

**EDGAR ALLAN POE BICENTENNIAL CONFERENCE –
“GENIUS AND PSYCHOSIS IN EDGAR ALLAN POE: NEW INTERDISCIPLINARY
PERSPECTIVES”, VALENCIA (SPAIN), 2-4 DECEMBER 2009**

Report by Christopher Rollason, Ph.D - Metz, France - rollason54@gmail.com

From 2 to 4 December 2009, the University of Valencia hosted the international conference “GENIUS AND PSYCHOSIS IN EDGAR ALLAN POE: NEW INTERDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES” – no less than the fourth such academic event to be held in Spain for the bicentennial of the American writer's birth. Its predecessors took place at the University of Castilla-La Mancha (Albacete campus) (3-6 February), the University of Alcalá de Henares (21-23 May), and the University of Extremadura (Cáceres campus) (19-21 November). To the present writer's knowledge, no other country in the world, not even the US, has held so many Poe conferences during the bicentennial year, and if we add the numerous other Poe-related events – theatre productions, readings, fancy-dress parties, etc – held in Madrid and elsewhere over the year, not to mention the multiple reissues and new illustrated editions in 2009 in Spanish of Poe's writings in translation, there can surely be no doubt that today's Spain offers an academic and cultural environment particularly favourable to the presiding shadow of the great Edgar. I myself, as a Poe scholar from outside Spain, was pleased and honoured to participate in the Valencia event with two texts, a paper and a round table contribution.

The overarching themes of this closing conference of 2009 were, on the one hand, the complex and disturbing range of Poe's themes, from the hyperrational to the irrational, and, on the other, the rich, if not, confusing variety of perspectives that critics and other artists have applied to an *oeuvre* that is particularly open to exploration from the multidisciplinary viewpoint. Poe is an author whose work belongs simultaneously to both high culture and mass culture, and whose writings have proved unusually permeable to adaptation into other media, including visual arts, cinema and music. Diversity, as hallmark of both Poe's own work and its reception and criticism, was, then, the keynote of the three days. The event was ably and sympathetically organised by Eusebio Llácer Llorca, Nicolás Estévez Fuertes and Amparo Olivares Pardo, all of the University of Valencia's Faculty of Philology, Translation and Communication. The proceedings were enlivened by a sherry and amontillado wine-tasting session at the Colegio Mayor Luis Vives (*can you tell Amontillado from Sherry?*) and an official reception at the Town Hall. There was also a poster session displaying the results of a competition among Valencia students to design the best Poe poster, and an exhibition of Poe poems in calligraphic form by the Paris-based artist William Wolkowski.

The four plenary lectures between them covered enormous ground, from “‘Mastery in mystery’: the real thing in Edgar Allan Poe's ghostly literature” (Juana Teresa Guerra de la Torre, University of Las Palmas) to ‘Edgar Allan Poe and Utopia’ (Daniel Ogden, University of Uppsala, Sweden) and from ‘Edgar A. Poe and French Musical Poetics’ (Michel Duchesneau, Université de Montréal, Canada) to ‘*La caída de la casa Usher* de Jean Epstein y las criptas de Luis Buñuel’ (‘Jean Epstein's Fall of the House of Usher and Luis Buñuel's crypts’) (Pilar Pedraza, University of Valencia). Ogden's revelation of Poe as social critic and science-fiction pioneer opened the eyes of those in the audience hitherto familiar mostly with the Gothic Poe, while the depth and detail of Poe's influence on such French composers as Claude Debussy, Maurice Ravel and Darius Milhaud, as explored by Duchesneau with generous visual and musical illustration, also broke new ground for many.

The papers offered reflected a commendably wide spectrum of interests, and from the viewpoint of interdisciplinarity the following merit particular mention: on Poe's literary intertext, 'Manifestaciones de lo clásico en los textos góticos de Edgar Allan Poe' ('Manifestations of the classical in Edgar Allan Poe's Gothic texts') (Ana González-Rivas Fernández, Universidad Complutense de Madrid); on translation ('Emmanuel Roidis: the introducer and first translator of Edgar Allan Poe in Greece' – Eleftheria Tsirakoglou, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece; 'La traducción de Poe: las figuras retóricas como elementos clave en la creación del miedo' ('The translation of Poe: rhetorical figures as key elements in the creation of fear' – Isabel Tello Fons, Universitat Jaume I de Castellón); on ageing ("I loved the old man – I made up my mind to kill the old man": Poe on the edge of ageing' – Marta Miquel Baldellou, University of Lleida/Lérida); on 'Usher' and avant-garde art ('Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher": a twenty-first-century revisit' – Christopher Rollason, Metz, France – my first of two contributions); on 'The Cask of Amontillado' and its literary and cultural progeny ('Tras la pista del barril de Amontillado' – 'On the trail of the Cask of Amontillado' - José Luis Jiménez García, Real Academia San Dionisio); on Poe and silence ("Siope" as the ineffable: Etymology of a Title' – María Carmen Pérez Branchadell, Universitat Jaume I de Castellón); and on Poe, Dickens and the didactics of literature ('Edgar Allan Poe and Charles Dickens: a perfect team creating atmosphere' - María Alcantud Díaz, University of Valencia)

The proceedings also included a workshop on a multimedia theme, namely the influence of Poe-inspired films on contemporary Italian musicians (led by Roberto Calabretto, University of Udine, Italy); and a round table, dedicated specifically to interdisciplinarity in Poe studies, with contributions on Poe and poetics (Jaime Siles, University of Valencia, poet and President of the Spanish Classical Studies Association), Poe and the sciences (Fernando Ballesteros, University of Valencia, astronomer), and Poe and psychology (Christopher Rollason, Metz, France; my own second contribution). From this three-way exchange, the American author emerged, intriguingly, as a continuator of Aristotle and precursor of both Freud and Einstein.

The unprecedented sequence of Poe conferences over this year has had the gratifying effect of creating an Edgar Allan Poe community in Spain, indeed one not even confined to that country. Many Poe scholars, from both Spain and further afield, attended two, three (in my own case) or even all four conferences, thus acquiring invaluable opportunities for networking and sharing. The challenge will now be to find new ways, more informal but lasting and sustainable, of building on these gains, and to take Poe studies in Spain on to fresh ground, in constant contact and cooperation with the best international scholarship.