



Midnight Dreary: The Mysterious Death of Edgar Allan Poe

By John P. Walsh

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With the publication of three short tales in the 1840s, Poe "invented" the detective story. Then his own sudden and bizarre death, still unsolved after 150 years, created a real-life mystery as tantalizing as any of his famous stories. Was it epilepsy? Lawless thugs? A diabetic coma? His heart? Alcohol? Poe departed this life in the best mystery-novel style. While travelling alone from Richmond, Virginia, to New York City, he disappeared for nearly a week. When seen again, he was terribly drunk and nearly dead in the Baltimore. Taken to a hospital, he never said what happened to him, where he'd been all that time, or who he'd been with. A few days later, after alternating periods of silence and raving delirium, he died. The immediate cause of death given was "congestion of the brain" or "inflammation of the brain", serviceable phrases in a day that knew little of internal medicine. At first no one seriously questioned the verdict that the culprit was liquor, that Poe died as a result of complications arising from drunken debauchery. Inevitably, as the years passed and his fame grew, efforts were made to clear him of what seemed weak, wanton self-destruction. While many theories of a physical nature about precipitating causes have been suggested - ranging from rabies to a blow on the head - no one has seriously probed the mystery of that missing week. This volume examines the last days of one of America's most admired authors, aiming to untangle more than a century of speculation and finally putting to rest on its 150th anniversary what may be the greatest Poe mystery of all.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

The circumstances leading to Poe's death in Baltimore, in October 1849, remain a mystery befitting the father of the modern detective story. Walsh, the author of several literary biographies and winner of the 1969 Edgar Award for *Poe the Detective: The Curious Circumstances Behind the Mystery of Marie Roget*, takes up the case with a zeal that his subject would have admired. Did Poe drink himself to death, as is widely believed? Or was he the naive victim of unknown or known thugs? Adopting a flavorful but unobtrusive 19th-century style ("In that situation, surely, there resides a macabre rightness"), Walsh begins the tale with Poe in Richmond that July, courting his childhood sweetheart, Elmira Shelton, by then a wealthy widow. Poe swore off alcohol, set a date for the wedding and went north to Philadelphia and New York, his future looking serene. But after a gap of five days, Poe was found drunk and in borrowed clothes in a Baltimore saloon, and he died in a hospital three days later. Walsh, a patient gumshoe, sifts through decades of acquaintances' contradictory explanations (including the "cooping" theory, which has Poe drugged by election-eve goons and forced to vote in eleven wards). Finally, with an eye to Poe's libertine reputation, Walsh presents his own solution to the puzzle in a romanticized but plausible re-creation of events. Will it settle the mystery once and for all? Probably not. But it will behoove future biographers to consider the hypotheses Walsh has laid over the curious blank of Poe's death.

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From Library Journal

Walsh, whose expertise ranges from the shroud of Turin to the Piltdown fraud (*Unraveling Piltdown*, LJ 8/15/96), has undertaken a superbly informed speculation on the week preceding the mysterious death of Edgar Allan Poe 150 years ago. Walsh has made an exhaustive study of newspaper articles, personal correspondence, and memoirs by and about the people who played any role in Poe's last days, during which he left Richmond, VA, for New York City, disappeared for nearly a week, and was next seen apparently paralyzed by drink on a Baltimore street shortly before dying of what was termed "congestion of the brain." Assuming nothing in this case, Walsh provides his reader with the facts about the noted author's late-1849 movements and then offers an utterly plausible explanation of how the hapless alcoholic might really have died. Walsh is a systematic and painstakingly resourceful literary detective. Given Poe's status as a cultural icon, Walsh's clever sleuthing should attract a wide audience. Recommended for all libraries. —Charles Nash, Cottey Coll., Nevada, MO

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From Kirkus Reviews

A ripping, gripping investigation of the puzzling, much-debated circumstances surrounding the death of the great 19th-century writer, poet, and critic. It is all too fitting that Poe, the inventor of the detective story, should have met with an uncommon death. He was traveling from Richmond, Va., to New York when he disappeared for almost a week, turning up at last in Baltimore, blind drunk and near death. Taken to the hospital, he died a few days later, never revealing where he'd been or what had occurred. There are several commonly accepted explanations for what really happened. One holds that Poe reverted to tipping from and went on a mammoth bender. But as Edgar-winning literary detective Walsh (for *Poe the Detective*, not reviewed) notes, Poe had just signed a temperance pledge in order to please his new fiancée and was traveling north to earn much-needed money. While he might not have honored the letter of his pledge, he was unlikely to fall so extravagantly off the wagon. The other, more regarded though more incredible explanation, cited by most biographers and even poet Hart Crane in "The Bridge," is that Poe was press-ganged or "cooped" by

villainous ward-healers, drugged, and taken from polling booth to polling booth to vote multiple times in a congressional election. Walsh handily demolishes this hypothesis as well. His own account of what transpired is a clever weaving together of many disparate strands. Unlike the solution to Poe's "The Purloined Letter," the evidence here is not hidden in the open. With the little he has to work with, Walsh has to make a few assumptions, suppositions, contradictions of the records, even leaps of faith, but he is still able to build a case that is both persuasive and literarily elegant. An utterly engaging and original work of detection. (17 b&w illustrations) -- Copyright ©1998, *Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Edna Spalding:

In this 21st one hundred year, people become competitive in every way. By being competitive at this point, people have to do something to make all of them survive, being in the middle of typically the crowded place and notice by means of surrounding. One thing that oftentimes many people have underestimated that for a while is reading. That's why, by reading a book your ability to survive increase then having chance to stand up than other is high. To suit your needs who want to start reading a new book, we give you this specific *Midnight Dreary: The Mysterious Death of Edgar Allan Poe* book as basic and daily reading book. Why, because this book is more than just a book.

Eleanor Hotchkiss:

Nowadays reading books become more and more than want or need but also become a life style. This reading addiction give you lot of advantages. The benefits you got of course the knowledge your information inside the book which improve your knowledge and information. The data you get based on what kind of book you read, if you want have more knowledge just go with education books but if you want sense happy read one together with theme for entertaining including comic or novel. Often the *Midnight Dreary: The Mysterious Death of Edgar Allan Poe* is kind of guide which is giving the reader unstable experience.

Harry Duffey:

Reading a reserve tends to be new life style within this era globalization. With reading you can get a lot of information which will give you benefit in your life. Together with book everyone in this world can share their idea. Guides can also inspire a lot of people. A great deal of author can inspire their very own reader with their story or even their experience. Not only the storyline that share in the guides. But also they write about the information about something that you need instance. How to get the good score toefl, or how to teach your kids, there are many kinds of book that exist now. The authors in this world always try to improve their ability in writing, they also doing some research before they write on their book. One of them is this *Midnight Dreary: The Mysterious Death of Edgar Allan Poe*.

Nancy Lundy:

This *Midnight Dreary: The Mysterious Death of Edgar Allan Poe* is great book for you because the content

which can be full of information for you who also always deal with world and have to make decision every minute. This kind of book reveal it facts accurately using great plan word or we can declare no rambling sentences inside. So if you are read it hurriedly you can have whole information in it. Doesn't mean it only provides you with straight forward sentences but tricky core information with lovely delivering sentences. Having Midnight Dreary: The Mysterious Death of Edgar Allan Poe in your hand like having the world in your arm, info in it is not ridiculous 1. We can say that no reserve that offer you world in ten or fifteen moment right but this guide already do that. So , it is good reading book. Heya Mr. and Mrs. active do you still doubt this?

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