

EDGAR ALLAN POE

ESSAYS AND REVIEWS

Theory of Poetry

Reviews of British and Continental Authors

Reviews of American Authors and American Literature

Magazines and Criticism

The Literary and Social Scene

Articles and Marginalia

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Every one for his own;
 The night is starry and cold, my friend,
 And the new year blithe and bold, my friend,
 Comes up to take his own.

How hard he breathes! Over the snow
 I heard just now the crowing cock.
 The shadows flicker to and fro:
 The cricket chirps: the light burns low:
 'Tis nearly one o'clock.

Shake hands before you die;
 Old year we'll dearly rue for you,
 What is it we can do for you?
 Speak out before you die.

His face is growing sharp and thin—
 Alack! our friend is gone.

Close up his eyes: tie up his chin:
 Step from the corpse and let him in
 That standeth there alone,

And waiteth at the door.

There's a new foot on the floor, my friend,
 And a new face at the door, my friend,
 A new face at the door.

We have no idea of commenting, at any length, upon this plagiarism; which is too palpable to be mistaken; and which belongs to the most barbarous class of literary robbery; that class in which, while the words of the wronged author are avoided, his most intangible, and therefore his least defensible and least reclaimable property, is purloined. Here, with the exception of lapses, which, however, speak volumes, (such for instance as the use of the capitalized "Old Year," the general peculiarity of the rhythm, and the absence of rhyme at the end of each stanza,) there is nothing of a visible or palpable nature by which the source of the American poem can be established. But then nearly all that is valuable in the piece of Tennyson, is the first conception of personifying the Old Year as a dying old man, with the singularly wild and fantastic *manner* in which that conception is carried out. Of this conception and of this manner he is robbed. Could he peruse to-

day the "Midnight Mass" of Professor Longfellow, would he peruse it with more of indignation or of grief?

Burton's Gentleman's Magazine, February 1840

Ballads and other Poems. By Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Author of "Voices of the Night," "Hyperion," etc: Second Edition. John Owen: Cambridge.

I*l y a à parier,*" says Chamfort, "*que toute idée publique, toute convention recue, est une sottise, car elle a convenue au plus grand nombre.*"—One would be safe in wagering that any given public idea is erroneous, for it has been yielded to the clamor of the majority;—and this strictly philosophical, although somewhat French assertion has especial bearing upon the whole race of what are termed maxims and popular proverbs; nine-tenths of which are the quintessence of folly. One of the most deplorably false of them is the antique adage, *De gustibus non est disputandum*—there should be no disputing about taste. Here the idea designed to be conveyed is that any one person has as just right to consider his own taste *the true*, as has any one other—that taste itself, in short, is an arbitrary something, amenable to no law, and measurable by no definite rules. It must be confessed, however, that the exceedingly vague and impotent treatises which are alone extant, have much to answer for as regards confirming the general error. Not the least important service which, hereafter, mankind will owe to *Phrenology*, may perhaps, be recognised in an analysis of the real principles, and a digest of the resulting laws of taste. These principles, in fact, are as clearly traceable, and these laws as readily susceptible of system as are any whatever.

In the meantime, the inane adage above mentioned is in no respect more generally, more stupidly, and more pertinaciously quoted than by the admirers of what is termed the "good old Pope," or the "good old Goldsmith school" of poetry, in reference to the bolder, more natural, and *more ideal* compositions of such authors as Coëtlogon and Lamartine*

*We allude here chiefly to the "David" of Coëtlogon, and *only* to the "*Chûte d'un Ange*" of Lamartine.

in France; Herder, Körner, and Uhland in Germany; Brun and Baggesen in Denmark; Bellman, Tegnér, and Nyberg* in Sweden; Keats, Shelley, Coleridge, and Tennyson in England; Lowell and Longfellow in America. "*De gustibus non,*" say these "good-old-school" fellows; and we have no doubt that their mental translation of the phrase is—"We pity your taste—we pity every body's taste but our own."

It is our purpose, hereafter, when occasion shall be afforded us, to controvert in an article of some length, the popular idea that the poets just mentioned owe to novelty, to trickeries of expression,—and to other meretricious effects, their appreciation by certain readers:—to demonstrate (for the matter is susceptible of demonstration) that such poetry and *such alone* has fulfilled the legitimate office of the muse; has thoroughly satisfied an earnest and unquenchable desire existing in the heart of man. In the present number of our Magazine we have left ourselves barely room to say a few random words of welcome to these "Ballads," by Longfellow, and to tender him, and all such as he, the homage of our most earnest love and admiration.

The volume before us (in whose outward appearance the keen "taste" of genius is evinced with nearly as much precision as in its internal soul) includes, with several brief original pieces, a translation from the Swedish of Tegnér. In attempting (what never should be attempted) a literal version of both the words and the metre of this poem, Professor Longfellow has failed to do justice either to his author or himself. He has striven to do what no man ever did well and what, from the nature of language itself, never *can* be well done. Unless, for example, we shall come to have an influx of *spondees* in our English tongue, it will always be impossible to construct an English hexameter. Our spondees, or, we should say, our spondaic words, are rare. In the Swedish they are nearly as abundant as in the Latin and Greek. We have only "*compound,*" "*context,*" "*footfall,*" and a few other similar ones. This is the difficulty; and that it *is* so will become evident upon reading "The Children of the Lord's Supper," where the sole *readable* verses are those in which we meet with the rare

*C. Julia Nyberg, author of the "Dikter von Euphrosyne."

spondaic dissyllables. We mean to say *readable as Hexameters*; for many of them will read very well as mere English Dactyls with certain irregularities.

