

THE SELECTED  
WRITINGS OF  
EDGAR ALLAN POE



EDITED BY G. R. THOMPSON

A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION

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OF  
EDGAR ALLAN POE



AUTHORITATIVE TEXTS  
BACKGROUNDS AND CONTEXTS  
CRITICISM

*Selected and Edited by*

G. R. Thompson

PURDUE UNIVERSITY

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W. W. NORTON & COMPANY • *New York • London*

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Printed in the United States of America.

First Edition.

Composition by PennSet, Inc.

Manufacturing by the Courier Companies—Westford Division.

Production manager: Ben Reynolds.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Poe, Edgar Allan, 1809–1849.

[Selections. 2004]

The selected writings of Edgar Allan Poe: authoritative texts, background and contexts, criticism / selected and edited by G.R. Thompson.

p. cm. — (A Norton critical edition)

Includes bibliographical references.

**ISBN 0-393-97285-2 (pbk.)**

1. Fantasy literature, American. 2. Poe, Edgar Allan, 1809–1849—Criticism and interpretation. 3. Fantasy literature, American—History and criticism. I. Thompson, Gary Richard, 1937– II. Title. III. Series.

PS2602.T3 2004

813'.3—dc22

2003057042

W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 500 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10110-0017

[www.wwnorton.com](http://www.wwnorton.com)

W. W. Norton & Company Ltd., Castle House, 75/76 Wells Street,  
London W1T 3QT

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## Edgar A. Poe: An American Life (1809–1849)

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Edgar A. Poe died relatively young—at the age of forty—mysteriously—in the streets of Baltimore. With only fifty-some poems, a short novel, two novellas, about seventy short stories (and, in mass, a more or less equal volume of essays), Poe managed to exert a significant influence on American and world literature. For one thing, he was surely the most important influence from the English-speaking world on the development of three related literary movements in Continental Europe at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. In death, Poe became the contested icon of the art-for-art's-sake, symbolist, and surrealist movements, especially among those contradictorily aesthetic extremists and sociopolitical dissenters associated with France. For Charles Baudelaire, Poe was the *poète maudit*—the blighted or cursed poet of the Ideal, ground up in the crass machinery of a materialist culture. For Stéphane Mallarmé, Poe was a cultural-aesthetic hero, the poet of the transcendental, standing in opposition to the bourgeois values of a philistine America. Poe was for Paul Valéry a stunning skeptic, critical of traditional religious and philosophical assumptions, particularly those of his own Anglo-American heritage. The French had discerned a similarity between Poe as poet of the “transcendental” and “otherworldly,” seeking escape from the material world, and Poe as prose critic—that is, someone who, giving vent to often acerbic cultural critique, stood in opposition to a materialist society.

The vogue of Poe in non-English-speaking countries in Europe continues to this day. His works hold special fascination for structuralist, poststructuralist, and deconstructionist critics and theorists and for other coteries of the avant-garde. Indeed, certain French intellectuals celebrate January 19, Poe's birthday, as a special occasion. But in America and Great Britain, with a few local exceptions, no such celebration is widely observed. In these countries, Poe presents a puzzle. The odd excesses of his style and his focus on the destructive aspect of the romantic life/death paradox, especially his addiction to gothic themes and grotesque modes, seem to many critics to put him outside the mainstream of the Anglo-American tradition. In fact, in English-speaking countries he is regarded by many as a sham artist, his works being more redolent of the carnival house of horrors than of the salons of serious art.

To those familiar with his American career, he has seemed quite

contradictory. Although he professed to be the poet of transcendental beauty, he was also deeply involved in the professional literary warfare of his time, which was exacerbated by differences between the North, where he was born, and the South, where he grew up. He was passionately ambitious to be a major player in the cultural scene of America, and indeed the world. And yet—although professionally he could be manipulative and sometimes deceptive, constantly wheeling and dealing in his efforts to establish a commercially successful magazine—he was also devoted to high standards of artistic merit and fiercely independent in his literary criticism. Such seeming oppositions—being both an elitist aesthete *and* a social critic, both a hack *and* a genius, both earnest *and* disingenuous at the same time—were to inform his personal life and professional career.

Poe's personality appears to have been strongly actuated by ambivalence and self-division, vigorously pursuing a desired goal and then self-destructing. In his fiction, he developed several stories around what he called "the perverse." By this term (which has both a theological and a psychological history antedating Poe's use of it) he meant to indicate a universal impulse to act in irrational opposition to one's own best interests. We can see this paradigm in both his creative works and in his life. Nevertheless, as a hard-working and ambitious professional, Poe tried all his adult life to invent himself as a Renaissance man of letters in nineteenth-century America. That is, he attempted to combine and unify the sophisticated and seemingly disparate roles of poet, writer of fiction, theoretical critic, practical critic, reviewer, journalist, editor, satirist, social critic, and philosopher.

