

EDGAR ALLAN POE

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POETRY, TALES, AND  
SELECTED ESSAYS

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vows of their baptism. Therefore, each nook and corner was swept and cleaned; and the dust was blown from the walls and ceiling, and from the oil-painted benches.”

There!—that is respectable prose; and it will incur no danger of ever getting its character ruined by any body’s mistaking it for verse.

But even when we let these modern hexameters go, as Greek, and merely hold them fast in their proper character of Longfellowian, or Feltonian, or Frogpondian, we must still condemn them as having been committed in a radical misconception of the philosophy of verse. The spondee, as I observed, is the *theme* of the Greek line. Most of the ancient hexameters *begin* with spondees, for the reason that the spondee *is* the theme; and the ear is filled with it as with a burden. Now the Feltonian dactyls have, in the same way, dactyls for the theme, and most of them begin with dactyls—which is all very proper if not very Greek—but, unhappily, the one point at which they *are* very Greek is that point, precisely, at which they should be nothing but Feltonian. They always *close* with what is meant for a spondee. To be consistently silly, they should die off in a dactyl.

That a truly Greek hexameter *cannot*, however, be readily composed in English, is a proposition which I am by no means inclined to admit. I think I could manage the point myself. For example:

Do tell! | when may we | hope to make | men of sense | out  
of the | Pundits |  
Born and brought | up with their | snouts deep | down in  
the | mud of the | Frog-pond?  
Why ask? | who ever | yet saw | money made | out of a | fat  
old—  
Jew, or | downright | upright | nutmegs | out of a | pine-  
knot? |

The proper spondee predominance is here preserved. Some of the dactyls are not so good as I could wish—but, upon the whole, the rhythm is very decent—to say nothing of its excellent sense.

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## The Poetic Principle

IN SPEAKING of the Poetic Principle, I have no design to be either thorough or profound. While discussing, very much at random, the essentiality of what we call Poetry, my principal purpose will be to cite for consideration, some few of those minor English or American poems which best suit my own taste, or which, upon my own fancy, have left the most definite impression. By “minor poems” I mean, of course, poems of little length. And here, in the beginning, permit me to say a few words in regard to a somewhat peculiar principle, which, whether rightfully or wrongfully, has always had its influence in my own critical estimate of the poem. I hold that a long poem does not exist. I maintain that the phrase, “a long poem,” is simply a flat contradiction in terms.

I need scarcely observe that a poem deserves its title only inasmuch as it excites, by elevating the soul. The value of the poem is in the ratio of this elevating excitement. But all excitements are, through a psychal necessity, transient. That degree of excitement which would entitle a poem to be so called at all, cannot be sustained throughout a composition of any great length. After the lapse of half an hour, at the very utmost, it flags—fails—a revulsion ensues—and then the poem is, in effect, and in fact, no longer such.

There are, no doubt, many who have found difficulty in reconciling the critical dictum that the “Paradise Lost” is to be devoutly admired throughout, with the absolute impossibility of maintaining for it, during perusal, the amount of enthusiasm which that critical dictum would demand. This great work, in fact, is to be regarded as poetical, only when, losing sight of that vital requisite in all works of Art, Unity, we view it merely as a series of minor poems. If, to preserve its Unity—its totality of effect or impression—we read it (as would be necessary) at a single sitting, the result is but a constant alternation of excitement and depression. After a passage of what we feel to be true poetry, there follows, inevitably, a passage of platitude which no critical pre-judgment can force us to admire; but if, upon completing the work, we read it again, omitting the first book—that is to say, commencing

with the second—we shall be surprised at now finding that admirable which we before condemned—that damnable which we had previously so much admired. It follows from all this that the ultimate, aggregate, or absolute effect of even the best epic under the sun, is a nullity:—and this is precisely the fact.

In regard to the Iliad, we have, if not positive proof, at least very good reason for believing it intended as a series of lyrics; but, granting the epic intention, I can say only that the work is based in an imperfect sense of art. The modern epic is, of the supposititious ancient model, but an inconsiderate and blindfold imitation. But the day of these artistic anomalies is over. If, at any time, any very long poem *were* popular in reality, which I doubt, it is at least clear that no very long poem will ever be popular again.

