

Edgar a. poe



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Informative Text/ EAP Essay Edgar Allen Poe was well known for his dark and mysterious writing, but what caused his abrupt death? How he died is very controversial, because there is little evidence to support any theory. Several people suggest that he died either of rabies, exposure, or alcohol abuse.

Although Poe's death remains in doubt, I believe that several factors led up to the writer falling ill.

I have gathered from the biography excerpt renamed "Poe's Final Days" by Kenneth Silverman, the article "Poe's Death is Rewritten as Case of Rabies, Not Telltale Alcohol", with the letter to the editor in response published in the New York Times, that Edgar Allen Poe died of symptoms of alcoholism, that escalated from stress. In the biography "Poe's Final Days" by Kenneth Silverman, the author reveals accounts during the end of Edgar Allen Poe's life that point towards the idea of alcoholism being the killer. Silverman traces back to before Poe fell ill, over his hospital stay, and during his rapid death.

Over this time period, the writer faced great stress like parting from his wife. He set for Baltimore soon after, where he was found abusing alcohol. The author states "Poe seemed to Walker 'rather the worse for wear' and 'in great distress.' Apparently flooded with drink, he may have also have been ill from exposure" (Silverman, 125). This suggests that Poe did not handle what he was going through in a healthy way. He was drinking to cope with his problems. The weather in Baltimore played a key role in Poe's last few days as well.

Silverman explains "Winds and soaking rains the day before had sent Baltimoreans prematurely hunting up overcoats and seeking charcoal fires

for warmth” (Silverman, 125). This information shows that Poe’s already weak body from alcoholism was made even feebler due to the harsh conditions. His immune system likely could not handle the stress, so it may have opened up his body to a sickness, or he may have just become delirious from not taking care of himself. His impaired judgment is noted within this excerpt, as he was seen wearing someone else’s clothes.

Poe was reported delirious in several accounts, and he may have been too drunk to care about protecting himself during the storm. Silverman states, “ According to Moran, one of his senior physicians diagnosed Poe’s condition as encephalitis, a brain inflammation, brought on by “ exposure. ” This explanation is consistent with the prematurely wintry weather at the time, with Snodgrass’s account of Poe’s partly clad condition, and with Elmira Shelton’s recollection that on leaving Richmond Poe already had a fever” (Silverman, 129).

Kenneth Silverman is not entirely credible; he is only a secondary source that provides passages of primary sources. However, this is the most convincing article, because it explains why he made poor decisions and how they led up to him dying. The article “ Poe’s Death is rewritten as Case of Rabies, Not Telltale Alcohol” from the New York Times, September 15, 1996, suggests that Poe did not die drunk and offers a new theory of rabies as the killer. This new study was developed during a medical conference and cardiologist Dr. Benitez believes Poe stopped drinking long before dying.

It states, “ In the brief period when he was calm and awake, Poe refused alcohol and could drink water only with great difficulty...Poe ‘ had all the features of encephalitic rabies’ said Henry Wilde” (131). These ideas are

supported with evidence, however they are unreliable sources. Henry Wilde and Dr. Benitez never treated Poe. Wilde has experience with rabies, but he never actually saw Poe's symptoms. They are secondary sources and are not valid. They reviewed Poe's case but never really treated Poe, the article tells how the legend of Poe dying in a gutter drunk was likely made up by his doctor.

The other information may also be untrustworthy that they provide about rabies. The article states, " There is no evidence that a rabid animal had bitten Poe" (131). This directly says that this theory cannot be entirely true. Poe could have been delirious and confused for several reasons, not specifically rabies. There are more accounts and reports of Poe being an alcoholic, than any sign of rabies. He may have refused alcohol a few times, but not before he was in the hospital. Mr. Jerome explains, " The writer was so sensitive to alcohol that a glass of wine would make him violently ill for days.

