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The British Journal of Psychiatry

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**Stigma and the  
pejorative use of  
disabling conditions**  
Cherney et al

**Racial disparities  
influence access and  
outcomes in talking  
therapies**  
Bamrah et al

**Professorships in  
child and adolescent  
psychiatry**  
Kelleher et al

**Promises and pitfalls  
of large language  
models in psychiatric  
diagnosis and  
knowledge tasks**  
Bang et al

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## Edgar Allan Poe by Stefanie Rocknak

This splendid bronze sculpture of the great American writer, Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) stands in the centre of Boston. A giant raven, representing his most famous poem, bursts from his case. Much of Poe's work deals with disturbed mental states, loss and death. His own life was very troubled, marked by poverty, bereavement, anxiety, melancholia and bouts of heavy drinking. He is best known for his poetry and short stories, one of which 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue' is considered to have instigated the genre of detective fiction and greatly influenced Conan Doyle when he came to create Sherlock Holmes.



In 'The Raven', the narrator is mourning the death of a loved one and is visited by the eponymous bird who increases his despondency. The poem proved hugely popular and its refrain 'Nevermore' was quoted by its many readers throughout the country. The short story, 'William Wilson' deals with the theme of the double. 'The Fall of the House of Usher' describes mental disintegration and hints at incest. In 'The Premature Burial', the central character suffers from catalepsy and fears being buried while he is still alive, a common fear during this period.

Poe was born in Boston. When he was an infant, his heavy-drinking father abandoned the family. Shortly afterwards, his mother died from consumption. 'Anxiety was his childhood bedfellow', his biographer Peter Akroyd observes. Poe and his sister were taken in by foster parents. In 1837 he married his 13 year old cousin, Virginia, who died of tuberculosis ten years later. Poe died in 1849 in Baltimore following an episode when he was acutely confused. Alcohol-induced delirium, brain disease or even suicide have been suggested as the cause of death. The French poet, Baudelaire, who admired Poe's work, suggested, 'this death was almost a suicide, a suicide prepared for a long time'.

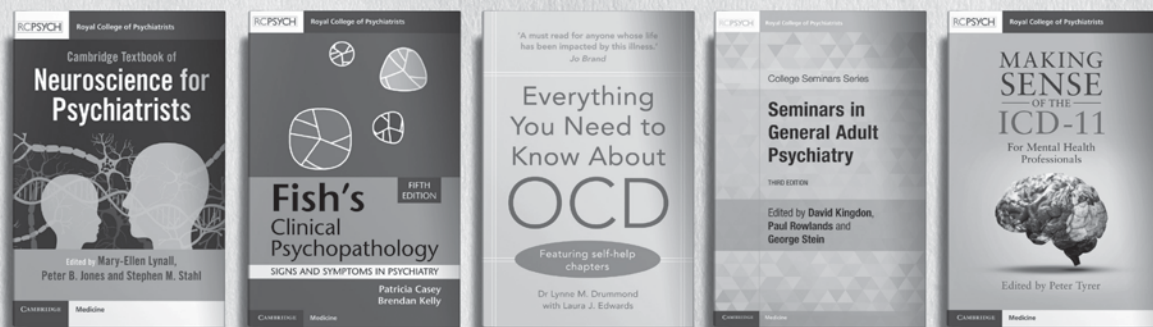
Peter Akroyd. *Poe. A Life Cut Short*. London: Chatto & Windus, 2008.

Text by Allan Beveridge

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