That the extent of a poetical work is, *ceteris paribus*, the measure of its merit, seems undoubtedly, when we thus state it, a proposition sufficiently absurd—yet we are indebted for it to the Quarterly Reviews. Surely there can be nothing in mere *size*, abstractly considered—there can be nothing in mere *bulk*, so far as a volume is concerned, which has so continuously elicited admiration from these saturnine pamphlets! A mountain, to be sure, by the mere sentiment of physical magnitude which it conveys, *does* impress us with a sense of the sublime—but no man is impressed after *this* fashion by the material grandeur of even “The Columbiad.” Even the Quarterlies have not instructed us to be so impressed by it. *As yet*, they have not *insisted* on our estimating Lamartine by the cubic foot, or Pollock by the pound—but what else are we to *infer* from their continual prating about “sustained effort?” If, by “sustained effort,” any little gentleman has accomplished an epic, let us frankly commend him for the effort—if this indeed be a thing commendable—but let us forbear praising the epic on the effort’s account. It is to be hoped that common sense, in the time to come, will prefer deciding upon a work of art, rather by the impression it makes, by the effect it produces, than by the time it took to impress the effect, or by the amount of “sustained effort” which had been found necessary in effecting the impression. The fact is, that perseverance is one thing, and genius quite

another; nor can all the Quarterlies in Christendom confound them. By and by, this proposition, with many which I have been just urging, will be received as self-evident. In the mean time, by being generally condemned as falsities, they will not be essentially damaged as truths.

On the other hand, it is clear that a poem may be improperly brief. Undue brevity degenerates into mere epigrammatism. A *very* short poem, while now and then producing a brilliant or vivid, never produces a profound or enduring effect. There must be the steady pressing down of the stamp upon the wax. De Béranger has wrought innumerable things, pungent and spirit-stirring; but, in general, they have been too imponderous to stamp themselves deeply into the public attention; and thus, as so many feathers of fancy, have been blown aloft only to be whistled down the wind.

A remarkable instance of the effect of undue brevity in depressing a poem—in keeping it out of the popular view—is afforded by the following exquisite little Serenade.

I arise from dreams of thee,  
 In the first sweet sleep of night,  
 When the winds are breathing low,  
 And the stars are shining bright.  
 I arise from dreams of thee,  
 And a spirit in my feet  
 Has led me—who knows how?—  
 To thy chamber-window, sweet!

The wandering airs they faint  
 On the dark, the silent stream—  
 The champak odours fail  
 Like sweet thoughts in a dream;  
 The nightingale’s complaint,  
 It dies upon her heart  
 As I must die on thine,  
 O, beloved as thou art!

O, lift me from the grass!  
 I die, I faint, I fail!  
 Let thy love in kisses rain

On my lips and eyelids pale.  
 My cheek is cold and white, alas!  
 My heart beats loud and fast:  
 Oh! press it close to thine again,  
 Where it will break at last!

Very few, perhaps, are familiar with these lines—yet no less a poet than Shelley is their author. Their warm, yet delicate and ethereal imagination will be appreciated by all—but by none so thoroughly as by him who has himself arisen from sweet dreams of one beloved, to bathe in the aromatic air of a southern mid-summer night.

One of the finest poems by Willis—the very best, in my opinion, which he has ever written—has, no doubt, through this same defect of undue brevity, been kept back from its proper position, not less in the critical than in the popular view.

The shadows lay along Broadway,  
 'Twas near the twilight-tide—  
 And slowly there a lady fair  
 Was walking in her pride.  
 Alone walked she; but, viewlessly,  
 Walked spirits at her side.

Peace charmed the street beneath her feet,  
 And Honour charmed the air;  
 And all astir looked kind on her,  
 And called her good as fair—  
 For all God ever gave to her  
 She kept with chary care.