Poe may have had problems as a younger man..." (132) Mr. Jerome was a museum curator researching Poe, who earlier explained that most theories offered no proof. Jerome never directly met Poe and he is basing his theory off of accounts that may have been skewed over time. I believe this article is not trustworthy, because the sources are not valid. The letter to the editor " If only Poe Had Succeeded When He Said Nevermore to Drink" by Burton Pollin from The New York Times, September 23, 1996, disputes Dr. Benitez's previous theory on rabies killing Edgar Allen Poe.

Pollin uncovers weaknesses in this theory and supports alcohol abuse as the main cause of death. Although Poe attempted to recover from alcoholism, he

never succeeded. The theory for rabies has no proof to support that Poe died from it; all but Benitez believes the cause of death was alcohol. Pollin reveals, “ Dr. Benitez admits the primary weakness of his theory- lack of evidence of a bite or scratch...rabies was well known as to causes and symptoms... could affect an entire limb or side of the body. How could Moran and his staff ignore such symptoms in a patient? (Pollin, 134). No clues suggest the theory of rabies and relatives of Poe even disagree with Dr. Benitez. Symptoms that significant are hard to ignore, so it is unlikely that rabies was the problem. Poe likely could not get away with such symptoms even if he wanted to. He was examined in the hospital, so if anything else were wrong with him it would have been reported. Another problem with this case is that most medical records and reports have been lost. Rabies cannot go unnoticed; Poe was not even around any animals that were infected.

Pollin states, “ Guiltless was the pet Caterina, who, uninfected and showed no sign of rabies, died of starvation when deserted by Clemm after Poe’s death” (Pollin, 134). Poe’s cat was innocent, and cannot be blamed for giving him rabies. Most accounts over Poe’s last few days were about him drunk or delirious. This is the most likely cause, because it is backed with the most evidence. Pollin states, “ Poe was found outside a Baltimore saloon in an alcoholic stupor on October 3, 1849, and died four days later. Dr. John J.

Moran’s account of his final days is given in a letter to Poe’s aunt and mother-in-law, Maria Clemm, a New York Herald article in 1875, and a book by Moran in 1885. Supplementary accounts of Poe’s alcoholic condition came from Joseph Walker... Dr. Snodgrass, and editor well known to Poe; and two of Poe’s relatives. None of these confirm Dr. Benitez’s statement that ‘ Poe

was not drunk’” (Pollin, 133). A great amount of evidence can support alcoholism as the true cause. Only one account suggests rabies. Alcohol was a big part of Poe’s past; it showed up through letters and was a constant obstacle for him.

This article is slightly biased and comes across as persuasive in tone. It is a secondary source, but addresses many primary sources. The author is very opinionated and believed that Poe’s self-destructive behavior should not be concealed. This article is credible and I agree with its argument. Edgar Allen Poe led a very mysterious life; even how he died is still in doubt. It is known that he was delirious, and had impaired judgment prior to staying in a hospital and suddenly dying. There are many disputed theories about how Poe specifically died.

The biography excerpt “ Poe’s Final Days” by Kenneth Silverman explains how weather and stress increased symptoms of alcoholism and caused Poe to die of poor decisions. He was too drunk to care, and faced stress that he could no longer handle. The New York Times article “ Poe’s Death is rewritten as Case of Rabies, Not Telltale Alcohol” explains Dr. Benitez’s new theory developed during a medical conference suggesting Poe died of rabies. It reveals how he was said to avoid alcohol despite a drunk past and was wrongly accused of alcoholism.

The letter to the editor response, “ If Only Poe Had Succeeded When He Said Nevermore To Drink” by Burton Pollin argues the idea of Poe dying of rabies and supports the traditional theory of Poe dying from alcoholism. Pollin explains how much more evidence is present about Poe’s struggle with abusing alcohol, and no animals could have infected Poe. I believe that Edgar

Allen Poe died of the stress from alcohol abuse and exposure. He made poor health decisions, and stopped caring about his well being. Poe's death remains as dark and mysterious as his stories.