Given the brevity of his career, his achievements are extraordinary. As a poet, Poe developed a mode of dramatized interior monologue and a lyric incantatory style aimed at suggesting a visionary state of supernal loveliness above or beyond the ordinary world. He tried to achieve this dreamlike perception through precise manipulation of sound and rhythm by means of hypnotic repetition. He developed a poetics that sought to reconcile the material and mental medium of language as sensuous sound that lifted the soul beyond the physical. At the same time that he sought a visionary spiritual beauty (tinged with loss and melancholy and glimpsed but indefinitely), he emphasized meticulous craftsmanship based on a pre-established pattern of total integration of all elements of a work.

As a practical critic, Poe unmasked carelessness, fraud, and literary theft while recognizing the talents of writers like Nathaniel Hawthorne. As a practicing journalist, Poe fought against the literary cliques that promoted inferior regional writing, especially those centered around the Northern periodicals. He defended the American struggle for literary independence from Europe. Yet, at the same time that he attacked slavish imitation of European models, he opposed the excesses of the American literary nationalism that forced critics into the dilemma of liking a stupid book because at least it represented an "American" stupidity. Although deeply involved in the literary warfare

of his times, Poe's quest was to establish a magazine of letters and culture freed from petty critical conflicts, social prejudice, and the prevailing moral bias of the age. Regarding the age's moral propensity, he even went so far as to propound the "heresy of the didactic." An overriding moral concern in a work of art, he said, was to be regarded as an offense against the ideals of art as art.

But it is Poe's achievement in the short story for which he is most famous. As he had with poetry, he codified an affective theory of the short story that aimed at an almost subliminal effect—one to be accomplished through a carefully predesigned and unified pattern. Every word, every phrase, and every sentence was essential to the reader's impression of the whole structure, an impression created not only by conscious responses but also by unconscious ones. He exemplified his theory in his practice, experimenting with proto-science fiction, visionary prose-poems, multileveled satire, and detective fiction. If he did not invent the detective story outright, he certainly brought it to new levels of "ratiocinative" analysis (reasoning logically and methodically). Simultaneously, he perfected the gothic tale of terror, horror, and mystery. Poe is an acknowledged master of external gothic atmosphere, but he is equally the master of the interior monologue of a profoundly disturbed mind. His fictional dramatizations of psychological turmoil operate on several levels, from gruesome physical shock, to spiritual anguish, to subtle manipulation of narrative point of view. The stories exhibit an architectural symmetry and proportion, reflecting his consistent attempt to integrate all details of setting, plot, and character into an indivisible whole.

Poe was a major advocate of one version of the romantic ideal of the organic wholeness of art. His romantic program was nothing less than to resolve all apparent contraries of the world into unity: the life and death impulses of existence; the apparent irradiation and collapse of a pulsating universe; the paradoxes of time and space, of matter and energy, of the rational and irrational; the seeming oppositions of the immaterial and material, of the serious and the comic, of imagination and logic, of poetry and science, of art and society. Although his critical reception has been marked by strong disagreement over the intrinsic merit of his writings, his achievements in poetry, criticism, magazine journalism, popular philosophy, and fiction are at the very least historically impressive. What cannot be denied is that in America he has had a major effect on the writing of fiction and the conception of the profession of letters.

Critical assessments of Poe's place in literature continue to be characterized by extreme division between the views of aesthetes and those of social activists. Until recently, the usual sketches of Edgar Poe's life and career have tended to psychoanalyze him according to simplistic Freudian models and to describe him in isolation from the social and political currents of his time. This critical tendency derives in part from Poe's habit of placing his narratives in some vague, often indeterminate setting. And Poe himself often affected the role of a visionary poet whose psychic existence takes form in a realm "out of

space—out of time.” There is also his obsessive focus on *isolato* characters, who, even when not completely isolated from others, are often off in some dark place, alone in their own minds, watching themselves go to pieces. But Poe lived through a major period of formative sociopolitical and economic change. He was born into a country whose first president had been inaugurated only twenty years earlier. The events of recent American history and of his specific time and place played a more important role in his thinking and writing than is immediately apparent.

