



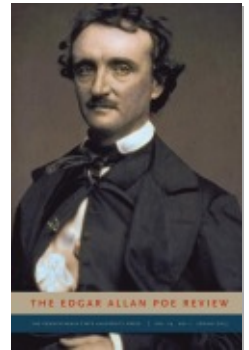
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## Abstracts for the PSA Panels at the ALA

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### *Poe and Place*

Chair: Philip Edward Phillips, Middle Tennessee State University

“The Ocean and the Urban: The Horrors of Space and Impossible Knowledge in Poe’s ‘The Oblong Box’ and Detective Fiction,” Tyler Roeger, Pennsylvania State University

At the end of Poe’s tale “The Oblong Box,” the narrator makes a surprising confession. Despite having solved the mystery of what lay inside the mysterious “box” to which the title refers, the narrator expresses that he rarely “sleeps soundly at night,” that he is kept awake by a “hysterical laugh which will forever ring” within his ears. There are several significant narrative elements that prove anomalous when compared to Poe’s other works. Why does the loss, rather than the return, of a coffin evoke horror from the narrator? And why does Poe, in “The Oblong Box,” map out explicitly American places on a tale of oceanic passage?

In my paper, I argue that, for Poe and his narrator, the ocean proves threatening through its ability to swallow and overwhelm the investigative, gothic interplay between surface and depth into a much larger, indeterminate depth below the sea’s surface. As opposed to the city, a space of surfaces and unending horizontal movement, the ocean’s vertical depth presents the notion of a limitless depth, unable to be contained by the study of city surfaces found in the true crime reporting of antebellum New York and imagined throughout Poe’s urban detective fictions. I argue that “The Oblong Box” is a tale that shows how the ocean becomes a space of depth that refuses mapping. While not grounded in a single city, this reading provides a way to consider how teachers might grapple with the way that conceptions of space, of surface and depth, in Poe’s fiction are inflected by the urban and oceanic places that shaped Poe’s life and imagination.

Considering Poe’s desire to map out the spaces of a ship and the horrors of the ocean in relation to his rendering of the urban surfaces of antebellum New York and Paris prompts us to explore Poe’s fiction in relation to oceanic space, a developing turn in American literary studies. Specifically, these questions of surface and depth open up conversations regarding the problems of the ocean in an antebellum society that was already struggling to map and contain the growing spaces of urban locales like Poe’s New York

and Philadelphia. Such connections between antebellum oceanic and urban space in Poe's work allow for an approach to teaching Poe's myriad tales in conversation with one another, recognizing how varying settings, like the oceanic and the urban, are mutually dependent in Poe's literary world.

"Lost Kingdom by the Sea: Edgar Allan Poe's Charleston Days," Candace Grissom, Independent Scholar

Perhaps one of the least-explored periods of Edgar Allan Poe's life is the brief time between 1827 and 1828 that the author spent under the name Edgar Allan Perry as a young serviceman stationed at Fort Moultrie, near Charleston, South Carolina. Yet the writer and the area seem to have made a lasting impact on one another. Poe set his story "The Gold-Bug" in Sullivan's Island, capturing within it both the unique history of the place as a base for pirates and a setting for the slave trade, as well as the curiously mixed aura of beauty and mystery that surrounds it. Two of Poe's other stories, "The Oblong Box" and "The Balloon-Hoax," also have significant connections to the area. In tribute to the author and his drinking days, Sullivan's Island today boasts a pub, Poe's Tavern, as well as a library, several streets, and a plethora of local legends, which will be discussed as part of this presentation. The most intriguing of these Charleston tales is that one possible source of Poe's inspiration for the poem "Annabel Lee" may have been an actual person, Anna Ravenel, the daughter of a prominent Charleston family and a relative of an acquaintance of Poe's, Dr. Edmund Ravenel, a noted conchologist.

This paper will explore the history of the Ravenels and their possible influence on Poe. Additionally, the history of Sullivan's Island and the surrounding city of Charleston will be discussed as a source of inspiration for several of Poe's works. Last, Poe's motivations for and reactions to spending time in military service, particularly at Fort Moultrie, will be considered for its lasting impact on the author's work, as well as his later life.

"No Place Like Home: Teaching Poe's Removals," Scott Peeples, College of Charleston

This paper draws on an undergraduate seminar I taught in 2012 titled "Poe, Place, and History." I discovered that exploring Poe's relationship to "place" really meant exploring his relationship to removal, to his not having a true home. This is not to say that Poe never attached himself to

a place—or, worse yet, that he lived in a “world of imagination,” caring little about his mundane physical surroundings. Instead of lapsing into an outmoded view of Poe as unconcerned with the dull realities of place and time, I will examine the implications of Poe’s shifting regional loyalties and lack of long-term identification with any single place. One might argue that Poe stayed physically unsettled for most of his adult life because he never made enough money to settle down—to be poor and unsatisfied is to be on the move—or that being orphaned conditioned him to a mentality of homelessness for the rest of his life. In this paper, I will consider those causes while also speculating on how Poe’s removals are reflected in stories dealing with displacement and estrangement, from “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” to “The Spectacles.”

