

THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO



**EDGAR
ALLAN POE**

Edited by Kevin J. Hayes



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The Cambridge Companion to Edgar Allan Poe

This collection of specially commissioned essays by experts in the field explores key dimensions of Edgar Allan Poe's work and life. Contributions provide a series of new perspectives on one of the most enigmatic and controversial American writers. The essays, specially tailored to the needs of undergraduates, examine all of Poe's major writings, his poetry, short stories, and criticism, and place his work in a variety of literary, cultural, and political contexts. They situate his imaginative writings in relation to different modes of writing: humor, Gothicism, anti-slavery tracts, science fiction, the detective story, and sentimental fiction. Three chapters examine specific works: *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, "The Fall of the House of Usher," "The Raven," and "Ulalume." The volume features a detailed chronology and a comprehensive guide to further reading, and will be of interest to students and scholars alike.

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For Myung-Sook

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CHRONOLOGY OF POE'S LIFE

- 1809 Edgar Poe is born 19 January in Boston, where his parents, Elizabeth Arnold Poe and David Poe, Jr., both actors, are performing.
- 1811 Elizabeth Poe dies 8 December in Richmond, Virginia. Since David Poe had abandoned the family prior to his wife's death, Edgar, his brother William Henry, and sister Rosalie enter different foster families. Frances and John Allan take Edgar into their family – without legally adopting him, however.
- 1815 John Allan moves his family to London, where he established a branch office of his mercantile firm, Allan and Ellis.
- 1816 Edgar enters a London boarding school run by the Misses Dubourg.
- 1818 Edgar becomes a boarding student at the Manor House School, Stoke Newington, run by the Reverend John Bransby, which would later serve as the model for the school in “William Wilson.”
- 1820 His London business venture proving unsuccessful, John Allan takes his family back to Richmond, Virginia, where Poe begins studying with Joseph H. Clarke and also writes much poetry.
- 1823 Poe transfers to a Richmond school run by William Burke.
- 1825 John Allan inherits much of the immense fortune of his uncle, William Galt.
- 1826 In February, Poe enters the University of Virginia, where he studies ancient and modern languages. He incurs considerable gambling debts, which John Allan refuses to honor. Poe leaves school in December and returns to Richmond.
- 1827 Frequently bickering with Allan, Poe leaves Richmond for Boston, where Calvin F. S. Thomas publishes his first collection of verse, *Tamerlane and Other Poems*. Using the name Edgar

- A. Perry, he enlists in the US Army and is ordered to Fort Moultrie, South Carolina.
- 1828 Rising to the rank of sergeant major, Poe begins to seek appointment to US Military Academy at West Point. To that end, he becomes reconciled with John Allan, who helps him obtain the appointment. Frances Allan dies 28 February.
- 1829 Hatch and Dunning publish Poe's second collection of verse, *Al Aaraaf, Tamerlane, and Minor Poems* at Baltimore.
- 1830 Poe enters West Point in May. John Allan remarries in October 1830.
- 1831 Though endearing himself to fellow cadets, Poe generally dislikes life at the Academy, deliberately disobeys orders, and is court-martialed and expelled from West Point. Before leaving, however, he solicits subscriptions for his third collection of verse, *Poems*, which is published at New York by Elam Bliss and dedicated to "The US Corps of Cadets." He relocates to Baltimore, where he lives with his aunt and cousin, Maria and Virginia Clemm. His brother Henry, who also lives with the Clemms, dies on 1 August.
- 1832 Poe submits five tales to a contest sponsored by the Philadelphia *Saturday Courier*: "The Bargain Lost," "A Decided Loss," "The Duke de L'Omelette," "Metzengerstein," and "A Tales of Jerusalem," which publishes all of them.
- 1833 In October, "MS. Found in a Bottle" wins the first prize of \$50 in a literary contest sponsored by the *Baltimore Saturday Visiter*, which also publishes "The Coliseum" this year. The contest serves to introduce Poe to John Pendleton Kennedy, who would prove to be an important literary connection.
- 1834 "The Visionary" (later, "The Assignment") appears in January. John Allan dies 27 March, yet leaves Poe nothing.
- 1835 Kennedy recommends that Poe begin contributing to the *Southern Literary Messenger* and encourages its proprietor, Thomas W. White, to hire Poe in an editorial capacity. In August, Poe moves to Richmond, where he joins the *Messenger* staff. His uncompromising reviews attract the attention of literati throughout the nation. The stories he contributes to the *Messenger* this year include "Berenice," "King Pest," "Lionizing," "Morella," and "Shadow: A