The relation of Poe to the sociopolitical problems of his times is particularly interesting because, though he wrote about contemporary political, economic, and political issues, he was much more insistently “literary” than most of his famous contemporaries. Writers like James Fenimore Cooper, William Cullen Bryant, Washington Irving, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller, Henry David Thoreau, Lydia Maria Child, Catharine Sedgwick, Herman Melville, and Harriet Beecher Stowe engaged contemporary sociopolitical themes more overtly than did Poe. To him, science and ancient history and myth were of greater interest. He was particularly interested in astronomy, in the developing sciences of the brain, and in aberrant psychology. He was also concerned with the history and profession of letters per se—with literary professionalism and poetic vocation. Nevertheless, socioeconomic and political themes are present in many of his writings, particularly his political and social satires. Like his contemporaries, he exhibited a strong interest in things “American,” but in a global rather than a provincial context. In the following biographical narrative, Poe’s highly literary accomplishments are placed in the historical context of his country and times, framed by the inception of the United States as a unified nation-state and by the threatened break up of this new nation in civil war. The political events of Poe’s turbulent America seem almost premonitory of his own divided self.

### Historical Backgrounds: 1790–1815

By 1809, the year of Poe’s birth, a number of momentous events had occurred in the life of the young American Republic. In the twenty years before Poe was born, the United States had rapidly become a world power; but Americans wanted to avoid being caught in the middle of European political conflicts. Although John Jay and Charles C. Pinckney had in 1794–95 negotiated a treaty with Great Britain that was favorable to American neutrality, tensions with the mother country remained high. Moreover, the American treaty with the British violated previous agreements with the French, leading to French naval aggression against American merchant vessels. Americans proposed a new treaty with France but were outraged by the XYZ Affair of 1797. It was discovered that the French foreign minister, Charles Maurice Talleyrand, had tried to extort £50,000 through three secret agents (X, Y, Z) as a “fee” before France would even talk to American emissaries



about a new treaty. America was finding it hard to remain neutral and uninvolved.

At home, struggling to enforce its centralized power, the new national government found itself in the throes of uncertain monetary and taxation policies. Representative are two events of 1791: the nationwide establishment of the First Bank of the United States and Alexander Hamilton's imposition of an excise tax on the manufacturing of whiskey as a federal prerogative. The former would set in motion a complicated series of national monetary crises that would extend over the next fifty years and would have a direct effect on the personal finances of the Poe family. The latter caused farmers in western Pennsylvania, who resented any extension of the power of the new central government over the economic interests of the states, to initiate the 1794 Whiskey Rebellion (cf. Shays's Rebellion in Massachusetts in 1786–87), forcing President Washington to send federal troops to put down the rioting. In 1798, four highly nationalistic congressional acts were passed into law. The so-called Alien and Sedition Acts were drafted by the Federalist Party, which advocated a strong (indeed, oppressive) central government, as a counter to the Jeffersonians, who represented a more decentralized position. The Alien Acts placed various restrictions on immigration and naturalization. More immediately alarming for intellectuals, writers, and political watchdogs was the restriction that the Sedition Acts put on American citizens' right to speak their minds. The Federalists were especially keen to suppress any expressions of opposition to them. The tension between a centralized federal power and individual state's rights, censorship and freedom of expression, would pervade Poe's lifetime.

At the beginning of the new century, the population had reached more than four million. The problems of central control over a burgeoning nation were intensified with the inauguration of Thomas Jefferson in 1801, whose administration had to face major issues of states' rights, economics, expansionism, and military power. In 1803, just as the Napoleonic Wars (1803–15) were beginning in Europe, Jefferson concluded the Louisiana Purchase, doubling the size of the country. Meanwhile, the international status of the United States was becoming even more pronounced. Repeated American victories from 1802 to 1805 over the Barbary Pirates (Algiers, Tunis, Tripoli) strengthened the position of the U.S. Navy. America's coming of age as a world sea power promoted increased exploration of both the Atlantic and the Pacific, including the distant Polar Regions, a topic that would absorb Poe. Another geographical event that would fascinate him was the Lewis and Clark Expedition. From 1804 to 1806, their party traveled up the Missouri River, across the Great Divide, to the Columbia River, and back. Overland explorations of the continent further increased expansionist sentiment among Americans—after all, there were fortunes to be made in the distant West. The establishment of the key fur-trading outpost in Astoria, Oregon, and a trading empire beyond, into the Pacific Ocean, Polynesia, and the Far East—a project Poe would write about in both fiction and nonfiction—would make



John Jacob Astor America's first bona fide multimillionaire. Driven by monetary interests, the widening expansionist view also brought increased federal regulation and taxation. By the time Poe was born in 1809, American nationalism was in full force both at home and abroad. Aaron Burr had recently been tried for treason against the nation, and the Embargo Act, aimed at curtailing British impressment of American sailors, had ratcheted up political tensions with England once again.

