

Eusebio V. Llácer Llorca, María Amparo Olivares Pardo and Nicolás Estévez Fuertes, eds. 2011: *A 21st-Century Retrospective View about Edgar Allan Poe/Una mirada retrospectiva sobre Edgar Allan Poe desde el siglo XXI*. Bern: Peter Lang, 257 pp. ISBN: 978-3-0343-0595-2.

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Poe scholars and readers around the world commemorated in 2009 the 200th anniversary of Edgar Allan Poe's birth. Such a propitious year inspired conferences and generated books on the American author aimed at reevaluating Poe's importance in twenty-first-century society. Ever since Charles Baudelaire translated his stories, Poe has enjoyed the long-lasting favour of a worldwide readership as *Poe Abroad* makes clear (Vines 1999). With respect to Poe in Spain, John Englekirk's early book *Edgar Allan Poe in Hispanic Literature* (1934) was for a long time a lonely milestone in Poe bibliography, and this was not remedied until the 1990s when certain scholars focused new attention on the study and reception of Poe in Spain (Rigal 1998; Rodríguez Guerrero-Strachan 1997; Gurpegui 1999; Roas 2001).

My reference to the reception of Poe merely aims to indicate the place of *A 21st-Century Retrospective View about Edgar Allan Poe* within Poe studies in Spain, where scholars are largely interested in reception. It is quite unusual for Spanish books on the American poet not to devote a chapter, an article or a section to reception, as is the case in, for example, Margarita Rigal and Beatriz González's three wide-ranging collections: *A Descent into Edgar Allan Poe and His Works: The Bicentennial* (2010a), *Edgar Allan Poe (1809-2009). Doscientos años después* (2010b), and *Los legados de Poe* (Rigal 2011). However, this strong contribution by no means indicates that Spanish scholars are simply interested in the reception of Poe. On the contrary, they pay careful attention to, and provide illuminating insights into other issues, as *A 21st Century Retrospective View* testifies.

Poe's life and writings continue to be a relevant reflection on American literary culture as well as its rejection, in their ambiguity towards evil and its correlate perversity, the fascination for ambivalent psychological abysses, the enthrallment with the ratiocinative, and the appeal for scientific enquiry. That teachers and critics alike consider his work still capable of shedding light on society in the twenty-first century lies at the heart of this interesting collection.

In the Preface, the editors write: "In addition to speculation, analysis and evaluation of different hypotheses, this collection of essays is an attempt to provide innovative,

multidisciplinary perspectives on Edgar Allan Poe's life and works from the point of view of the newly-born twenty-first century" (11, my translation). This goal is variously achieved by the authors of the chapters of the book.

The volume is divided into five sections plus an introductory essay, which is the most debatable piece of writing in the book. In it, Estévez and Olivares highlight the reasons for Poe's continued presence in contemporary society, considering one of the most important to be his literary achievement, which they ascribe to his mastery of the *novella* ("Sobre todo la habilidad para la novela corta", 15), but this is not really the case, as Poe was a master of the short story but not of the *novella*, unlike, say, Herman Melville. They also assert that Poe excelled as a novelist ("aquellos géneros en los que sobresale el escritor norteamericano, es decir, como crítico literario, poeta y novelista", 17). Poe, however, only published one novel, although he left another unfinished, whilst he published a good number of outstanding short stories; his most enduring legacy in American narrative. The essay sketches Poe's life with an emphasis on the tormented aspects. They base their information and comment on a wide array of biographies, although the omission of the important conclusions of two widely acclaimed works, Kenneth Silverman's *Edgar Allan Poe: A Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance* (1991) and Dwight Thomas and David Jackson's *The Poe Log: A Documentary Life of Edgar Allan Poe 1809-1849* (1987), is a surprise. They list some of the conferences that took place during 2009 in Spain and abroad and the resulting publications but fail to mention Rigal's *Los legados de Poe* and her critical edition of Poe's works in Cátedra (Poe 2011), as well as the *Edgar Allan Poe Review* issues that collected some contributions to the conferences on Poe in Albacete and Romania, neither of which are included.

In the second part of the introductory essay, the authors briefly summarize Poe's achievements as a literary critic, as a poet and as a writer of short fiction. Quite interestingly, they link Poe's critical writings to a rejection of America's Manifest Destiny, though in my opinion Poe's dark romanticism has deeper roots and must be read against Transcendentalism and Jacksonian society, which favoured him as a writer. They also mention other authors' accusations of plagiarism vested against Poe, an issue already explored by Galván (2009) and Martín (2011), among others. When discussing Poe's narrative, Estévez and Olivares mention his influence on subsequent authors in mystery and fantastic narrative. However, they have overlooked the fact that the common link to Poe's narratives is the ratiocinative, which indeed functions as the core aim in the poetics of Poe's narrative pieces.

