

Edgar allan poe essay

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**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Writers are like any other type of artist; their lives are reflected in their work. Edgar Allan Poe is called the “ master of the macabre” because of the constant perusal of the dark and sad depths of life that he wrote about. He seemed to see life from such a sad and miserable point of view that it could not help but be mirrored in his writings. In comparison to the ease and convenience of today, life in the early 19th century in the United States was a terrific ordeal any way but for some it was worse than others, and a prime example was Edgar Allan Poe. Going back to his very beginnings, it is easy to tell where his talent came from. His father, David Poe Jr. , was the disappointing son of Revolutionary War Hero. General David Poe Sr.

was famed for his dedication to his country and his expertise at war, but his eldest son was a dreamer. David Poe eventually ran away from what he considered a suffocating atmosphere in his father’s house, and joined a troupe of actors to pursue his own chosen following, the art of theatre. However, David Poe did not excel at acting but was for the most part considered mediocre; sincere but mechanical and thus not able to place the proper passion into his work. Perhaps it came from having his natural creativity stymied while growing up or maybe because he was given no formal training in theatre, so his acting failed to draw much public acclaim. Edgar’s mother, Elizabeth Arnold Hopkins, was the daughter of a fairly renowned actress of the time.

Mrs. Arnold had raised her daughter in the theatre and the young woman seemed to be a natural. Her reviews read well and though not as strong a personality as her mother, she did have a fire and passion. She met David Poe while in performance together and after a brief courtship after having

been recently widowed, Elizabeth Hopkins became Elizabeth Poe. What follows in the first five years of Edgar Allan Poe's life is a stamp of a life that he was to fall in and out of in intermitted succession over the course of his life, poverty, uncertainty and destitution. He was the second of three children born to the Poes. His father dropped somewhere off into obscurity shortly after the third child, Rosalie's birth and finally died of consumption in 1810 but the mother continued on until she finally succumbed to a fatal disease and died. Her life was summed in the following quote.

“ The tinsel crown, the gauze, the flash of the paste jewels, the robes and the red shoes, went into the chest of faded things. Harlequin must seek a new Columbine before the footlights should flare up again; and there, left over from the comedy, were three children, the eldest five years old, all helpless and in want. Woodberry 16)” Elizabeth had taken refuge during these hard times with some of her friends from the theatre, including the Greens and the Ushers .

Mrs. Poe had also come under the charitable attention of some families in Richmond, Virginia where she had brought her family before her death. As the mother was a widow and at that point there seemed to be no close relatives, the children were divided among certain families and Edgar was placed with the Allan family.

He was promptly given their surname, changing it to Edgar Allan and dropping the Poe. A small child, orphaned and destitute, beginning of a lifetime fraught with despair and trouble and perhaps a forewarning of what was yet to come. “ Was there ever a life sadder than Edgar Allan Poe's? Of

course his sadness is part of the famous literary mythology now associated with his work and life; in so many ways Poe was the king of pain, the paragon of the lonely heart of lost love, the archetypical Romantic.

(Magistrale 1)” Summing up a human being’s life as sad seems to be such a radical statement in itself. While it was often the case that many of the great Masters suffered from poverty, poor recognition and emotional problems during their lifetimes, it does not necessarily mean that a person has to starve in order to create beautiful work or to be recognized for their genius. “ The horrific themes in Poe’s work may have been the result of the tough times and struggles he was enduring.

” “ There were a lot of things going on in his life at that time,” Mr. Jerome says, “ He was starving,...he applied for a teaching position and as a brick layer but did not get either job. He was a starving writer. He didn’t know what the public wanted so he experimented with a lot of things. (“ Cloaked-Visitor, like Raven” M14)” Or there was another opinion offered in this quote.

“ While other men engaged in “ meaningful work” by selling, farming, or laboring with products and profits, the Romantic artist’s sole purpose was to create the “ Beautiful,” and he was not only severely misunderstood by those immersed in the daily dynamics of capitalism, he likewise came to savor both the scorn and rejection of the majority. (Magistrale 1)” So what was Edgar Allan Poe? A victim of a cruel society or a man who drew from his own experiences and wrote as he chose and not as the public dictated; as to point, the latter statement would be more sensible. Poe was never given an easy life, though he did not spend his whole life without knowing some

critical acclaim. His works were published for a time and he held a position as a lecturer at different periods but for the most part, his life seems steeped in sorrow and bad habits. He began with a rocky family foundation by having lost both of his parents at such a young age and then finding himself placed in a foster home to be raised by the Allan family. Though not wealthy, the Allans were affluent and opened many doors to Edgar. He was transported from America to England when his foster father took his family there to open a new branch.

