

Fall/Winter 2019-2020

AP/EN 4332 3.0A (F)

Edgar Allan Poe

Course Director:

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Delivery Format:

Seminar

Time:

Tuesdays 2:30 - 5:30 pm

Description:

Edgar Allan Poe is one of the most important figures in the history of American literature and a far more versatile writer than most people know. He contributed to a variety of literary forms and genres. He invented detective fiction forty years before the first Sherlock Holmes story appeared. He fostered the developing genre of science fiction with several tales and his one novel, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*. A handful of his tales are considered masterpieces of terror fiction—perfect specimens not only of the short story form but also of a new kind of writing: psychological Gothic. Additionally, Poe wrote comedies (though not very funny ones). In his own time, he was known primarily for his often-scathing literary reviews; in them he was striving toward coherent critical theories about the short story and lyric poetry. He finally brought the theories together in a handful of essays that demand attention. The best of his own short stories and poems *illustrate* his (rather magisterial and exclusive) beliefs about how (and why) one goes about composing a short tale of Gothic terror, or a short lyric poem. Poetry, Poe said, was his greatest passion; for him it was, in fact, rather like a religion.

In this course we examine a healthy selection of Poe's many forms, genres, and sub-genres. In the context of his theories regarding the short story, we study several of his best-known tales of terror. We discover, for one thing, that despite his claims to hatred of allegory, many of his tales are in fact allegorical. We read his detective stories to observe how he established almost all of the key conventions of the genre. We also dip into his "comedic" tales. With one eye on his theories of lyric poetry, we study several of his poems, including those for which he is most famous.

We take a variety of critical approaches to the texts: history-of-ideas; psychoanalytic; feminist; generic; New Critical (stylistics, rhetoric, linguistics). Since Poe contributed so significantly to psychological terror, we examine theories of mind coeval with Poe (phrenology, physiognomy, “moral insanity,” “intellectual insanity,” “religious insanity”) but also some of those current in our own time (as taken from the latest edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*). As well, we draw upon stylistics, examining not only what Poe wrote but also how he wrote: we touch on linguistics but mostly fall back on what was the very first stylistics—classical rhetoric—to demonstrate that Poe was a *master* of language, a linguistic genius. We must not forget, furthermore, that Poe’s narrators are rhetoricians, even orators, trying to convince us of their (often warped) perspectives; so we see how they employ some of the classical figures of speech, figures of thought, and Aristotelian appeals in order to get us to see their points of view.

Category:

C

Historical Requirement:

Time Period II (1700-1900)

Requirements:

Essay:	30 %
Exam:	35 %
Participation:	15 %
JSTOR Research Assignment:	5 %
Critical Reading Assignment 1:	10 %
Critical Reading Assignment 2:	5 %

Reading List:

Kennedy, J. Gerald, ed. *The Portable Edgar Allan Poe*. New York: Penguin, 2006.

Zimmerman, Brett. AS/EN 4332 3.0A Edgar Allan Poe – primary course kit

Zimmerman, Brett. AS/EN 4332 3.0A Edgar Allan Poe – critical skills course kit

Open To:

Honours Year 4 (84+ credits)