


UNIT 2 Expressing a National Spirit
American Renaissance 1800 to 1850

A STEEM SCHOOL
FROEBEL
BILINGUAL SCHOOL
Home of the Space Generation

AUTHOR FOCUS –
EDGAR ALLAN
POE

The Tragic Life
and Legacy of an
American Literary
Giant



A black and white illustration of a large bird, possibly a phoenix or a similar mythical creature, in flight. The bird is shown from a side profile, with its wings spread wide. The background is a light, textured sky with several dark, teardrop-shaped feathers falling from it. The overall mood is somber and dramatic.

*"I dwelt alone
In a world of moan"*

from EULALIE (1845)

THE MASTER OF MOAN

Contributing greatly to the genres of horror and mystery, Edgar Allan Poe is considered the father of the modern detective story and is also lauded as one of America's greatest poets. Poe's psychologically thrilling horror examining the depths of the human mind earned him much fame during his lifetime but not enough money to make a decent living in spite of the excellent written works he produced. Poe endured the deaths of the women he loved amidst the destitute condition he was in during his forty some years of life.



TRAGIC CHILDHOOD

Edgar Poe was born on January 19th, 1809 in Boston, Massachusetts to actors Elizabeth Arnold and David Poe. In 1810, David abandoned the household, and within a year Elizabeth died of consumption at the age of 24 (almost 25% of Americans in the 19th century died from this illness). Edgar was only 2 years old.





After the death of his parents, Edgar was taken in by Frances and John Allan, a wealthy tobacco merchant from Richmond, Virginia. The Allan family was quite wealthy, and Edgar lived well with them. The Allans were his foster family but never formally adopted Poe, though they gave him the name "Edgar Allan Poe".

ESTRANGEMENT

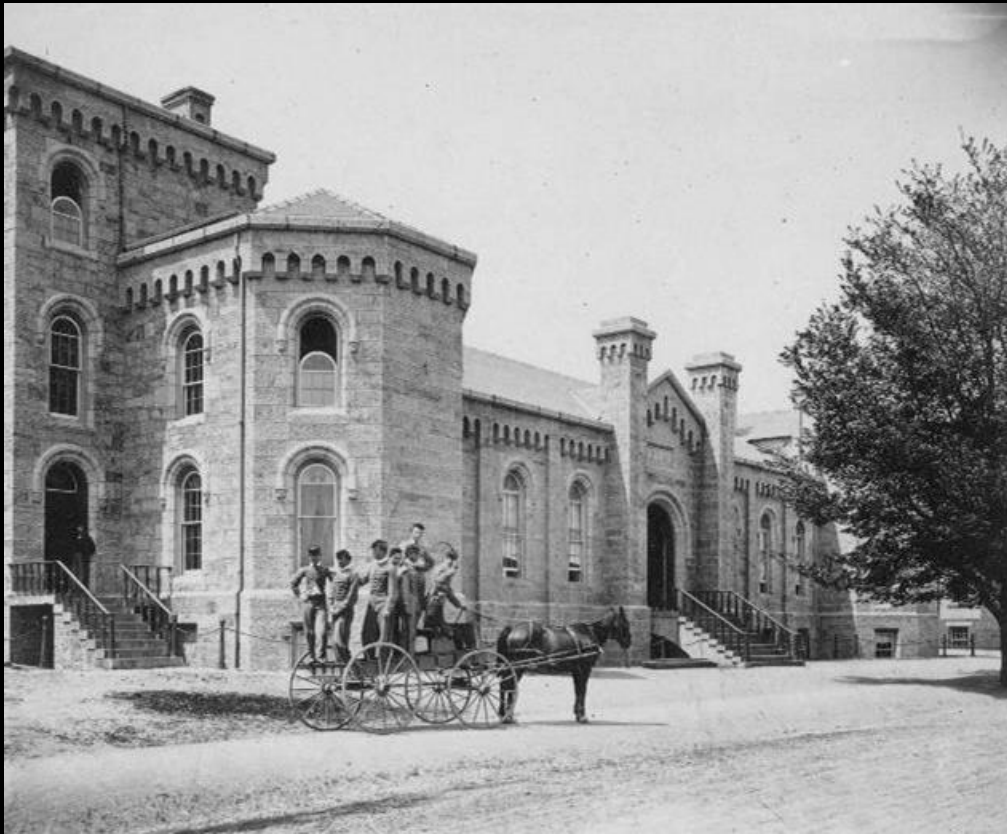


Poe registered at the University of Virginia in 1826. During his time there, Poe became estranged from his foster father over gambling debts. Poe claimed that Allan had not given him sufficient money to cover his college expenses. Allan did send additional money, but Poe's debts increased. Poe dropped out after a year, and, not feeling welcome in Richmond, he traveled to Boston in April 1827, sustaining himself with odd jobs as a clerk and newspaper writer.