- Parable." In October, Maria and Virginia Clemm join Poe in Richmond.
- 1836 Poe weds Virginia Clemm on 16 May. His contributions to the *Messenger* this year include the two-part "Autography" and numerous important critical essays including the "Drake-Halleck Review." Poe's editorial freedoms, combined with occasional drinking bouts, alienate him from White.
- 1837 Poe resigns from the *Messenger* in January and then moves his family to New York, where he unsuccessfully seeks employment. Maria Clemm manages a boarding house to help make ends meet. One tenant, bookman William Gowans, befriends Poe and initiates him into the world of antiquarian books.
- 1838 Poe moves his family to Philadelphia early in the year. Harpers publishes *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* in July. Late this year he contributes "Ligeia" and "The Psyche Zenobia" (later, "How to Write a Blackwood Article") to the Baltimore *American Museum*.
- 1839 Poe helps Thomas Wyatt compile *The Conchologist's First Book* and *A Synopsis of Natural History*. He becomes an editor of *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine*, to which he contributes most of its reviews and several tales including "The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion," "The Fall of the House of Usher," and "The Man That Was Used Up." "William Wilson" appears in *The Gift*. Lea and Blanchard publish Poe's first collection of short stories, *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* in December at Philadelphia. Also in December, Poe begins contributing cryptographic puzzles and miscellaneous articles to *Alexander's Weekly Messenger*.
- 1840 Poe continues contributing puzzles and essays to *Alexander's*, and, besides his editorial writings, contributes to *Burton's* "Peter Pendulum" (later, "The Business Man"), "The Philosophy of Furniture," and "Sonnet – Silence." The serial, "The Journal of Julius Rodman," which had begun in the January issue of *Burton's*, ends unfinished after Burton discharges Poe, who had been making plans to found his own literary magazine, the *Penn Magazine*. Unable to generate sufficient support for his proposed magazine, Poe delays his plans. George R. Graham buys *Burton's* in November and unites it with *The Casket* to form *Graham's Magazine*,

- to which Poe contributes "The Man of the Crowd" in December.
- 1841 Poe accepts an editorial position with *Graham's*, to which he also contributes several tales: "The Colloquy of Monos and Una," "The Descent into the Maelström," "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," and "Never Bet the Devil Your Head."
- 1842 "Life in Death" (later, "The Oval Portrait") and "The Masque of the Red Death" appear in *Graham's*, yet Poe resigns from the magazine partway through the year. "The Pit and the Pendulum" appears in *The Gift* and the first two installments of "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" appear in Snowden's *Ladies' Companion* the last two months of the year.
- 1843 "The Tell-Tale Heart" appears in *The Pioneer* in January, and the final installment of "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" appears in the February *Ladies' Companion*. Poe arranges with Philadelphia publisher Thomas C. Clarke to issue his ideal magazine, now titled *The Stylus*, and Clarke publishes a lengthy biographical essay on Poe in his *Saturday Museum*. Plans for the magazine fall through, however. In March, Poe visits Washington, DC, to seek a position with the Tyler administration, yet he gets drunk and ruins his chances for the job. In June "The Gold-Bug" wins a \$100 prize in a literary contest sponsored by the Philadelphia *Dollar Newspaper*. The tale is widely reprinted and also dramatized on the Philadelphia stage. In July William H. Graham issues *The Prose Romances of Edgar A. Poe*, which contains "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and "The Man That Was Used Up," the first and only installment of a planned, serialized collection of Poe's stories. In November Poe delivers his first public lecture, "Poets and Poetry of America," a means of income he would frequently resort to during the remainder of his life.
- 1844 In April Poe and Virginia move to New York City, where his "Balloon-Hoax" dupes New Yorkers into believing that the Atlantic had been successfully crossed by balloon. In May and June, Poe contributes the essay series, "Doings of Gotham," to the *Columbia Spy*. In October he obtains employment with the *New York Evening Mirror*. Tales published this year include "The Literary Life of Thingum Bob, Esq.," "Mesmeric Revelation," "The Oblong Box," "The Premature Burial," "The Purloined Letter," "The Spectacles," and "A Tale of the Ragged Mountains."