But within the narrow compass now left us we must not indulge in anything like critical comment. Our readers will be better satisfied perhaps with a few brief extracts from the original poems of the volume—which we give for their rare excellence, without pausing now to say in what particulars this excellence exists.

And, like the water's flow
Under December's snow
Came a dull voice of woe,
From the heart's chamber.

So the loud laugh of scorn,
Out of those lips unshorn
From the deep drinking-horn
Blew the foam lightly.

As with his wings aslant
Sails the fierce cormorant
Seeking some rocky haunt,
With his prey laden,
So toward the open main,
Beating to sea again,
Through the wild hurricane,
Bore I the maiden.

Down came the storm and smote amain
The vessel in its strength;
She shuddered and paused like a frightened steed
Then leaped her cable's length.

She drifted a dreary wreck,
And a whooping billow swept the crew
Like icicles from her deck.

He hears the parson pray and preach,
He hears his daughter's voice,
Singing in the village choir,
And it makes his heart rejoice.
It sounds to him like her mother's voice

Singing in Paradise!

He needs must think of her once more
How in the grave she lies;
And with his hard rough hand he wipes
A tear out of his eyes.

Thus at the flaming forge of life
Our fortunes must be wrought;
Thus on its sounding anvil shaped
Each burning deed and thought.

The rising moon has hid the stars
Her level rays like golden bars
Lie on the landscape green
With shadows brown between.

Love lifts the boughs whose shadows deep
Are life's oblivion, the soul's sleep,
And kisses the closed eyes
Of him who slumbering lies.

Friends my soul with joy remembers!
How like quivering flames they start,
When I fan the living embers
On the hearth-stone of my heart.

Hearst thou voices on the shore,
That our ears perceive no more
Deafened by the cataract's roar?

And from the sky, serene and far,
A voice fell like a falling star.

Some of these passages cannot be fully appreciated apart from the context—but we address those who have read the book. Of the translations we have not spoken. It is but right to say, however, that "The Luck of Edenhall" is a far finer poem, in every respect, than any of the original pieces. Nor would we have our previous observations misunderstood. Much as we admire the genius of Mr. Longfellow, we are fully sensible of his many errors of affectation and imitation. His artistical skill is great, and his ideality high. But his conception of the *aims* of poesy is *all wrong*; and this we shall

prove at some future day—to our own satisfaction, at least. His didactics are all *out of place*. He has written brilliant poems—by accident; that is to say when permitting his genius to get the better of his conventional habit of thinking—a habit deduced from German study. We do not mean to say that a didactic moral may not be well made the *under-current* of a poetical thesis; but that it can never be well put so obtrusively forth, as in the majority of his compositions. There is a young American who, with ideality not richer than that of Longfellow, and with less artistical knowledge, has yet composed far truer poems, merely through the greater propriety of his themes. We allude to James Russell Lowell; and in the number of this Magazine for last month, will be found a ballad entitled "Rosaline," affording an excellent exemplification of our meaning. This composition has unquestionably its defects, and the very defects which are never perceptible in Mr. Longfellow—but we sincerely think that *no American poem equals it* in the higher elements of song.

Graham's Magazine, March 1842

Ballads and Other Poems. By Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Author of "Voices of the Night," "Hyperion," &c. Second Edition. John Owen: Cambridge.

IN OUR LAST NUMBER we had some hasty observations on these "Ballads"—observations which we now propose, in some measure, to amplify and explain.

It may be remembered that, among other points, we demurred to Mr. Longfellow's *themes*, or rather to their general character. We found fault with the too obtrusive nature of their *didacticism*. Some years ago we urged a similar objection to one or two of the longer pieces of Bryant; and neither time nor reflection has sufficed to modify, in the slightest particular, our convictions upon this topic.

We have said that Mr. Longfellow's conception of the *aims* of poesy is erroneous; and that thus, laboring at a disadvantage, he does violent wrong to his own high powers; and now the question is, what *are* his ideas of the aims of the Muse, as we gather these ideas from the *general* tendency of

compare
this work
with
Warren's

his poems? It will be at once evident that, imbued with the peculiar spirit of German song (a pure conventionality) he regards the inculcation of a *moral* as essential. Here we find it necessary to repeat that we have reference only to the *general* tendency of his compositions; for there are some magnificent exceptions, where, as if by accident, he has permitted his genius to get the better of his conventional prejudice. But didacticism is the prevalent *tone* of his song. His invention, his imagery, his all, is made subservient to the elucidation of some one or more points (but rarely of more than one) which he looks upon as *truth*. And that this mode of procedure will find stern defenders should never excite surprise, so long as the world is full to overflowing with cant and conventicles. There are men who will scramble on all fours through the muddiest sloughs of vice to pick up a single apple of virtue. There are things called men who, so long as the sun rolls, will greet with snuffling huzzas every figure that takes upon itself the semblance of truth, even although the figure, in itself only a "stuffed Paddy," be as much out of place as a toga on the statue of Washington, or out of season as rabbits in the days of the dog-star.