In 1810, Poe's second year of life, the Supreme Court under Chief Justice John Marshall, in a monumental legal step, declared that an act of the Georgia Legislature was unconstitutional. This decision (*Fletcher vs. Peck*) extended the precedent (*Marbury vs. Madison* in 1803) of federal jurisdiction over state laws and legislatures—that is, it affirmed the “implied powers” of the Court's judicial review of constitutionality. The sense of the formation of a new nation, under uniform federal law, which would extend farther and farther west, south, and north with exploration and annexation, was accelerating. Although there were counterforces to the expansion of federal powers, War Hawks began to advocate aggression in the Northwest (along the Canadian border) and the Southwest (near the Mexican border).

In 1811, when Poe was three years of age, William Henry Harrison's troops at Tippecanoe broke the power of the Indian Confederation (led by Tecumseh and The Prophet). This loose but powerful American Indian coalition had included an immense territory from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico. (Poe would satirize the politics of Indian warfare in several of his early stories.) Harrison's victory gave new impetus to American continental nationalism. But there were international problems on the horizon. British guns and ammunition were found among Indian supplies, fanning calls for another war with Britain, which, indeed, broke out in 1812.

Paradoxically, as the sentiment for a unique American tradition separate from European influences intensified, regional conflicts grew. And as the U.S. Supreme Court continued to enlarge its powers of judicial review over the states, the issue of the extension of slavery into new territories was heating up. While the North called for greater jurisdiction over all the states, in the South calls for a separate Southern Country began to appear. Moreover, when Congress failed to recharter the Bank of the United States, regional banks began to multiply rapidly; currencies became highly inflationary, adding economic flames to the coming political conflagration.

Such was the divided and somewhat precarious American world that Edgar Poe came into in 1809; and at the end of Poe's life, America would once again be heading toward revolution. Political, military, and economic crises framed the beginning of Poe's life; another war with the mother country and near financial disaster were central historical events of Poe's early boyhood; and shortly before he turned twenty, alienated from his foster father, Poe would leave the South and head North to join the U.S. Army, carrying with him a sheaf of unpublished romantic poems. At the beginning of the young poet's career, the

perennial economic instability of the early republic was beginning to come to a head—almost at the very moment that Poe, who would never know financial security, was striking out on his own to earn a living as a professional man of letters.

### Poe's Early Years: 1809–27

In an American context of increasing divisiveness, Boston-born Edgar Poe, the orphaned son of impoverished itinerant actors, was to be brought up in Richmond, Virginia, as the foster son of a well-to-do Southern merchant. Although an acting career was regarded as rather disreputable, Poe's maternal grandmother, an English actress, had brought Poe's mother to America and immediately put her before the footlights. Young Elizabeth Arnold (c. 1787–1811) made her debut on the American stage at the age of nine. In 1802, at the age of fifteen or sixteen, Elizabeth married another actor, Charles Hopkins, who died three years later of unknown causes. The following spring Elizabeth Arnold Hopkins married David Poe Jr. (1784–1811?), the son of an Irish-born Revolutionary War patriot. David Poe had made his own acting debut at the end of 1803 at the age of nineteen. He was described by contemporaries as somewhat unstable and was reputed to be a heavy drinker. The oldest of the couple's three children, William Henry Leonard, was born on January 30, 1807; Edgar, the middle child, on January 19, 1809; and Rosalie, the youngest, on December 20, 1810. In 1811, the Poes found themselves in Richmond, where Elizabeth, in ill health, died on December 8. The children were promptly taken into the homes of various foster parents. Their father seems to have suddenly disappeared, though there are stories that he died shortly after Elizabeth.

Little Eddie was received into the childless home of a Richmond couple, John Allan (1779–1834) and Frances Keeling Valentine Allan (1785–1829). The Scots-born Allan was co-owner of a profitable import and export business (mainly tobacco and other domestic goods). Although not legally adopted by the couple, the boy was reared as the Allans' son and renamed Edgar Allan Poe. At first, John Allan seemed proud of Eddie's obvious intellect and precocious poetic gifts and used to take great pleasure in showing him off to neighbors. Later, as Eddie grew up and hit puberty, their relationship was to take a marked downward turn.

In 1812, just as the three Poe children were taken into foster homes, war with Britain broke out again. When the Peace of Ghent in 1814 proved advantageous to America, the quest for a national identity intensified. Almost simultaneously, the charter of the Second Bank of the United States forced regional banks to limit their currency issues and to pay full value for them. In 1815, seeking better business opportunities, John Allan took his family to Great Britain—first to Scotland for a brief period, and then to London, where they lived until 1820. The Allans made sure that young Edgar received the founda-

tions of a traditional classical education at British private schools. He first attended an academy run by the Misses Dubourg. In 1818, he became a boarding student at the Manor House School in the Stoke Newington section of suburban London, a site that would imaginistically figure in "William Wilson," "The Fall of the House of Usher," and other tales.

