Edgar Allan Poe (Biography.com)

Born January 19, 1809, Boston, Massachusetts, U.S. American short-story writer, poet, critic, and editor Edgar Allan Poe's tales of mystery and horror initiated the modern detective story, and the atmosphere in his tales of horror is unrivaled in American fiction. His *The Raven* (1845) numbers among the best-known poems in national literature.

In late 1830s, Poe published *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*, a collection of stories. It contained several of his most spine-tingling tales, including "The Fall of the House of Usher," "Ligeia" and "William Wilson." Poe launched the new genre of detective fiction with 1841's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." A writer on the rise, he won a literary prize in 1843 for "The Gold Bug," a suspenseful tale of secret codes and hunting treasure.

Poe became a literary sensation in 1845 with the publication of the poem "The Raven." It is considered a great American literary work and one of the best of Poe's career. In the work, Poe explored some of his common themes—death and loss. An unknown narrator laments the demise of his great love Lenore. That same year, he found himself under attack for his stinging criticisms of his fellow poet [Henry Wadsworth Longfellow](http://www.biography.com/people/henry-wadsworth-longfellow-9385673). Poe claimed that Longfellow, a widely popular literary figure, was a plagiarist, and this written assault on Longfellow created a bit of backlash for Poe.

Poe was overcome by grief after the death of his beloved Virginia in 1847. While he continued to work, he suffered from poor health and struggled financially. His final days remain somewhat of a mystery. He left Richmond on September 27, 1849, and was supposedly on his way to Philadelphia. On October 3, Poe was found in Baltimore in great distress. He was taken to Washington College Hospital where he died on October 7. His last words were "Lord, help my poor soul."

At the time, it was said that Poe died of "congestion of the brain." But his actual cause of death has been the subject of endless speculation. Some experts believe that alcoholism led to his demise while others offer up alternative theories. Rabies, epilepsy, carbon monoxide poisoning are just some of the conditions thought to have led to the great writer's death.

Shortly after his passing, Poe's reputation was badly damaged by his literary adversary Rufus Griswold. Griswold, who had been sharply criticized by Poe, took his revenge in his obituary of Poe, portraying the gifted yet troubled writer as a mentally deranged drunkard and womanizer. He also penned the first biography of Poe, which helped cement some of these misconceptions in the public's minds