

A 21st-CENTURY RETROSPECTIVE VIEW ABOUT EDGAR ALLAN POE. UNA MIRADA RETROSPECTIVA SOBRE EDGAR ALLAN POE DESDE EL SIGLO XXI

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This recent compilation of articles comprising manifold aspects of the works of Edgar Allan Poe certainly accomplishes its main objective, which is to reflect upon Poe's literary legacy and emphasise his undeniable presence in contemporary culture. It is an interdisciplinary collection of essays inasmuch as it focuses on multiple themes within Poe's universe, unfolds them by using different approaches, and presents them from different perspectives that go beyond the scope of literary studies, *stricto sensu*. This volume discusses Poe's works on issues such as the historical context in which they came to light, their intertextuality regarding other arts such as music and cinema, the metaphysical component prevailing in some of Poe's short stories, as well as the poetics and stylistic features that turned Poe into a major literary theorist. Different literary approaches are adopted, ranging from recourse to formalism, psychoanalysis and structuralism to comparative literature and cultural studies. One of the most remarkable innovations of this volume lies in the fact that some of the essays compiled come from linguists, musicologists, film historians and even physicists, in addition to specialists from literary studies. The multidisciplinary quality characterising this collection certainly reflects Poe's significant flexibility and versatility, bearing in mind the numerous genres to which his works belong, as well as his multifaceted interests as a writer, critic, journalist, poet and theorist.

The essays that make up this collection were written in the context of the two-hundredth anniversary of Edgar Allan Poe's birth, which was commemorated in the

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year 2009,¹ and even though this volume cannot be considered a direct outcome of the Poe conference held in Valencia in the same year, it does, nevertheless, contain a representative number of the papers delivered at the plenary lectures of the conference. The articles comprising this collection are presented in five sections: they discuss the relevance of Poe's works in their social context, the intertextuality between Poe and other arts and sciences, Poe's influence on the linguistic and literary codification, stylistic and literary aspects in Poe's fiction, and the influence and legacy of Poe's poetics on creativity. In the first of these sections, Daniel Ogden brings to the fore Poe's critique of American expansionism on land and sea, emphasising Poe's warning about the dangers of creating a commercial empire in the Pacific as depicted in some of his short-stories such as "The Balloon-Hoax" as well as in his only novel *The Adventures of Arthur Gordon Pym*. Subsequently, in his essay, Christopher Rollason revises some of the most important interpretations of Poe's stories within the framework of psychoanalysis —particularly those of Otto Rank, Marie Bonaparte and Jacques Lacan. Likewise, Rollason also examines the presence of the psychoanalytic imprint in Poe criticism through the perspectives of Jacques Derrida, Walter Benjamin and Hélène Cixous, arguing that, in the future, the dialogue between Poe studies and psychoanalysis will be mostly based on the notions of interrelationship and intersubjectivity. The first section of this volume closes with Emma Sopeña's article, which categorises the features of a criminal's psychology examining the discourse of criminal narrators in four of Poe's tales, through a structuralist approach.

The second section of this compilation, which addresses the possible intertextuality between Poe and other fields of expertise, opens with Pilar Pedraza's essay about the relevance that dead beauties acquired in the imagery of the eighteenth-century and the romantic period, and how these images regained importance in Jean Epstein's film *La Chute de la Maison Usher* (1928). Pedraza claims that the images of dead women as objects of art became prominent in the advent of modernity and were interpreted as both disturbing and seducing, especially for Poe, owing to the tragic death of many of his beloved women. Alternatively, Michael Duchesneau comments on the intertextual links between Poe's works and their influence on French musicians such as Florent Schmitt, André Caplet, Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel. Duchesneau also underscores the influence that Poe's theoretical writings, in particular "The Philosophy of Composition" and "The Poetic Principle", exerted on the construction of a poetics of modern music. Finally, Poe's remarkable interest in science becomes the focus of attention of Fernando Ballesteros' article, which, through its tripartite structure, claims that Poe made considerable use of scientific elements in his stories, putting his writing at the service of science, unmasking some fakes —as happens in his tale "Maelzel's Chess Player"— and even attempting some scientific work, as in his essay *Eureka*.