Edgar was sent away to a stoic but accomplished school in which he thrived. “ During the five years of Allan’s English sojourn, Poe attended two different boarding schools, the first in Chelsea, run by the Misses Dubourg, and the second in the outlying village of Stoke Newington, operated by the Reverend Bransby. Twenty years later Poe would base his famous tale “ William Wilson” on haunting childhood memories of the latter school.

Kennedy 20)” This school would also later influence his writings by his discovery of Shakespeare and other English authors, including his fascination with a monthly periodical entitled Blackwood’s. He later wrote “ How to Publish a Blackwood Article. ” His contact with the old European mansions and the darkness of the school gave him inspiration in his writing of “ Ligeia” and the “ Fall of the House of Usher. ” He was a handsome boy, quick, sharp and eager to please.

He enjoyed attention and his foster parents doted on him. When they returned to America and to Richmond, Edgar was sent to another school to continue his education and build a foundation for his future. Some of his

acting blood began to arise and he joined a small play group, but his words were already rising and he had begun to pen some very promising prose. It was quickly coming into sight that Edgar was something of a child prodigy.

Yet, that fact did little to help him outrun his past as is shown in the following quote. “ But neither his facile scholarship, nor his aptness in quoting Latin hexameters and stringing English rhymes, nor his fame in the sports, made him the favorite of the school. His aristocratic mates, it is said by one of themselves, remembered that he was sprung from the poor actors, and were averse to his leadership.

(Woodberry 26)” Edgar Allan Poe would go on to achieve more success in his youth but it was if the black cloud that had hovered over him from birth would stay continuously with him. He was extremely fond of his foster mother because it was said that she reminded him of his own mother, which he carried a portrait of in a locket. Having returned to the United States at the age of eleven and entered into the school that still judged him by his birth; the young boy began to act out. When his foster father wanted to see if Edgar’s first volumes of poetry, he was counseled by the proprietor of the school, Joseph H. Clarke that the publication might “ go to the boy’s head”, a setback that must have rankled the young boy as the poetry had become his passion. Poe also excelled at sports and joined a military group within the school, perhaps, recalling to himself his paternal grandfather’s illustrious military career.

Being highly intelligent and emotional, Poe pushed himself to achieve the top of what he had chosen to pursue. His impetuosity and willfulness was

beginning to cause strife between himself and his foster father. He was especially impressed with the Marquis de Lafayette. “ When a Revolutionary War hero, the Marquis de Lafayette, visited Richmond in 1824, young Poe and fellow members of the Morgan Junior Riflemen formed part of the honor guard. In the throes of adolescence, though, Poe clashed increasingly with John Allen, who complained that his foster son felt “ not a Spark of affection for nor a particle of gratitude. ” (PL, 51, (Kennedy 22) Poe was also discovering the first pangs of love and the opposite sex. He wrote several love poems to many different girls from Richmond but he seemed to have a particularly strong affection for an older woman, Jane Stith Stanard, the mother of one of his friends. When Mrs.

Stanard eventually became deranged and later died, Poe visited her grave religiously and it is said that his lyrical poem, “ To Helen ” was inspired by her. He came to know his first taste of heartbroken love. Poe was also becoming aware of his foster father’s financial troubles which seemed to aggravate the strain even more between Mr. Allan and Poe, whom Allan had never officially adopted, though Poe was known at that time as Edgar Allan. A sudden bequeath of three large plantations to Allan from an uncle rectified Allan’s financial troubles but he and his foster son continued to be at odds with each other, due to Poe’s unwillingness to compromise his viewpoints and the same on the elder Allan’s part as well. It was during this time that Poe met the first real infatuation with a young girl his own age. It also came the time when he met the first member of his birth family, his older brother, Henry.

Henry discovered that Edgar was in love with a fifteen year old named Sarah Elmira Royster, to whom Edgar had written several poems and also had decided to marry when he returned from college. Edgar was beginning to fancy himself as a wealthy young Southern gentleman due to his foster father's newly acquired wealth. The country was now going through a great growing period and a young man's future could look bright and promising. Poe saw all kinds of writing opportunities for an educated man so he was most pleased when he was sent to the University of Virginia with his foster father's blessings. Poe saw him finally clearing the stigma of poverty and ill educated like his brother, Henry as his education continued to advance.