### *Irish Poe*

Chair: Amy C. Branam, Frostburg State University

“The Elusive ‘Ligeia’: Problems with Poe’s Short Story,” David Budde, Ohio State University

In Edgar Allan Poe’s short story “Ligeia,” published in 1838, tension shrouds the unnamed narrator as he grapples with relationships with two vastly different women. The narrator’s first wife, Ligeia, is the subject of what essentially amounts to a love letter in the first section of the text. When Ligeia dies, however, the narrator enters into a far less meaningful relationship with Lady Rowena Trevanion. In this paper, I deconstruct how the geography of the poem functions in conversation with the differing levels of love for the two women. Namely, that the narrator lives with his beloved Ligeia in a “decaying city near the Rhine” while he meets and lives with his second wife in England speaks to Poe’s subconscious disdain for the latter location. In order to supplement my understanding of how the subconscious might reveal itself in Poe’s work, I look first to his short story “The Imp of the Perverse,” wherein Poe creates a dichotomy between the conscious and subconscious, before the works of Sigmund Freud popularized these ideas. I also look to the poem “A Dream Within a Dream,” in order to establish a foundation for how Poe as author deals with tragic circumstances such as the ones that abound in “Ligeia.” Ultimately, I argue that “Ligeia” serves as a textual representation for Poe’s preference not only for the pastoral over the urban but also for other locales outside the realm of British rule.

Poe's "The System of Dr. Tarr and Prof. Fether" is explicitly a dark comedy critical of contemporaneous treatments of mental illness. Closer attention to the narrative, crossing the "teas" and dotting the "eyes," traces out an Irish presence within Poe's linguistic manipulations. Whereas Maxwell Morton indicated Irish resonances in the similarities between Poe's story and Charles Lever's *Charles O'Malley*, "The System" bears even more striking similarities with Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal." Swift and Poe cultivate a critique built around circulating oral tropes, specifically those of eating, drinking, and speaking. These oral tropes critically manifest, explicitly for Swift and implicitly for Poe, Irish colonial identity through orality.

My contention is that Poe's narrative constructs a French and British facade as the historical backdrop for a critique of English colonial practices vis-à-vis Irish orality. The Irish mouth, as David Lloyd recently argued, is the chief orifice of Irish colonial identity, and this is manifest in the circulating oral tropes of "The System." These circulating tropes align with a historical visual that details the convergence of liberty and slavery with French and British mouths: James Gillray's 1792 "French Liberty. British Slavery." In this image, French and British cultural, religious, and ideological difference is encapsulated in speech and eating, both of which are yoked to the ideals of liberty and slavery. This convergence is mapped around the mouth. The image provides a visual reading of the ideas Poe grapples with when, for example, the French countryside is (re)articulated through linguistic manipulation into an ideological space of Irishness. Swift's discourse on the beneficial consumption of Irish flesh is then shifted when the narrator attends dinner at the asylum and speaks with a "fat little gentleman" who explains that "there is scarcely an insane asylum in France which cannot supply a human tea-pot. *Our* gentleman was a Britannia-ware tea-pot, and was careful to polish himself every morning with buckskin and whiting." Not only does this "gentleman" yearn to be British—"Britannia-ware"—but he must engage in a daily process of "whiting." This yearning and "whiting" resonates with the pulse of the stereotyped Irishman, savage and simian. Throughout dinner, the narrator is continually unnerved by the manners of the "lunatics" and the band producing "an infinite variety of noises, which were intended for music." Loud, slovenly, and ill-mannered, the

stereotypical Irish give way to a subversive Irish in the narrator's naming of the "lunatics" as "rebels" who instituted a "rebellion," not unlike Irish rebellions in 1641 and 1798.

Poe casts Irishness in sharper relief during the narrative's chaotic ending. Prior to the "keepers" regaining control of the asylum, the narrator inquires of his host, "Have you had practical reason to think liberty hazardous in the case of a lunatic?" The unstated Irishness of the scene is emphasized here in connection with French "liberty" and madness. This connection between French and Irish is underscored by Catholicism in opposition to British Protestantism and "British Slavery." Once the doors are breached, the "keepers" attack like "a perfect army of what I took to be Chimpanzees, Ourang-Outangs, or big black baboons of the Cape of Good Hope." Here, the story inverts the racial stereotyping of the Irish onto the "keepers," casting British authority figures as "big black baboons." The narrator's further history of the "lunatic" "rebellion" also underscores the Britishness of "the keepers, ten in number, having been suddenly overpowered, were first well tarred, then carefully feathered, and then shut up in underground cells." This tar and feathering evokes memories of British officials in the American colonies, a colonial rebellion echoing various Irish ones.