Now with as deep a reverence for "the true" as ever inspired the bosom of mortal man, we would limit, in many respects, its modes of inculcation. We would limit to enforce them. We would not render them impotent by dissipation. The demands of truth are severe. She has no sympathy with the myrtles. All that is indispensable in song is all with which she has nothing to do. To deck her in gay robes is to render her a harlot. It is but making her a flaunting paradox to wreath her in gems and flowers. Even in stating this our present proposition, we verify our own words—we feel the necessity, in enforcing this *truth*, of descending from metaphor. Let us then be simple and distinct. To convey "the true" we are required to dismiss from the attention all inessentials. We must be perspicuous, precise, terse. We need concentration rather than expansion of mind. We must be calm, unimpassioned, unexcited—in a word, we must be in that peculiar mood which, as nearly as possible, is the exact converse of the poetical. He must be blind indeed who cannot perceive the radical and chasmal difference between the truthful and the

poetical modes of inculcation. He must be grossly wedded to conventionalisms who, in spite of this difference, shall still attempt to reconcile the obstinate oils and waters of Poetry and Truth.

Dividing the world of mind into its most obvious and immediately recognisable distinctions, we have the pure intellect, taste, and the moral sense. We place *taste* between the intellect and the moral sense, because it is just this intermediate space which, in the mind, it occupies. It is the connecting link in the triple chain. It serves to sustain a mutual intelligence between the extremes. It appertains, in strict appreciation, to the former, but is distinguished from the latter by so faint a difference, that Aristotle has not hesitated to class some of its operations among the Virtues themselves. But the *offices* of the trio are broadly marked. Just as conscience, or the moral sense, recognises duty; just as the intellect deals with *truth*; so is it the part of taste alone to inform us of BEAUTY. And Poesy is the handmaiden but of Taste. Yet we would not be misunderstood. This handmaiden is not forbidden to moralise—in her own fashion. She is not forbidden to depict—but to reason and preach, of virtue. As, of this latter, conscience recognises the obligation, so intellect teaches the expediency, while taste contents herself with displaying the beauty: waging war with vice merely on the ground of its inconsistency with fitness, harmony, proportion—in a word with $\tau\omicron\ \chi\alpha\lambda\omicron\nu$.

An important condition of man's immortal nature is thus, plainly, the sense of the Beautiful. This it is which ministers to his delight in the manifold forms and colors and sounds and sentiments amid which he exists. And, just as the eyes of Amaryllis are repeated in the mirror, or the living lily in the lake, so is the mere *record* of these forms and colors and sounds and sentiments—so is their mere oral or written repetition a duplicate source of delight. But this repetition is not Poesy. He who shall merely sing with whatever rapture, in however harmonious strains, or with however vivid a truth of imitation, of the sights and sounds which greet him in common with all mankind—he, we say, has yet failed to prove his divine title. There is still a longing unsatisfied, which he has been impotent to fulfil. There is still a thirst unquench-

able, which to allay he has shown us no crystal springs. This burning thirst belongs to the *immortal* essence of man's nature. It is equally a consequence and an indication of his perennial life. It is the desire of the moth for the star. It is not the mere appreciation of the beauty before us. It is a wild effort to reach the beauty above. It is a forethought of the loveliness to come. It is a passion to be satiated by no sub-lunary sights, or sounds, or sentiments, and the soul thus athirst strives to allay its fever in futile efforts at *creation*. Inspired with a prescient ecstasy of the beauty beyond the grave, it struggles by multiform novelty of combination among the things and thoughts of Time, to anticipate some portion of that loveliness whose very elements, perhaps, appertain solely to Eternity. And the result of such effort, on the part of souls fittingly constituted, is alone what mankind have agreed to denominate Poetry.

We say this with little fear of contradiction. Yet the spirit of our assertion must be more heeded than the letter. Mankind have *seemed* to define Poesy in a thousand, and in a thousand conflicting definitions. But the war is one only of words. Induction is as well applicable to this subject as to the most palpable and utilitarian; and by its sober processes we find that, in respect to compositions which have been really received as poems, the *imaginative*, or, more popularly, the creative portions *alone* have ensured them to be so received. Yet these works, on account of these portions, having once been so received and so named, it has happened, naturally and inevitably, that other portions totally unpoetic have not only come to be regarded by the popular voice as poetic, but have been made to serve as false standards of perfection, in the adjustment of other poetical claims. Whatever has been found in whatever has been received as a poem, has been blindly regarded as *ex statû* poetic. And this is a species of gross error which scarcely could have made its way into any less intangible topic. In fact that license which appertains to the Muse herself, it has been thought decorous, if not sagacious to indulge, in all examination of her character.

