

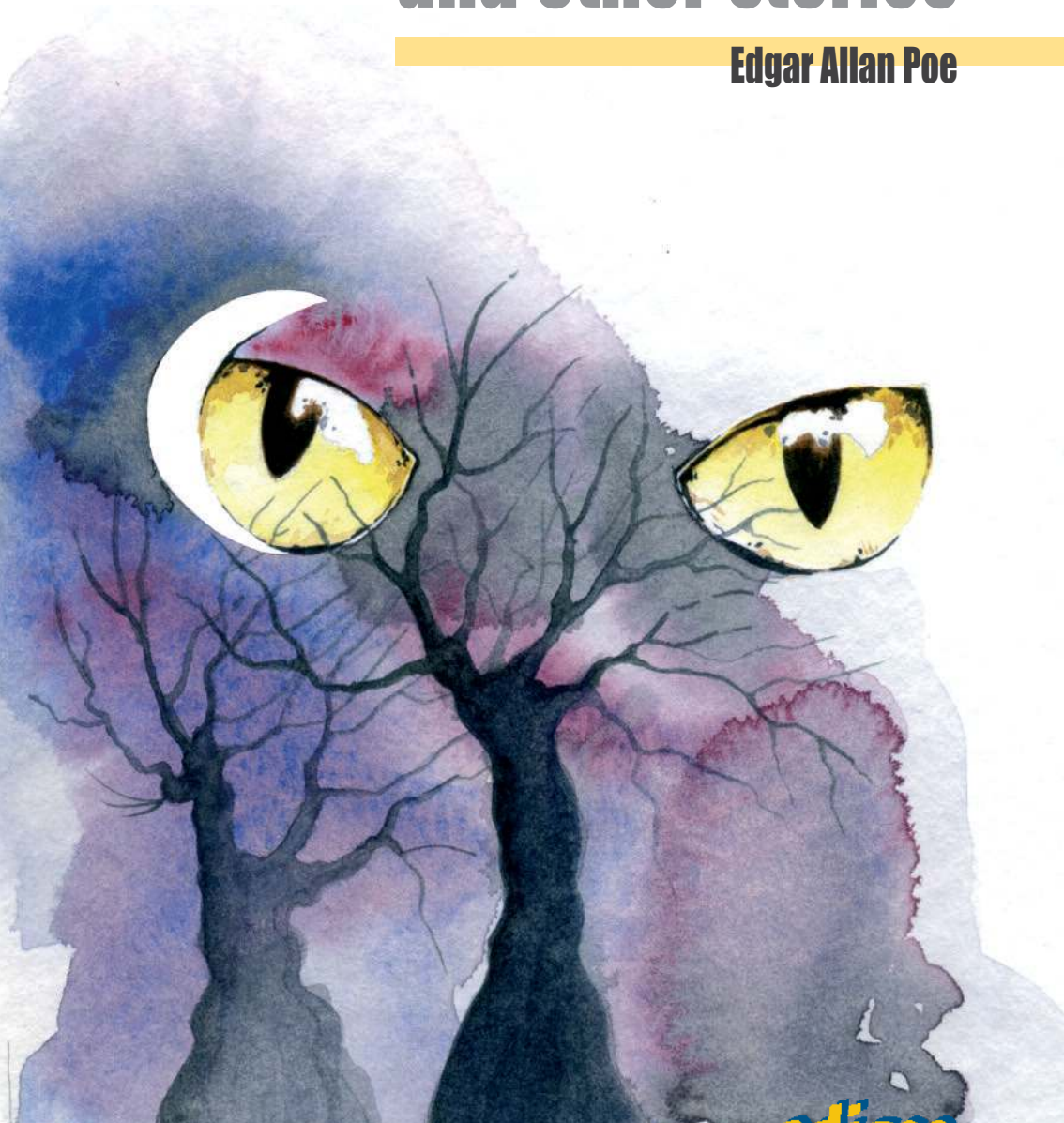


pre-intermediate

R A I N B O W S

The Black Cat and other stories

Edgar Allan Poe



edisco



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Edgar Allan Poe

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The Black Cat and other stories

