

Edgar Allan Poe:

life and style

Edgar Allan Poe was born in Boston in 1809. His parents died very early and he was brought up by a merchant, John Allan. The Allans moved to England and Poe was educated there. On his return to America, he entered the University of Virginia and dedicated himself to poetry.

In 1830 he entered the famous military academy West Point, but he was dismissed a year later for neglect of duty. This led to a permanent break with the Allans.

In 1836 Poe married his 13 years old cousin.

Poe first came to attention with his story *MS Found in a Bottle* published in 1833, for which he was awarded first prize in a literary competition. Poe now began working as an Editor and publishing short stories.

His first collection of short stories, *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*, was published in 1840. Over the next 5 years, Poe produced some of his best-known stories including *The Tell-tale Heart*, *The Black Cat*, *The Pit and the Pendulum* and *the Gold Bug*.

In 1845 he bought the *Broadway Journal*, a year later the journal failed.

In 1847 his wife died of tuberculosis.

Poe continued to work also producing poems. However, he now suffered from fits of madness and depression and started drinking heavily. He died in Baltimore in mysterious circumstances in 1849. Poe is best remembered for his tales of mystery, imagination and horror and for his stories of ratiocination.

His work was important for the development of the short story as a genre in American and European literature.

Poe was highly critical of the provincial standards of American writing his day. In his essay *The Poetic Principle* Poe claimed that the supreme work is the "poem per se... A poem written solely for a poem's sake". This concern with the formal beauty of his work, made him the hero of 19th century French writers and poets, notably Baudelaire, who regarded him as the great forerunner of the aesthetic approach to art.

Poe could also claim to be the short story's first theorist. In a review written in 1842, he stated that a short story was a work of fiction that could be read at one sitting, and that it concentrated on creating a single limited effect, to which every detail was subordinate.

The neurasthenic characters and narrators of his tales of mystery and imagination inhabit a world dominated by irrational, violent impulses and taboo desires. Their distance from common everyday experience is stressed by the settings of many of these stories, which tend to be remote in time and place, even when there is a more contemporary setting, Poe colors the milieu with suggestions of aristocratic decadence and touches of the Gothic.

As a romantic spirit, Poe was drawn to explore the hidden side of human nature. One of the ways he chose to explore man's dual nature was by using a device known as *doppelgänger* or double. It is a German word which means "double walker", a shadowy other self that walks beside an individual. It is used to indicate a double that embodies opposite or complementary qualities of a character. Unusually, Poe decides to make the original character represent the darker side, while the *doppelgänger* embodies his moral conscience.