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From a linguistic perspective, María Carbonell-Olivares' article inaugurates the next section on Poe's influence on the linguistic and literary codification, where she analyses the translation into French and Spanish of different contrastive connectors used in Poe's tale "The Black Cat" from a semantic and pragmatic perception. This is followed by David Ketterer's essay in which the important influence that Poe exerted on the works of renowned science-fiction writers such as Jules Verne and H. P. Lovecraft is highlighted, while also scrutinising the trace that Poe's *Adventures of Arthur Gordon Pym* left in Yann Martel's successful novel *Life of Pi*. Drawing on Poe's anti-utopian perspective in his works, Miguel Martínez underlines Poe's critique of the idea of progress and the notion of perfectibility, ultimately stating that the Bostonian writer believed that the modern world carried, inherently, the seeds of self-destruction. Peter Caverzasi draws attention to Poe's thoughts as a rationalist in his reading of Poe's masterpiece "The Fall of the House of Usher", whereby Poe intended to fight against the extended belief in animism and advocate instead the need to rely on reason to neutralise its effects.

This volume concludes with a series of articles that tackle the influence and legacy of Poe's poetics on creativity. In this respect, Jaime Siles analyses Poe's critical writings and their significant influence on subsequent theoretical principles of rhetoric and poetry. Similarly, in his essay, Alberto Chimal revises Poe's premises about the need to create dramatic tension and respect the unity of effect, claiming that Poe's aesthetic ideas are of current use in contemporary theories about creative writing. Chimal also underlines Poe's defence of the genre of short fiction inasmuch as he placed emphasis on issues such as form and structure, as well as on its appropriateness for experimentation. As a final corollary, Eusebio Llácer pays homage to Poe as master of different literary genres and highlights his undeniable legacy to contemporary world culture. Llácer also makes reference to important aspects of Poe's biography that have greatly contributed to the shaping of his legend.

Given the myriad issues it addresses, this compilation of essays has its roots in the tradition of international collections that amalgamate articles focused on different aspects within Poe studies. As one of its main strengths, this volume addresses and updates consolidated aspects of Poe studies, such as psychoanalysis or the study of Poe's detective fiction, and in comparison with other collections, it places special emphasis on issues like aesthetics, stylistics and poetics. Given its interdisciplinary nature, this volume also approaches Poe's works from innovative perspectives like linguistics and even physics. Nonetheless, it disregards other important themes in Poe studies that also deserve attention, such as some of his traditionally underestimated tales, or other works of his, such as various articles, his letters and his unfinished play. Similarly, some approaches which are particularly

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relevant in contemporary Poe studies are not mentioned, as is the case with analyses of Poe's tales from the perspective of literary discourses such as feminism, postcolonialism, postmodernism, and popular culture. A notable differentiating factor of this volume, connected directly with its origins, is the attention given in the introductory essay to the influence Poe exerted on certain Spanish writers such as Pedro Antonio de Alarcón and Fernán Caballero.

This collection of essays achieves a remarkable balance between—to use T.S. Eliot's terms—tradition and the individual talent, drawing on classic issues within Poe studies but also introducing new approaches into the field. Four years after his bicentennial, the revisions and new insights into Poe's works in this volume certainly show Poe's presence in our times, underscoring, as the Bostonian writer stated in one of his critical essays, that the soul of the reader—that is, that of all of us—still remains in the writer's control.

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¹. The publications resulting from the academic commemorations of Poe's bicentenary, edited by Luisa Juárez; Margarita Rigal and Beatriz González; and Nicolás Estévez, Eusebio Llácer and María Amparo Olivares are of particular interest.

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