While the Allan family was in England, cheap land in the American West had been made available to settlers, and the transportation system was improved. In 1817, work had begun on the Erie Canal with the purpose of connecting New York harbor to the Great Lakes. Westward roads (like the Wilderness Road, the Cumberland Road, the Lancaster Turnpike, and the Genessee Road) began to multiply rapidly. Meanwhile, the expansionist mood manifested itself in the deep South. As part of a conflict with Spain, war against the Seminole Indians in Florida broke out when General Andrew Jackson's troops seized Spanish forts on the peninsula, resulting in 1819 in the sale of Florida by the Spanish to the United States. (These Indian wars and Andrew Jackson would figure, like Harrison, Martin Van Buren, Richard M. Johnson, and others, in Poe's early satires a decade and a half later.)

Conflict over the slavery issue continued. When Missouri applied for admission to the Union in 1818, Congressman James Tallmadge proposed that admission of additional slave states should be prohibited and that the children of slave parents should be freed at the age of twenty-five. The Tallmadge Amendment passed in the House but was defeated in the Senate. The Missouri Compromise of 1820 dictated that slave and free states were to be equal in number. Missouri was to be admitted as a slave state along with Maine as a free state; slavery was to be excluded from Louisiana Purchase territory north of 36° 30', except in Missouri. Such was the intensifying political situation when the Allans returned to Richmond in July 1820.

The Allans saw to it that Edgar, now eleven years of age, continued to receive the best education available. They enrolled him in private academies in Richmond, where he excelled in languages (especially Latin), sports (especially swimming and jumping), amateur theatricals—and pranks. Records show that he composed several verse satires in couplets, all lost except for "O, Tempora! O, Mores!" During these years, he became devoted to Jane Stanard, the mother of a schoolboy friend; he described her later as "the first, purely ideal love of my soul" (she was the inspiration for his 1831 poem "To Helen"). In 1823–24, as Poe entered the middle of his teenage years, two important political events took place: the formulation of the Monroe Doctrine and the founding of the Democratic Party.

The Monroe Doctrine has a complicated history, going back to American efforts in the 1790s to avoid involvement in European politics; related political developments in the 1820s included the issues of nationalism, internationalism, isolationism, expansionism, and regionalism. By 1823 John Quincy Adams (then secretary of state) had become alarmed by the plans of Prince Metternich of Austria for the Quadruple Alliance (Great Britain, Austria, Prussia, and Russia) to re-

store the Spanish colonies in America to King Ferdinand of Spain. Adams was also concerned about the edict of Czar Alexander I extending the boundary of Alaska southward; the czar claimed all rights of exploration for Russia and announced the possible colonization of the western shore of North America. In response, President James Monroe declared that any attempts by European monarchies to expand farther into the American hemisphere would be considered a threat to the peace and safety of the United States. Nevertheless, Monroe and Adams declared, the United States would not interfere with any existing European colonies: the States had no interest in becoming entangled in any conflicts that European nations had with one another. In 1824, Andrew Jackson (nicknamed "Old Hickory" for his stiff military resolve) and several National Republican political leaders (John C. Calhoun, William Harris Crawford, Martin Van Buren) formed a splinter party. They took the name *Democrat* (from *demos*, government of the "people"). The Democrats were to dominate American political life for the next fourteen years.

It was also in 1824, following a two-year period of financial trouble, that John Allan's firm was dissolved. But the death of an uncle in 1825 soon made Allan a much richer man than he had been before. He bought a house in a fashionable quarter of Richmond, and young Edgar began to pay suit to Sarah Elmira Royster. Despite strong objections from both the Roysters and the Allans (in part because of their youth), they became engaged.

In 1826, Poe entered the University of Virginia at Charlottesville, established the preceding year by Thomas Jefferson. He again distinguished himself in ancient and modern romance languages. The rowdy students of the new university were given to heavy drinking, an activity in which Poe also seems to have distinguished himself. It was a problem that was to plague him for the rest of his life. (By an interesting coincidence, the American Temperance Society was formed in Boston in this same year.) The young man soon found the school allowance from his foster parent inadequate, especially if he were to participate in the gentlemanly art of gambling. Poe later claimed that he had to gamble because of Allan's miserliness, but he seems to have lost some \$2,000, an enormous sum, equivalent to at least as much as fifteen times that amount today (probably more). Not unreasonably, Allan refused to pay the debt and withdrew him from the university. Poe returned to Richmond to find that he was no longer welcome in the Royster home. (Years later, he was to discover that Elmira's parents had intercepted his letters to her.)

