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The Afterlife Of Edgar Allan Poe (Literary Criticism In Perspective)



Synopsis

Controversies abound in studies of Edgar Allan Poe. From the time of his death well into the twentieth century, partisans debated the issue of his character: was he an alcoholic? drug addict? pathological liar? necrophile? In the 1920s and 30s, psychoanalytic critics sought to divorce the study of Poe from Victorian moral concerns but in the process made scandalous claims by linking Poe's dream-like stories to his personality. The status of Poe's literary productions was similarly disputed; dismissed by the New Critics but championed by poets such as William Carlos Williams and Allen Tate. Recent scholars have debated the meaning and significance of Poe's representations of race, class, and gender, often returning to the character issue: how racist and misogynist was he, and how important are those questions to understanding his work? Finally, how have the seemingly countless plays, films, novels, comic books, and pop music experiments based on his image and works intertwined with academic study of Poe? This book examines these and other controversies, shedding light on broader issues of canon formation, the role of biography in literary study, and the importance of integrating various, even conflicting interpretations into one's own reading of a literary work. This book will be of great interest to Poe scholars, both those who have been a part of the literary battles described above and newcomers to the field who can use the book as a guide to the field of Poe studies, and to all those interested in Poe and his work. Scott Peeples is associate professor of English at the College of Charleston.

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Customer Reviews

Anyone faced with an in-depth study of E.A. Poe needs this book. Not only does the work show Poe's impact on the American scene, it unravels large portions of the lies, and myths that have sprung up, like weeds in a graveyard, since Poe's death. Much of what has become "the accepted image" of this author, critic, and editor is simply a mass of received falsehoods. Poe emerges as a real, 19th century man, who deals with the questions of his age, (slavery, class, race and more). His biting comments on writing, mass publication, pseudo-intellectualism, and cultural ignorance are refreshingly opposed to the prevailing sentiments towards America's oncoming love with "realism," and it's adulation of the colloquial. Poe comes off in this collection as too smart for the room, because he was.

This overview of Poe criticism and the various guises in which he's appeared over the years is witty, adept, perceptive, and is full of critical views that are presented in a clear and precise manner. It's a joy to read, delightful, and you come away recognizing how easily we re-cast writers to fit our present images of them.

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