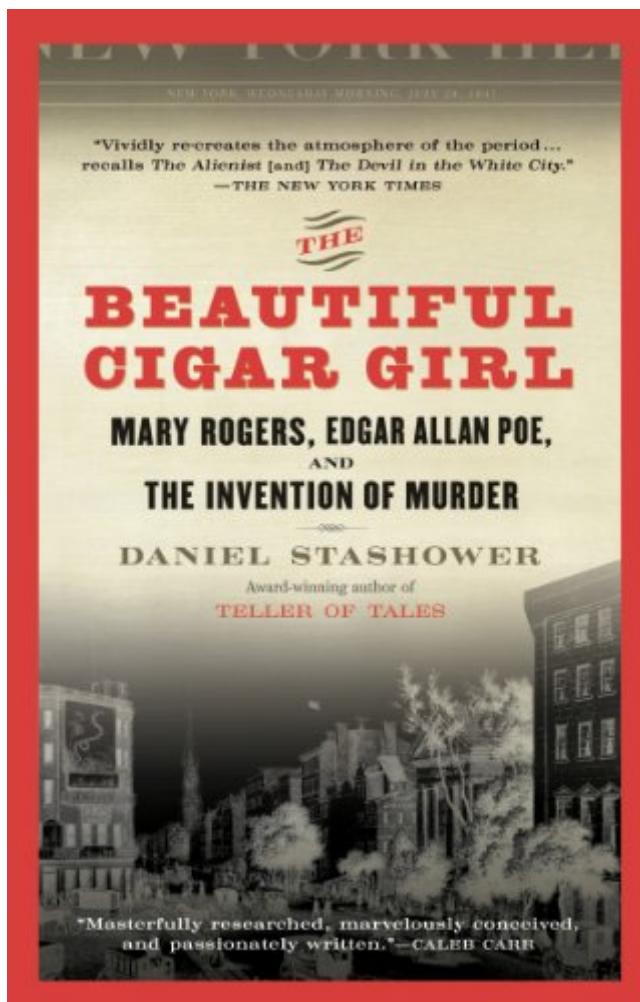


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The Beautiful Cigar Girl: Mary Rogers, Edgar Allan Poe, And The Invention Of Murder



Synopsis

On July 28, 1841, the body of Mary Rogers, a twenty-year-old cigar girl, was found floating in the Hudson-and New York's unregulated police force proved incapable of solving the crime. One year later, a struggling writer named Edgar Allan Poe decided to take on the case-and sent his fictional detective, C. Auguste Dupin, to solve the baffling murder of Mary Rogers in "The Mystery of Marie Rogt."

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Customer Reviews

THE BEAUTIFUL CIGAR GIRL is attention-holding social and literary history nimbly written by Daniel Stashower. It is the story of a real crime committed in July 1841 in or about New York City that transfixed the media of the day, challenged Edgar Allan Poe to put his detective fiction theories to the test and transformed New York before eventually fading away in the public consciousness a few decades later. If there is something to be learned by the ubiquitous episodes of the "Law and Order" and "CSI" franchises, it is that a murder is never straightforward. Just like those shows, when the lovely, alluring yet innocent seeming Manhattan store clerk who worked in a popular smoke shop frequented by men of all walks of life goes missing and her body is later found washing up

near a waterfront park in Hoboken, New Jersey, Pandora's box is opened. Circumstantial evidence suggests connections to the city's gang culture and abortionists. There is a revolving door of individual suspects, too, who may or may not have been the victim's swains. The police department is largely night watchmen and process servers prone to corruption and unequal to the task of fighting and detecting crime. Then the media steps in and it is hyped beyond belief. In Philadelphia, where he has taken umbrage after burning just about every personal and professional bridge in New York, Poe reads the newspaper accounts and realizes that his ever-present money problems and professional ambitions could be resolved by inserting the fictive detecting methods he created for "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." He puts himself on the line, advertising that in his new story starring his detective Dupin, "The Mystery of Marie Roget," he will solve the puzzle. To say more is to spoil this very real plot.

I would certainly tend to agree with some of the other reviewers who point out quite correctly that "The Beautiful Cigar Girl" appears to be more about the life of Edgar Allan Poe than about the unfortunate murder of a beautiful young woman. Nevertheless, author Daniel Stashower does a workmanlike job of weaving together the two stories that were so representative of life in New York City in the late 1830's and early 1940's. Times were tough indeed as the nation limped through a severe downturn in the economy. The young lady who came to be known as "The Beautiful Cigar Girl" was Mary Rogers. In 1938 the proprietor of a local cigar emporium named John Anderson hired Mary to work as a salesgirl in his store. Thanks to his new hire and the convenient location Anderson's Tobacco Emporium proved to be an immediate and smashing success. Newspaper moguls, business leaders and government officials all frequented the store. Suddenly, Mary Rogers was somewhat of an "item" and her name would appear from time to time in various newspapers. As things turned out Mary Rogers only worked at Anderson's for a short period of time. However, when her battered and bludgeoned body was fished out of the Hudson River in 1941 the apparent murder of Mary Rogers became a sensation in the newspapers. The stories were rife with speculation and inuendo. Over the next year or so the story would take any number of strange twists and turns. And while the murder of Mary Rogers has never been conclusively solved the most likely scenario turns out to be quite surprising indeed! In the meantime, it seems that Daniel Stashower devotes more than half of the pages of "The Beautiful Cigar Girl" to the life of Edgar Allan Poe.

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