Vituperative arguments between Poe and Allan broke out over various matters, leading eventually to their complete alienation. Indeed, Poe was later to abbreviate his middle name, diminishing *Allan* to the single initial A. Part of the problem seems to have been that Edgar had been brought up to expect the life of the son of a Virginia gentleman—or, if not quite an aristocrat, the next best to that—the son of a prosperous merchant. Allan, however, became more and more parsimonious as he became increasingly disaffected with his headstrong

ward. Despite Frances Allan's efforts at conciliation, Poe stormed out of the Allan household in March of 1827. In doing so, he forfeited family and class, perhaps perversely.

Nationalism, sectionalism, and regionalism—the young Poe was suspicious of all such politics. Southerner he was—American he would be—but, as he dreamed of a literary career, nothing less than worldwide fame would satisfy him. Under the alias of “Henri Le Renet,” he sailed for Boston and a larger world.

### Cast Adrift: 1827–34

As the population of the United States neared thirteen million, transportation received special attention: the final phase of the Erie Canal began, and in 1827 the Baltimore & Ohio Rail Road received its charter. The second half of the decade of the 1820s also saw significant shifts in the relationship between political power and social class—changes of which the young Poe as a fledgling Virginia gentleman did not fully approve. During the administration of John Quincy Adams (1825–29), frontier democracy in the West eroded the power of money and privilege. At the same time, Northeastern laboring men (who had voting rights in every state but Rhode Island) campaigned for free public education, for the abolition of imprisonment for debt, for equitable mechanic's lien laws, and for the right to collective bargaining. Democratization and a version of socialism, suspect developments for most Southerners of station and means, were on the rise.

Such was the general condition of the country when in May 1827 young Poe, needful of an income, enlisted in the U.S. Army. He gave his name as “Edgar A. Perry,” his age as twenty-two (he was eighteen), and his occupation as “clerk.” He was assigned to a coastal artillery regiment at Fort Independence in Boston Harbor. By summer, he had somehow persuaded a young printer to publish his first book, *Tamerlane and Other Poems*—not by a Virginian, but by “a Bostonian.” This was a thin volume of fewer than a dozen dreamy pieces. In addition to the title work, it included such poems as “Dreams,” “Visit of the Dead,” “Evening Star,” and “Imitation” (later revised as “A Dream within a Dream”).

In November 1827, Poe's unit was transferred to Fort Moultrie, on Sullivan's Island (the scene of “The Gold-Bug” years later), in the harbor of Charleston, South Carolina. After several rapid promotions, Poe reached the rank of sergeant major, the highest noncommissioned rank in the army. With a career as a commissioned officer in mind, he asked Allan to help him obtain an appointment to the Military Academy at West Point. Mrs. Allan was ill, and John Allan's attitude toward Edgar softened somewhat. The death of Frances Allan on February 28, 1829, prompted a temporary reconciliation between Poe and Allan. In April, having found a replacement enlistee, Poe was able to resign his noncommissioned position in the army. He went to live with various relatives in Baltimore to await word about his expected West Point

appointment. There is an unsubstantiated story (which some critics have taken as evidence of his Southern racism) that Poe may have acted as an agent for his paternal aunt, Maria Clemm, in the indenturing of a Negro slave named Edwin to one Henry Ridgway for a period of nine years.

During this time, Poe wrote Allan for money to subsidize a second volume of poems, seeking to mollify him by adding: "I have long given up Byron for a model." Allan refused to help him; nevertheless, *Al Aaraaf, Tamerlane and Minor Poems* was published by Hatch & Dunning of Baltimore in December 1829. This edition generally maintained the romantic, dreamy, and visionary quality of Poe's earlier poems, but the faint comic note of the first volume was now more noticeable. The *Al Aaraaf* volume contained a half-dozen new works added to the revised *Tamerlane* poems, including "Sonnet—To Science," "Fairy-Land," and a verse "Preface" (later to be expanded as the seriocomic "Introduction" for the 1831 edition of poems, and yet later to be reduced as "Romance"). Poe set the title poem (named for the Muslim limbo region of *Al Aaraaf*, where souls sleepily wait for yet another world) in a dreamlike star world out in space. Here poets and their poetic imaginings, banished from the earthly world, have ethereal existence.

