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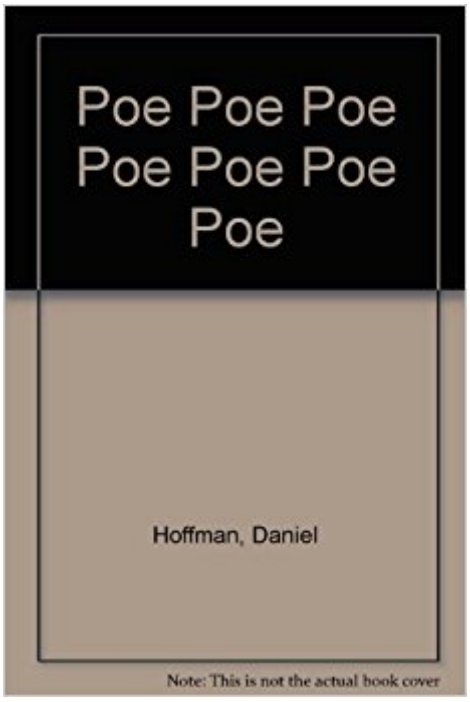

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Synopsis

A critical examination of Poe, taking a more liberal view of his work. --This text refers to the Mass Market Paperback edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

It surprises me that one could read Hoffman’s humor in this engaging critical study as anything but reverential to Poe’s work. Hoffman isn’t (as so many reviewers here have suggested) picking on Poe; instead, he’s tempering his reverence with some very honest comments about an author whose work (like that of all authors) is not entirely consistent. I found it enlightening to read Hoffman’s section on Poe’s poetry, which brings out the steadfastness ofthe author’s attempts, whether they succeed entirely or fail. In fact, Hoffman’s honesty about the writings of Poe was this Poe devotee’s first view of the author from a perspective other than absolute worship. Hoffman doesn’t dwell on the misses in Poe’s ouvre to belittle the author; he does it to show the experimental quality of the author’s work. He illuminates the author’s process and his struggle. Considering that writing is a struggle, and that "genius" is a problematic term, I think Hoffman justly humanizes Poe in this excellent, engaging book.

i always wondered why i keep returning to read Poe and now i somewhat understand after reading Dr. Hoffman’s work.This evaluation of Poe’s works is lively with alot of soul to it.If you haven’t read it yet and you love Poe,why do it now!There is alot of humour and psychological insight into Poe’s

works. the chapter on Poe and how he viewed God was a little rough but worth sticking to it.

The short of it is that Hoffman's book does all you could want for a critical book about an author you love. (I would not recommend it for those who have not read the bulk of Poe's prose and poetry.)In mostly clear prose, Hoffman points out reoccurring motifs and plot elements in Poe's work, makes you want to go back and re-read certain stories to find things you missed. For instance, what exactly is the relation of the old man in "The Tell-Tale Heart" to his murderer?He finds, appropriately enough for a writer so famously concerned with unity of effect in his work, that there is a common theme and philosophy in Poe's works.As I understand his argument, and greatly simplifying a 335 page book, Hoffman contends Poe was most obsessed with Beauty as symbolized most often by the death of a beautiful woman, "the most poetical topic in the world" according to Poe. That Beauty, which to Poe was the same as Truth, passes into another realm, a realm that we can access upon death when we are re-unified with the universe. There our powers of "ratiocination", Poe's phrase applied to the powers of Auguste Dupin, the ur-private detective of world literature, can be used unhindered by the tribulations of our flesh in this world.This great metaphysical idea, argues Hoffman, is there in Poe's earliest poems. (Hoffman, as a poet, in not very impressed by Poe's poetry.) He thinks the idea was much better worked out in his stories and in what Hoffman claims is Poe's masterpiece:Â Eureka: A Prose Poem.Hoffman has done a good job explaining what's really going on in Poe's odd -- and rather boring -- Eureka. He has convinced me it is not a piece of crank science, but, as Poe said, an "Art-Product". A literary work that tries to explain the natural world, but is not science itself, is not without precedence. Most famous is Lucretius De Rerum Naturia, which examined the idea of an atomistic universe. But there were others, less known: The Enneads by Plotinos, Sir John Davies' Orchestra, and W. B. Yeats' later A Vision. (None of which I'm familiar with.)Reunifying with the universe is what's at the end of "Ms. Found in a Bottle" and Pym as their heroes hurtle toward mysterious dooms that also promise revelation of the universe's mysteries. It's what the revelation from beyond death's veil is at the end of "The Colloquy of Monos and Una".The book is, in the end, a look at Poe's metaphysics and just how obsessive Poe was about expressing them in many poems and stories, but there are enlightening side trips as Hoffman breaks down his examination of Poe's stories into groups.There are the "disentanglements", Poe's stories of detection and ratiocination. Hoffman credits Poe with the brilliant innovation of creating a sidekick for Dupin, a character that both allows the detective to explain his deduction and whose relative stupidity we can relate to.Somebody going somewhere and reporting back is, as Hoffman points out, a typical Poe device, and he looks at Poe's "Voyages".In the "Dull Realities" section, we look at

