

On January 19, 1809, Edgar Allan Poe was born in Boston, Massachusetts. Poe's father and mother, both professional actors, died before the poet was three years old, and John and Frances Allan raised him as a foster child in Richmond, Virginia. John Allan, a prosperous tobacco exporter, sent Poe to the best boarding schools and later to the University of Virginia, where Poe excelled academically. After less than one year of school, however, he was forced to leave the university when Allan refused to pay Poe's gambling debts.

Poe returned briefly to Richmond, but his relationship with Allan deteriorated. In 1827, he moved to Boston and enlisted in the United States Army. His first collection of poems, *Tamerlane, and Other Poems*, was published that year. Following his Army service, Poe was admitted to the United States Military Academy, but he was again forced to leave for lack of financial support. He then moved into the home of his aunt Maria Clemm and her daughter Virginia in Baltimore, Maryland.

Poe began to sell short stories to magazines at around this time, and, in 1835, he became the editor of the *Southern Literary Messenger* in Richmond, where he moved with his aunt and cousin Virginia. In 1836, he married Virginia, who was fourteen years old at the time. Over the next ten years, he established himself as a poet, a short story writer, and an editor. He published some of his best-known stories and poems, including "The Fall of the House of Usher," "The Tell-Tale Heart," "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," and "The Raven." After Virginia's death from tuberculosis in 1847, Poe's lifelong struggle with depression and alcoholism worsened. On October 3, 1849, he was found in a state of semi-consciousness. Poe died four days later of "acute congestion of the brain." Evidence by medical practitioners who reopened the case has shown that Poe may have been suffering from rabies.

Edgar Allan Poe was born January 19, 1809, and died October 7, 1849; he lived only forty years, but during his brief lifetime, he made a permanent place for himself in American literature and also in world literature. A few facts about Poe's life are indisputable, but, unfortunately, almost everything else about Poe's life has been falsified, romanticized, slanderously distorted, or subjected to grotesque Freudian interpretations. Poe, it has been said at various times, was a manic depressive, a dope addict, an epileptic, and an alcoholic; moreover, it has been whispered that he was syphilitic, that he was impotent, and that he fathered at least one illegitimate child. Hardly any of Poe's biographers have been content to write a straight account of his life. This was particularly true of his early biographers, and only recently have those early studies been refuted. Intrigued with the horror and mystery of Poe's stories and by the dark romanticism of his poetry, his early critics and biographers often embroidered on the facts of his past in order to create their own imaginative vision of what kind of man produced these "strange" tales and poems.

-cliffs notes