MILITARY STINT

Poe enlisted in the U.S. Army and two years he sought to end his 5 year enlistment early. He tried to reconcile with John Allan and wrote to him. He remained unsympathetic, not even telling him of his foster mother's illness. Frances Allan died on February 28, 1829, and Poe visited the day after her burial. Softened by his wife's death, John Allan agreed to support Poe's attempt to receive an appointment to West Point. Poe finally was discharged from the Army.





Poe enrolled as a cadet West Point on July 1, 1830. In October 1830, John Allan married his second wife. The new marriage, and bitter fights with Poe over scandalous affairs, led to Mr. Allan finally disowning Poe.

Poe decided to leave West Point and on February 8, 1831, he left for Baltimore, to his aunt in March.

PUBLISHING CAREER

Poe began publishing his short stories in Philadelphia. He also won a prize for another short story titled "The Manuscript found in a Bottle" *from* the Saturday Visitor, a Baltimore newspaper. Another kind of bottle was getting the best of him, though.



This got him a job as the assistant editor on the Southern Literary Messenger in Richmond. However, he was fired shortly for being drunk. This was to be the paradoxical pattern for Poe's career: success as an artist and editor but failure to satisfy his employers and to secure a livelihood.

Returning to Baltimore, he married his cousin Virginia. She was 13 at that time.





Trying to make himself known, Poe moved between New York and Philadelphia from 1838 to 1844. He had little success, but he did establish himself as the inventor of the detective story publishing "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" wherein he created the character of C. Auguste Dupin who solves crimes by the means of deduction. This character, later, went on to influence Arthur Conan Doyle in the creation of his famous detective, Sherlock Holmes.



Of all his tales Poe considered "*Ligeia*" to be his best, yet "*The Pit and the Pendulum*", "*The Fall of the House of Usher*", and "*The Masque of the Red Death*" have become his most popular.

Poe mastered the art of musically flowing language evident in all his poems and very noticeable in *The Raven*. His literary theories have remained very influential in both short prose and poetry, and he states that both should have "*a certain unique or single effect.*"

Though his work made Poe popular in his day, it did not bring him significant financial success.



LOVE AND DEATH

In 1842, his wife Virginia broke a blood vessel and started bleeding heavily from the mouth. This was the first sign of consumption and she recovered, but only partly. Under this stress, Poe began to drink heavily. In 1847, she finally died from tuberculosis and left Poe a broken man.

