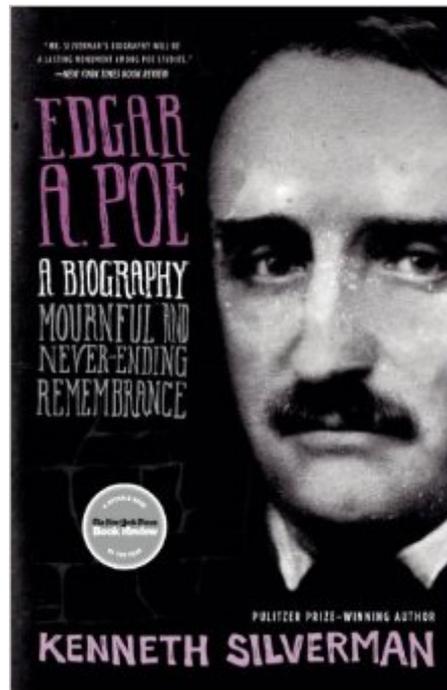


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# Edgar A. Poe: Mournful And Never-ending Remembrance



## Synopsis

From a Pulitzer-Prize winning biographer, the most revealing, fascinating, and important biography of one of our greatest literary figures.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

If you have enough interest in Poe to even entertain the idea of reading a biography, you should move ahead now and order a copy of this fantastic book. But you'd better have a copy of Poe's works nearby, because Silverman's book (as with all excellent literary biographies) will continually fire your yearning to revisit familiar Poe works and to discover ones you've missed. Assuming that your interest derives first from Poe's writings, you'll find Silverman's account wholly engaging. I like to thumb through it simply for Silverman's analytic synopses of Poe's poems and stories, which the author enlivens with connections between the work he's currently reviewing and earlier and later ones as well. Silverman thus offers a total panorama of Poe's interests, development, themes and aims. Indeed, the book could almost be the biography of Poe's literary accomplishment. Silverman's finely detailed yet compulsively readable account of Poe's life is equally engrossing. The book's title is the most sensationalistic thing about it, for Silverman pursues the facts and speculations about Poe with deep scholarly interest but objective, rational distance--and yet he relays it all with a novelist's drive. He allows the unremittingly frustrating commingling of tragedy and success in Poe's life speak for itself. Though this is a book to be read from cover to cover, you can nonetheless pick it up anywhere and find yourself immediately involved. Silverman captures Poe's person and his art with balance and intensity in his solid biography.

I love biographies and read a great many of them. Silverman's work on Poe is certainly my favorite bio of the American Romantic. Poe was my first and most important influence in life. I read him in middle school, and later in high school, I wrote my senior paper on his works. Since then, I have read every biography I could get my hands on. This one book is my keeper. Somehow, in his own personal way, Silverman was able to capture a side to Poe I had not really seen in earlier readings. It is subtitled a Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance, and that is exactly what it is. Here Poe comes alive, in all his glories and disappointments. It's mournful, it's detailed, and it will certainly never leave your memory. Silverman actually breathes life into Poe, and for a moment, while you are reading, you feel as though you might look over and see Edgar A sitting next to you. That's kind of nice.

I bought this book primarily to find out Silverman's take on Poe's being found (just before his death) in clothes that did not belong to him (as indicated in a video in the Great Authors series). That odd fact, combined with the alter egos he created in stories like "Fall of the House of Usher" made me wonder if Poe had some sort of alter ego himself. Though the clothing issue is not completely explained (after all, who could know with certainty?), Silverman's book does offer insights into Poe's use of false identity, pseudonym, anonymous writing, plagiarism, and other identity issues (especially relating to his odd perversions of the Allan name and his brother's name). In addition, Poe's behavior, as explained by Silverman, put me in mind of a book entitled *\*I Hate You, Don't Leave Me: Understanding the Borderline Personality Disorder\** by Jerold J. Kreisman and Hal Straus, published in 1989. I'm an English teacher, not a psychologist, and I do not know the current thinking on borderline personality disorder, but it is apparent that virtually every characteristic Kreisman and Straus identified in the borderline personality were exhibited by Poe. The next time I teach Poe, I plan to present information from both books for my students to consider (after reading "Fall of the House of Usher," Poe's story with a cross-gender alter ego). Thanks, Professor Silverman, for a marvelously researched and documented book!

