Edgar Allan Poe: From Shame To Fame

Heroes will always be remembered, but legends will never die. Edgar Allan Poe, an American poet, critic and writer of short stories, profoundly fathered the birth of a new genre, gothic literature, and claimed the title of one of the most famous influencers on American literature; these were accomplished merely by transitioning and mirroring his unfortunate life events into words on paper. In the nineteenth century, Poe’s literary works would unveil the distinct categorization of detective fiction, satire, tales of suspense and a brooding expression towards death and loss, which continues to impact modern day literature. Numerous of these genres noted and portrayed would derive from the implied peculiar mental battle Poe faced that was molded by the eccentric and grim upbringing he had endured most of his life. Poe would experience hardships that would enable him to create an uncanny and dry emotional appeal to his works, enticing the public eye for his bizarre, yet unique writing style.

There is a mass amount of power in the art of influence, which begins at home. Edgar Allan Poe was born on January 19, 1809, in Boston, Massachusetts, to his parents David Poe, Jr. and Elizabeth Arnold, who were professional actors (Edgar Allan Poe). An initial reaction would assume that a child beheld to successful celebrities would have it good, however, Poe substantially had it eerily rough. Before the age of three, Poe’s father had abandoned the family and Poe’s mother suffered an attack by pneumonia, which led
to her death (Edgar Allan Poe). At an early age, Poe experienced the firsthand effects of loss. Separated from his brother, William, and his sister, Rosalie, Edgar Allan Poe was taken in and fostered by John Allan, a wealthy tobacco exporter with his wife, Frances Allan – this is where Poe would incorporate his middle name (Minor). To incorporate another person’s name is also incorporating an identity of theirs within. While growing up, Poe attended schools at a suburb in London and in Richmond, Virginia, gaining praise from a professor, on how he was “ambitious to excel” (R). In 1826, Edgar Allan Poe began his studies at the University of the Virginia, where he excelled academically, but ended up leaving after one semester due to the lack of available funds, deemed by racked up debts (Edgar Allan Poe). Tension began surfacing between Poe and Allan because Poe unfortunately resulted in obtaining a large heap of debt by his excessive gambling, which Allan refused to pay (May). It can be inferred that the initial build up of Poe becoming distraught began with the pressure and friction at that occurred within the relationships he mentally and financially relied on.

Poe’s early career took time to take flight and required some risk-tasking decisions to do so. After estranging from Allan who opposed his chosen career path, Poe made his first literary ventures in 1827 and 1829, publishing *Tamerlame and Other Poems* and *Al Aaraf, Tamerlame and Minor Poems* (R). Poe enlisted himself in the army for a brief term, making the decision to enter West Point Academy with aid from John Allan and after the death of his foster mother, Frances Allan (R). As one could have predicted, Poe and Allan further argued over the means of necessary financial support, leaving Poe in a state of urgency and he propositioned to get expelled; he got what he wished for (May). Following his departure from West Point at the age of twenty-two
years old, Poe went to live with his aunt, Maria Clemm, and her daughter, Virginia and by free-lancing, he published a third volume to his poetry collection in 1831, *Poems by Edgar Allan Poe* (Minor).

A first occupational experience can mold one’s aspirations, create new personal goals and emerge feelings of enmity with disagreements. In 1834, John Allan had passed and Poe was still in a lingering phase of animosity due to his foster father’s remarriage and was not listed in Allan’s will; therefore, he carried on with his life (Edgar Allan Poe). By 1835, Edgar Allan Poe managed to land his first job as an editor with the *Southern Literary Messenger* after winning a short story contest in the *Baltimore Sunday Visiter* (Minor). This position would allow him to get his foot in the door with publishing his own literary works, where his style and ideas could flow freely, like he had always had yearned for. Shortly afterwards, Poe began heavily drinking and ended up marrying his thirteen-year-old cousin, Virginia Clemm, when he was just twenty-six years old (May). Love interests can significantly boost one’s pursuit for prosperity, and in Poe’s case, creative flow for published works. As he wrapped up the end of his career with *The Literary Messenger*, Poe published eighty-three reviews, six poems, four essays and three stories, one of which would gain great popularity: “Arthur Gordon Pym” (Edgar Allan Poe).

