

# Annual Report and Newsletter, 2024

Poe Society Activities and General Information, 2024 - 2025



## One Hundred-and-Second Annual Commemorative Lecture -

Ashley Kniss (Associate Professor and Director of Writing, Department of English, Stevenson University). will be our speaker. For this presentation, she will read an expanded version of her essay, forthcoming in *Poe Studies*: “Gothic Mycology and Posthuman Ethics in Poe’s ‘The Fall of the House of Usher’.” Our speaker has kindly provided the following abstract of the lecture:

In light of the recent popularity of fungi in ecohorror literature and film, this presentation coins the term “Gothic mycology” to describe instances of human-fungal hybridity that suggest posthuman entanglement and symbiosis, using Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher” as an early and exemplary instance of its use. Gothic mycology is frightening due to the very nature of fungi themselves: they resist categories, being more closely related to animals than plant life; they proliferate at seemingly unnatural rates; they grow in darkness; they are agents of decomposition; they are mysterious, chthonic, and Other. However, Gothic mycology is also inherently hopeful, offering a glimpse of how we might reimagine our entanglement with the nonhuman that goes beyond mere posthuman hybridity, and embraces instead a novel becoming. Poe’s tale undermines anthropocentric individualism and prioritizes human entanglement through the fungal colonization of both house and human. In doing so, Poe’s tale transgresses the boundary of what defines the human and suggests the necessity, perhaps more accurately, the current reality of our hybrid, dependent, and symbiotic relationship with the more-than-human.

Please note that the presentation this year will be available both in person and as a live stream on ZOOM. (It will not be recorded or available for later viewing.) The in person portion will take place at Westminster Hall, at the corner of Fayette and Greene streets, merging with the annual International Poe Festival sponsored by Poe Baltimore (which is celebrating its 10th anniversary) and the Baltimore Poe House and Museum (which is celebrating its 75th anniversary). This arrangement is a bit complicated because, while the Poe Festival itself is generally free, the lecture this year is tied to the dedication ceremony for new plaques in the cemetery, and there is a charge for the public at large.

For more information, see the enclosed program and the event page on the Poe Society website, which includes the link to register. (Registration is required for both in person and live stream participation.) After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting via computer or audio only, or a ticket for the in person event, depending on which option was selected. For the live stream, to avoid the potential problem of ZOOM-bombing, the use of video, microphone and chat will be restricted.

## The Poe Society Website (<http://www.eapoe.org>) -

We continue to add to and revise material on the website, including the new appearance of a large number of contemporary and historical reviews and other articles about Poe and his writings. Among other items, we have added a large number of reviews of Poe’s books (*Pym*, *Eureka*, etc.) as well as the various magazines on which Poe worked as an editor, reviews that make a notable reference to Poe as editor or for a specific contribution to the issue in question. Many of these reviews are at least noted in Dwight Thomas and David K. Jackson’s *The Poe Log* (1987), or included in Ian Walker’s *Edgar Allan Poe: The Critical Heritage* (1986), or Ben Fisher’s collection *Poe in His Own Time* (2010). In all cases, our texts are taken from the original material and take advantage of not being limited by space, as a physical book must necessarily be, and thus including the fuller texts. In addition to these relatively shorter items, We have also added a number of full texts from longer articles, such as the series of articles by George Woodberry from the *Century Magazine* (1894 and 1903), and books, including the late G. Richard Thompson’s *Poe’s Fiction: Romantic Irony in the Gothic Tales* (1973), J. A. Harrison’s *The Last Letters of Edgar Allan Poe to Sarah Helen Whitman* (1909) and Richard Beale Davis’s edition of *Chivers’ Life of Poe* (1952). All of these items are presented as HTML/XHTML, so they are fully searchable and support cutting and pasting elsewhere. Many of these works support references from other works that are also on the website. Over time, the idea is to enhance the use of these online versions with actual direct links to the works referenced, forming a literal web of scholarship and views of Poe over the last century and a half.

## The Edgar Allan Poe House and Grave -

The Poe House and Museum at 203 N. Amity Street, is celebrating its 75th year as a museum. (The Poe Society rescued it from destruction in 1939, renovated the building, and opened it as a museum, beginning in 1949.) Under the direction of Poe Baltimore since 2012, the Museum is open Thursday through Sunday, 11:00am to 4:00pm, but all visits must be made by appointment, which can be done online. Poe Baltimore will also hold its International Festival and Awards on the weekend of October 5-6, 2024, two days of Poe-themed performances, vendors, booksellers and music, plus family-friendly activities, tours, poetry and art. Most events are free and open to the public, but tickets are required for some events, including the house tours, the Poe Places Death Weekend Bus Tour and the Black Cat Ball. (See the enclosed flyer.) The tours in particular have sold out for the last several years, so if interested it is recommended that you act early. For more information, refer to the Baltimore Poe House and Museum website at URL: <https://www.poebaltimore.org> or <https://PoeFestInternational.org>.

## Conferences and Papers on Poe -

The Modern Language Association (MLA) was held January 4-7, 2024, online and in person, at the Philadelphia Downtown Marriott, Loews Philadelphia, and the Pennsylvania Convention Center in Philadelphia, PA. The Poe Studies Association (PSA) sponsored a session “On Poe's Longer Works” (chaired by Emron Esplin, Brigham Young University). The presentations included: “ ‘Some Civilized Footsteps’: Colonial Hypochondria in *The Journal of Julius Rodman*” (William Hunt, Barton College); “ ‘Unity of Effect’ as a Self-Destruction Button in Edgar Allan Poe's *Eureka*” (Dania Haidar, Université Paris-Est Créteil); “*Eureka* and the Aesthetics of the Cosmos: From Poe's Unity of Effect to Divine Adaptation” (Bessem Chaouachi, University of Manouba); and “At Length: Poe, Duration, and the ‘Mystery of Marie Rogêt’ ” (Stephen Rachman, Michigan State University).