This book is the first I've read about the life of Edgar Allan Poe, so I'm not in position to declare it the definitive Poe study but I cannot imagine another biography being as thoroughly researched and thought-out as Kenneth Silverman's work. I purchased this book because I wanted to read about Poe's life not analyses of his works. Silverman concentrates on Poe's life and career but does include some analysis of his writings. Often he finds parallels in the names of Poe's characters and

the names of the people in his life (see pages 208 and 237, for example). On the surface, that does not seem very unusual but Silverman expands beyond just the names having the same letters into insight on the role such people played in Poe's life. Silverman also examines Poe's writing techniques which used punctuation, sounds, and rhythm to bring emphasis and effectiveness to his works (pg. 113). A student of mathematics at the University of Virginia, logic and methodology also played roles in Poe's writing as he, himself, explained in "The Philosophy of Composition" (pp. 296-7). The biography is 447 pages with 73 pages of chapter notes and Appendices that summarize some of Poe's works, but it reads very quickly. The text is divided into 46 chapters of about ten pages each with the dates being covered at the top so it is easy to follow and to read in short time blocks like lunch breaks. It is "reader friendly" in other words. It is scholarly but not inaccessible. It is also a fair account. Silverman does not gloss over or ignore Poe's faults but also does not dwell on them and puts some of his actions in context (i.e. his marriage to his 13 year-old cousin and his womanizing after--and even before--her death is not as promiscuous as it seems). It is not a sycophantic account either. Poe was a strict editor and sometimes vicious reviewer who found many errors and even evidence of plagiarism in the works of some of the greatest writers of his day, but Silverman points out similar mistakes and plagiarisms in Poe's works (pp. 71, 84, 398). Silverman also makes sure that, when there is no direct evidence to certain information, there is reliable corroborating evidence (i.e. pg. 291). Silverman uses letters and primary sources to bring the facts together. I was also impressed by Silverman's analysis of the daguerreotypes of Poe. He notices details in the images that may not be evident to the casual viewer. A vein in Poe's forehead is bulging in the daguerreotype taken just after his suicide attempt (pg. 376). The last known daguerreotype of Poe was taken impromptu and his clothes are a bit disheveled in it as a result (pg. 432). Sixteen pages in the center of the book have images of Poe and many of the people and places in his life as well as a handwritten letter to his aunt/mother-in-law. Silverman's account is very thorough. It includes information on Poe's parents that, although only nine-pages, is revealing. John Allan's upbringing is examined which gives insight into his attitude regarding young Edgar whom he considered ungrateful. Poe's attachment to his cousin and aunt and his need for a mother-figure in his life is discussed. His views on poetry, periodicals as well as his attitude regarding the America of his time (which he saw as conformist and money-driven), Abolition, Christianity, and Democracy are revealed through the use of his own writings. I think I found an error, though. On page 47, Silverman states that Poe claimed his parents died in the "Richmond theater fire of 1809." The fire occurred on December 26, 1811. Did Poe write the wrong date or was that a typo on Silverman's part? One area which is not examined much, though, is his death. Poe's death and the events immediately leading

up to it only make up an 8-page chapter. In his chapter notes, Silverman states that his account relies on Dr. Moran's November 1849 letter to Maria Clemm (pg. 518). This book is not one of rumors and hearsay, but an examination of the theories regarding Poe's death would have been welcomed. A friend of mine claims Poe died of rabies. I also read that Poe may have been kidnapped and forced to vote during the elections. How and why did these stories come about? The book ends with the last decades of Muddy's life (Poe's aunt/mother-in-law) and seems to close abruptly considering the thoroughness of the rest of the work. Still, I highly recommend "Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance" to anyone interested in the life of Edgar Allan Poe. Also, check out the website of the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas campus. They currently have an exhibit that includes vintage books and letters, one of Poe's desks, a brooch with a lock of his hair and other paraphernalia that is going on until January 3, 2010. I saw these items in person when I visited the museum but you can also view the mementos on their website.

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