

2019 Belmont Undergraduate Research Symposium

English Session 1

Moderator: Dr. Maggie Monteverde

April 11, 2019 4-4:50pm

IHSB 340

4:00 p.m. – 4:10 p.m.

Peoples of Ragnarok: A Website

Erin Stender

Faculty Advisor: Maggie Monteverde

In Fall 2018, the English department offered a special topics course focusing on the concept of Ragnarok, the cataclysmic world-ending event that both defined and reflected many aspects of Germanic culture. In an uncertain world of harsh environments, violent clashes, and cyclical prophecy, the ancient Germanic peoples shaped a civilization which would become one of the core pillars of the western world. This Nordic civilization which spanned not just the countries of Scandinavia but also England and Germany formed a close community of shared values, full of rich genealogy, and deep religious ties to the world around them that laid the foundation for many of our ideologies today. From the fjords of Iceland to books in our classroom, we spent the semester reading and analyzing the lives and events of the Nordic world. This website is a comprehensive look into both our coursework and perceptions surrounding the Peoples of Ragnarok.

4:10 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.

The Changing Purpose of Myth over Time

Emily Allen

Faculty Advisor: Maggie Monteverde

Focusing on the Icelandic texts *The Prose Edda* and *Sage of the Volsungs*, this essay examines the way the values and purpose of a people's myths may change over time, even though the stories and myths themselves remain the same. Within Norse culture, we see Norse mythology shift from an oral tradition of myth to a literary tradition of myth which then moves into a literary tradition of legendary and historical sagas. Through each of these transitions, the purpose of the stories moves from explaining the natural world and the human experience to preserving the people's cultural heritage and historical knowledge.

4:30 p.m. – 4:50 p.m.

Raising Cain: Interrogating Monstrosity in *Beowulf*

Victoria Pan

Faculty Advisor: Maggie Monteverde

In this paper, I explore the implications of the narrator in *Beowulf* describing Grendel as the "son of Cain." I use this reference as it applies to Beowulf, Grendel, and Grendel's mother, to interrogate what exactly it means to be a monster, and who gets to place this designation on others. What I find is ultimately, there is no true system behind who is the monster and who is the hero: one is simply favored by society, accepted as part of their "normal," and one is not. By walking through a series of parallels between Beowulf and Grendel, who both inherit characteristics from the Biblical Cain and Abel story, I point out exactly how dependent on chance and perspective this labeling can be.

2019 Belmont Undergraduate Research Symposium

English II

Moderator: David Curtis, Ph.D.

April 11, 2019, 7-8 p.m.
JAAC 2141

7:00 p.m.-7:15 p.m.

The Unknowable Mother of Arthur Gordon Pym

Brooke Steen

Faculty Advisor: David Curtis, Ph.D.

The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket by Edgar Allan Poe is notorious for generating a wide range of interpretations from scholars of different disciplines. For example, Marie Bonaparte, using a psychoanalytic approach to read Poe's words as symptoms of the author's neuroses, makes vague claims that the sea, as well as the various ships, symbolize Poe's mother throughout the work.

In this paper, I instead take her "sea-as-mother" theory and apply it only to the confines of the story. In understanding the sea as the maternal influence over the protagonist instead of the author, a metaphor of life, death and rebirth is revealed throughout the changing tone and scope of the story. By dividing the three sections of the novel and examining them as parts of this cycle, with the maternal sea at their center, themes of reincarnation and transcendence become clear. These themes begin to offer explanation for the other ambiguous elements present in the work, such as the layered authorship and vague ending that the book is known for. By understanding Pym's journey in this context, the work itself can be understood as a spiritual journey of ongoing renewal.

7:15 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.

The Philosophy of Poe's Puzzles

Kalin Hendricks

Faculty Advisor: David Curtis, Ph.D.

The works of Edgar Allan Poe that fall within the genre of mystery have seemingly left behind a mystery of their own: what was the author's purpose in their dissemination? Through a close analysis of a number of Poe's mysteries, I came to discover what I believe to be Poe's ultimate goal in writing his narrative mysteries. In Poe's mysteries, the author is offering insight into his methodology of interpretation and deduction: discovering meaning requires rational, imaginative thought and consideration of the whole as well as its partial expressions; the relationship between signifiers and the elements they signify is ultimately ambiguous; and proper deduction requires contextualizing of a message, as well as closely studying the messenger.

My analysis examined *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, “The Gold-Bug,” and “The Purloined Letter.” The mysteries of Poe encourage readers to stretch their imaginations and challenge their preconceived notions to become better readers and thinkers. By repeatedly working at the metaphorical puzzles of Poe’s fiction, readers will ideally grow in their interpretive and deductive abilities, modeling the ingenuity of Poe’s detectives.

7:30 p.m. – 7:45 p.m.

Edgar Allan Poe, King of Memes: A History of “The Cask of Amontillado” and Its Interpretation

Anna Clark

Faculty Advisor: David Curtis, Ph.D.

In 1846, Edgar Allan Poe published “The Cask of Amontillado,” a short story that is seen by many as the greatest of all his prose writing. In just seven pages, Poe created a story that has been the center of critical debate and cultural reinterpretation for over a century. The story’s fascinating narrator, abnormal character relationships, and ambiguous intention have inspired a variety of analytic and interpretive reactions manifesting in literary magazines, movie references, and, most recently, in memes.

This research essay examines the reception of “The Cask of Amontillado” since its publication. “The Cask of Amontillado” demonstrates the unique interplay of highbrow academia and popular culture that Poe’s writing has always solicited. “The Cask of Amontillado” is just one example of how traditional analysis and popular interpretation come together in literary studies: both methodologies are rooted in the same intention – to find greater cultural significance within a text. The only regrettable thing about Poe’s newfound presence in social media is that he can never personally share the experience; Poe has found his people nearly two centuries too late.