As it is human nature, it is also particularly male instinct to aspire to be the caretaker and the “bread winner.” Between 1837 and 1839, Poe published two short stories, one review and his fourth book, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, by freelancing these works (Edgar Allan Poe). In 1839, with a profound new desire to provide financial stability for his aunt and his new wife, Poe attempted at another editing position
with Burton’s Gentlemen Magazine and contributed some of his famous short stories, such as “The Fall of the House of Usher,” “The Journal of Julius Rodman,” “William Wilson,” and “Morella” (Minor). However, Poe quit this position approximately a year later, after failing at his desire to establish his own magazine in spite of the quarrels that occurred within the workplace (May). Also during this time, Poe published his sixth bound work, Tales of Grotesque and Arabesque (Edgar Allan Poe).

It is vividly displayed through the rigorous journey of Poe’s revolving door with careers that he possessed an aggressively domineering work ethic and had an unfeasible desire to successfully publish his own works when he pleased. By 1841, Poe became an editor at Graham Lady’s and Gentleman’s Magazine, which became the most popular magazine in the United States during this time (May). Here, Edgar Allan Poe’s vast popularity would begin booming. However, the time at Graham’s was short-lived, as a mirroring image from the previous predicament, due to a relapse with alcohol consumption, leading to the revival of his dream to publish his own magazine (Minor). In 1843, one of Poe’s most popular efforts, “The Gold Bug,” won a one hundred dollar cash prize and was published in the Dollar Newspaper (Edgar Allan Poe). Poe eventually settled with his next occupational decision, and from 1842 to 1845, he edited and critiqued aggressively for the New York Mirror (Minor).

As commonly portrayed: hard work, perseverance and persistence would eventually pay off. Poe would finally receive the break he had been searching for during 1845, when he landed a lead editor position for the Broadway Journal, where he published his eighth bound of works, Tales, and later, The Raven and Other Poems (Edgar Allan Poe). The publication of “The Raven” would immensely gain Poe the title
of a celebrity that is still carried into modern day literature (May). After the declination of his wife’s health, Poe relinquished his position at the *Broadway Journal* (Edgar Allan Poe). Virginia Poe’s health began dwindling in 1842 and later died in 1847 due to tuberculosis, leaving Edgar Allan Poe in a disastrous, detrimental mental state of distraught and somber (Minor). Death can change an emotionally intuitive human being monumentally and Poe experienced the latter upper scale of this. By 1849, Poe fell to alcoholism and decreased his health entirely, falling to delirium and was in the Washington Hospital for four days, then succumbing to his death on October 7, due to an implication of “mental agony” (Edgar Allan Poe). There was much speculation of the distinct causes to Poe’s death, but would remain a mystery. The last words Edgar Allan Poe that would escape his mouth were “Lord, help my poor soul” (May). This alone gives a vivid description to his unusual psychological battle he had been facing for forty years.

Talent in specific areas comes naturally to those gifted with it, but cannot always come easy. Edgar Allan Poe’s most notable works, chronologically, would be:

*Tamerlame and Other Poems, Al Aaraaf, Tamerlame and Minor Poems,* “Berenice,”

fantasies, science fiction, dark romanticism and ratiocination throughout his literary works.

