

0. RUFUS GRISWOLD and POE'S LEGACY - Story  
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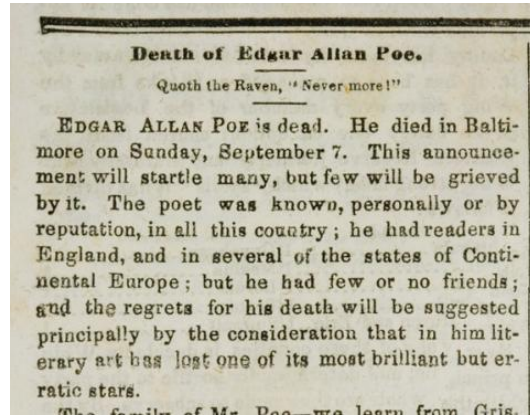
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Rufus Griswold wrote an obituary about Edgar Allan Poe which was extremely unflattering. Signing it "Ludwig," Griswold did not fool Poe's friends who suspected that Griswold was responsible. This image, [online via the University of Virginia Magazine](#), depicts a view of that obituary. Note, however, that the date of Poe's death is incorrect in this excerpt.

[Rufus Griswold](#) and Edgar Poe were not friends. They worked with each other, when it was mutually beneficial, but they [shared a suspicious distrust](#).

Two days after Poe died, the *New York Tribune* carried a [widely disseminated obituary](#) of the famous writer. Although it was signed by "Ludwig," Poe's friends suspected Griswold had written the unflattering piece. It started with these words:

*Edgar Allan Poe is dead. He died in Baltimore the day before yesterday. This announcement will startle many, but few will be grieved by it. (New York Tribune, October 9, 1849, page 2.)*

Griswold didn't stop with the obituary. [Conning Maria Clemm](#) into entrusting him with Poe's works, Rufus busily changed Poe's words. The end result had a disastrous effect on Poe's personal legacy.

Although [his poems](#), stories and criticisms speak for themselves, since most were published before Edgar died, Poe's private letters were wracked by Griswold's changes and inventions. Comparing Poe's original writings with Griswold's publications of them, scholars have been stunned at the extent of the man's blatant rewrite of Poe's history (and Griswold's role therein).

No rewrite was too outrageous, and no lie was too great, when it came to Griswold's reworking of Poe's private papers, letters and life facts. A few examples make the point:

- Poe had voluntarily decided not to return to the University of Virginia; Griswold had him expelled for bad behavior
- Poe had an honorable discharge from the U.S. Army; Griswold tagged him a deserter
- A "[Memoir of the Author](#)," written by Griswold, contains forged letters to make Griswold look good and changed documents to make Poe look bad.

Because Griswold published Poe's collected literary works, he was able to accomplish what Poe never could during his own lifetime. On the other hand, Griswold's personal interjections and inappropriate changes were repeated, for years, in the works of many other writers.

In "The Raven," a film version of Poe's last days - in which John Cusack portrays the famous poet - a critic named Griswold endures a very bad end (akin to the story of *The Pit and the Pendulum*). The real critic Griswold also met a bad end - of tuberculosis - in August of 1857.

Of Griswold, in 1843, one of Poe's friends prophetically wrote:

*...what will be his fate? ... if he is spoken of hereafter, he will be quoted as the unfaithful servant who abused his trust. (Henry Beck Hirst, Philadelphia Saturday Museum, 28 January 1843.)*

For Griswold, in 2012, what fate awaits him in a fictional film? Pleading for his life, after abusing his trust, he cries-out:

*I'm only a critic!*

To which Poe, himself - were he still alive - might respond: "So be careful not to libel or slander someone!"

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/RUFUS-GRISWOLD-and-POE-S-LEGACY-The-Raven>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/RUFUS-GRISWOLD-and-POE-S-LEGACY-The-Raven>

## Questions 2 Ponder

### Should Public Bashing Go Hand-in-Hand with Anonymity?

Two days after Edgar Allan Poe's death, the New York Tribune carried a widely disseminated obituary of the famous writer. Although it was signed by "Ludwig," Poe's friends suspected Rufus Griswold as the anonymous writer.

Thereafter, Griswold conned Poe's mother-in-law into giving him Poe's papers, including his letters and other works. Griswold then took it upon himself to massively change Poe's writings.

No rewrite was too outrageous, and no lie was too great, when it came to Griswold's reworking of Poe's private papers, letters and life facts. The public believed the lies and grossly altered "facts."

Rufus Griswold intentionally and negatively changed Poe's private letters and documents. What would have caused him to do such a thing?

When people write things anonymously—like Griswold's obituary of Poe—do they tend to be more vicious than if they were identified? Explain your answer.

Do anonymous comments in today's online world bear some of the same trademarks as Griswold's insensitive assessment of Poe? Why, or why not?

If people were required to sign their real names to their online comments, would those comments likely change? How?

### How Careful Should Critics Be in their Criticisms?

During his career as a writer, Edgar Allan Poe earned money as a literary critic. He could be ruthless in his opinions.

At the same time, a man named Rufus Griswold was a critic who was not always widely respected. He earned the disdain of Poe's friends, and many others, when he took over Poe's papers - after Poe died - and then massively edited them to make Poe look bad.

Of Griswold, one of Poe's friends prophetically observed, in 1843: "... what will be his fate? ... if he is spoken of hereafter, he will be quoted as the unfaithful servant who abused his trust."

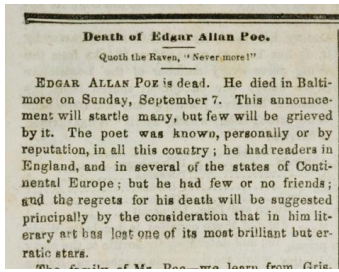
What is your view of critics whose criticism, generally speaking, can help to "sell" or "tank" a book or movie?

Are critics, who review books and films, helpful or not helpful? Explain your answer.

Do you think the public trusts some critics but not others? What explains the differing views?

Do you think that critics ever lean one way, or another, based on their friendship (or lack of friendship) with certain authors or movie makers? If that is true, would such critics be abusive of the public's trust in them? Explain your answer.

## Media Stream

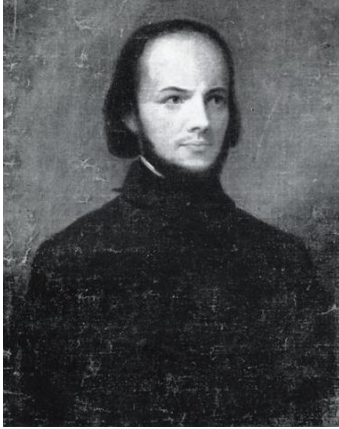


### Obituary of Edgar Allan Poe Written by Rufus Griswold

Poe obituary published in the New York Tribune, written by Rufus Griswold. Online via the University of Virginia Magazine.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Obituary-of-Edgar-Allan-Poe-Written-by-Rufus-Griswold>



### Rufus Griswold

Image of Rufus Griswold from *Rufus Wilmot Griswold: Poe's Literary Executor*, by Joy Bayless (1943). Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Rufus-Griswold>