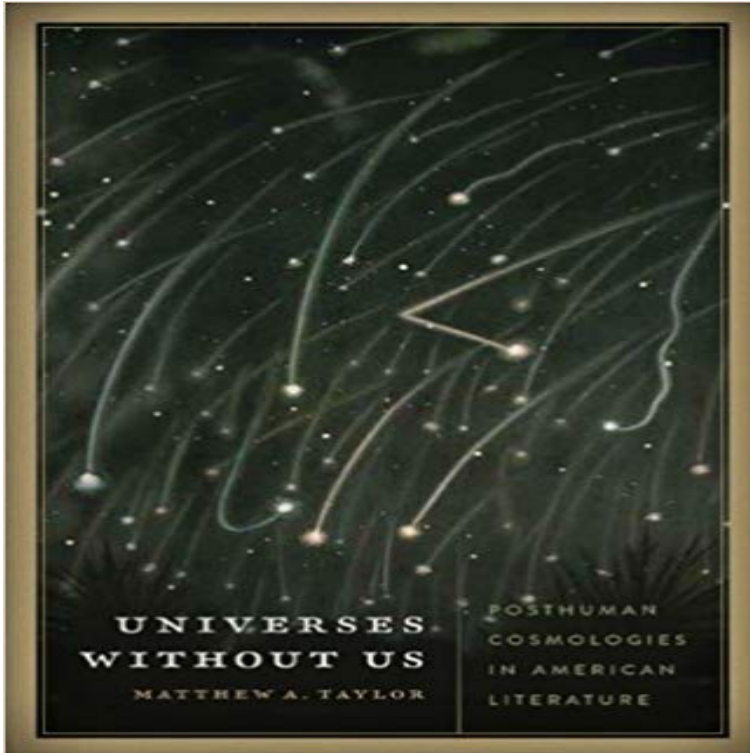


## Universes without Us: Posthuman Cosmologies in American Literature



During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a wide variety of American writers proposed the existence of energies connecting human beings to cosmic processes. From varying points of view—scientific, philosophical, religious, and literary—they suggested that such energies would eventually result in the perfection of individual and collective bodies, assuming that assimilation into larger networks of being meant the expansion of humanity's powers and potentialities—a belief that continues to inform much posthumanist theory today. *Universes without Us* explores a lesser-known countertradition in American literature. As Matthew A. Taylor's incisive readings reveal, the heterodox cosmologies of Edgar Allan Poe, Henry Adams, Charles Chesnut, and Zora Neale Hurston reject the anthropocentric fantasy that sees the universe as a kind of reservoir of self-realization. For these authors, the world can be made neither other nor mirror. Instead, humans are enmeshed with alien processes that are both constitutive and destructive of us. By envisioning universes no longer our own, these cosmologies picture a form of interconnectedness that denies any human ability to master it. *Universes without Us* demonstrates how the questions, possibilities, and dangers raised by the posthuman appeared nearly two centuries ago. Taylor finds in these works an untimely engagement with posthumanism, particularly in their imagining of universes in which humans are only one category of heterogeneous thing in a vast array of species, objects, and forces. He shows how posthumanist theory can illuminate American literary texts and how those texts might, in turn, prompt a reassessment of posthumanist theory. By understanding the posthuman as a materialist cosmology rather than a technological innovation, Taylor extends the range of thinkers who can be included in contemporary

conversations about the posthuman.

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