



Beyond Spoon River: The Legacy of Edgar Lee Masters (The Dan Danciger Publication Series)

Ronald Primeau

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As the first full-length critical study of Edgar Lee Masters, *Beyond Spoon River* is important not only for its reevaluation of this American poet and his work but also for its valuable insights into central questions of aesthetics, regionalism, and the nature and meaning of literary influence.

The inordinate popularity of *Spoon River Anthology* has for many years unfairly restricted Masters' reputation as a "one-book phenomenon," although between 1911 and 1942 he wrote over fifty other books—most of which were neglected or misinterpreted precisely because they attempted a large-scale rewriting of what he felt had been obscured or distorted in the Anglo-American tradition. Masters' wide reading in the whole of western literature shaped his own attitudes, themes, and style, and his detailed accounts of that reading and its effect on his work form the basis for this reinterpretation of his place in American poetry in this century.

After reviewing Masters' own statements on literary influence and his role as a critic, Primeau devotes the main body of his study to the major influences on Masters' work—the Greeks, Goethe, Emerson, Whitman, Shelley, and Browning. For Masters, the composite of all these influences provided a corrective to the poetry and criticism of his time, which he little admired. Primeau concludes by exploring Masters' midwestern heritage in the light of recent reinterpretations of regionalism.

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