

**EDGAR ALLAN POE BICENTENNIAL CONFERENCE –  
"POE ALIVE IN THE CENTURY OF ANXIETY",  
ALCALÁ DE HENARES (SPAIN), 21-23 MAY 2009**

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Between 21 and 23 May 2009, the University of Alcalá (Alcalá de Henares, Madrid province and region, Spain) played host to the international conference "POE ALIVE IN THE CENTURY OF ANXIETY / POE PRESENTE EN EL SIGLO DE ANSIEDAD", the second academic event of this nature to be organised in Spain for the bicentennial of the great American writer's birth (the first took place at the Albacete campus of the University of Castilla-La Mancha from 3 to 6 February). Now, the torch was taken up by the historic city of Alcalá de Henares, the birthplace of Miguel de Cervantes and a UNESCO World Heritage site. During these days, the Colegio de San Ildefonso and the former Trinitarios convent welcomed Poe scholars from numerous Spanish universities, from other European countries and from the USA, to deliver lectures or papers in either Spanish or English.

The event was organised by the host university's Instituto Universitario de Investigación en Estudios Norteamericanos (University Research Institute for American Studies - IUIEN; now rebaptised as the Instituto Franklin: [www.institutofranklin.net](http://www.institutofranklin.net)), with the support of the US Embassy to Spain. The principal organisers were Prof. José Antonio Gurpegui Palacios and the Institute's project administrator Cristina Crespo. The present brief note is not intended to replace the official programme, to which those interested are referred; the aim is, rather, to share my personal impressions - which are necessarily incomplete, since, as we know, in an event of this kind with panels organised in parallel sessions it is, alas, never possible to attend everything.

The conference included four plenary lectures, of which three offered global readings of Poe's work. In the inaugural session, Prof. Djelal Kadir (Pennsylvania State University) spoke on "E.A. Poe: America's Conscience and Epistemic Anxiety"; Prof. Félix Martín Gutiérrez (Universidad Complutense de Madrid) examined aspects of "Edgar Allan Poe: Delirios de un Confabulador" ("Edgar Allan Poe: Reveries of a Schemer"); and, in the closing lecture, Prof. Boris Vejdovsky (University of Lausanne, Switzerland), in "Poe's Catastrophic Fiction: Judgment and Responsibility in Poe's Century", linked the sensations of collapse and disintegration in a tale like "The Fall of the House of Usher" to the repercussions of the present financial crisis. The fourth plenary lecturer, Christopher Rollason (Metz, France), offered, in "Tell-Tale Signs: Edgar Allan Poe and Bob Dylan – Towards a Model of Intertextuality", an intertextual perspective, examining Poe's traces in the work of the famous American singer-songwriter and the parallels between the two *oeuvres*, both of which hover on the borderline between elite and mass cultures. This lecture included a Power Point presentation designed by the architect Hilda Hurtado (Mexico).

The papers presented in the various panels covered a very wide range of facets, textual, intertextual and theoretical, of Poe's writing: I will here mention a number of them, without in any wishing to detract from the value of those not named. Those presenting more general views of Poe's work included: Andrzej Dorobek (Higher State School of Professional Education, Plock, Poland), "Psychedelic Relevance of E. A. Poe for the 20th Century American Culture"; Daniel Taylor Ogden (University of Uppsala, Sweden), "Poe and the Technological Sublime" (on a lesser-known but important aspect of Poe, his role as a questioning pioneer of science fiction); Peter Caverzasi (Lehman College, CUNY, New York), "Animism and Adaptation in Poe's Short Stories"; Eulalia Piñero Gil (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid), "'Memento mori': E. A. Poe's Rituals of Death and the Female Dead Body"; Maya Zalbidea Paniagua (Universidad Complutense de Madrid), "New Psychoanalytical Readings of 'The Premature Burial', 'William Wilson' and 'The Colloquy of Monos

and Una"; and, on the teaching of Poe's tales in the context of literature and education, Miguel Berga Bagué, Pere Gifra Adroher and María Antonia Oliver (Universidad Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona), "Enseñar Poe en una Facultad de Humanidades: Interdisciplinariedad e Intervención Textual" ("Teaching Poe in a Faculty of Humanities: Interdisciplinarity and Textual Intervention").

Other papers focused on individual works of Poe, including: for the short stories, Luis Girón Echevarría (University of Extremadura), "Cryptography and wordplay in Poe's 'The Gold-Bug'"; for Poe's solitary novel, Marita Nadal (University of Zaragoza), "Unspeakable Effects: Parodic Treatment of Horror and Terror in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*"; and for the poems, Slawomir Studniarz (University of Warnia and Mazury, Olsztyn, Poland), "Sound and Sense Relation in Edgar Allan Poe's Poetry: A Study of 'Ulalume'", and Carmen Lara-Rallo (University of Málaga), "An Intratextual Approach to 'The Raven': Intuitive and Ecstatic Echoes Behind Poe's 'Mathematical Problem'". Intertextual or inter-generic readings were offered by: Juana Celia Djelal (Pennsylvania State University), "Poe and the Ancients – Thresholds of Anxiety" (on Poe and the Greek and Latin classics); Antonio Ballesteros (National Distance Education University [UNED], Madrid), "Edogawa Rampo, el Poe japonés" ("Edogawa Rampo, the Japanese Poe"); Borja Menéndez Díaz-Jorge (Universidad Complutense de Madrid), "Visions of the Avant-Garde in Poe's 'Fall of the House of Usher'" (linking Poe's tale to painting and the cinema); and Santiago Rodríguez Guerrero-Strachan (University of Valladolid), "Comentarios de Poe acerca del realismo pictórico" ("Poe's comments on pictorial realism"). Finally, also featured were aspects of the relationship between Poe and Spanish culture, in: Eusebio Llácer Llorca and Nicolás Estévez (University of Valencia), "La obra literaria de Edgar Allan Poe en la prensa española de Posguerra" ("Poe's writing in the post-Civil War Spanish press", i.e. in the earlier years of Francoism); and Cristina Flores Moreno (University of La Rioja), "Circulation and Reception of Edgar Allan Poe's Poetry in Spanish Modernism: Antonio Machado".

The aspects of Poe analysed in the lectures and papers were, then, infinite in their variety. In addition to the strictly academic part, the event also included: an exhibition, in the cloister of the Trinitarios, of poems by Poe translated into a remarkable range of languages, conceived by the Paris-based artist William Wolkowski; a talk, accompanied by slides, on Amontillado (the variant of sherry immortalised by Poe in one of his Spanish-inspired tales, "The Cask of Amontillado") and its presence in Poe's work and its adaptations in other media, given by José Luis Jiménez García, of the Spanish Royal Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters (himself from Jerez, the Andalusian cradle of sherry) and followed by a sherry-tasting session in the Trinitarios garden; and, finally, the closing dinner, held in the imposing and hospitable venue of the Nuevo Parador de Alcalá.

This conference succeeded in generating a visible and contagious atmosphere of literary passion and intellectual camaraderie: there is no doubt that it has marked another step forward in the development of Poe studies among both Spanish and non-Spanish specialists. Meanwhile, the bicentennial commemorations continue: in Spain, two more conferences are in preparation, in Cáceres (November) and Valencia (December), as well as less academic celebrations such as the *Semana Gótica* (Gothic Week) of Madrid, which is scheduled for late October and will include Poe-related activities. Over 2009, Spain has been and is positioning itself as one of the countries making the biggest efforts to recall and promote the still dazzlingly current work of this major American writer: right up to the end of the bicentennial year, we can be sure that there will be plenty of Amontillado in the cask!