Poe is frequently portrayed as an isolated idiosyncratic genius who was unwilling or unable to adapt himself to the cultural conditions of his time. Eliza Richards revises this portrayal through an exploration of his collaborations and rivalries with his female contemporaries. Richards demonstrates that he staged his performance of tortured isolation in the salons and ephemeral publications of New York City in conjunction with prominent women poets whose work he both emulated and sought to surpass. She introduces and interprets the work of three important and largely forgotten women poets: Frances Sargent Osgood, Sarah Helen Whitman, and Elizabeth Oakes Smith. Richards re-evaluates the work of these writers, and of nineteenth-century lyric practices more generally, by examining poems in the context of their circulation and reception within nineteenth-century print culture. This book will be of interest to scholars of American print culture as well as specialists of nineteenth-century literature and poetry.

Eliza Richards is Assistant Professor of English at Boston University. She has published essays in Arizona Quarterly, The Yale Journal of Criticism, and Poe Studies.
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In memory of Ann, and for Raúl.
Helen thy beauty is to me
Like those Nicéan barks of yore . . .

Poe, “To Helen”

The face was my lover's face. Do you know those white, water-lily magnolias? I suppose I thought the words he said. He said “Helen thy beauty.” Is poetry enchantment? Have people forgotten what poetry is?

H. D., Paint it Today
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Note on texts used

I have done my best to track down the full citations for newspaper and magazine clippings that I first encountered in library special collections. Occasionally, however, I was unable to locate the clipping's source; in these cases, I give as much information as possible.
Abbreviations

Books


ER  Edgar Allan Poe, Essays and Reviews (Library of America, 1984).

FSOP  Frances Sargent Osgood, Poems (Philadelphia: Carey and Hart, 1850).


PH  Caroline Ticknor, Poe’s Helen (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1916).


PIL  Lizzie Doten, Poems From the Inner Life (Boston: William White and Co., 1864).

List of abbreviations

PW  The Poetical Writings of Elizabeth Oakes Smith (NY: J. S. Redfield, 1845).


SP  John Grier Varner, Sarah Helen Whitman: Seeress of Providence (Ph.D. Diss. University of Virginia, 1940).

Archives

Alderman  Elizabeth Oakes Smith Papers (308–707), Manuscripts Department, Alderman Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville.

Brown  Sarah Helen Whitman Papers (MS 79.11), Harris Collection, John Hay Library, Brown University.

Houghton  Frances Sargent Osgood Papers (54m-222), Manuscript Collections, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

Lilly  Sarah Helen Whitman Papers, Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington.

NYPL  The Elizabeth Oakes Smith Papers, Rare Books and Manuscripts Division, New York Public Library.