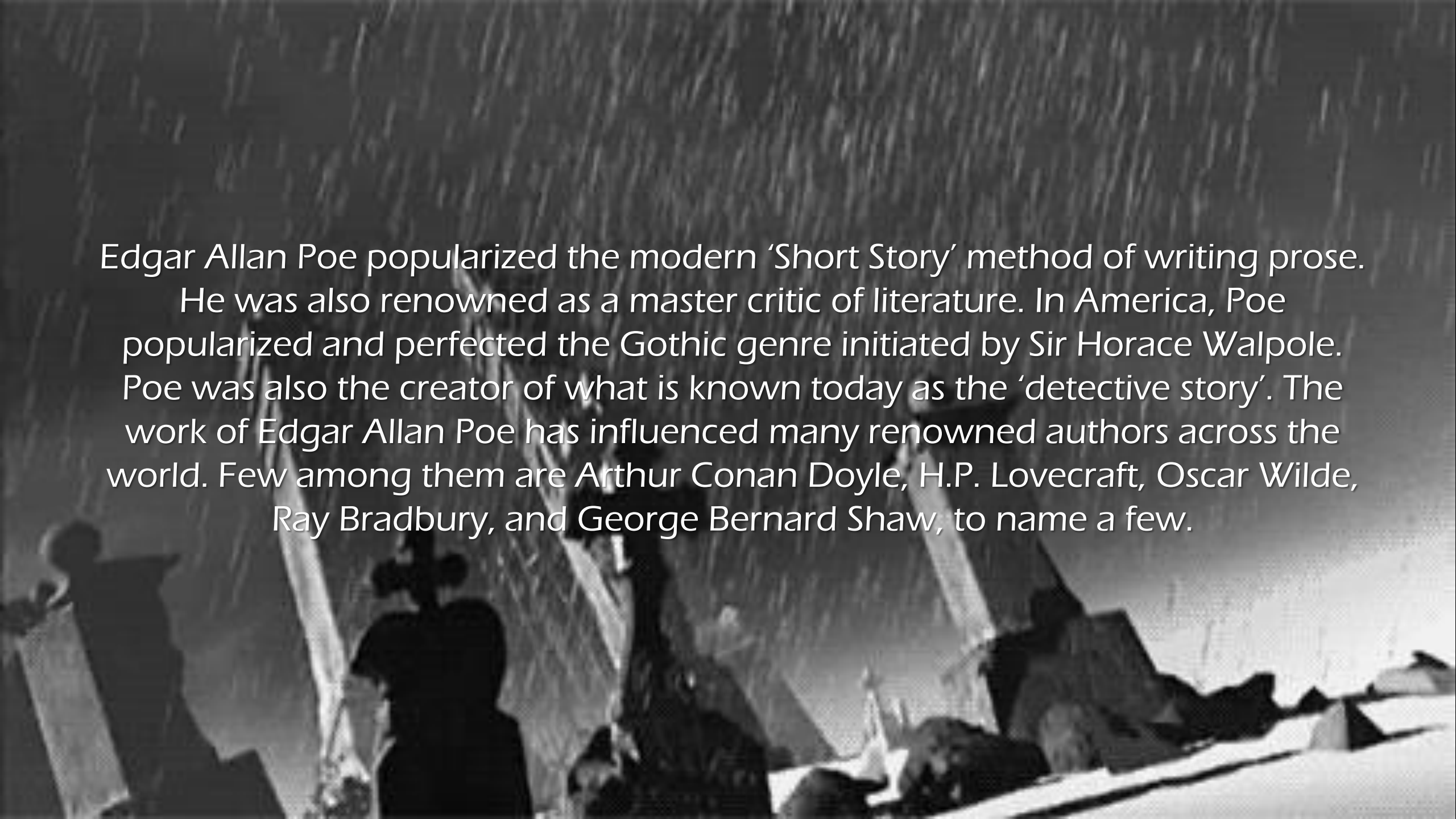


He became more unstable and started to drink heavily. He began to suffer bouts of depression and madness. Some say, that apart from drinking, he also began using opium and absinthe – two quite ‘popular’ psychedelic drugs at that time. It was during this time that Poe composed the poem *Annabelle Lee*.



As in life, Poe dealt with demons even in his death. On October 3rd, 1849 Poe was discovered in a saloon of Baltimore in a very delirious condition. He was taken to the Washington College Hospital, where his condition worsened. He wasn't coherent enough to explain how he came to be found in that state. He finally died on October 7th, 1849. His last words were - "*Lord help my poor soul!*"



A black and white photograph of a snowy mountain peak. A person is standing on the ridge, looking out over the landscape. The scene is misty or foggy, creating a dramatic and atmospheric setting. The text is overlaid on the image in a white, sans-serif font.

Edgar Allan Poe popularized the modern 'Short Story' method of writing prose. He was also renowned as a master critic of literature. In America, Poe popularized and perfected the Gothic genre initiated by Sir Horace Walpole. Poe was also the creator of what is known today as the 'detective story'. The work of Edgar Allan Poe has influenced many renowned authors across the world. Few among them are Arthur Conan Doyle, H.P. Lovecraft, Oscar Wilde, Ray Bradbury, and George Bernard Shaw, to name a few.

ASSESSMENT

1. How did Poe contribute to American literature?
2. How was Edgar's relationship with John Allan?
3. List the important women in Poe's life.
4. According to Poe, what should prose and poetry have?
5. List five (3) poems and five (3) stories from Poe.

*"All that we see or seem
Is but a dream within a dream."*
— A Dream within a Dream

Edgar A Poe

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