Seven American Literary Stylists from Poe to Mailer: An Introduction

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This book provides critical introductions, biographical information, and selected bibliographies for seven outstanding American literary stylists. It is based on the material of seven pamphlets in the series of University of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers: Edgar Allan Poe by Roger Asselineau, George Santayana by Newton P. Stallknecht, Stephen Crane by Jean Cazemajou, Gertrude Stein by Frederick J. Hoffman, Vladimir Nabokov by Julian Moynahan, Robert Penn Warren by Paul West, and Norman Mailer by Richard Foster. In an introduction Professor Wright finds many threads of similarity as well as diversity among the seven writers. He points out: "They seem at first about as miscellaneous a set of distinguished writers as American literature could provide, but of all seven at least this can be said: that early in any discussion of their work we must talk of style." He observes that as American authors go they make an unusually cosmopolitan group, but they belong to different eras and no two of them are associated with the same literary movement. All have written fiction but also poetry. They have produced works of various kinds - criticism, autobiography, translations, plays, opera libretti, political commentary, and film. Their common interest in style, he suggests, points to other similarities, of structure and outlook, peculiar perhaps to American stylists, to American writers generally, or even to literature since Poe. In conclusion he writes: "Mailer tells us that 'Style is character,' and by this standard even the most bizarre of the writers before us is a solid citizen. But it is also possible to say that nowadays style is poetry and to claim for these seven stylists the name of poet."

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