

Poe and Materialism

In “Philosophy of Furniture,” Poe identifies the “aristocracy of dollars” in the United States and tracks its impact on interior decorating. In “The Literary Life of Thingum Bob, ESQ.” and “Some Secrets of the Magazine Prison-House,” he shifts his critique to the world of magazine publishing. “William Wilson” and “The Masque of the Red Death” contain characters that “out-Heroded Herod.” “The Man That Was Used Up” and “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar” conclude with men in grotesque, transformed states. “Peter Pendulum (The Business Man)” and “Raising the Wind (Diddling)” probe confidence schemes. “MS. Found in a Bottle” and *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* find their narrators crossing oceans, embroiled in emergent systems of global exchange. While the list could go on to reference “The Fall of the House of Usher,” “Eldorado,” *Eureka: An Essay on the Material and Spiritual Universe*, and many other writings, this survey begins to illustrate how Poe’s works variously engage with materialism and material culture. A focus on materialism in Poe can launch investigations of antebellum culture, capitalism, the limits of the body, the expanse of space, religion and spirituality, recent scientific theories and technological advances, and, to borrow the title of his final angelic dialogue, “The Power of Words.”

The PSA will sponsor a panel titled **Poe and Materialism** at the upcoming American Literature Association Conference in Boston (May 21-24, 2025). We seek proposals that explore Poe’s consistent, complex, and sometimes contradictory representations, reflections, and analyses of materialism and related topics. Panelists are invited to engage with long-standing and recent trends in American literary and cultural studies and interdisciplinary scholarship, especially as related to print and material culture, historical materialism, and/or new materialisms.

To submit a proposal, please send a title and abstract of no more than 250 words to Caleb Doan at caleb.doan@fmarion.edu. Please use “PSA ALA Panel 2025” for the subject line. This panel is “in-person” only. The deadline for submissions is January 10, 2025. Panelists will be notified by January 15, 2025.