The American Literature Association (ALA) was held May 22-25, 2024, at the Palmer House Hilton in Chicago, IL. The Poe Studies Association sponsored two sessions. The first session was “Teaching Poe and (No) Nature” (chaired by Travis Montgomery, Oklahoma Christian University). Papers presented included: “Art or Apocalypse: Poe’s Environmentalist Pedagogy” (Sara Crosby, The Ohio State University at Marion); “Adapting Poe, Teaching Horror-Based Approaches to the Environmental Humanities: Mike Flanagan’s *The Fall of the House of Usher*” (Micah Donohue, Eastern New Mexico University); and “How Nature Framed Poe’s Big Questions about Life, the Universe, and Everything” (Harry Lee Poe, Union University, Jackson, TN). The second session was “Poe and the Global Gothic: New Perspectives” (chaired by Philip Edward Phillips, Middle Tennessee State University). Papers presented included: “From Photogeny to Photogénie: Edgar Allan Poe and Jean Epstein’s ‘Usher,’ ” (Nicholas Bloechl, Boston University); “Grim Remedies: Conan Doyle’s Round the Red Lamp, Epistemic Crisis, and the Influence of Poe” (Travis Montgomery, Oklahoma Christian University); and “Intellectualization of Oriental Women and Othering of White Male Protagonists in Edgar Allan Poe’s ‘Ligeia’ and ‘Morella,’ ” (Syeda Rizvi, Western Michigan University). An additional session was called “Gothic Horror in Poe and Lovecraft” (chaired by Jeffrey Weinstock, Central Michigan University). Papers presented included: “Identifying the First Incarnations of the American Gothic Carnival: Analyzing “The Fall of the House of Usher” Through a New Critical Lens” (Joshua Collica, California Baptist University); and “The Francophobic Face of Poe” (Amanda Louise Johnson, Pitzer College). Outside of these sessions, another Poe-related paper presented was “Recontextualizing Poe: Mike Flanagan’s *The Fall of the House of Usher*” (Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, Central Michigan University).

## Some Preliminary Thoughts on the Future of the Annual Membership Mailing -

The Poe Society of Baltimore has never really been an organization that focused on raising funds. It has also never been an organization that was primarily focused on its membership, although we enjoy the feeling of appreciation that comes from our members in return for our general efforts. Instead, our attention has been on spreading information about Poe's life and writings as freely and for as broad an audience as possible. In our early years, the audience most easily reached by means that were at our disposal was our members. That model remained true for the first seventy years or so of our existence. Then, about 1995, something dramatic appeared on the scene — something that no one could have predicted in 1923. That thing was to be called the Internet and the World Wide Web, the two names being used somewhat interchangeably. Not since Gutenberg invented the printing press in 1448 has there been such a revolution in communication. Beginning about the start of the 20th century, radio — and about the middle of the century, television — it was possible to reach a mass audience, but presentations in those formats was necessarily limited to very expensive products. Thus producing content for both was well beyond the means of less well-financed entities. With the Internet, it was possible for those with far more modest circumstances to make and disseminate that content.

The Poe Society jumped into this new world in 1995, initially with some admittedly hesitant experimentation, and then in 1996 with enthusiastic gusto. The result has been <https://www.eapoe.org>, which is now not only the most comprehensive collection of Poe's writings ever assembled in one place, but also the largest archive of material about Poe's life and works, all made freely available to the world. Although still an ongoing project, it has already fundamentally changed the nature of Poe scholarship. At the same time, we have continued to recognize an annual membership year of October of one year to October of the next, and our annual membership mailings typically go out in August. Unfortunately, doing so has become increasingly expensive and burdensome on limited resources. The cost of paper, envelopes and stamps has increased dramatically, and continues to do so. Some members have, over the years, inquired about paying online, especially some of our foreign members. One problem has always been that accepting online payments is a service that requires a third-party vendor, and those vendors understandably want to make money on every transaction. Another issue has been how to send a large block of emails without appearing to be spam. (Mailchimp appears to address the spam question.) We have not raised our membership dues in decades, in part because we did not need to do so and in part because it was not clear what member-specific services we were offering in return. We have also been fortunate that many of our members donate a sum far in excess of the stated dues, for which we are very grateful.

What has been suggested is a 3-tier membership scheme. (Current life and honorary members would be automatically carried at the first tier level.) Tier 1: \$10-49 donations get the annual e-mailing of the newsletter and automatic invitation to the annual lecture; Tier 2: \$50-99 donations get the same as Tier 1, plus names will be added to a card to accompany the wreath laid on Poe's grave; Tier 3: \$100+ donations get the same as Tier 2, plus names will be read out loud at the wreath laying.

There is a related question about the continuation of the annual lecture. Having the traditional in-person lecture is both logistically complicated and expensive, as it usually requires us to pay transportation and a hotel room for the speaker. The in-person lecture has also typically not been very well attended. ZOOM allows us to reach a much larger audience, and although many have asked that it be recorded and made available for later viewing, that has other complications and most speakers do not want that. This year, linking the in-person portion of the lecture to the Poe Festival of the Poe House and Museum may address part of that issue.

What do you — our members — think?