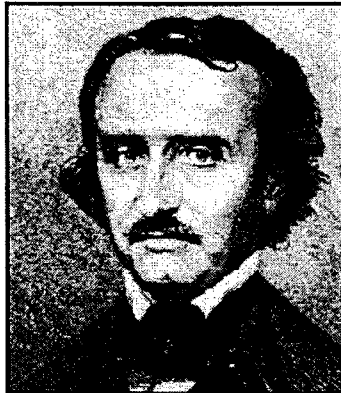




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Edgar Allan Poe

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Edgar Allen Poe (1809-1849), American poet, a master of the horror tale, credited with practically inventing the detective story.

Edgar Allan Poe was born on January 19, 1809 in Boston, Massachusetts, to parents who were itinerant actors. His father David Poe Jr. died probably in 1810 and his mother Elizabeth Hopkins Poe in 1811. Edgar was taken into the home of a Richmond merchant John Allan and brought up partly in England (1815-20), where he attended Manor School at Stoke Newington. Never legally adopted, Poe took Allan's name for his middle name.

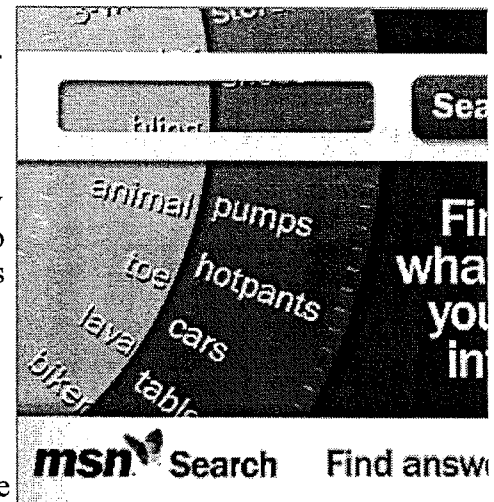
Poe attended the University of Virginia (1826), but was expelled for not paying gambling debts. This led to a quarrel with Allan, who later disowned him. In 1830 Poe joined the U.S. Army as a common soldier under assumed name and in 1830 Poe entered West Point and was dishonorably discharged next year, for intentional neglect of his duties.

Little is known about his life in this time, but in 1833 he lived in Baltimore with his father's sister. After winning a prize of \$50 for the short story "MS Found in a Bottle," he started a career as a staff member of various magazines, among them *Southern Literary Messenger* in Richmond (1835-37), *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine* in Philadelphia (1839-40), and *Graham's Magazine* (1842-43). During these years he wrote some of his best-known stories.

In 1836 Poe married his 13-year-old cousin Virginia Clemm. She burst a blood

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vessel in 1842, and remained a virtual invalid until her death from tuberculosis years later. After the death of his wife, Poe began to lose his struggle with drugs. He addressed the famous poem "Annabel Lee" (1849) to her.

Poe's first collection, *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*, appeared in 1835 and contained one of his most famous works, "The Fall of the House of Usher." In the early 1840s Poe's best-selling work was *The Conchologist's First Book* (1842). The dark poem of lost love, "The Raven," brought Poe national fame, when it appeared in 1845. *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1841) and *The Purloined Letter* are among Poe's most famous detective stories. Poe was also one of the most famous literary journalists in American history.

Poe suffered from bouts of depression and madness, and he attempted suicide in 1848. In September the following year he disappeared for three days after a birthday party and on his way to visit his new fiancée in Richmond. He turned into a delirious condition in Baltimore gutter and died on October 7, 1849.

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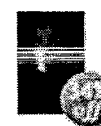
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Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849)

Edgar Allan Poe's literary legacy is sometimes overshadowed by his personal life. After he died, his enemies published unflattering reports about him concerning the reckless way in which he lived his life. Poe's other, and more important, legacy is the poems, essays, and stories that have influenced writers and other artists throughout the decades. Much of his work is still read and studied today.

Poe was born in 1809; his parents were actors. His father deserted the family in 1810. In 1811, his mother died in Richmond, Virginia, at the age of 24. Poe then went to live with a guardian.

Poe's guardian was John Allan, a tobacco exporter. Although he never adopted Edgar legally, Allan gave him the name Edgar Allan. At schools in Virginia and Great Britain, Edgar was considered a scholar and athlete.

Poe studied at the University of Virginia until, deep in debt, he was forced to leave the university. He ran off to Boston, where he paid to have his first book of poems published. To earn a living, he joined the Army.

When Mrs. Allan died in 1829, Poe and John Allan resumed relations. Poe's next plan was to apply to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. He entered in 1830, after publishing another collection of his poems. At West Point he again got into trouble with debt and was court-martialed and expelled for disobeying orders. He then published a third collection of poems, which included "To Helen."

In 1831, Poe worked part-time for newspapers and wrote stories for literary magazines. When John Allan died in 1834, Poe was left out of his will. He moved to Richmond in 1835 to work as an editor of a new magazine, the *Southern Literary Messenger*. The book reviews that Poe wrote for the magazine attracted attention and subscribers. He was often harsh in his criticism but always interesting. He challenged the New England writers who were the literary establishment of his day. In 1836, Poe married a girl named Virginia. By then, he had begun writing the stories that he is known for today, but the magazine's owner complained about his depressed moods and fired Poe at the end of 1836.

After a year in New York and the publication of a short novel that did not sell well, Poe moved with his wife to Philadelphia. He held editing jobs there while publishing many of his best-known stories. Some of Poe's work

reflected the popular taste of the time for Gothic art, architecture, and literature, with its dark mysteries, ruined castles, horror, and the supernatural. Like other Americans of his era, Poe was interested in the classical ideals of order, light, and rationality, exemplified in the ancient Greeks and Romans.

By 1844, Poe was becoming recognized for his writing, especially when his poem "The Raven" was published in dozens of magazines and newspapers. He began to give public lectures on poetry. In addition, a volume of his stories called *The Raven and Other Poems* was published in 1845.

At the height of his success and fame, Poe also experienced several difficult years as well. No one is certain what caused his troubles. Many observers wrote about Poe's excesses. Recent scholarship, however, suggests too much emphasis may have been placed on Poe's behavior. It may be that Poe's macabre way of writing had more to do with the popular interests of the time than with his personal life.

Poe's best-known characters are fascinating because they seem driven by terrible forces. It would be a mistake, however, to view the author as one of his own creations, because Poe functioned relatively well in his life and was a productive writer. In his later years, however, Poe grieved over Virginia's death, often making him morose.

On a lecture tour in 1849, he was found unconscious on a street in Baltimore. After treatment in a hospital, he fell into a coma and died. The doctor, limited by the medical knowledge of the times, called Poe's condition "congestion of the brain." We will probably never know exactly what caused Poe's death, and it is indeed ironic that one of America's foremost creators of the detective story died in a mysterious way.

While watching detective characters on television or in a movie, we probably do not realize they are frequently offshoots of Edgar Allan Poe's work. Poe most likely based C. Auguste Dupin, the detective in three of his stories, on the memoirs of a French detective named Vidocq. Many features found in detective stories today are claimed to be inventions of Poe's, including the super-intelligent detective, the police who are stumped by a crime, and the detective's friend who narrates the story.

A fitting recognition of Poe's literary contribution is the name of the awards given each year by the Mystery Writers of America: the Edgar Awards.