The notably last greatest short story that Poe had left behind was “The Cask of Amontillado.” Driven by an impeccable ego undermined with self-honor, as outlined in Edgar Allan Poe’s first person narrative, “The Cask of Amontillado,” the audience is immediately indulged into Montresor’s mental whirlpool of hatred and vulgarity. The audience could immediately refer to the mental state Poe must had been enduring to create such a grotesque fictional story. Thrusted into a scene in which Montresor explicitly displays vile perceptions of his perpetrator, Fortunato, who “ventured upon insult” and where “a wrong [would be] undressed,” and vowing the ultimate “retribution” (Poe 1117-1118). Although the insult or verbal crime Montresor claimed Fortunato had committed was not visible, he continues emerging the deathly, merciless promise of revenge and to “punish with impunity” (1118); if he does not, it is implied he will be the lesser person. This stems vaguely embedded envy, that Fortunato was identified as a recurrent, jubilant, prideful millionaire. Brainstorming a successful psychological ploy for the anticipated meeting of his “friend,” Montresor briefly explores the shared common interests between he and Fortunato, such as a fondness for “the Italian vintages” of wine (1118). Strategically, Montresor encounters Fortunato at the carnival, where they engage in a pleasant conversation as compliments and praise were exchanged, stringing along his grand plan. Concluding the mental preparation of the deed, his premeditation, Montresor lures his victim into the trap by an enticing invite to a glass of “Medoc” (1119), in his catacombs. The cask and catacombs Poe incorporates also displays ironic symbolism and an allegory to the chosen title. At the false pretense of a respected
friendship cloaked in manipulation, Fortunato would not adopt suspicion that he attended a graveyard for his own immolation.

Thus, revenge proves its own executioner. Poe’s writing darkens, as Fortunato’s timely death succumbed to “succession of loud and shrill screams” filling the catacombs, Montresor initially “felt satisfied,” resting jovially that his deed had been done (Poe 1122). The protagonist’s reaction to his gruesome accomplishment becomes one of perverted enjoyment, acknowledging that the hairs on his head “erected” (1122). Through this morally distasteful imagery in this gothic literature piece, the reader can deduce that Montresor has no sympathy for his actions, given that he had apprised of this occurrence fifty years later. If one can bear the patience to keep quiet of an inexcusable crime, then it is vividly shown that remorse exists within that individual. In fact, it can also be discerned that Montresor finds his murder justifiable in the sense of a religious connection, hearkening a dead Fortunato’s voice in sync with his own shouting, “For the love of God!” (1122). Alas, religion does not serve as an underlying justification of justice for one’s actions; neither does one’s prideful sense of character, triggered by an insult.

The reader could precisely gather that Edgar Allan Poe’s psychological implications while writing the short story, “The Cask of Amontillado,” are twisted and unstable. While being informed of Poe’s life that consisted of a series of unfortunate events and the patterns of his grim decisions that were gleamed parallel through his literary works, the reader can infer that Poe’s facing deafening challenges through his life, such as the story of loss and death: whether or not it was intentionally taken by nature or a human. This short story could be in relation to the repeated deaths from
tuberculosis Poe was surrounded by with his family, following the course of a mental detachment he had felt from the rest of the world. Poe could be considered as an outcast in his time, belittled for his peculiar and vastly diverse works, but genius in the way he could express them. Death was death, no matter the cost of justice or righteousness, or what or who had committed it. To Edgar Allan Poe, death was a gruesome tragedy that he had become all too familiar with and let the apathetic, weary idea of it settle within him.

The legacy that Edgar Allan Poe has entailed for past and modern day literature is a vastly significant one, as he created a grotesque, dark and bigger-picture-meaning of emotions and how they reflected visibly well on paper. Poe’s works emphasize the abnormal, yet appealing psychological and mental string of spooky, yet relatable thoughts that literature would begin to accept. Edgar Allan Poe had a seemingly wretched childhood and adulthood, where he struggled in every humanly aspect possible for someone that was undermined as genius. These calamities he endured, along with grand confidence, fabricated how and whom Edgar Allan Poe could transpire into his works. Due to this, Edgar Allan Poe triggered newly enticing literary genres, accepted and complimented by various critics and authors. It was renowned as praise for the dark thoughts or emotions one may have or feel and still inspires thousands of writers into today.
Works Cited


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