



Press Release

For Immediate Release

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University of Virginia Library Acquires Rare Poe Letter and Opens Major Exhibit

In honor of the 200th anniversary of the birth of Edgar Allan Poe — the 19th-century American author and one-time University of Virginia student — the U.Va. Library announces the acquisition of a rare Poe letter and the opening of an exhibit that explores his life, works and enduring influence.

In the letter, written in July 1842, Poe apologizes to publishers J. and H.G. Langley for his drunken behavior. He encloses an article he hopes the publishers will buy, as he is "desperately pushed for money." He also blames a friend, poet and lawyer William Ross Wallace, for making him drink too many "juleps" and tries to make amends for the unfortunate result:

"Will you be so kind enough to put the best possible interpretation upon my behavior while in New-York? You must have conceived a queer idea of me – but the simple truth is that Wallace would insist upon the juleps, and I knew not what I was either doing or saying."

Poe (1809-1849) was born in Boston to stage actors and his life was plagued by debt, drink, and tragedy. His wanderings took him from one city to another until he died in Baltimore at the age of 40. His works are considered among the most influential in American literature and include "The Raven" and "The Tell-Tale Heart."

"This one letter provides a very illuminating and also poignant look into the many demons Poe wrestled with throughout his career," said Stephen Railton, professor of English at U.Va. "It shows both his own temperamental frailties as well as the economic difficulties that even a great author faced while trying to earn a living by his genius in 19th-century America."

Poe closes the letter by hoping to see the publishers again "under better auspices." The Langleys rejected the article, but it was published elsewhere later that year.

The letter builds on the University Library's strong collection of Poe materials, including manuscripts, rare first editions and the John Henry Ingram's Poe Collection, a research resource compiled by Poe's first biographer containing documents from people who knew him.

On March 7, the Library will open an exhibition, "From Out That Shadow: the Life and Legacy of Edgar Allan Poe." The exhibit features more than 100 items related to Poe, including records of his student days at U.Va., manuscripts of landmark works such as "The Raven," first editions,

original artwork and personal effects such as his writing desk and portraits of Poe and his mother. The newly acquired letter will be on exhibit in a related Poe display in the Special Collections Library later in March.

Upcoming Poe events include "**Poe and the Power of Imagination,**" part of the Virginia Festival of the Book, and The Tell Tale Hearts performing "**In Honor of Poe: An Afternoon of Stories and Songs.**"

Co-sponsored with the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas-Austin, the exhibit will be in the main gallery of the Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library/ Mary and David Harrison Institute for American History, Literature, and Culture on U.Va.'s Central Grounds. Additional materials are from the Free Library of Philadelphia, the Valentine Richmond History Center and the Poe Museum in Richmond.

The exhibition will be on display at the U.Va. Library's Harrison Institute from March 7-August 1, 2009, and the Harry Ransom Center from September 8, 2009, through January 4, 2010. Please visit the **Harrison Institute hours listings** before your visit. Admission is free.

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Poe Online Exhibition

<http://www.lib.virginia.edu/poe/>

Poe Exhibit Related Events

<http://www2.lib.virginia.edu/press/poe/events.html>

Area celebrations and events for Poe's bicentennial:

<http://www.poe200th.com/>

For hours and other information about the Harrison Institute:

<http://www.lib.virginia.edu/harrison/>