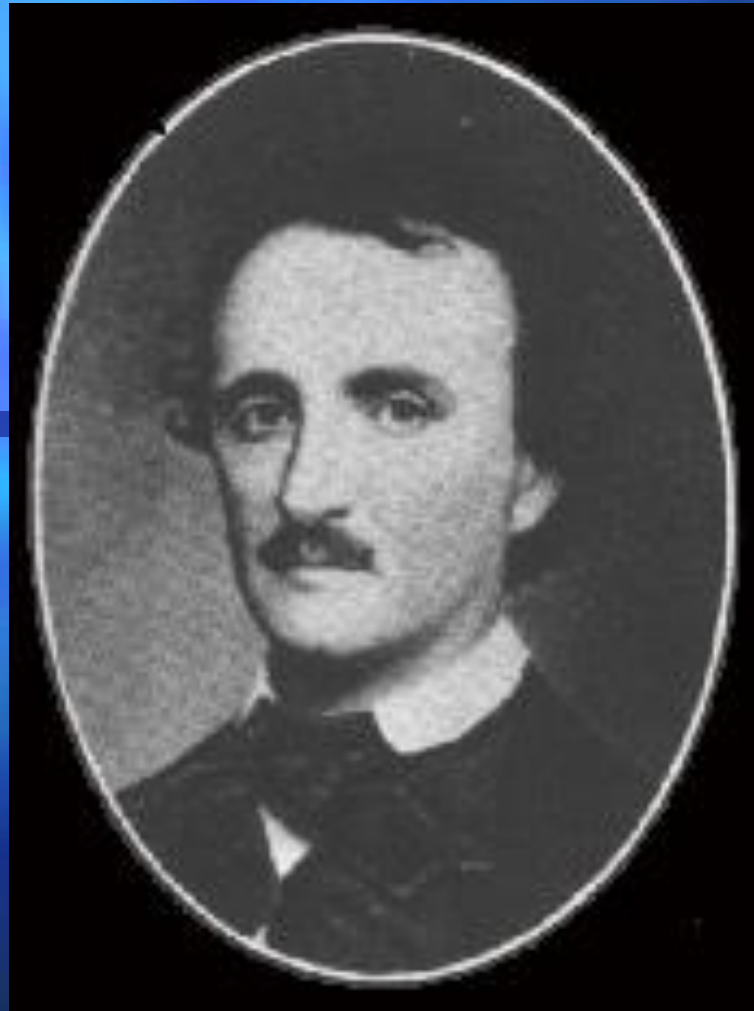


Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849)



Melodramatic Life

- Determining the facts of Poe's life has proved difficult, as lurid legend became entwined with fact even before he died.
- Some of these legends were spread by Poe himself.
- Two days after Poe's death, his literary executor began a smear campaign, rewriting Poe's correspondence so as to alienate many of his friends.

Early Life

- Poe was born in Boston on January 19, 1809, his parents' second child.
- His father deserted the family a year later.
- In December 1811, his mother died at twenty-four, and her husband disappeared completely.
- Poe was taken in by John Allan, a successful and stable Richmond merchant.

College and West Point

- Poe spent most of 1826 at the University of West Virginia, doing well in his studies, but running up gambling debts and drinking.
- He was admitted at West Point in 1830, but got himself expelled by missing classes and roll calls.
- By 1831, Poe had already published three versions of his early poetry.

Poe's Death

- During the last two years of his life, Poe was seriously ill--perhaps with a brain lesion--and drinking steadily.
- On Election Day, October 3, 1849, he was found senseless near a polling place.
- Taken to a hospital, he died on October 7, "of congestion of the brain."
- A recent theory is that he died of rabies.

Poe worked in a variety of genres (1827-1849)

- Criticism--he gained a national reputation as a virulently sarcastic critic, a literary hatchetman. The bulk of his writing consists of his criticism, and his most abiding ambition was to become a powerful critic.
- Poetry--He was an experimental poet.
- Psychological fiction--He wanted to produce the greatest possible horrific effects on the reader.
- Detective Story--Poe created this form when he was 32, will all its major conventions complete.

Characteristics of Poe's detective stories

- Poe places veiled clues before the reader.
- The writer/narrator strives to appear objective.
 - Poe would have liked to solve everything by the mind.
 - He was disturbed by what he could not solve by reason.
- The climax of the story is the narrator's explanation of the crime.