Poesy is thus seen to be a response—unsatisfactory it is true—but still in some measure a response, to a natural and irrepressible demand. Man being what he is, the time could

never have been in which Poesy was not. Its first element is the thirst for supernal BEAUTY—a beauty which is not afforded the soul by any existing collocation of earth's forms—a beauty which, perhaps, *no possible* combination of these forms would fully produce. Its second element is the attempt to satisfy this thirst by *novel* combinations among those forms of beauty which already exist—or by novel combinations of *those combinations which our predecessors, toiling in chase of the same phantom, have already set in order*. We thus clearly deduce the *novelty*, the *originality*, the *invention*, the *imagination*, or lastly the *creation* of BEAUTY, (for the terms as here employed are synonymous) as the essence of all Poesy. Nor is this idea so much at variance with ordinary opinion as, at first sight, it may appear. A multitude of antique dogmas on this topic will be found, when divested of extrinsic speculation, to be easily resolvable into the definition now proposed. We do nothing more than present tangibly the vague clouds of the world's idea. We recognize the idea itself floating, unsettled, indefinite, in every attempt which has yet been made to circumscribe the conception of "Poesy" in words. A striking instance of this is observable in the fact that no definition exists, in which either "the beautiful," or some one of those qualities which we have above designated synonymously with "creation," has not been pointed out as the *chief* attribute of the Muse. "Invention," however, or "imagination," is by far more commonly insisted upon. The word ποιησις itself (creation) speaks volumes upon this point. Neither will it be amiss here to mention Count Bielfeld's definition of poetry as "*L'art d'exprimer les pensées par la fiction*." With this definition (of which the philosophy is profound to a certain extent) the German terms *Dichtkunst*, the art of fiction, and *Dichten*, to feign, which are used for "poetry" and "to make verses," are in full and remarkable accordance. It is, nevertheless, in the *combination* of the two omni-prevalent ideas that the novelty and, we believe, the force of our own proposition is to be found.

So far, we have spoken of Poesy as of an abstraction alone. As such, it is obvious that it may be applicable in various moods. The sentiment may develop itself in Sculpture, in Painting, in Music, or otherwise. But our present business is

with its development in words—that development to which, in practical acceptance, the world has agreed to limit the term. And at this point there is one consideration which induces us to pause. We cannot make up our minds to admit (as some have admitted) the inessentiality of rhythm. On the contrary, the universality of its use in the earliest poetical efforts of all mankind would be sufficient to assure us, not merely of its congeniality with the Muse, or of its adaptation to her purposes, but of its elementary and indispensable importance. But here we must, perforce, content ourselves with mere suggestion; for this topic is of a character which would lead us too far. We have already spoken of Music as one of the moods of poetical development. It is in Music, perhaps, that the soul most nearly attains that end upon which we have commented—the creation of supernal beauty. It may be, indeed, that this august aim is here even partially or imperfectly attained, *in fact*. The *elements* of that beauty which is felt in sound, *may be* the mutual or common heritage of Earth and Heaven. In the soul's struggles at combination it is thus not impossible that a harp may strike notes not unfamiliar to the angels. And in this view the wonder may well be less that all attempts at defining the character or sentiment of the deeper musical impressions, has been found absolutely futile. Contenting ourselves, therefore, with the firm conviction, that music (in its modifications of rhythm and rhyme) is of so vast a moment in Poesy, as *never* to be neglected by him who is truly poetical—is of so mighty a force in furthering the great aim intended that he is mad who rejects its assistance—content with this idea we shall not pause to maintain its absolute essentiality, for the mere sake of rounding a definition. We will but add, at this point, that the highest possible development of the Poetical Sentiment is to be found in the union of song with music, in its popular sense. The old Bards and Minnesingers possessed, in the fullest perfection, the finest and truest elements of Poesy; and Thomas Moore, singing his own ballads, is but putting the final touch to their completion as poems.

To recapitulate, then, we would define in brief the Poetry of words as the *Rhythmical Creation of Beauty*. Beyond the limits of Beauty its province does not extend. Its sole arbiter

is Taste. With the Intellect or with the Conscience it has only collateral relations. It has no dependence, unless incidentally, upon either Duty or *Truth*. That our definition will necessarily exclude much of what, through a supine toleration, has been hitherto ranked as poetical, is a matter which affords us not even momentary concern. We address but the thoughtful, and heed only their approval—with our own. If our suggestions are truthful, then “after many days” shall they be understood as truth, even though found in contradiction of *all* that has been hitherto so understood. If false shall we not be the first to bid them die?

We would reject, of course, all such matters as “Armstrong on Health,” a revolting production; Pope’s “Essay on Man,” which may well be content with the title of an “Essay in Rhyme;” “Hudibras” and other merely humorous pieces. We do not gainsay the peculiar merits of either of these latter compositions—but deny them the position held. In a notice, month before last, of Brainard’s Poems, we took occasion to show that the common use of a certain instrument, (rhythm) had tended, more than aught else, to confound humorous verse with poetry. The observation is now recalled to corroborate what we have just said in respect to the vast effect or force of melody in itself—an effect which could elevate into even momentary confusion with the highest efforts of mind, compositions such as are the greater number of satires or burlesques.