“ When Poe entered the University of Virginia on Valentine's Day, 1826, he arrived bearing John Allan's high expectations but precious little of his ample fortune. During his first semester the young scholar pursued language studies exclusively—in Greek, Latin, French, Spanish, and Italian. The university established by President Jefferson was still under construction, and the student body then consisted of a rowdy, ill-mannered contingent. (Kennedy 23) They indulged in fighting and dueling which appealed to Poe's more rambunctious nature and would later be part of the basis for a tale entitled “ Mystification”. With all of this carousing and violent behavior, Poe discovered the pleasure of alcohol. It would prove to be one of his life's undoing.

He was also inclined to sketching and hiking where he later portrayed in “ A Tale of the Ragged Mountains”. It was truly becoming evident that even at his young age, his life experiences were beginning to reflect in his work.

What follows from this point are many years of ups and downs. Allan would recommend his foster son for school or military appointments but would not aid Poe during these periods. John Allan thoroughly disapproved of most of Edgar Allan Poe's reading and personal pursuits and he made himself adamantly clear on that point.

Having to flee the University of Virginia, Poe enlisted in the army, served on a naval vessel, and continuously appealed to his foster father for help, which was never coming. The estranged foster father and son grew farther and farther apart, especially after John Allan remarried after his first wife's death and was now the father of three natural children of his own. He was determined to disown Poe. Poe began to travel and in his travels, he encountered his brother, Henry once again who was now a confirmed drunk.

He also sought out his paternal grandmother, whom he found lodging with. " By early May, however, Poe had migrated to Baltimore, where he found shelter with his grandmother, Mrs. David Poe, and his aunt, Maria Poe Clemm.

Once again reunited with Henry, a sailor-poet given to alcohol and now wracked by consumption, Poe witnessed the shocking decline of his sibling. (Kennedy 29)He continuously wrote and was published but the money that came from them was so small or basically nothing at all. This did nothing but increase Poe's dark moods and his fondness for alcohol. " OF my country and of my family I have little to say. Ill usage and length of years have driven me from the one, and estranged me from the other. Hereditary wealth afforded me an education of no common order, and a contemplative turn of mind

enabled me to methodize the stores which early study diligently garnered up.

(Poe 123)” A quote from his story, “ MS Found in a Bottle”, which seems contradictory to his own life but still bears a resemblance to some of the way, he chose to pursue things. He never could seem to maintain gainful employment. “ His utter impoverishment continued for nearly three more years. He saw a few poems appear in the Saturday Visitor in 1833 and that spring removed with Mrs.

Poe, Mrs. Clemm (his aunt) and Virginia (his cousin who later become his wife) to a tiny brick rowhouse on Amity Street. (Kennedy 31) “ Edgar Allan Poe wrote of loss and sorrow, death and haunting.

He did some of that writing in the garrett of a Baltimore row house.

Baltimore also is where the poet mysteriously died in 1849 at age 40. Poe’s life – riddled with alcoholism, poverty and illness – lives on in works such as “ The Raven” and “ Annabel Lee.

” True fans can get a glimpse of how he lived by visiting the Edgar Allan Poe House and Museum. (“ Visit to Poe House;” D04)” Poe did maintain gainful employment for a number of years with the magazine, the Southern Literary Messenger, and its founder, Thomas W. White.

Poe grew with this periodical and became well known as the editor of it through circulatory literary professionals. He was able to write freely and also support his aunt and his wife, Virginia in on and off style for a number of years. Poe had married Virginia when she was thirteen and he supposedly

kept it a platonic relationship until she came of age. She lived until 1837 when she died of tuberculosis and her death found Poe once again unemployed and drunk most of the time.

With a bright start, Edgar Allan Poe could have perhaps a better life than he did but as often with geniuses, he was besieged with deep mood swings and a weakness to self-indulgence. He continued to slip down hill until he made a random visit to Baltimore and after a drunken spree; he collapsed into a gutter and died in a hospital a few days later. It is ironic that Poe's most famous work, "The Raven" is so symbolic of his life as stated in the following quote. "Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered weak and weary, Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore – While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping, As of some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door. " 'Tis some visitor," I muttered, "tapping at my chamber door – Only this and nothing more.

" (Edgar Allen Poe, 1809-1849)