She kept with care her beauties rare  
 From lovers warm and true—  
 For her heart was cold to all but gold,  
 And the rich came not to woo—  
 But honoured well are charms to sell  
 If priests the selling do.

Now walking there was one more fair—  
 A slight girl, lily-pale;

And she had unseen company  
 To make the spirit quail—  
 'Twixt Want and Scorn she walked forlorn,  
 And nothing could avail.

No mercy now can clear her brow  
 For this world's peace to pray;  
 For, as love's wild prayer dissolved in air,  
 Her woman's heart gave way!—  
 But the sin forgiven by Christ in Heaven  
 By man is cursed away!

In this composition we find it difficult to recognise the Willis who has written so many mere “verses of society.” The lines are not only richly ideal, but full of energy; while they breathe an earnestness—an evident sincerity of sentiment—for which we look in vain throughout all the other works of this author.

While the epic mania—while the idea that, to merit in poetry, prolixity is indispensable—has, for some years past, been gradually dying out of the public mind, by mere dint of its own absurdity—we find it succeeded by a heresy too palpably false to be long tolerated, but one which, in the brief period it has already endured, may be said to have accomplished more in the corruption of our Poetical Literature than all its other enemies combined. I allude to the heresy of *The Didactic*. It has been assumed, tacitly and avowedly, directly and indirectly, that the ultimate object of all Poetry is Truth. Every poem, it is said, should inculcate a moral; and by this moral is the poetical merit of the work to be adjudged. We Americans, especially, have patronised this happy idea; and we Bostonians, very especially, have developed it in full. We have taken it into our heads that to write a poem simply for the poem's sake, and to acknowledge such to have been our design, would be to confess ourselves radically wanting in the true Poetic dignity and force:—but the simple fact is, that, would we but permit ourselves to look into our own souls, we should immediately there discover that under the sun there neither exists nor *can* exist any work more thoroughly dignified—more supremely noble than this very poem—this

poem *per se*—this poem which is a poem and nothing more—this poem written solely for the poem's sake.

With as deep a reverence for the True as ever inspired the bosom of man, I would, nevertheless, limit, in some measure, its modes of inculcation. I would limit to enforce them. I would not enfeeble them by dissipation. The demands of Truth are severe. She has no sympathy with the myrtles. All *that* which is so indispensable in Song, is precisely all *that* with which *she* has nothing whatever to do. It is but making her a flaunting paradox, to wreath her in gems and flowers. In enforcing a truth, we need severity rather than efflorescence of language. We must be simple, precise, terse. We must be cool, calm, unimpassioned. In a word, we must be in that mood which, as nearly as possible, is the exact converse of the poetical. *He* must be blind, indeed, who does not perceive the radical and chasmal differences between the truthful and the poetical modes of inculcation. He must be theory-mad beyond redemption who, in spite of these differences, shall still persist in attempting to reconcile the obstinate oils and waters of Poetry and Truth.

Dividing the world of mind into its three most immediately obvious distinctions, we have the Pure Intellect, Taste, and the Moral Sense. I place Taste in the middle, because it is just this position, which, in the mind, it occupies. It holds intimate relations with either extreme; but from the Moral Sense is separated by so faint a difference that Aristotle has not hesitated to place some of its operations among the virtues themselves. Nevertheless, we find the *offices* of the trio marked with a sufficient distinction. Just as the Intellect concerns itself with Truth, so Taste informs us of the Beautiful while the Moral Sense is regardful of Duty. Of this latter, while Conscience teaches the obligation, and Reason the expediency, Taste contents herself with displaying the charms:—waging war upon Vice solely on the ground of her deformity—her disproportion—her animosity to the fitting, to the appropriate, to the harmonious—in a word, to Beauty.