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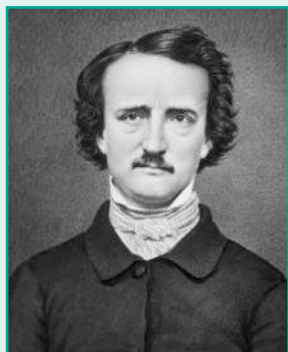
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The author

Edgar Allan Poe



Life. Edgar Poe was born on 19th January 1809, in Boston, Massachusetts, U.S.A. where his mother, Elizabeth Arnold Poe, worked as an actress. He was the grandson of Baltimore Revolutionary War patriot, David Poe Sr. His father disappeared a short time after his birth and his mother died of tuberculosis when he was only two. Fortunately, Edgar was brought up by the Allans, who lived in Richmond, West Virginia. Even though they never adopted him, he took their surname.

John Allan was a tobacco merchant and was able to give him a good education. Edgar attended school in America and in England and then entered the University of Virginia. He soon proved to be a good student, showed a deep interest in literature and became a member of the *Jefferson Literary Society*. Unfortunately, because of his gambling debts¹, he quarrelled² with his foster father³ and was sent away from the family with no money. He had to leave his studies, went to Boston and in 1827 entered the army under the name of Edgar A. Perry. When Mrs Allan was dying, there was some sort of reconciliation and his foster father started helping him financially again. That allowed him to leave the army after serving in it for two years and enter West Point Military Academy. He was expelled⁴ from it the following year, though.

Meanwhile, he published two volumes of poetry in Boston. When John Allan remarried and had a son, he sent Edgar no more money.

In 1832 Poe went to Baltimore, Maryland, where he lived with his widowed aunt, Maria Poe Clemm, who had rented⁵ a house at 3 Amity Street, later been transformed into a museum. It was then that Poe, so far a poet, decided to write short stories and won the \$50 prize offered by a Baltimore newspaper for best short story. The winning story was called *MS Found in a Bottle*. Another volume of poetry was published in 1832 and five of his prose tales appeared in *The Philadelphia Saturday Courier*.

1. *gambling debts*: money you lose when you risk it in the hope of winning more.
2. *quarrelled*: had an argument.
3. *foster father*: person that looks after

- a child as if he were his/her real father.
4. *expelled*: sent away.
5. *rented*: paid a monthly sum of money to live in a house which was not his.

Poe lived in Baltimore until 1835, then he moved to Richmond, Virginia, to edit⁶ the *Southern Literary Messenger*. In 1836 he sent for⁷ Maria and Virginia Clemm, who were in financial difficulties. He and Virginia got married when he was 27 and she was only 13. Poe was always devoted to his wife.

In 1838 his book *Arthur Gordon Pym* was published. In the same year he moved to Philadelphia, where he lived until 1844. We have little information about that period. We know that he was an editor of *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine* from July 1839 to June 1840, and of *Graham's Magazine* from April 1841 to May 1842.

Those were difficult years: it was very hard for him to earn a living⁸ for his three-member family. In April 1844, Poe went to New York where he worked for the *New York Evening Mirror*. Meanwhile other poems and tales were published. He also joined C. F. Briggs to publish *The Broadway Journal*.

The year 1846 was tragic: *The Broadway Journal* failed, and Virginia became very ill. Poe rented a little cottage at Fordham, where he lived for three years. In 1847 his wife died, leaving him sad and addicted to⁹ alcohol, whose effects were terrible on him. He took an interest in numerous women and decided to marry his first love, Mrs Sarah Elmira Shelton, at that time a widow. He never married her, though, as he was found unconscious in Baltimore, while he was travelling north. He died after three days, on Sunday, 7th October 1849, but the circumstances of his death remain a mystery. He was buried¹⁰ in the graveyard¹¹ of Westminster Presbyterian Church in Baltimore.

Works. Poe was a poet, a journalist, a literary critic, a writer of long tales and short stories. Here are a few.

– **Poems:** *Tamerlane*, *Al Aaraaf*, *Lenore*, *Israfel*, *The Raven*, *A Valentine*, *Ulalume*, *An Enigma*, *For Annie*, *To My Mother*, *Annabel Lee*.

– **Long tales:** *The Murders In The Rue Morgue*, *The Mystery Of Marie Roget*, *The Gold Bug*, *The Narrative Of Arthur Gordon Pym Of Nantucket*.