Poe and the Gothic

- Poe did not want to write gothic stories; he started his career spoofing the Gothic.
- He said that he wrote, "Tales of terror, not of Germany, but of the soul."
- He transformed tales of terror into psychological stories; he delved into the mysterious recesses of the human mind.

Elements of Gothic in Poe's Fiction

■ Grim setting

- Landscapes are often reflections of character's mind.
- Unusual buildings, extremes of nature, eccentric works of art
- Very few of his stories take place in America; most take place in Europe or Never-never-land.

Other elements of the Gothic

■ Hidden evil

- Unspeakable, mysterious crimes, including incest and parricide

■ Obsession with Death

- Ghosts, blood, body parts

■ Maniacal Laughter

■ The discovered manuscript

- gives responsibility to someone else

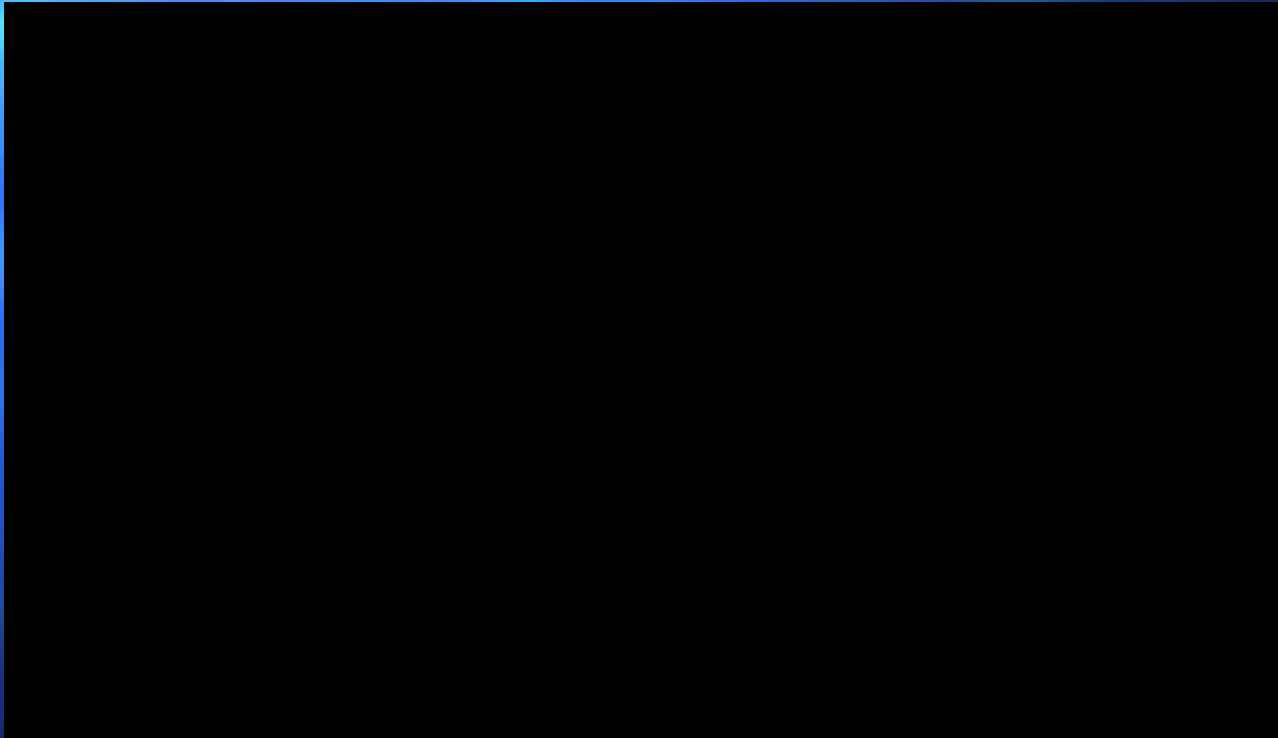
■ Deformity

- the grotesque--people who don't look right are capable of activity beyond the norm

An element of Poe's style

- Poe uses vocabulary to create setting, for rhetorical effect, rather than for information.
- Modern horror films use music to create atmosphere; Poe used vocabulary.

An element of Poe's style



Hawthorne/Poe

- Hawthorne described the conflict between the intellect and heart.
- Poe described the conflict between two sides of the intellect.

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