



**Edgar Allan Poe**  
**(1809-1849)**

# Primary Works

*Tamerlane and Other Poems*, 1827 (poems); *Al Aaraaf, Tamarlane, and Minor Poems*, 1829 (poems); *Poems: Second Edition*, 1831 (poems); "Ms Found in a Bottle," 1835; *Politan - A Tragedy*, 1835 (play); *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, 1838 (novel); *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*. 2 vols., 1840 (stories); *The Prose Romances*, 1843 (stories); *Tales*, 1845 (stories); *The Raven and Other Poems*, 1845 (poems); *Eureka: An Essay on the Material and Spiritual Universe*, 1848 (criticism).

# Major Themes

1. Love - usually of a mourning man for his deceased beloved.
2. Pride - physical and intellectual.
3. Beauty - of a young woman either dying or dead.
4. Death - a source of horror.

## Influence of Poe

1. Influenced writers of split personality.
2. Influenced literary criticism.
3. Influenced writers dealing with the disintegration of personality.

# Poe's Four Types of Short Stories

1. Arabesque - strange; use of the supernatural; symbolic fantasies of the human condition; (Example - "The Fall of the House of Usher").
2. Grotesque - heightening of one aspect of a character (Example - "The Man Who Was Used Up").

# Poe's Four Types of Short Stories

3. Ratiocinative - detective fiction  
(Example "The Purloined Letter").

4. Descriptive (Example - "The  
Landscape Garden").

# Poe's Aesthetic Theory of Effect

1. "Unity of effect or impression" is of primary importance; the most effective story is one that can be read at a single sitting.
2. The short story writer should deliberately subordinate everything in the story - characters, incidents, style, and tone - to bringing out of a single, preconceived effect.
3. The prose tale may be made a vehicle for a great variety of these effects than even the short poem.



## -- design vs effect

- Poe's main concern focused upon matters of design, proportion and composition; his use of *effect* meant the impact which a short work would make upon a reader. In reviewing Hawthorne's *Twice Told Tales*, he pointed out the writer's obligation and reward: "If his very initial sentence tend not to be the outbringing of this effect, then he has failed in his first step."



# Theory of composition

- In the whole composition there should be no word written, of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one pre-established design. And by such means, with such care and skill, a picture is at length painted which leaves in the mind of him who contemplates it with a kindred art, a sense of the fullest satisfaction."

# Paradoxes in Poe

1. His life - basically insecure and highly emotional, but his writing is structured.
2. He reflects the paradoxical time - there was the apocalyptic sense of doom combined with the romantic innocence of childhood.
3. Poe was a romantic writer, but he emphasized rationality.
4. He presents realistic details in gothic settings.
5. There is a paradox in Poe's critical thinking - he believed in individual creativity but advocated classical norms - the ideal length of a poem, suggested Poe, is 100 lines.

# Selected Readings

- P 700 “To Helen”
- P 701 “The Raven” notice the sound scheme of the poem “Nevermore”
- P 707 “Annabel Lee” sound and sense
- pp. 700-708 *The Purloined Letter* 734-47 (read next wk)
- *The Philosophy of Composition* 752-60

# Websites

- [http://www.poetryloverspage.com/poets/poe/poe\\_ind.html](http://www.poetryloverspage.com/poets/poe/poe_ind.html) Poe's Poems
- <http://www.underthesun.cc/Classics/Poe/> About Edgar Allan Poe