– **Short stories:** *Ms. Found In A Bottle* (1833), *The Fall Of The House Of Usher*, *The Masque Of The Red Death* (1842), *The Pit And The Pendulum* (1842), *Ligeia*, *A Descent Into The Maelstrom*, *The Black Cat* (1843), *The Tell-Tale Heart* (1843).

6. *edit*: make a book or magazine ready to be published by correcting it.

7. *sent* (*send – sent – sent*) *for*: asked her to go to him.

8. *earn a living*: earn money to live on.

9. *addicted to*: incapable of stopping

drinking.

10. *buried*: put in the ground during a funeral ceremony.

11. *churchyard*: area around/in front of a church where people are buried.



BEFORE READING

- 1 Think of all the words connected to *sea* and *ships* you know and write them down in these columns.

Sea

Ships

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

- 2 Predictions. Think of possible messages that a bottle found in the sea might contain. Write at least four.

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.

- 3 The words in the box are in the text. Write them next to their opposites below.

*uneasy – survivor – gigantic – joy – start – narrow – difficulty –
wealthy – carefully – tall – hopeless – bent –
beautiful – weak – above – old – latter – worse –
departure – total – sunset – impossible*

poor	finish
ugly	arrival
carelessly	sunrise
wide	former
easy	possible
young	easiness
dead	sorrow
partial	below
hopeful	better
strong	straight
short	tiny

Edgar Allan Poe

MS¹ Found in a Bottle

I have little to say about my country or my family, as life has driven² me away from both. My family was very wealthy and that allowed me a high level of education. I was particularly interested in the works of the German moralists, which I examined very carefully, as I have always been used to doing. I have often been criticized for the aridity of my genius and my lack of imagination.

The tale I'm going to tell, though, might seem the consequence of a lively imagination. That's why I have decided to start the narration referring to my education and my frame of mind³.

1. *MS*: manuscript.

2. *driven* (*drive, drove, driven*): taken.

3. *frame of mind*: way of thinking.



"I sailed from the port of Batavia, in the rich island of Java, ..."



I spent many years abroad. In the year 18— I sailed from the port of Batavia, in the rich island of Java, on a voyage to the Archipelago Islands. The ship was beautiful, weighed about four hundred tons, was built of teak⁴ and was copper-fastened⁵. She carried cotton and oil from the Lachadive Island and other kinds of goods, among which a few cases of opium.

For many days we stood along the western coast of Java. One evening, I observed a very singular, isolated cloud, to the north-west. It was remarkable both because of its colour and because it was the first we had seen since our departure. I observed it carefully until sunset, when it spread⁶ at once westward and eastward. It formed a narrow⁷ strip of vapour above the horizon that looked like a long beach.

Soon afterwards, my attention was attracted by the red of the moon and the particular appearance of the sea. The latter⁸ was rapidly changing and the water seemed more transparent than usual. The air became intolerably hot, with a sort of smoke similar to that produced by heated iron⁹. At night the wind stopped blowing and there was absolute calm.

I told the captain my fears, but he paid no attention to what I said. As he thought there was no danger at all, he gave the order to sail. No watch¹⁰ was set and the crew¹¹ lay¹² on the deck. However, I felt uneasy and I couldn't sleep. At about midnight I went upon deck. There I was surprised to hear a loud, humming¹³ noise. Before I could understand where it came from, I found the ship moving to her centre. In the next instant, a violent rush of foam¹⁴ invaded the entire deck. Although completely filled with water, the ship rose from the sea after a minute and finally regained her right position.

4. *teak*: kind of wood.

5. *copper-fastened*: fixed by a red-brown kind of metal.

6. *spread* (*spread* – *spread* – *spread*): opened, covered an area.

7. *narrow*: thin, opposite of wide.

8. *the latter*: the last mentioned (in this case, it refers to the sea).

9. *iron*: dark grey metal.

10. *watch*: person/people observing what happens.

11. *crew*: all the sailors.

12. *lay* (*lie* – *lay* – *lain*): were with their bodies flat.

13. *humming*: producing a noise similar to 'hum'.

14. *foam*: a lot of bubbles in the sea.

