

EDGARD ALLAN POE • *THE BLACK CAT*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

EDGARD ALLAN POE

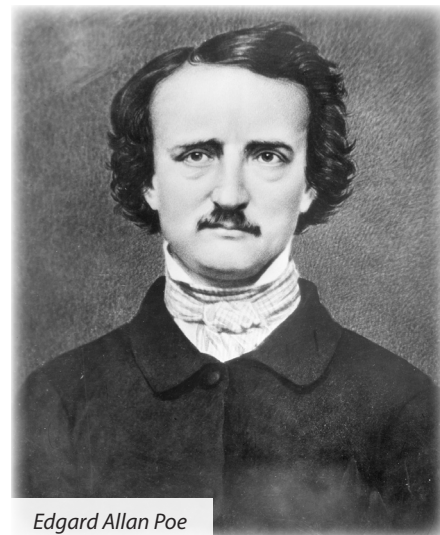
Poet, journalist, literary critic and writer of long tales and short stories, Edgar Poe was born in Boston in 1809. When he was only two, his mother died and he was then brought up by the Allans, tobacco merchants who gave him a good education.

Although he was a good student, he liked **gambling** and for this reason he was sent away by his **foster father** with no money. He left his studies and tried a military career but was expelled from West Point Military Academy. Meanwhile, he had already published two volumes of poetry.

In 1832 he went to live with his aunt in Baltimore and decided to write short stories and won a prize for *MS Found in a Bottle*. In 1835 he moved to Richmond, Virginia, to edit the *Southern Literary Messenger* and the following year sent for his cousins who were in financial difficulties. When he was 27, he married his cousin Virginia who was only 13. Later, he moved to Philadelphia and New York, still working as an editor.

In 1847 his wife died, leaving him sad and **addicted** to alcohol, which had terrible effects on him. While travelling North, he was found unconscious in Baltimore and died three days later on 7th October 1849. His death is still a mystery.

His most famous poem is *The Raven*, while the most famous short stories are *The Pit and the Pendulum*, *The Black Cat* and *The Masque of the Red Death*. His most famous long tale is *The Murders of the Rue Morgue*.



Edgard Allan Poe



ABOUT THE SHORT STORY

THE BLACK CAT

The story, written in 1843, is about a man who says that, from an early age, he has always loved animals. He and his wife have many pets, including a large black cat named Pluto. The mutual friendship between Pluto and the man lasts for years until the man becomes an **alcoholic** and starts **mistreating** his wife and Pluto.

When Pluto attacks him in self-defence one night, the man seizes the cat in a fury and takes out one of its eyes from the socket. Later, he hangs the poor pet. That night, his house is mysteriously set on fire, and, on the only surviving wall, the figure of a gigantic cat appears.

Later, the man finds a cat in a tavern. It is like Pluto apart from a large white patch on its chest. He takes it home but is afraid. One day, the man takes an **axe** to kill the cat, but is stopped by his wife. In a fury, he kills the woman and hides her body.

When the police come to investigate, they hear a sound from behind a wall and find the woman's **corpse** and the cat on her head.

addicted: *dipendente (da alcol, droghe, ecc.)*
alcoholic: *alcolizzato*

axe: *accetta*
corpse: *cadavere*
foster father: *padre adottivo*

gambling: *gioco d'azzardo*
to mistreat: *maltrattare*

THE TEXT

THE STORY OF PLUTO

From my infancy I was noted for the docility and humanity of my disposition. (...) I was especially fond of animals and was indulged by my parents with a great variety of pets. With these I spent most of my time, and never was so happy as when feeding or caressing them. This peculiarity of character grew with my growth, and, in manhood, I derived from it one of my principal sources of pleasure. (...) I married early, and was happy to find in my wife a disposition non uncongential with my own. Observing my partiality for domestic pets, she lost no opportunity of procuring those of the most agreeable kind. We had birds, gold fish, a fine dog, rabbits, a small monkey, and a cat.