Poe’s not always successful satires and hoaxes and japes of American life and the often underlying seriousness and disenchantment with his lot as an impoverished man barely making a living while trying to better American letters.Stories with doppelgangers, madness, murder, and Poe’s famous "imp of the perverse" get their own section as do stories of peculiar marriages.Hoffman seems a devotee of W. H. Auden’s New Criticism school, so he often feels the need to find some sort of allegory in Poe’s stories. I’m somewhat skeptical. Sometimes stories are just stories, but he also does point out that Poe didn’t swear off allegory, just bad allegory that didn’t work in the context of a story.While he frequently resorts to Freudian analysis, he’s not prepared to go as far as Marie Bonaparte’sÂ The life and works of Edgar Allan Poe,: A psycho-analytic interpretation;, and he mocks her at points. However, he goes off the rails with an unconvincing analysis of "The Fall of the House of Usher".Hoffman’s prose is sometimes idiosyncratic. We get references to "Idgar Poe" and "Hoaxiepoe". The book is also something of a dual biography: Hoffman’s lifelong study of Poe and the writer’s life.The book concludes with a nice chapter on why Poe the man has so many legends of madness and intoxication about him. I agree with Hoffman that, because Poe so frequently wrote about our dark desires to harm ourselves, his "imp of the perverse", Freud’s "death wish", we can not accept that, in the end, his was a gentleman who contended with poverty and, perhaps, alcoholism

Too many Poe books play on the reputation Poe had as a genius who lost a high number of woman he loved to TB, and drank himself to death. Hoffman can’t ignore history and doesn’t, but he does talk, unlike many others, about the writing. He does it in a playful, flirtacious way, yet engages a Poe fan in something beyond the ’same old, same old’. If it is the last word on Poe you want, that authoritative tome of all things Poe, go elsewhere. If you want to kick back and ENJOY a new look at one of the most influential American writers ever, buy this one.

Hoffman has put together a very odd book. It is not biography of Poe, nor is it a straightforward critical study of Poe’s works. It’s almost a memoir, discussing Hoffman’s own relationship with Poe and his works over time. Hoffman, a poet himself, looks into Poe’s works with an aesthetic mind, but is also careful to point out the bad with the good (noting, for example some of Poe’s pathetic made-up words used as forced rhymes and, of course, the monotonous repetition of "The Bells" - the poem from which the book draws its seemingly-silly title). It’s also somewhat refreshing to read an analyst who is capable of separating the author’s life from his works; it’s true that sometimes writing can be read independently - even with Poe!Hoffman uses a lot of ink focusing on works that

are not the typical Poe works most often read. In lieu of extensive discussions on "The Tell-Tale Heart" or "The Black Cat," he writes about Poe's only complete novel "The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket" as well as "Eureka," Poe's nonfiction essay on the origins of the universe. It's fascinating to try to figure out if Hoffman really is a Poe fan, or if his occasionally-caustic assessment qualifies him as another Griswold who can only reluctantly admit there are some gems hidden somewhere in Poe's body of works.

A very interesting and different book but one that is loaded with insights and is written by a Poe scholar for the general reader. I love this book.

I can never figure out why people who seem to hate Poe's work insist on writing books about him. This book contains a critical analysis of Poe's work, and therefore is worth reading, but Hoffman doesn't really seem to like Poe's work very much. He is overly critical of Poe at nearly every turn. You'd really be better off reading Poe himself.

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