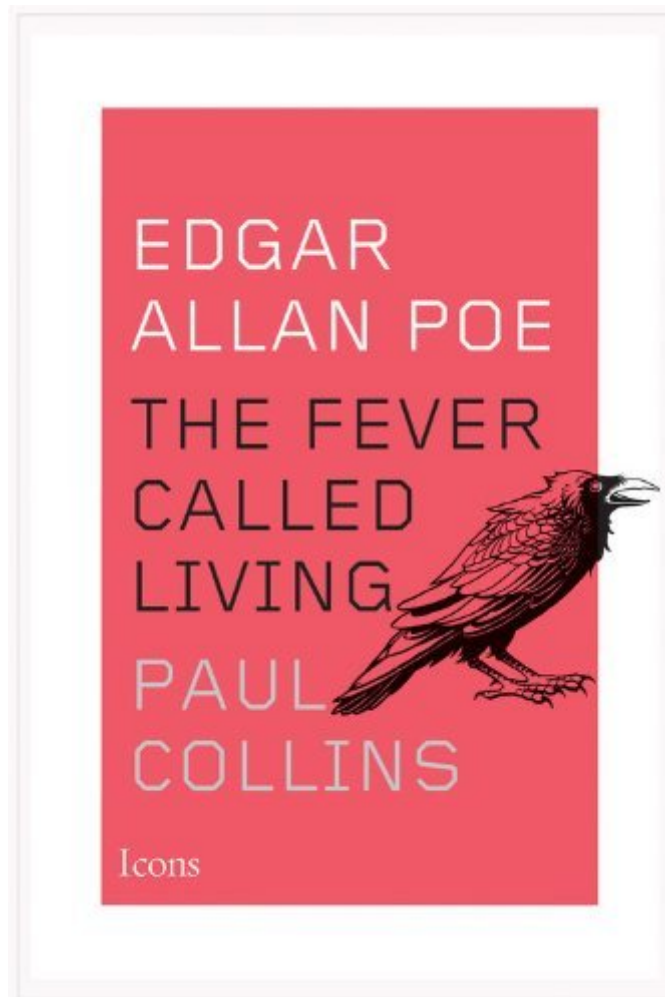


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Edgar Allan Poe: The Fever Called Living (Icons)



Synopsis

Looming large in the popular imagination as a serious poet and lively drunk who died in penury, Edgar Allan Poe was also the most celebrated and notorious writer of his day. He died broke and alone at the age of forty, but not before he had written some of the greatest works in the English language, from the chilling "The Tell-Tale Heart" to "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" "the first modern detective story" to the iconic poem "The Raven." Poe's life was one of unremitting hardship. His father abandoned the family, and his mother died when he was three. Poe was thrown out of West Point, and married his beloved thirteen-year-old cousin, who died of tuberculosis at twenty-four. He was so poor that he burned furniture to stay warm. He was a scourge to other poets, but more so to himself. In the hands of Paul Collins, one of our liveliest historians, this mysteriously conflicted figure emerges as a genius both driven and undone by his artistic ambitions. Collins illuminates Poe's huge successes and greatest flop (a 143-page prose poem titled Eureka), and even tracks down what may be Poe's first published fiction, long hidden under an enigmatic byline. Clear-eyed and sympathetic, Edgar Allan Poe is a spellbinding story about the man once hailed as "the Shakespeare of America."

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Customer Reviews

Unless one considers those stories about Jack and Jill that I read in Kindergarten, my first encounter with what we know as Literature came through the works of Edgar Allan Poe. By first grade, I was already a fan of Roger Corman's colorfully lurid film adaptations of the author's works, so imagine my excitement when finding dusty hardcover collections of Poe's tales on the shelf of the library of the Catholic school I attended. Many years would pass before I could really comprehend Poe's poetry and prose, but I was fascinated by the man long before then. He invented the mystery story and made it possible for Arthur Conan Doyle to create Sherlock Holmes. His horror tales inspired H.P. Lovecraft and, indeed, almost every author who wished to probe our darkest fears. He was The Man with a Cloak in that 1951 movie with Joseph Cotton and Barbara Stanwyck. Is there another literary figure whose name conjures such striking images of mystery, terror, and tragedy? Poe's life has inspired enough books, too many perhaps, but Paul Collins' Edgar Allan Poe: The Fever Called Living is welcome regardless. This is a nice, compact volume (only 107 pages) that offers a refresher course for those who already know Poe's story, and a reader-friendly introduction for those unfamiliar with the circumstance of the man's life and art. Poe's image has been soiled through the years with too much focus placed on his drinking, or his marriage, at age 27, to a 13-year-old cousin. There is also a tendency to assume that his preoccupation with the grotesque was a natural result of his own eccentricities. "To be appreciated you must be read," Poe once informed an editor, "and these things are invariably sought after with avidity."

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