

Engel satisfies "morbid curiosity"



Dr. Elliot Engel talks to students following his lecture.
PHOTO: Sharon Bledsoe

By SHARON BLEDSOE

The transformation of Edgar Allen Poe's pathetic and grotesque life into his tales and poems was the subject of Dr. Elliot Engel's September 17th lecture held at the Wayne County Library.

The bizarre events in Poe's life strongly influenced his works, leading him to become the father of the modern horror tale.

"You must know his life in order to know his works," Engel said.

In the informal and humorous way that makes him a public favorite, Engel gave the details in "The Tortured Genius of Edgar Allen Poe."

An estimated 200 attended the 7:30 p.m. lecture sponsored by the Friends of the Library.

Engel gave a slightly shorter presentation at 4:00 p.m. attended mostly by high school students.

Engel indicated that this was his first after-school lecture.

The agonizing deaths of the four women Poe loved influenced his works most, fostering his obsession with "beautiful, dead women," Engel said.

As a result, Poe single-handedly invented the tale of terror.

"Without Poe, Stephen King would not be writing today," Engel said.

He also invented the format of the modern short story, where every sentence must support a central theme. Poe's theme was, of course, terror.

In 1842 Poe came into contact with Charles Dickens.

Since Engel's first literary love has always been Dickens, he said he was delighted to discover the connection.

Dickens, with the story of the death of a beloved pet, inspired Poe to write "The Raven."

Engel quoted several stanzas of "The Raven" which he said was meant to be a fairy tale.

When Poe was asked why he didn't begin with the standard "Once Upon a Time" he replied, "in my imagination all time is midnight dreary."

When his young wife became the fourth woman he loved to die in agony, he wrote a poem about her entitled "To Virginia."

It was his greatest work ever, according to Engel, but critics felt the title was confusing because Poe lived in Virginia.

He changed the name to "Annabelle Lee" which he thought was more poetic.

Through a series of misfortunes, Poe died in relative obscurity; however, his works are now read by more people than any other American author except Mark Twain.

Engel ended his lecture with a pitch for his literary group, "Dickens Disciples" which meets on weekends in Raleigh.

Membership is \$12.00 per year and includes a newsletter.

A membership along with a tape of the lecture on Poe is available for \$15.00.

All proceeds from the tape go to the London Children's Hospital.

Some of Rosalyn Lomax's English students attended the lecture for extra credit and were pleasantly surprised.

"He captured my attention throughout the hour," Bonnie Low said. "It was well worth the time."

Another student, Geraldine Brown, thought he was a distinctive speaker "because of his expression. His humor kept my interest."

Visiting Artist discusses craft

By SHARON BLEDSOE and JULIE A. AYCOCK

At a time when controversy threatens funding for the arts, Cynthia Mitchell manages to bring an air of self-assurance to the WCC Visiting Artist program.

Because of the National Endowment for the Arts scandal and the Basic Education Plan, which stresses the "3 R's" but neglects the extras, many arts programs have been dropped from school curriculums.

WCC and James Sprunt Community College share Mitchell because of budget cuts at both institutions.

She feels that these schools should be applauded for keeping the program.

Mitchell realizes she will be challenged familiarizing herself with both the Goldsboro and Kenansville communities but views the program positively and feels she can still function successfully.

Perhaps this confidence comes from her belief in the "empowerment of the human voice."

Mitchell believes that every individual has a unique voice. This includes a speaking voice as well as people's beliefs, which define who we really are as people.

She maintains that these voices can change throughout life, triggering a lifetime of exploration.

"One can allow different places of the voice to be heard," Mitchell said.

"Finding these voices empowers you by putting you in touch with your emotions, opinions, and feelings."

People reveal themselves through their voices, said Mitchell.

Actors need to find other, interesting places in their voices in order to develop a character.

Mitchell thinks the arts should play an active role in education. "Art is all about thinking creatively," she said.

Mitchell dislikes the word "teach," preferring "permit."

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