Of the poets who have appeared most fully instinct with the principles now developed, we may mention *Keats* as the most remarkable. He is the sole British poet who has never erred in his themes. Beauty is always his aim.

We have thus shown our ground of objection to the general *themes* of Professor Longfellow. In common with all who claim the sacred title of poet, he should limit his endeavors to the creation of novel moods of beauty, in form, in color, in sound, in sentiment; for over all this wide range has the poetry of words dominion. To what the world terms *prose* may be safely and properly left all else. The artist who doubts of his thesis, may always resolve his doubt by the single question—“might not this matter be as well or better handled in *prose*?” If it *may*, then is it no subject for the Muse. In the

general acceptance of the term *Beauty* we are content to rest; being careful only to suggest that, in our peculiar views, it must be understood as inclusive of *the sublime*.

Of the pieces which constitute the present volume, there are not more than one or two thoroughly fulfilling the idea above proposed; although the volume as a whole is by no means so chargeable with didacticism as Mr. Longfellow's previous book. We would mention as poems *nearly true*, "The Village Blacksmith;" "The Wreck of the Hesperus" and especially "The Skeleton in Armor." In the first-mentioned we have the *beauty* of simple-mindedness as a genuine thesis; and this thesis is inimitably handled until the concluding stanza, where the spirit of legitimate poesy is aggrieved in the pointed antithetical deduction of a *moral* from what has gone before. In "The Wreck of the Hesperus" we have the *beauty* of child-like confidence and innocence, with that of the father's stern courage and affection. But, with slight exception, those particulars of the storm here detailed are not poetic subjects. Their thrilling *horror* belongs to prose, in which it could be far more effectively discussed, as Professor Longfellow may assure himself at any moment by experiment. There *are* points of a tempest which afford the loftiest and truest poetical themes—points in which pure beauty is found, or, better still, beauty heightened into the sublime, by terror. But when we read, among other similar things, that

The salt sea was frozen on her breast,
The salt tears in her eyes,

we feel, if not positive disgust, at least a chilling sense of the inappropriate. In the "Skeleton in Armor" we find a pure and perfect thesis artistically treated. We find the beauty of bold courage and self-confidence, of love and maiden devotion, of reckless adventure, and finally of life-contemning grief. Combined with all this we have numerous *points* of beauty apparently insulated, but all aiding the main effect or impression. The heart is stirred, and the mind does not lament its malinstruction. The metre is simple, sonorous, well-balanced and fully adapted to the subject. Upon the whole, there are fewer truer poems than this. It has but one defect—an important one. The prose remarks prefacing the narrative are really *nec-*

essary. But every work of art should contain within itself all that is requisite for its own comprehension. And this remark is especially true of the ballad. In poems of magnitude the mind of the reader is not, at all times, enabled to include, in one comprehensive survey, the proportions and proper adjustment of the whole. He is pleased, if at all, with particular passages; and the sum of his pleasure is compounded of the sums of the pleasurable sentiments inspired by these individual passages in the progress of perusal. But, in pieces of less extent, the pleasure is *unique*, in the proper acceptance of this term—the understanding is employed, without difficulty, in the contemplation of the picture *as a whole*; and thus its effect will depend, in great measure, upon the perfection of its finish, upon the nice adaptation of its constituent parts, and especially, upon what is rightly termed by Schlegel *the unity or totality of interest*. But the practice of prefixing explanatory passages is utterly at variance with such unity. By the prefix, we are either put in possession of the subject of the poem; or some hint, historic fact, or suggestion, is thereby afforded, not included in the body of the piece, which, without the hint, is incomprehensible. In the latter case, while perusing the poem, the reader must revert, in mind at least, to the prefix, for the necessary explanation. In the former, the poem being a mere paraphrase of the prefix, the interest is divided between the prefix and the paraphrase. In either instance the totality of effect is destroyed.

Of the other original poems in the volume before us, there is none in which the aim of instruction, or *truth*, has not been too obviously substituted for the legitimate aim, *beauty*. In our last number, we took occasion to say that a didactic moral might be happily made the *under-current* of a poetical theme, and, in "Burton's Magazine," some two years since, we treated this point at length, in a review of Moore's "Alciphron;" but the moral thus conveyed is invariably an ill effect when obtruding beyond the upper current of the thesis itself. Perhaps the worst specimen of this obtrusion is given us by our poet in "Blind Bartimeus" and the "Goblet of Life," where, it will be observed that the *sole* interest of the upper current of meaning depends upon its relation or reference to the under. What we read upon the surface would be *vax et*

preterea nihil in default of the moral beneath. The Greek *fi- nales* of "Blind Bartimeus" are an affectation altogether inexcusable. What the small, second-hand, Gibbon-ish pedantry of Byron introduced, is unworthy the imitation of Longfellow.