- 1845 In January, "The Raven" appears in the January *Evening Mirror*, is an instant sensation, and brings Poe newfound popularity and critical acclaim, which prompt his inclusion in the prestigious series, "The Library of American Books," published by Wiley and Putnam. *Tales* appears as part of the series in July and *The Raven and Other Poems* in November. Early in the year, Poe begins contributing to the *Broadway Journal*, becomes its editor in July, and, on borrowed money, then becomes its proprietor. This year, Poe revises and republishes many of his earlier stories in the *Broadway Journal*. Original tales first published this year include "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar," "The Imp of the Perverse," "The Power of Words," "Some Secrets of the Magazine Prison-House," "Some Words with a Mummy," and "The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether." The periodical battle Poe wages with Longfellow contributes to his notoriety.
- 1846 Poe ends publication of the *Broadway Journal* in January. Periodical publications this year include "The Cask of Amontillado"; "The Literati of New York City," a lively series which generates much controversy and additional notoriety; and "The Sphinx."
- 1847 Virginia dies 30 January, and Poe himself is beset with illness through much of the year. "Ulalume" appears in the *American Review* in December.
- 1848 In February, Poe delivers a lecture on "The Universe," which forms the basis of his cosmological treatise, *Eureka*, which Putnam publishes in June.
- 1849 Poe lectures much this year. His periodical publications include "Eldorado," "Hop-Frog," "Mellonta Tauta," "Von Kempelen and His Discovery," and "X-ing a Paragrab." Visiting Richmond, he becomes engaged to boyhood sweetheart Elmira Royster Shelton, now a widow. On 3 October, he is found semi-conscious and delirious in Baltimore. He dies on 7 October. "The Bells" and "Annabel Lee" appear posthumously before the year's end.

SHORT TITLES AND ABBREVIATIONS

- CH* *Edgar Allan Poe: The Critical Heritage.*
Ed. I. M. Walker. London: Routledge
and Kegan Paul, 1986.
- Collected Works* (Mabbott) *Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe.*
Ed. Thomas Ollive Mabbott. 3 vols.
Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard
University Press, 1969–1978.
- Complete Works* (Harrison) *Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe.*
Ed. James A. Harrison. 17 vols. 1902.
Reprinted, New York: AMS, 1965.
- E&R* *Edgar Allan Poe: Essays and Reviews.*
Ed. G. R. Thompson. New York: Library
of America, 1984.
- Letters* *The Letters of Edgar Allan Poe.* Ed. John
Ward Ostrom. 1948. Reprinted, with
supplement. 2 vols. New York: Gordian
Press, 1966.
- Log* Thomas, Dwight and David K. Jackson.
*The Poe Log: A Documentary Life of
Edgar Allan Poe 1809–1849.* Boston:
G. K. Hall, 1987.
- P&T* *Edgar Allan Poe: Poetry and Tales.*
Ed. Patrick F. Quinn. New York: Library
of America, 1984.
- Recognition* *The Recognition of Edgar Allan Poe*
Ed. Eric W. Carlson. Ann Arbor:
University of Michigan Press, 1966.

KEVIN J. HAYES

Introduction

On 1 January 1875, William M. Cash, an Alexandria, Louisiana news carrier, had a special New Year's Day gift for the customers on his paper route: he presented each with *The Bells*, a handsome, eight-page pamphlet reprinting the well-known poem by Edgar Allan Poe. Louisiana newspaper subscribers were not the only people to receive copies of *The Bells* as presents during the 1870s. In Philadelphia, a china and glassware retailer issued a complimentary edition of the poem for its customers during Christmas time, 1872, and the week after Christmas, grocery boys in the employ of Philadelphia grocer, Mitchell and Fletcher, gave copies of *The Bells* to their customers as New Year's Day presents.¹ Since bells had been a commonplace holiday motif for centuries, perhaps it should come as no surprise that copies of *The Bells* were being distributed to Philadelphia grocery shoppers or Louisiana newspaper subscribers. Anyone who believed what they read in the literary periodicals of the day, however, would hardly find Poe's writings suitable material to pass through the hands of impressionable young news carriers and grocery boys.

While Poe had achieved a status in France equal to that of a great national author and, through his French reputation, was gaining much acceptance in other parts of Europe, his reputation among the literati in English-speaking nations was ambiguous. Many of the articles in the English-language press in 1875 conveyed animosity toward Poe. One characterized him as a madman and attempted to muster evidence in an unconvincing effort to verify the diagnosis in clinical terms.² Robert Louis Stevenson wrote one of the more balanced essays of the time for the New Year's issue of the widely-respected British literary weekly, *The Academy*. Stevenson expressed his conviction that Poe had "the true story-teller's instinct," related his appreciation of "The Cask of Amontillado" and "The Masque of the Red Death," yet deprecated several of Poe's other stories and critiqued his personal image. Before analyzing the tales, Stevenson observed, "I cannot find it in my heart to like either his portrait or his character; and though it is possible that we see him

more or less refracted through the strange medium of his works, yet I do fancy that we can detect, alike in these, in his portrait, and in the facts of his life . . . a certain jarring note, a taint of something that we do not care to dwell upon or find a name for.”³

To be sure, not everyone who was writing about Poe in English during the 1870s expressed such skepticism toward his works and his person. In the mid-1870s, Poe gained his greatest British admirer, John H. Ingram, who began defending Poe in print with a rousing defense in *Temple Bar* in 1874 and began publishing his multi-volume collected edition of Poe’s works the same year. The first two volumes of the Ingram edition appeared in late 1874, and Stevenson’s essay forms a review of these. Volumes three and four would appear in early 1875.

