



# **A Dream Within a Dream: The Life of Edgar Allan Poe**

*Nigel Barnes*

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## **A Dream Within a Dream: The Life of Edgar Allan Poe** Nigel Barnes

160 years after his death, Edgar Allan Poe remains one of the most polarizing and mysterious figures in American literature. Hailed as a genius and condemned as a mentally unstable alcoholic —often in the same breath —the genre pioneer has received a considerable amount of less-than-kind attention from biographers. Taking a far more sympathetic approach, this meticulously researched account draws on public records, previous biographies, an exhaustive list of rare periodicals, and an impressive catalog of correspondence between Poe and numerous relatives and associates. The account reconstructs Poe from his dire beginnings, born to two struggling actors, to his tragic end, dying alone at age 40. Barnes's scholarly style is ponderous and slow at times, but he offers one of the most complete and fair portraits of Poe yet written. He spends much time defending and excusing Poe's more outré behavior—binging, marrying his 15-year-old cousin, locking himself away for days at a time —but also reframing it by jettisoning the hyperbolic Poe caricature popular in the public imagination: drunk, insane, perverted, and overrated.

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