Of the translations we scarcely think it necessary to speak at all. We regret that our poet will persist in busying himself about such matters. *His* time might be better employed in original conception. Most of these versions are marked with the error upon which we have commented. This error is in fact, essentially Germanic. "The Luck of Edenhall," however, is a truly beautiful poem; and we say this with all that deference which the opinion of the "Democratic Review" demands. This composition appears to us *one of the very finest*. It has all the free, hearty, *obvious* movement of the true ballad-legend. The greatest force of language is combined in it with the richest imagination, acting in its most legitimate province. Upon the whole, we prefer it even to the "Sword-Song" of Körner. The pointed moral with which it terminates is so exceedingly natural—so perfectly fluent from the incidents—that we have hardly heart to pronounce it in ill taste. We may observe of this ballad, in conclusion, that its subject is more *physical* than is usual in Germany. Its images are rich rather in physical than in moral beauty. And this tendency, in Song, is the true one. It is chiefly, if we are not mistaken—it is chiefly amid forms of physical loveliness (we use the word *forms* in its widest sense as embracing modifications of sound and color) that the soul seeks the realization of its dreams of BEAUTY. It is to her demand in this sense especially, that the poet, who is wise, will most frequently and most earnestly respond.

"The Children of the Lord's Supper" is, beyond doubt, a true and most beautiful poem in great part, while, in some particulars, it is too metaphysical to have any pretension to the name. In our last number, we objected, briefly, to its metre—the ordinary Latin or Greek Hexameter—dactyls and spondees at random, with a spondee in conclusion. We maintain that the Hexameter can never be introduced into our language, from the nature of that language itself. This rhythm demands, *for English ears*, a preponderance of natural spon-

dees. Our tongue has few. Not only does the Latin and Greek, with the Swedish, and some others, abound in them; but the Greek and Roman ear had become reconciled (why or how is unknown) to the reception of artificial spondees—that is to say, spondaic words formed partly of one word and partly of another, or from an excised part of one word. In short the ancients were content to read *as they scanned*, or nearly so. It may be safely prophesied that we shall never do this; and thus we shall never admit English Hexameters. The attempt to introduce them, after the repeated failures of Sir Philip Sidney, and others, is, perhaps, somewhat discreditable to the scholarship of Professor Longfellow. The "Democratic Review," in saying that he has triumphed over difficulties in this rhythm, has been deceived, it is evident, by the facility with which some of these verses may be read. In glancing over the poem, we do not observe a single verse which can be read, *to English ears, as a Greek Hexameter*. There are many, however, which can be well read as mere English dactylic verses; such, for example, as the well known lines of Byron, commencing

Know ye the | land where the | cypress and | myrtle.

These lines (although full of irregularities) are, in their perfection, formed of three dactyls and a cæsura—just as if we should cut short the initial verse of the Bucolics thus—

Tityre | tu patu | læ recu | bans—

The "myrtle," at the close of Byron's line, is a double rhyme, and must be understood as one syllable.

Now a great number of Professor Longfellow's Hexameters are merely these dactylic lines, *continued for two feet*. For example—

Whispered the | race of the | flowers and | merry on |
balancing | branches.

In this example, also, "branches," which is a double ending, must be regarded as the cæsura, or one syllable, of which alone it has the force.

As we have already alluded, in one or two regards, to a notice of these poems which appeared in the "Democratic Re-

view," we may as well here proceed with some few further comments upon the article in question—with whose general tenor we are happy to agree.

The Review speaks of "Maidenhood" as a poem, "not to be understood but at the expense of more time and trouble than a song can justly claim." We are scarcely less surprised at this opinion from Mr. Langtree than we were at the condemnation of "The Luck of Edenhall."

"Maidenhood" is faulty, it appears to us, only on the score of its theme, which is somewhat didactic. Its *meaning* seems simplicity itself. A maiden on the verge of womanhood, hesitating to enjoy life (for which she has a strong appetite) through a false idea of duty, is bidden to fear nothing, having purity of heart as her lion of Una.

What Mr. Langtree styles "an unfortunate peculiarity" in Mr. Longfellow, resulting from "adherence to a false system" has really been always regarded by us as one of his idiosyncratic merits. "In each poem," says the critic, "he has but *one* idea which, in the progress of his song is gradually unfolded, and at last reaches its full development in the concluding lines; this singleness of thought might lead a harsh critic to suspect intellectual barrenness." It leads *us*, individually, only to a full sense of the artistical power and knowledge of the poet. We confess that now, for the first time, we hear unity of conception objected to as a defect. But Mr. Langtree seems to have fallen into the singular error of supposing the poet to have absolutely *but one idea* in each of his ballads. Yet how "one idea" can be "gradually unfolded" without other ideas, is, to us, a mystery of mysteries. Mr. Longfellow, very properly, has but one *leading* idea which forms the basis of his poem; but to the aid and development of this one there are innumerable others, of which the rare excellence is, that all are in keeping, that none could be well omitted, that each tends to the one general effect. It is unnecessary to say another word upon this topic.

In speaking of "Excelsior," Mr. Langtree (are we wrong in attributing the notice to his very forcible pen?) seems to labor under some similar misconception. "It carries along with it," says he, "a false moral which greatly diminishes its merit in our eyes. The great merit of a picture, whether made with the

pencil or pen, is its *truth*; and this merit does not belong to Mr. Longfellow's sketch. Men of genius may and probably do, meet with greater difficulties in their struggles with the world than their fellow-men who are less highly gifted; but their power of overcoming obstacles is proportionably greater, and the result of their laborious suffering is not death but immortality."