In short, by the time people rang in the New Year, 1875, three predominant attitudes toward Poe had emerged: popular acclaim, measured skepticism, and ardent enthusiasm. The copies of *The Bells* William Cash distributed to Louisiana newspaper subscribers indicate Poe’s acceptance among the general public. Robert Louis Stevenson represents the skeptics, and Ingram, like Charles Baudelaire before him, was an ardent enthusiast. These three varying attitudes toward Poe prevailed into the twentieth century. Writing in the 1920s, Paul Elmer More assumed the skeptical position as he articulated the other two, identifying Poe as “chiefly the poet of unripe boys and unsound men,” the unsound men, from More’s viewpoint, being the ardent enthusiasts.⁴ Like many skeptical professors of literature after him, More associated Poe with adolescence and refused to acknowledge the wide-ranging literary and aesthetic implications of his imaginative and critical writings.

These three basic attitudes toward Poe have persisted to the present day. In the United States, virtually all students read some Poe during their news-carrier years, and Poe, perhaps more than any other author taught in middle schools and high schools today, functions as a catalyst for teaching students the magic of reading. Most leave school with fond memories of reading Poe. While some do not reread Poe after leaving high school, many do. Those who read him with growing fondness over the course of their lives belong among the ardent enthusiasts. Those who choose the study of literature as their profession may take one of two different directions. They may, like many of the contributors to this present volume, become enthusiasts and devote much of their professional lives to the study of Poe’s life and art or, alternatively, they may turn skeptic and question Poe’s significance to literary history. *The Cambridge Companion to Poe* has been designed for those who are returning to Poe with a general desire to know more about the man and his work. Its purpose is to provide a general overview of his writings and

to indicate some of their complexities. It might even help to turn potential skeptics into enthusiasts.

Prior to completing their individual chapters, contributors to the present volume were issued a challenge: to write chapters that would contain fundamental information for students returning to Poe for the first time since their youth as well as new information and ideas that would appeal to seasoned Poe scholars. The contributors rose to the challenge and accomplished their tasks admirably. Regardless of individual focus, each of the following chapters presents a combination of general overview and original insight. Taken together, this collection of essays offers a fresh view of Poe's life and work for the new century.

The image of Poe that emerges from the following chapters is, however, considerably different from the image of Poe people held in William Cash's time. As the nineteenth century gave way to the twentieth, Poe was known, first and foremost, as a poet. The list of books in the 1897 Sears catalog, for example, extended for dozens of pages and contained multiple editions of Poe's verse, but no editions of his short tales.⁵ With the celebration of the centenary of Poe's birth in 1909, his short stories began to achieve renewed attention. Reflecting on the numerous centenary tributes that had appeared in the London press during the week of the centenary, Arnold Bennett, writing the following week, observed, "Last week we all admitted that Poe had understood the 'art of the short story.' (His name had not occurred to us before.)"⁶ The trend that began with the centenary continued over the course of the century. Marie Bonaparte, in her groundbreaking study, *Edgar Poe, Étude Psychanalytique* (1933; translated as *The Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe: A Psycho-Analytic Interpretation* [1949]), subsumed Poe's verse into the biographical portion of the study yet devoted separate chapters to nearly all of the major stories. Poe's verse continued to attract considerable attention through the mid century, however, for his rich symbolism and scrupulous attention to poetic form was especially appealing to the prevailing critical approach of the time, the New Criticism. As Structuralist critical approaches gave way to Post-Structuralism, however, readers began recognizing anew the importance of reading Poe in relation to his cultural milieu. Consequently, emphasis shifted to those works that could be analyzed in relation to their times. Furthermore, the still-burgeoning emphasis on criticism in literary studies has placed additional importance on Poe's large body of critical writings.

The *Cambridge Companion to Poe* reflects current attitudes toward Poe's work. Only one chapter specifically treats his poetry whereas a majority of the chapters take his fiction as their subject, and three concern his critical writings. While the individual chapters in this collection need not be read in

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