An immortal instinct, deep within the spirit of man, is thus, plainly, a sense of the Beautiful. This it is which administers to his delight in the manifold forms, and sounds, and odours, and sentiments amid which he exists. And just as the lily is

repeated in the lake, or the eyes of Amaryllis in the mirror, so is the mere oral or written repetition of these forms, and sounds, and colours, and odours, and sentiments, a duplicate source of delight. But this mere repetition is not poetry. He who shall simply sing, with however glowing enthusiasm, or with however vivid a truth of description, of the sights, and sounds, and odours, and colours, and sentiments, which greet *him* in common with all mankind—he, I say, has yet failed to prove his divine title. There is still a something in the distance which he has been unable to attain. We have still a thirst unquenchable, to allay which he has not shown us the crystal springs. This thirst belongs to the immortality of Man. It is at once a consequence and an indication of his perennial existence. It is the desire of the moth for the star. It is no mere appreciation of the Beauty before us—but a wild effort to reach the Beauty above. Inspired by an ecstatic prescience of the glories beyond the grave, we struggle, by multiform combinations among the things and thoughts of Time, to attain a portion of that Loveliness whose very elements, perhaps, appertain to eternity alone. And thus when by Poetry—or when by Music, the most entrancing of the Poetic moods—we find ourselves melted into tears—we weep then—not as the Abbaté Gravina supposes—through excess of pleasure, but through a certain, petulant, impatient sorrow at our inability to grasp *now*, wholly, here on earth, at once and for ever, those divine and rapturous joys, of which *through* the poem, or *through* the music, we attain to but brief and indeterminate glimpses.

The struggle to apprehend the supernal Loveliness—this struggle, on the part of souls fittingly constituted—has given to the world all *that* which it (the world) has ever been enabled at once to understand and *to feel* as poetic.

The Poetic Sentiment, of course, may develop itself in various modes—in Painting, in Sculpture, in Architecture, in the Dance—very especially in Music—and very peculiarly, and with a wide field, in the composition of the Landscape Garden. Our present theme, however, has regard only to its manifestation in words. And here let me speak briefly on the topic of rhythm. Contenting myself with the certainty that Music, in its various modes of metre, rhythm, and rhyme, is of so

vast a moment in Poetry as never to be wisely rejected—is so vitally important an adjunct, that he is simply silly who declines its assistance, I will not now pause to maintain its absolute essentiality. It is in Music, perhaps, that the soul most nearly attains the great end for which, when inspired with the Poetic Sentiment, it struggles—the creation of supernal Beauty. It *may* be, indeed, that here this sublime end is, now and then, attained *in fact*. We are often made to feel, with a shivering delight, that from an earthly harp are stricken notes which *cannot* have been unfamiliar to the angels. And thus there can be little doubt that in the union of Poetry with Music in its popular sense, we shall find the widest field for the Poetic development. The old Bards and Minnesingers had advantages which we do not possess—and Thomas Moore, singing his own songs, was, in the most legitimate manner, perfecting them as poems.

To recapitulate, then:—I would define, in brief, the Poetry of words as *The Rhythmical Creation of Beauty*. Its sole arbiter is Taste. With the Intellect or with the Conscience, it has only collateral relations. Unless incidentally, it has no concern whatever either with Duty or with Truth.

A few words, however, in explanation. *That* pleasure which is at once the most pure, the most elevating, and the most intense, is derived, I maintain, from the contemplation of the Beautiful. In the contemplation of Beauty we alone find it possible to attain that pleasurable elevation, or excitement, *of the soul*, which we recognise as the Poetic Sentiment, and which is so easily distinguished from Truth, which is the satisfaction of the Reason, or from Passion, which is the excitement of the heart. I make Beauty, therefore—using the word as inclusive of the sublime—I make Beauty the province of the poem, simply because it is an obvious rule of Art that effects should be made to spring as directly as possible from their causes:—no one as yet having been weak enough to deny that the peculiar elevation in question is at least *most readily* attainable in the poem. It by no means follows, however, that the incitements of Passion, or the precepts of Duty, or even the lessons of Truth, may not be introduced into a poem, and with advantage; for they may subserve, incidentally, in various ways, the general purposes of the work:—

but the true artist will always contrive to tone them down in proper subjection to that *Beauty* which is the atmosphere and the real essence of the poem.