That the chief merit of a picture is its *truth*, is an assertion deplorably erroneous. Even in Painting which is, more essentially than Poetry, a mimetic art, the proposition cannot be sustained. Truth is not even *the aim*. Indeed it is curious to observe how very slight a degree of truth is sufficient to satisfy the mind, which acquiesces in the absence of numerous essentials in the thing depicted. An outline frequently stirs the spirit more pleasantly than the most elaborate picture. We need only refer to the compositions of Flaxman and of Retzch. Here all details are omitted—nothing can be farther from *truth*. Without even color the most thrilling effects are produced. In statues we are rather pleased than disgusted with *the want of the eyeball*. The hair of the Venus de Medicis was *gilded*. Truth indeed! The grapes of Zeuxis as well as the curtain of Parrhasius were received as indisputable evidence of the truthful ability of these artists—but they were not even *classed among their pictures*. If truth is the highest aim of either Painting or Poesy, then Jan Steen was a greater artist than Angelo, and Crabbe is a more noble poet than Milton.

But we have not quoted the observation of Mr. Langtree to deny its philosophy; our design was simply to show that he has misunderstood the poet. "Excelsior" has not even a remote tendency to the interpretation assigned it by the critic. It depicts the *earnest upward impulse of the soul*—an impulse not to be subdued even in Death. Despising danger, resisting pleasure, the youth, bearing the banner inscribed "*Excelsior!*" (higher still!) struggles through all difficulties to an Alpine summit. Warned to be content with the elevation attained, his cry is still "*Excelsior!*" And, even in falling dead on the highest pinnacle, his cry is *still* "*Excelsior!*" There is yet an immortal height to be surmounted—an ascent in Eternity. The poet holds in view the idea of never-ending *progress*. That he is misunderstood is rather the misfortune of Mr. Langtree than

the fault of Mr. Longfellow. There is an old adage about the difficulty of one's furnishing an auditor both with matter to be comprehended and brains for its comprehension.

Graham's Magazine, April 1842

Longfellow's *Waif*, with an Exchange.

OBVIOUSLY, this volume is a collection of some few of the prettiest shells that have been thrown ashore by the poetic ocean; but, looking behind this idea, we see that Mr. Longfellow's real design has been to make a book of his "waifs," and his own late compositions, conjointly; since these late compositions are not enough in number to make a book of themselves:—an ingenious thought, too, with which no one can possibly quarrel. There are fifty brief poems in all, exclusive of the Proem which is professedly by the compiler; and, of these fifty, the seventeen attributed to Anonymous (a person who writes more and better than any man living,) we take to be the work of him who composed *Outre-Mer*.

Of a book put together purposely at random, we also at random shall be forced to speak—unless we go violently out of our way to get up principles of generalization for which no one would be at the trouble of thanking us.

Let us mention—let us pronounce reverently, yet lovingly—some half dozen of the great *names* which embellish the compilation:—Shelley, Herrick, Marvel, Browning, Hood, and Horace Smith:—there are others, too, nearly, if not equally, eminent. Of course, then, we mean a compliment worth at least a bow with the hand upon the heart, when we say that the Proem is the worthiest composition in the volume. It is a *singular*—a remarkable poem, and in no particular more remarkable than in this—that its particular excellence arises from what is, generically, a gross demerit. There is no error, as a general rule, more certainly fatal to a poem than defective *rhythm*;—but in this case the cautious, skillfully planned and dexterously executed *slip-shod-iness* is so thoroughly in unison with the *nonchalant* air of the thoughts—which, again, are so capitally applicable to the thing done—

(a mere introduction of other people's fancies)—that the effect of the looseness of metre becomes palpable, and we see at once that here is a case in which to be *correct* would have been to be inartistic.

How willingly would we quote *all* the lines were it possible with our limited space—but here are three of the quatrains:

I see the light of the village
Gleam through the rain and the mist,
And a feeling of sadness comes o'er me
That my soul cannot resist;

A feeling of sadness and longing
That is not akin to pain,
And *resembles sorrow only*
As the mist resembles the rain.

* * *

And the night shall be filled with music,
And the cares that infest the day
Shall fold their tents, like the Arabs,
And as silently steal away.

Now, if any man fancy that these lines are scansible, we say *no*. They are referable to no true principles of rhythm. The general idea is that of a succession of dactyls; yet, not only is this idea confounded with an idea of anapæsts, but this succession is improperly interrupted at all points—improperly, because by unequivalent feet. The partial prosaicism thus brought about, however, without any interference with the mere melody, becomes a beauty, solely through the nicety of its adaptation to the whole tone of the poem, and of this tone again to the matter in hand. In his keen sense of this adaptation (which conveys the notion of what is vaguely termed "ease") the reader so far loses sight of the rhythmical imperfection, that he can only be convinced of its existence by treating, in the same metre, a subject of different tone.

