Podium Presentation
Modernism and Individual Classification in Poe’s “The Man of the Crowd” and “The Man That Was Used Up”
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In the first half of the 19th century, identity was built through the culmination of one’s family name, individual rank, achievement, and position in society. However, with the inception of a new and rising middle class by the mid-century, as well as the tendency for tens of thousands of people to congregate in cities, it became staggeringly difficult to maintain identity through classic aristocratic means. My paper analyzes how Edgar Allan Poe’s short stories “The Man of the Crowd,” published in Burton Gentleman’s Magazine in December 1840, and “The Man That Was Used Up,” published in the American Monthly Review in August 1839, document the upper class’s anxiety toward the emergent middle class’s disruption of classic forms of identity construction. Readers wanted to consume stories which addressed the classic methods of construction of identity and class structure, and as a result, Poe offered his critique of the aristocracy with these two stories. It is important to note that putting “The Man of the Crowd” and “The Man That Was Used Up” in context with one another in relationship of their original publication has never been done before. By putting them in context of their original publications, we are afforded a better opportunity to understand the sociopolitical context of these stories and their relevance to Poe scholarship.