

0. ORDER and CHAOS - Story Preface

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2. ORDER and CHAOS

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John A. McDougall created this watercolor of Edgar Allan Poe, circa 1846. It is online via the Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore, courtesy The Huntington Library, San. Marino, California.

Chaos seemed to shadow Poe. Order and stability lasted for periods of time, then something bad always seemed to happen.

Losing his mother, he was placed in the care of Fanny Allan who became a second mother to him. Then Mrs. Allan also died of the dreaded TB.

A boy with few friends, "Eddy" - as he was known at the time - had two close pals (Robert Stanard and Robert Cabell). He especially loved to visit the Stanard home where Robert's mother - Jane Stith Craig Stanard - was very kind to the young Poe. Later, Sarah Helen Whitman wrote about Mrs. Stanard's impact:

This lady afterwards became the confidant of all his boyish sorrows, and her's was the one redeeming influence that saved and guided him in the earlier days of his turbulent and passionate youth... (Edgar Poe and His Critics, by Sarah Helen Whitman, [page 49](#).)

When she was 31, Jane Stanard also died. Poe - then 15 years old - often visited her grave at Richmond's Shockoe Cemetery.

Poe's education had a bit more stability, at least while he was young. After moving to the United Kingdom, with the Allans, he was a very good student at Manor House School in Stoke Newington (a suburb of London). At the time, he was known as "Edgar Allan."

Dr. Bransby, the Manor House headmaster, liked Edgar. He believed, however, that the lad was spoiled:

... a quick and clever boy and would have been a very good boy if he had not been spoilt by his parents [meaning the Allans]; but they spoilt him, and allowed him an extravagant amount of pocket-money, which enabled him to get into all manner of mischief - still I liked the boy - poor fellow, his parents spoilt him! (Jeffrey Meyers, *Edgar Allan Poe: His Life and Legacy*, page 13.)

Edgar didn't think John Allan spoiled him - at least, not while he attended college.

A student at the University of Virginia, when the college was only two years old, Poe had just-enough money for tuition. When he bought goods and services from local merchants, on credit, he couldn't pay his bills. Poe thought gambling might provide a way out of his financial crisis, but that didn't work. Now burdened with debts he could not repay, he sought help from Allan.

Regaling fellow students with his brilliance, Edgar read his stories and displayed his art work. His debts haunted him, however, and in 1828 he wrote a blistering letter to his foster father. Instead of getting the help he needed, Poe and his scathing words engineered a break in whatever relationship he still had with John Allan.

Now on his own, and using a new name - Edgar A. Perry - Poe fled to Boston (the place of his birth) and enlisted in the U.S. Army as a soldier. That career path was a bad choice for him, and even his time at West Point did not go well.

Poe wanted to write for a living - particularly, poetry - but he must have asked himself: Who makes money writing poetry? The answer was: practically no one.

Poe found work as a literary critic, expressing his views about various books and writers. Employed by the Southern Literary Messenger, he was blunt and opinionated.

By 1836, the new critic - who worked in Richmond - was known as "Tomahawk Man" and the "Comanche of Literature." He even called Henry Wadsworth Longfellow a plagiarist.

Meanwhile ... another crisis-of-sorts was developing. Poe, who had previously lived in Baltimore with his Aunt Maria and her daughter Virginia, fell in love with ... his very-young cousin.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/ORDER-and-CHAOS-The-Raven>

See [Learning Tasks for this story online at:](#)

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Questions 2 Ponder

Do Personal Losses Fuel Poets?

Poe lost many people close to him when he was very young. Did that help, or harm, his ability as a writer? Explain your answer.

Poe thought that his foster father unfairly withheld financial support—but—his school headmaster thought that his foster-father spoiled the lad. Explain how such different perspectives could describe the same person?

Should Money Be the Motivator of Job Choices?

Edgar Allan Poe wanted to write poetry, but poets didn't earn much of an income at the time. Poe chose to write poetry but also supported himself by writing other things, like novels and articles.

What course of action should a person follow when a chosen profession provides joy but little-to-no income?

Poe's stories, written in prose, are still relevant and some have been made into movies. What does that tell us about the themes which Poe selected?

What Makes a Mentor Special?

Edgar Allan Poe lost a series of women who were important in his life:

- First his mother;
- Then his foster mother;
- Then his friend's mother who had become a mentor to the teenager.

How important is it to have a mentor who is willing to guide us along life's path? Explain your answer.

If we have limited, or nonexistent, family support, should we seek-out a mentor who can help us to thrive better than we can on our own? Why, or why not?

Have you ever been a mentor to anyone? How did that make you feel about yourself?

Media Stream

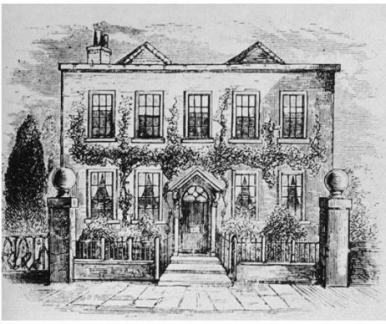


Edgar Allan Poe in His Early Years

Circa 1846, John A. McDougall created this watercolor depicting Edgar Allan Poe. It is online via the Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore, courtesy The Huntington Library, San. Marino, California. Public Domain

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Edgar Allan Poe - Manor House School

Image of the Manor House School, online courtesy University of Virginia Library.

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Poe - Richmond, Virginia Office

Image of former office of Southern Literary Messenger, online courtesy U.S.

National Archives.

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