The *poetic* beauty of the passages italicised will enchant all who read. We forbear to comment on them in full, for no other reason than that we should never have done. The first quatrain of this poem, nevertheless, embodies a fault of illus-

610.25-26 Commodore Patterson] Daniel Todd Patterson (1786-1839), American naval officer in command of forces against the Gulf buccaneers and against the British at New Orleans.

646.7 Vathek and Nouronihar] Characters in William Beckford's Arabian romance, *Vathek* (1786).

670.1 *Longfellow*] The controversy, called by Poe "The Little Longfellow War" (in which Longfellow himself appears never to have participated directly), may be traced in the reviews and rejoinders here collected.

670.8-9 Phantasy . . . Callôt] "Phantasy Pieces" refers to the etchings of Jacques Callôt (1592-1635) of Lorraine and to the German romantic writer E. T. A. Hoffman, who titled his first collection of tales *Phantasiestücke in Callôts Manier* (1814).

685.5-7 Dividing . . . sense.] The paradigm of Immanuel Kant; see note 76.22-23.

685.26 το χαλον] "Beauty"; the discussion is Kantian rather than directly derived from Aristotle's *Ethics* or *Poetics*.

687.28 Count Bielfeld's] Baron Jacob de Bielfeld, *Les Premiers Traits de L'Erudition Universelle* (1767); translated by W. Hooper as *The Elements of Universal Erudition* (London, 1770). The work is frequently referred to by Poe.

689.12-13 "Armstrong on Health"] Dr. John Armstrong, *The Art of Preserving Health* (1744), a didactic poem.

691.15 Schlegel] A. W. Schlegel, *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*.

696.5 Longfellow's Waif] The volume was a gift-book containing poems selected by Longfellow chiefly from forgotten sources, that is, the "waifs" and "estrays" of literature. Poe's review originally appeared in two parts in the New York *Evening Mirror*, January 13 and 14, 1845. It was reprinted in the New York *Weekly Mirror*, January 25, 1845, along with a disclaimer by N. P. Willis (the editor of both the daily and weekly), a defense of Longfellow signed "H." (George S. Hillard), and Poe's reply to the defense, titled "Post-Notes by the Critic."

696.25 Horace Smith] English writer (1779-1849) of humorous prose and verse; author of *Zillah; a Tale of the Holy City* (1828), parodied by Poe in "A Tale of Jerusalem" (1832).

698.3-14 The day . . . Logic.] Poe repeats these lines in the "Marginalia," pp. 1368-69.

700.33-34 "Night's . . . walls."] See Poe's review of *Voices of the Night*, pp. 671-79.

701.32-702.4 Her . . . paradise.] By James Aldrich, from Rufus W. Griswold's *Poets and Poetry of America*.

702.13-14 *moral taint*] A probable reference to an article, "The Poets of America," in the British *Foreign Quarterly Review*, 32 (January 1844), which claimed that American poets, with the exception of Longfellow, were mere imitators and plagiarists. Poe was named as an imitator of Tennyson, whom he had previously charged Longfellow with imitating (see pp. 675-79). James Russell Lowell wrote to Poe (June 27, 1844) that the article was written by John Forster, "a friend of some of the Longfellow clique here."

702.21-31 LONGFELLOW . . . fretted.] This headnote is probably by N. P. Willis, editor of the *Mirror*.

703.20 Corporal Nym's] Character in Shakespeare's *Henry V* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

703.39 H.] George S. Hillard, a friend of Longfellow's.

704.1 POST-NOTES] Poe's reply to "H."

705.6 Imitation—Plagiarism] On February 15, Charles Briggs, editor of the *Broadway Journal*, published an article "Thefts of American Authors," observing (erroneously) that Aldrich's poem had been published before Hood's. Although Briggs suggested that a more precise foundation was needed for charges of plagiarism, he also referred, with ambiguous intent, to a recent charge from the *Western Literary Messenger* of Buffalo, New York, that Longfellow had stolen a Scots ballad from William Motherwell's *Minstrelsy* (1827) and misrepresented it as a "translation" from the German. Poe's response in the New York *Evening Mirror* (February 17, 1845) was reprinted in the *Weekly Mirror* (February 22, 1845), and again copied in full in the selection here, "Imitation—Plagiarism." In the meantime, there appeared in the *Evening Mirror* of March 1, 1845, an article entitled "Plagiarism," signed by "Outis" ("Nobody"). Suggestions of the true identity of "Outis" include Charles Briggs, Cornelius Conway Felton (a member of Longfellow's Cambridge circle), and, most probably, Poe himself, seeking to incite controversy to increase the circulation of the *Broadway Journal*, where he had recently joined the editorial staff. (Poe later wrote such a third-person critique of himself as a critic, entitled "A Reviewer Reviewed, by Walter G. Bowen"; see pp. 1046-53.)

709.12 in full.] The following is a complete and accurate reprint of the letter of "Outis."

721.25-26 *avec . . . patrie*] "With the air of a Roman defending his country."

742.7-10 Gifford . . . Wilson] William Gifford of the *Quarterly Review*; John Wilson ("Christopher North") of *Blackwood's*.

745.26-28 Longfellow . . . Tennyson.] See the review of *Voices of the Night*, pp. 671-79.