It's impossible to say by what miracle I was not swept away¹⁵. I stood with great difficulty, I felt confused and I looked around. I was struck to see the whirlpool¹⁶ of mountainous and foaming ocean around us. After a while, I heard the voice of an old Swede who had shipped with us at the moment of leaving port. I said hello to him with all my strength. We soon discovered that we were the only survivors of the accident. All on deck, except us, had been swept overboard; the captain and the crew had died while they were sleeping.



"In the next instant, a violent rush of foam invaded the entire deck!"



We moved very fast on the water that opened in big waves before us. The ship had been seriously damaged, but, to our great joy, not the pumps¹⁷. When the strong wind had calmed down, it was no longer dangerous. We looked forward to¹⁸ its total end, although we feared the terrible swell¹⁹ that would follow. We thought we would die in it, but nothing like that happened.

For five days and nights – during which we ate very little – the ship moved at a very high speed. For the first four days, we sailed south-east and south. On the fifth day it became very cold. The sun rose with a sickly²⁰ yellow light, only reaching a few degrees above the horizon. No clouds could be seen, but the wind became stronger and blew with fury. At noon, our attention was once again attracted by the appearance of the sun. It gave out no light. Then, just before setting, its central fires suddenly went out²¹. All that seemed caused by some

15. *swept* (*sweep – swept – swept*) away: thrown into the water.

16. *whirlpool*: strong circular movement attracting things to its centre.

17. *pump*: piece of equipment for making a liquid or gas move into or out of something.

18. *looked forward to*: were eager/keen to see.

19. *swell*: movement of the waves in the sea.

20. *sickly*: looking as if it were ill.

21. *went* (*go – went – gone*) out: disappeared.

indefinite power. We waited in vain for the arrival of the sixth day – for me that day has not yet arrived – for the Swede it never arrived.



From that moment on, all was very dark, so dark that we couldn't see an object at twenty paces from the ship. We also noticed that, despite the violent tempest, there was no foam in the water. All around was horror, gloom²² and a black desert. Little by little, the old Swede grew frightened, whereas I was amazed²³. We forgot to take care of the ship and looked bitterly at the ocean. We were able neither to calculate time nor to guess our situation. We knew, however, that we had moved further south. In the meantime, every moment seemed to be our last. The swell surpassed anything I had imagined possible. My companion reminded me of the excellent qualities of our ship but I felt hopeless all the same. I prepared myself for our inevitable death.



The swelling of the black sea was becoming worse and worse. Sometimes we were as high up in the sky as the albatross²⁴, sometimes we descended into watery²⁵ hell. We were at the bottom of one of these abysses, when 'Look! Look!' cried my companion. 'Almighty God! Look! Look!' As he spoke, I saw a low, red light on the water on both sides of our ship, throwing a sort of brilliancy on the deck. Looking up, I observed something that froze²⁶ my blood.



At an incredible height, directly above us, was a gigantic ship of perhaps four thousand tons. It was much bigger than any ship I had ever seen. It was all black and had a single row of cannons. The lights of an enormous quantity of battle-lanterns swung to and fro²⁷. The ship could easily resist the violence of that supernatural sea. That was what surprised and scared us. We saw her while she was rising from the water. When she reached the highest point, she paused as if in self-contemplation, then came down.

22. *gloom*: sadness.

23. *amazed*: wondering, not understanding.

24. *albatross*: sea bird.

25. *watery*: full of water.

26. *froze* (*freeze* – *froze* – *frozen*): turned into ice.

27. *swung* (*swing* – *swung* – *swung*) *to and fro*: moved backwards and forwards.



The Black Cat and other stories

Five famous and gripping tales by E. A. Poe – MS Found in a Bottle, The Pit and the Pendulum, The Masque of the Red Death, The Tell-Tale Heart and The Black Cat – are contained in this reader.

The book also includes in-depth inserts on Poe’s biography, the origin and structure of the short story and its evolution and division into literary subgenres, in addition to themes related to the tales themselves.

beginner

• A1 (Breakthrough)

elementary

• A2 (Waystage)

✓ pre-intermediate

• B1 (Threshold)

intermediate

• B2 (Vantage)

post-intermediate

• C1 (Effectiveness)

Levels of accredited examination boards:

Cambridge ESOL:	PET
Trinity:	Grade 5, 6 / ISE I
City & Guilds (Pitman):	Intermediate
ESB:	Intermediate 1, 2
Edexcel:	Elementary



Teacher's Resources:
Answer Key available on line.