The third part of the essay is devoted to the reception of Poe in Spain in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and states that there were few translations of Poe's writings in the nineteenth century ("La carencia de traducciones en español de sus obras fundamentales de referencia", 25-26). However, Roas lists translations into Spanish of 42 narrative pieces (out of 67 short stories and a novel), plus 'The Conqueror Worm' and 'The Raven' (2011: 37-38; 187-94), all in the nineteenth century. There are some rather serious inaccuracies within this section; for example, the ascription of Benito Pérez Galdós to the Spanish

Generación del 98 (26) or the mention of Juan Ramón Jiménez's poems as indebted to Poe: "La huella de Poe quedaría reflejada entre otros en el poema 'Ida, ninfeas y alma de violeta' (29), which are, in fact, three independent poems. Similarly, the translation of 'The Raven' that Estévez and Olivares attribute to Jiménez was actually completed by Viriato Díaz Pérez and published in *Helios* in April 1904, where Juan Ramón Jiménez would read it. Jiménez's translations were made later in his life and not published until 1953 in his essay 'En casa de Poe', one of the many pieces of critical writing in which Jiménez discussed the importance of Poe's poetry in America and in Spain. Finally, Estévez and Olivares emphasize the oblivion into which Poe fell following the Spanish Civil War, an assertion that should be qualified in many respects: it is true that censorship limited the translations of foreign works, but Poe was a popular author, whose writings, mainly the narrative pieces, were in fact translated into Spanish between 1950 and 1975. It must also be mentioned that there was a revival of interest in Poe in Spain in the 1970s when he was much praised and discussed by important Spanish philosophers such as Fernando Savater and Rafael Argullol. As a final comment on this introduction, the authors should have provided a list of references at the end. They use footnotes and in-text citation but do not give the full reference, which could well lose the non-specialist reader of Poe among the many abridged references.

The first section of the book proper is devoted to Poe and society. Daniel Ogden's 'Edgar Allan Poe and American Expansionism on Land and Sea' brings the reader back to Estévez and Olivares' assertion that Poe's works were a rebuttal of American Manifest Destiny. Ogden aims to examine Poe's "critique of American expansionism in the early decades of the nineteenth century on land and sea" (38). He places Poe's narrative in its cultural context and then explores some stories that have traditionally been neglected, for instance, 'The Man That Was Used Up', 'The Thousand-and-Second Tale of Scherezade', 'The Balloon Hoax', 'Some Words with a Mummy' (a narrative that indicates the interest in Egypt that seized America in the nineteenth century), and, naturally *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*. In putting together this array of narratives, Ogden succeeds in demonstrating that Poe's interest in travel literature went beyond *Pym*, and he manages to contextualize the stories. As Ogden puts it, "In the production of this literature the line between fiction and non-fiction was not always observed" (44). Poe himself wrote some narratives that were meant to be facts rather than fiction and others that merged both under the implicit objective of exposing the limits of scientific inquiry, as he meets with skepticism America's plans for commercial expansion.

Next, Christopher Rollason's 'Perspectivas psicoanalíticas sobre Poe — ¿Dupin, inventor del psicoanálisis?' draws on a large tradition of psychoanalytic studies on Poe's writings and life. A cursory glance at, for example, Scott Peebles 'A Dream Within a Dream: Poe and Psychoanalysis' (2004) shows the immense attention that Poe's writings have attracted, starting with Lorine Pruette's article 'A Psychoanalytical Study of Edgar Allan Poe' (1920), followed by Marie Bonaparte's psychoanalytical interpretation (1933) and continued by many others, such as Daniel Hoffman (1972) and Jacques Lacan (1988). Rollason does not stick to an orthodox understanding of psychoanalysis. While he pays homage to previous research on psychoanalytic Poe, he also explores the early mentions of the word psychology

in literature and indicates that Otto Rank was the first psychoanalyst to be interested in Poe's writings, more particularly in the figure of the double (56). Rollason reports Bonaparte's and Lacan's conclusions but also reviews Walter Benjamin's and Hélène Cixous' unorthodox writings on Poe. The article provides valuable insight into Poe and psychoanalysis through its addressing of new approaches that could overcome the crisis of psychoanalysis that Rollason addresses. Rollason hints towards a reformulation of psychoanalysis to include studies of mass communication as well as the Internet, and their impact on subjectivity. Unfortunately, the article falls short of its subtitle as only a small paragraph is devoted to the exploration of Dupin as the creator of psychoanalysis.