This latter was a remarkably large and beautiful animal, entirely black, and sagacious to an astonishing degree. In speaking of his intelligence, my wife, who at heart was not a little tinctured with superstition, made frequent allusions to the ancient popular notion, which regarded all black cats as witches in disguise. Not that she was ever serious upon this point – and I mention the matter at all for no better reason than that it happens, just now, to be remembered. Pluto – this was the cat's name – was my favorite pet and playmate. I alone fed him, and he attended me wherever I went about the house. It was even with difficulty that I could prevent him from following me through the streets. Our friendship lasted, in this manner, for several years, during which my general temperament and character (...) experienced a radical alteration for the worse. I grew, day by day, more moody, more irritable, more regardless of the feelings of others. I suffered myself to use intemperate language to my wife. At length, I even offered her personal violence. My pets, of course, were made to feel the change in my disposition. I not only neglected, but ill-used them.

For Pluto, however, I still retained sufficient regard to restrain me from maltreating him, as I made no scruple of maltreating the rabbits, the monkey, or even the dog, when, by accident, or through affection, they came in my way. But my disease grew upon me – for what disease is like Alcohol! (...) Even Pluto began to experience the effect of

my ill temper. One night, returning home, much intoxicated, from one of my haunts about town, I fancied that the cat avoided my presence. I seized him; when, in his fright at my violence, he inflicted a slight wound upon my hand with his teeth. The fury of a demon instantly possessed me. I knew myself no longer. My original soul seemed, at once, to take its flight from my body. (...) I took from my waistcoat pocket a penknife, opened it, grasped the poor beast by the throat, and deliberately cut one of its eyes from the socket. (...)

In the meantime the cat slowly recovered. The socket of the lost eye presented, it is true, a frightful appearance, but he no longer appeared to suffer any pain. He went about the house as usual, but, as might be expected, fled in extreme terror at my approach. I had so much of my old heart left, as to be at first grieved by this evident dislike on the part of a creature which had once so loved me. But this feeling soon gave place to irritation. And then came, as if to my final and irrevocable overthrow, the spirit of PERVERSENESS. (...) This spirit of perverseness, I say, came to my final overthrow. (...) One morning, in cold blood, I slipped a noose about its neck and hung it to the limb of a tree; hung it with the tears streaming from my eyes, and with the bitterest remorse at my heart; hung it because I knew that it had loved me, and because I felt it had given me no reason to offence; hung it because I knew that in so doing I was committing a sin – a deadly sin that would so jeopardize my immortal soul as to place it – if such a thing were possible – even beyond the reach of the infinite mercy of the Most Merciful and Most Terrible God.

to fancy: *immaginare*
to grieve: *addolorarsi*
haunt: *luogo di ritrovo*
in disguise: *travestito*
to ill-use: *maltrattare*
to indulge: *compiacere*
intemperate:
intemperante
to jeopardize:
compromettere
limb: *grosso ramo*
manhood: *età adulta*
mercy: *grazia*

to neglect: *trascurare*
noose: *cappio*
overthrow: *eccesso*
partiality: *preferenza*
playmate: *compagno di giochi*
to restrain: *contenersi*
to slip: *far scorrere*
socket: *orbita*
tinctured: *toccato*
waistcoat: *panciotto, gilet*
wound: *ferita*

COMPREHENSION

- 1** Read the first part of the text and complete the table with information on the narrator and Pluto.

The narrator	Pluto
Interests:	Physical appearance:
Free time activities:	Relationship with the narrator:
Favourite pet and his relationship with it:	
His opinion of his wife:	Relationship with the narrator's wife:

- 2** Read the whole text and answer the questions.

1. What happens to the narrator at the end of the first part of the text?
2. What is the cause of that?
3. What happens to Pluto?

ANALYSIS

- 3** Answer the questions.

1. Is the story told by a first- or third-person narrator?
2. Is the narrator reliable? Why/why not?
3. What words are used by the narrator to describe his new behaviour? What are the causes?
Underline the relevant parts of the text.
4. How does the narrator define the killing of the cat? What are the consequences?
5. Why does the writer refer to Pluto as "him" in the first part of the text, while in the end he uses "it"?
6. Why does the writer repeat the expression "I hung it because...?"

DISCUSSION

- 4** **PAIR WORK** In this text Poe deals with the consequences of alcohol addiction. Answer the questions.

- Do you think that alcohol addiction can lead to violence and even murder?
- What are the consequences on the addict?
- Does his perception of the external world change? And the inner self?