In the more mundane world of the United States, Poe's appointment to West Point finally came through, and he entered the academy in May of 1830, where he once again excelled in languages. He soon became popular among cadets for his comic verses satirizing the officers. In October of the same year John Allan remarried and shortly afterward forever severed relations with his foster son, ostensibly because of an offensive letter (dated May 3, 1830) that Poe had sent to his army replacement in the enlisted corps, one Sergeant Samuel (Bully) Graves. In it Poe tried to explain his failure to send Graves the whole fee for standing in for him; his foster parent, he said, had not yet come forth with the money, adding that "Mr. A. is not very often sober." Graves wrote Allan for the money and apparently either enclosed Poe's letter or revealed its contents.

Once more Poe found himself without the kind of financial assistance a young Virginia gentleman might have come to expect. Embarrassed among the class of more or less aristocratic officer candidates, he intentionally disobeyed orders so as to obtain his release from the academy. These infractions consisted of absence from class, chapel, and roll call, though there is an unsubstantiated tradition that he also appeared in formation naked, wearing only the cross-straps of the uniform. In January 1831, he underwent the formality of what appears to have been a friendly court-martial and was expelled.

In February 1831, he relocated temporarily to New York City. With funds donated by fellow cadets, he was able in the spring to publish *Poems: Second Edition*, by "Edgar A. Poe," a volume he dedicated to "The U.S. Corps of Cadets." This work (in which the apocalyptic note is somewhat greater) included extensive revisions of "Tamerlane" and "Al Aaraaf" and a half-dozen new poems in much the same mode

next five years, the unresolved monetary and banking policies stemming from the conflict would lead to a nationwide financial crash—one that would directly affect Poe and his family.

In this political climate, the penniless Poe left New York in May 1831 and took refuge in the Baltimore home of his aunt, Maria Clemm, a single mother with an eight-year-old daughter named Virginia. The household also included Poe's brother, William Henry (who was to die in August, probably of tuberculosis), and his grandmother Elizabeth Cairnes Poe, whose small pension from her late husband's Revolutionary War service helped keep the nearly destitute family afloat. While living in the Clemm household, Poe acted as a tutor to his little cousin Virginia and continued to pursue his writing career.

During this time, he submitted several tales to a contest announced by the Philadelphia *Saturday Courier*. The *Courier* published five of his tales at regular intervals from January to December in 1832: "Metzengerstein," "The Duke de L'Omelette," "A Tale of Jerusalem," "A Decided Loss" (the first version of "Loss of Breath"), and "The Bargain Lost" (the first version of "Bon-Bon"). With the possible exception of "Metzengerstein," these were all satiric parodies of popular genres and authors.

He also submitted six other stories for a prize announced in the Baltimore *Saturday Visitor*: "Some Passages in the Life of a Lion" (revised as "Lionizing"), "The Visionary" (revised as "The Assignment"), "Shadow," "Epimanes," "Siope" (revised as "Silence"), and "Ms. Found in a Bottle." Except for "Lionizing" (a satire on literary salons), these tales all seem to be, at least on the surface, serious romantic and visionary works, though a case has been made for a satiric component in each of them. "Ms.," based on the legend of the *Flying Dutchman* (the phantom ship doomed to roam the seas for eternity), won the first prize of \$50. Poe also submitted the poem "The Coliseum," an evocation of the grandeur of the ancient world, which won an honorary second prize.

In May 1833, Poe wrote to the publishers of the *New England Magazine* about a unified volume of sequential tales he had tentatively titled "Eleven Tales of the Arabesque." He included a story-sketch that he thought was representative of the volume as a whole, "Epimanes" (later called "Four Beasts in One—The Homocameleopard"), an overtly comic work with many satiric thrusts at nineteenth-century concepts of progress and at American democracy as "mobocracy." This never-published volume Poe apparently intended as a large-scale parody. The whole series of tales and sketches, Poe explained in his letter to the editors, was not only an imitation of contemporary styles of tale writing, but also a burlesque of current modes of criticism:

They are supposed to be read at table by the eleven members of a literary club, and are followed by the remarks of the company upon each. These remarks are intended as a burlesque upon criticism. In the whole, originality more than anything else has been attempted. . . . If you like the specimen which I have sent I will



forward the rest at your suggestion—but if you decide upon publishing all the tales, it would not be proper to print the one I now send until it can be printed in its place with the others.

In October 1833, the *Visiter* published the prize-winning “Ms. Found in a Bottle” and “The Coliseum,” along with an advertisement soliciting subscriptions to a volume to be called *Tales of the Folio Club*. The “Folio Club” was an expansion of the scheme of the “Eleven Tales of the Arabesque,” also never published as an interconnected whole. Many critics have come to regard the Folio Club plan as centrally important for a full and balanced view of Poe’s art in fiction. The Folio Club survives in a fragmentary manuscript that contains only the preface and the concluding tale, “Siope” (“Silence”). This manuscript is all that remains of a relatively lengthy collection of tales that Poe unsuccessfully sent to various publishers over the next three years.