Emma Sopeña's contribution examines the psychopathic characters in Poe's writings. She first reviews theories on the matter to then apply them to 'The Tell-Tale Heart', 'The Cask of Amontillado', 'The Imp of the Perverse' and 'The Black Cat'. While the article is valuable in itself and its conclusions shed light on the stories, Sopeña fails to contextualize madness in American society or the role of science in the US in the nineteenth century. I have a feeling that such contextualisation would have shown the common origin of psychotic and melancholic characters, the only difference being one of degree. It would also have explained that stories which deal with the fantastic and with perversity are originated in the same theory on human nature, and more importantly, it would have linked Poe's theories on madness to contemporary science.

The issue of science is investigated in the second section of the book, along with other chapters that deal with Poe and the Arts. Fernando Ballesteros, a scientist himself, follows Sopeña and deals with this most interesting issue of science in Poe's writings. He aims to link Poe's 'scientific discoveries' to contemporary science (it seems that Poe had some insights on astronomy that were duly demonstrated in the twentieth century). Ballesteros' scientific expertise is evident, as is his thorough knowledge of Poe's work. He examines Poe's interest in science as a reader of popular scientific literature, his education at West Point where he took various science courses, his use of scientific vocabulary in his narratives, his scientific hoaxes and his last work, *Eureka!*, challenging some common assumptions. It is my view that a broader contextualization of science in the nineteenth century would have led Ballesteros to different conclusions. In fact, Poe's approach to science is fully romantic, in the vein of J. W. Goethe, and, as other Romantics, Poe would contribute to scientific development by highlighting the limits and inconsistencies of nineteenth-century scientific theories (Frank 2003; Scheick 1992; Tresch 2002).

Pilar Pedraza's and Michel Duchesneau's articles are most appealing. Pedraza investigates the figure of the maiden in the writings of Poe as other writers such as Ramón María del Valle-Inclán, and the filmmaker Luis Buñuel have also done. Pedraza has explored the topic of the maiden in other books such as *Máquinas de amar. Secretos del cuerpo artificial* (1998) or *Espectra. Descenso a las criptas de la literatura y el cine* (2004), and shows a comprehensive command of the bibliography. All this makes her conclusions engaging. In contrast, Duchesneau focuses on the issue of Poe's influence in French modern music, an issue that has rarely been explored. There are few studies on Poe and music, which makes

this article a valuable contribution due to its novelty, its methodology and its conclusions. While difficult to imagine, perhaps, Poe is shown to be a source of inspiration for the works of such fascinating composers as Maurice Ravel and Claude Debussy, through their exposure to Charles Baudelaire's and Stéphane Mallarmé's readings of 'The Philosophy of Composition' and 'The Poetic Principle'.

The third section is miscellaneous and includes an article on the translation of contrastive connectives and the influence of Poe's *Pym* in Yann Martel's *Life of Pi* (2001). The fourth section discusses literary and stylistic aspects of Poe's writings. In 'Ex nihilo nihil fit: Dystopian Satire in Poe's 'Mellonta Tauta', Miguel Martínez explores "a far less frequented avenue: the atypical Poe of satirical, anti-utopian, dystopian philosophy and politics" (169). In this most informative and engaging article, Martínez examines Poe's skeptic view of contemporary American society and concludes that 'Mellonta Tauta' is an attack on Western civilization and nineteenth-century USA. Martínez's article should be read coupled with Ogden's, as both scholars discuss the same story and, to a large extent, share the same purpose. Rather than overlapping, they complement and illuminate each other.

The final section focuses on Poe's poetics. Siles' article reads Poe's poetics as discussed in 'The Philosophy of Composition', 'The Poetic Principle' and 'The Rationale of Verse' against nineteenth-century literary poetics. He clearly demonstrates Poe's indebtedness to tradition and his novelty as a poet and a theorist of poetry. Siles pays detailed attention to significant points in Poe's poetics and relates them to previous theorists and with the aim of finally describing Poe's originality he examines his ideas on verse, meter, rhyme, grammar, rhetoric and prosody.

A final reservation about the book: Rollason is the only contributor who uses Mabbot's edition of Poe's works (1969-1978) while only a few make use of Quinn's (Poe 1984). All things considered, the book is a valuable contribution to Poe studies in the wake of his bicentennial. It must be noted that the book does not include a single study of Poe's poetry and his mystery fiction is likewise not discussed. Contributors have preferred to concentrate on Poe's critical writings on poetry and on a handful of stories, not always the most popular or most analysed, a definite positive for the book, for which the contributors and editors must be credited. Similarly, they do not discuss traditional topics such as the grotesque but rather explore Poe's resistance to shared opinions and prejudices then prevalent in the USA. The apparent limitation of its scope is thus compensated for by the novelty and the depth of most essays.

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