

Edgar Allan Poe

By Laura Whitehead

January 19, 2018, will mark 209 years since the birth of Edgar Poe in Boston, Massachusetts, to David and Elizabeth Poe. Edgar had an older brother, Henry, and a younger sister Rosalie. After his father abandoned the family and his mother died of tuberculosis, the children were separated and Edgar was taken in by John and Frances Allan. From that point on he was known as Edgar Allan Poe.

Edgar Allan Poe went to the University of Virginia in 1826, but did not finish his course of study because of financial difficulties. Instead, he joined the U.S. Army in 1827, the same year his first book was published. He married his cousin, Virginia, in 1836. She died in 1847 from tuberculosis. Poe did not recover from the grief of her death and struggled with both his health and financial woes until he died two years later.

Edgar Allan Poe died October 7, 1849, at the age of 40. Although there has been conjecture, the exact cause of his death was never determined. While on a trip from Richmond to Philadelphia, something happened to Poe in Baltimore. He was found incoherently roaming the streets and was taken to the hospital. A few days later he died, without ever being able to tell anyone what had happened.

Unfortunately, a fellow writer and adversary, Rufus Griswold, took it upon himself to write Poe's obituary and followed that with a memoir. Both were offensive, comprised of many exaggerations and falsehoods. While friends of Poe attempted to defend him and correct the misinformation, Griswold continued to publish slanderous biographical information on Poe and even forged letters that he claimed Poe had written.

While there are very few who remember Rufus Griswold, the damage that he did to Poe's reputation was long-lasting and pervasive. Part of this is due to his continued and unwavering attacks upon Poe and his work through magazine articles and letters. It is also due to the fact that no one else took it upon themselves to write a more accurate biography. For more than 25 years Griswold's biography of Poe was the standard Edgar Allan Poe biography used by anyone researching or writing about Poe. This only served to further disseminate the lies and cement them in public opinion.

Poe was actually a gifted and intelligent writer who took his craft very seriously. He wrote across many genres, making contributions as a critic, poet, essayist, editor, playwright, lecturer, and fiction writer. While well-known for his stories of horror and the macabre, he is also widely regarded as the father of the modern detective novel and an important pioneer in the writing of science fiction.

His writing in all forms showcases his intellect, and at times his humor. Many of his lesser known works contain delightful gems. For example: "I have great faith in fools - self-confidence my friends will call it."

The library contains several of Edgar Allan Poe's works—perfect for reading by the fire on a cold Nebraska evening. Or, if you would like to learn more about the author himself, you can visit the Columbus Public Library's digital library. The Biography Reference Bank, Biography Reference Center, EBSCOhost, and MasterFILE Complete all contain information about Edgar Allan Poe. As an added bonus, some of the above mentioned sites also contain full text versions of his works.

A captivating and adept writer, Edgar Allan Poe is worthy of more than a cursory thought and can provide some thoroughly enjoyable reading.