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Exploratory Essay

As I continued to conduct research on Edgar Allen Poe’s “Balloon Hoax”, I discovered many literary essays analyzing Poe’s work in general, as well as specific pieces that reflect on the “Balloon Hoax”. As I delved into Poe’s works I realized what an enigmatic writer he was because of his unique writing style and techniques. Based on the background information about his life as a child, he seems to incorporate many of his past experiences into the way in which he writes. His childhood experiences could be reflected in some of his macabre writings as well as his tendency to leave stories open-ended and up to the reader’s interpretation. Poe was also a very versatile writer who could write psychoanalytic pieces, satires, hoaxes, and more. Most of his works could be interpreted in multiple ways, which is reflected in the plethora of perspectives that now exist among the large array of literary essays about his works.

On just the “Balloon Hoax”, I found authors who believe it was a hoax meant to intentionally deceive, while others think it was meant to be a humorous and satirical piece that poked fun at the growing number of discoveries in air balloon travel. Then, there are some who believe he was immensely influential in the development of science fiction as a genre, while others claim he had almost no impact and his work couldn’t even be categorized as science fiction. The controversy surrounding Poe’s works makes an interesting research topic with a lot to explore. As I read more essays about his creations, I began to see new ways to interpret his style of writing and his intentions as a writer, even in just the “Balloon Hoax” itself, there are multiple ways to perceive what he intended for his audiences to believe.

Although I found many sources that analyze Poe’s literary works, I found it more difficult to find sources tracing the history of air balloon travel. It seems as though aviation history usually begins with the first airplanes, whereas balloons weren’t considered a major milestone in aeronautics history. I find this ironic considering how popular hot air balloons were in the mid nineteenth century, however it may have only garnered such popularity because of the large number of fictional works and short stories about hot air balloon trips published at the time. Besides Poe’s “Balloon Hoax”, there were also works such as the “Great Moon Hoax” published in the New York Sun and Jules Verne’s famous *Around the World in 80 Days*. These fictional stories may have sparked the attention around hot air balloons, rather than real events, which is why the balloons aren’t as commonly written about in the history books.

As I’ve done more research, I’ve found more ways to look at one story and as I found more evidence, I started to piece together each artifact and decided on how I could best use it to support my claims. For example, I realized I could use different parts of one book, *Taking Flight: Inventing the Aerial Age from Antiquity through the First World War*, for multiple supporting arguments. Additionally, the sources that I’ve found have contributed to the growth of some of my ideas and it helped me decide on which direction I would be taking my argument. With the controversy over whether Poe was influential to science fiction, I decided to add a rounded analysis about his work, rather than just arguing one side of it. Overall, the research process has been helpful in developing my ideas and discovering new and interesting facts about Edgar Allen Poe’s literature.