

Why is Stamp Collecting Like *The Raven* by Thomas Lera

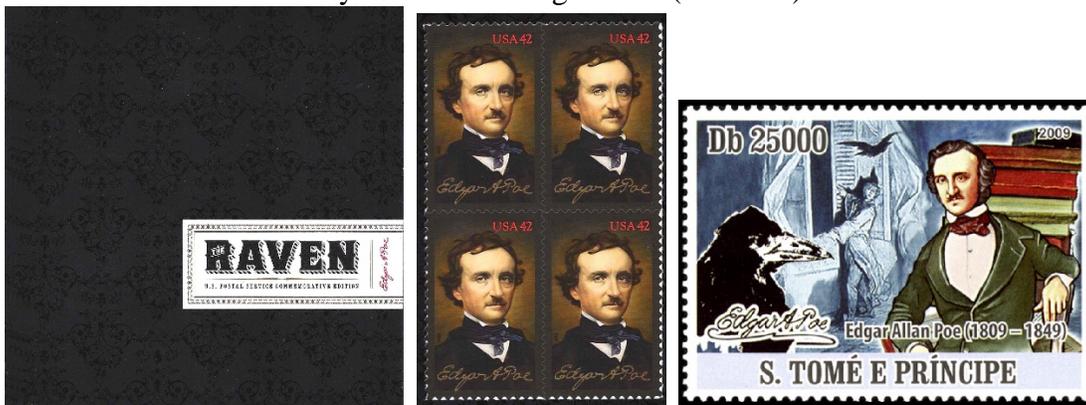
The APS Stampshow (August 3-6, 2017) is right around the corner in Richmond, VA where, interestingly, the Edgar Allen Poe Museum is located. Situated at 1914 E. Main St., it is basically right around the corner from the show as the raven flies.



Museum Garden and inside Exhibit Hall (Courtesy of Thomas Lera)

One of Poe's best known poems, of course, is "*The Raven*," which begins:

"Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary,
Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore –
While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,
As of some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door –
"Tis some visitor," I muttered, "tapping at my chamber door –
Only this and nothing more." (lines 1-6)ⁱ

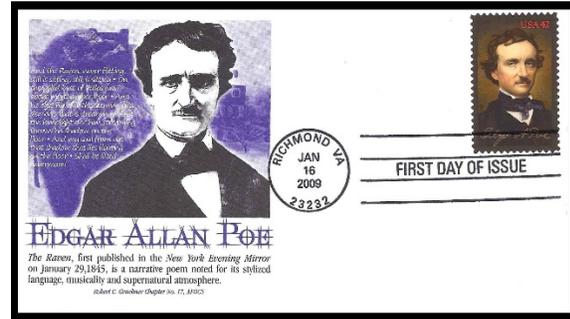
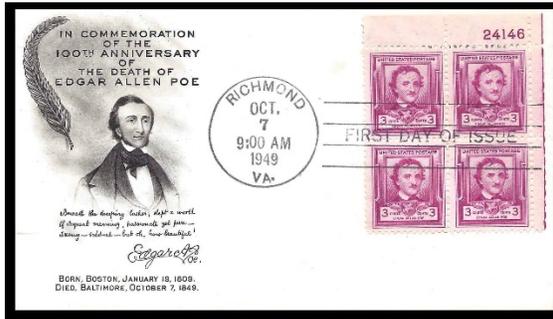


2009 Commemorative Edition with B/4 and "The Raven" single from S. Tomé and Príncipe B/4 set.

As you read the next one hundred and two lines, think about your stamp collecting activities. Are we not always madly trying to fill the holes in our collections and exhibits? Don't we go to stamp club meetings and shows to discuss stamps in their every shape and form? Have we become prisoners of the stamp world? Perhaps we too are a bit possessed, a bit mad.

Line 14 of the poem reads: "Thrilled me – filled me with fantastic terrors never felt before;" the possibility of madness creeps in slowly. Here Poe seems like he might just be having a weird night, perhaps he's a little more imaginative than is good for him. But remember, all it takes to thrill and terrify him is the "rustling of each purple curtain," like the turning of a stamp album page may excite collectors. We feel him teetering on the edge, just as you may feel when you finally locate that illusive cover to complete your exhibit.

As we know, Poe's visitor is the Raven which sits on a statue above the door. For some reason, his first instinct is to speak to it. He asks for its name, just like you usually do with those strange stamp collector "birds" that fly into your space, right? Amazingly, the Raven answers back, with a single word: "Nevermore."



Richmond First Day covers of the 1949 (Scott 986) and 2009 (Scott 4377) Edgar Allen Poe Issues

Understandably, Poe asks more questions. The bird’s vocabulary turns out to be as limited as some stamp collector’s; all it says is “Nevermore.” He catches on to this rather slowly and asks more questions, which get more painful and personal. The Raven doesn’t change his story, and Poe starts to lose his sanity, just like some stamp collectors might feel having visited every table at every bourse for a year and not finding their holy grail.

“And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor
Shall be lifted – nevermore!” (lines 107-8)

For us collectors, these last lines seal the deal. Like Poe being tormented by the bird, do you feel the awe of stamp collecting is keeping your soul prisoner, locked in an insane eternal struggle?

Over the course of the poem, Poe has gone from feeling a little nervous, to screaming at the Raven, to becoming the eternal prisoner of the bird. While madness may be in the eye of the beholder, he is mad. Is his experience similar to the madness of stamp collecting? ⁱⁱ

While in Richmond, take a side trip to the Edgar Allan Poe Museum – it’s well worth it. Don’t leave the Richmond Stampshow saying “Nevermore....”



If you get to Baltimore, visit his house and grave at Westminster Cemetery on October 17th. ⁱⁱⁱ
It is a big event at the cemetery on the anniversary of his death (Courtesy of Thomas Lera)

[Editor’s Note: There is much more to the story of E.A.P. that can be found at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poe_Toaster]

ⁱ *The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe*, “The Raven,” 2002, Castle Books, Edison N.J. pp.773-775. The quotes from the poem are from this book, line count by author. The book includes 73 short stories and 48 poems.

ⁱⁱ Note: If you want to learn about *The Raven* in detail what every word, phrase, and line means, visit: Shmoop Editorial Team. (2008, November 11). *The Raven*. Retrieved December 11, 2016, from <http://www.shmoop.com/the-raven/>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Visit <http://www.eapoe.org/>, Retrieved December 11, 2016. *The Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore* website is full of various Poe items. Edgar Allan Poe’s Grave Site and Memorial are in Westminster Cemetery, on the southeast corner of Fayette and Greene Streets, Baltimore Maryland.