He conceived of the Folio Club as a “Junto of Dunderheadism.” The club meets once a month at dinner for a reading by each member of “a short tale of his own composition.” The author of “the best tale” becomes “president for the month,” while the author of “the worst tale” provides dinner and wine for the next meeting. The writer of the preface represents himself as offering an exposé of the group after attending his first meeting. The intention of the club, the narrator says, is “to abolish Literature, subvert the Press, and overturn the Government of Nouns and Pronouns.” The membership includes, besides the newly elected author of the preface, ten “most remarkable men,” such as “Mr. Convolvulus Gondola,” “De Rerum Natura, Esqr.,” “Mr. Solomon Seadrift who had every appearance of a fish,” “Mr. Blackwood Blackwood who had written certain articles for foreign magazines,” and so forth. A good deal of scholarly speculation has ensued about which of the fictitious “authors” are to be assigned to the various tales (such as Horribile Dictu to “Metzengerstein,” Chronologos Chronology to “A Tale of Jerusalem,” Solomon Seadrift to “Ms. Found in a Bottle,” and so on). The document has also generated critical debate over the implications of the Folio Club manuscript for Poe’s overall intentions in his earliest tales—that is, about how serious, satiric, comic, or ironic these works were intended to be.

### Back to Old Virginia: 1834–37

In January 1834, Poe’s tale “The Visionary” appeared in *Godey’s Lady’s Book*—his first publication in a journal of wide circulation. In March 1834 John Allan died. Although both legitimate and illegitimate children were mentioned in his will, Poe was not. Fortunately, however, one of the judges in the *Visiter* contest, John P. Kennedy, had taken an interest in young Poe’s career. But when Kennedy invited him to dinner, Poe was forced to decline, “for reasons of the most humiliating nature in my personal appearance”—which prompted Kennedy to lend him money for suitable clothes. Kennedy also recommended Poe to

Thomas White, the publisher of the new literary journal, the *Southern Literary Messenger*, back in Richmond.

White soon offered the young man a position with the magazine. Although Poe was not to move to Richmond until summer, he immediately began, from March 1835 forward, to contribute creative works and book reviews to the *Messenger*. These included several poems; the first part of a verse drama, *Politian*; and five new tales, "Morella," "Berenice," "King Pest," "Shadow," and his first long narrative, "Hans Phaall." Whereas *Politian*, "Morella," and "Shadow" appeared to be serious poetic evocations in the high dark-romantic style, the grotesque stories "Berenice" and "King Pest" were more problematic. "Berenice," by Poe's own testimony in a letter to Thomas White, seems to have been, gruesome as it is, a literary spoof of the kind of tale that was representative, in his opinion, of the popular literature of his time.

The history of all Magazines shows plainly that those which have attained celebrity were indebted for it to articles *similar in nature—to Berenice*. . . . You ask me in what does the nature consist? In the ludicrous heightened into the grotesque: the fearful coloured into the horrible: the witty exaggerated into the burlesque: the singular wrought out into the strange and mystical.

"King Pest," misunderstood by many of Poe's contemporaries, was an allegorical satire (indeed, a somewhat vicious one) directed at Andrew Jackson and his Kitchen Cabinet, in which Poe suggested that the "reign" of King Andrew and his "court" has created a vile "pestilence" in American political life (see notes to "King Pest," p. 148 herein).

In July 1835 Grandmother Poe died. In August, Edgar Poe went to Richmond, where he began to concentrate on becoming a professional "magazinish." He threw himself into his work. During his first nine months with the *Messenger*, he wrote a column on current literary events, and the number of his book reviews climbed to more than thirty. With this new vehicle of a vigorous southern magazine, he launched a campaign for a free and independent criticism—one that was to be on the world stage rather than a merely regional or national one. Although he noted that the South saw no "farther necessity for being ridden to death by New-England," he also commented that the real goal of American letters should be "a national as distinguished from a sectional literature." But even a national literature was not the true issue. He had earlier noted the many arguments in favor of maintaining a "proper nationality in American Letters." But "what this nationality is, or what is to be gained by it," he said, "has never been distinctly understood. That an American should confine himself to American themes, or even prefer them, is rather a political than a literary idea."

In addition to this cosmopolitan sensibility, Poe's outrage over the politics of publishing manifested itself in his first reviews in a sarcastic mode that seemed to some of his Northern contemporaries unnecessarily barbed. But these reviews helped sell copies of the *Messenger* and alerted Northern literary circles to the new, prickly tongued critic