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Edgar Allan Poe: a debt Repaid

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directed by Richard Gravil and Molly Lefebure

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Edgar Allan Poe: A Debt Repaid

JONATHAN BATE

Poet and teller of supernatural tales, literary critic and theorist, philosophical speculator, author of marginalia, plagiarist, laudanum taker: Edgar Allan Poe (1809–49) was something of an American Coleridge. He knew Coleridge’s works well and had no hesitation in making use of them. In the first half of this century Poe scholars busied themselves documenting the influence; they did not, however, stop to consider its dynamics, consequences, or theoretical implications. In 1930 Floyd Stovall undertook a comprehensive survey of ‘Poe’s Debt to Coleridge’, and concluded that he had validated the opinion of one of Poe’s first biographers that Coleridge was ‘the guiding genius of Poe’s entire intellectual life’. But he did not make it his business to ask whether the notion of a ‘guiding genius’ might be problematic in view of Poe’s much-vaunted claim to originality – ‘My first object (as usual) was originality’, he said of his ballad The Raven. Similarly, the scholars who revealed Poe’s unacknowledged borrowings from A. W. Schlegel, did not reflect upon the uncanny,