I cannot better introduce the few poems which I shall present for your consideration, than by the citation of the *Prœm* to Mr. Longfellow's "Waif:"

The day is done, and the darkness  
Falls from the wings of Night,  
As a feather is wafted downward  
From an Eagle in his flight.

I see the lights 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.

Come, read to me some poem,  
Some simple and heartfelt lay,  
That shall soothe this restless feeling,  
And banish the thoughts of day.

Not from the grand old masters,  
Not from the bards sublime,  
Whose distant footsteps echo  
Through the corridors of time.

For, like strains of martial music,  
Their mighty thoughts suggest  
Life's endless toil and endeavour;  
And to-night I long for rest.

Read from some humbler poet,  
Whose songs gushed from his heart,  
As showers from the clouds of summer,  
Or tears from the eyelids start;

Who through long days of labour,  
 And nights devoid of ease,  
 Still heard in his soul the music  
 Of wonderful melodies.

Such songs have power to quiet  
 The restless pulse of care,  
 And come like the benediction  
 That follows after prayer.

Then read from the treasured volume  
 The poem of thy choice,  
 And lend to the rhyme of the poet  
 The beauty of thy voice.

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

With no great range of imagination, these lines have been justly admired for their delicacy of expression. Some of the images are very effective. Nothing can be better than—

—The bards sublime,  
 Whose distant footsteps echo  
 Down the corridors of Time.

The idea of the last quatrain is also very effective. The poem, on the whole, however, is chiefly to be admired for the graceful *insouciance* of its metre, so well in accordance with the character of the sentiments, and especially for the *ease* of the general manner. This “ease,” or naturalness, in a literary style, it has long been the fashion to regard as ease in appearance alone—as a point of really difficult attainment. But not so:—a natural manner is difficult only to him who should never meddle with it—to the unnatural. It is but the result of writing with the understanding, or with the instinct, that *the tone*, in composition, should always be that which the mass of

mankind would adopt—and must perpetually vary, of course, with the occasion. The author who, after the fashion of “The North American Review,” should be, upon *all* occasions, merely “quiet,” must necessarily upon *many* occasions, be simply silly, or stupid; and has no more right to be considered “easy,” or “natural,” than the Cockney exquisite, or than the sleeping Beauty in the wax-works.

Among the minor poems of Bryant, none has so much impressed me as the one which he entitles “June.” I quote only a portion of it:

There through the long, long summer hours,  
 The golden light should lie,  
 And thick young herbs and groups of flowers  
 Stand in their beauty by.  
 The oriole should build and tell  
 His love-tale, close beside my cell;  
 The idle butterfly  
 Should rest him there, and there be heard  
 The housewife-bee and humming bird.

And what, if cheerful shouts at noon,  
 Come, from the village sent,  
 Or songs of maids, beneath the moon,  
 With fairy laughter blent?  
 And what, if in the evening light,  
 Betrothed lovers walk in sight  
 Of my low monument?  
 I would the lovely scene around  
 Might know no sadder sight nor sound.

I know, I know I should not see  
 The season's glorious show,  
 Nor would its brightness shine for me,  
 Nor its wild music flow;  
 But if, around my place of sleep,  
 The friends I love should come to weep,  
 They might not haste to go.  
 Soft airs, and song, and light, and bloom  
 Should keep them lingering by my tomb.

These to their softened hearts should bear  
 The thought of what has been,  
 And speak of one who cannot share  
 The gladness of the scene;  
 Whose part in all the pomp that fills  
 The circuit of the summer hills,  
 Is—that his grave is green;  
 And deeply would their hearts rejoice  
 To hear again his living voice.

The rhythmical flow, here, is even voluptuous—nothing could be more melodious. The poem has always affected me in a remarkable manner. The intense melancholy which seems to well up, perforce, to the surface of all the poet's cheerful sayings about his grave, we find thrilling us to the soul—while there is the truest poetic elevation in the thrill. The impression left is one of a pleasurable sadness.

And if, in the remaining compositions which I shall introduce to you, there be more or less of a similar tone always apparent, let me remind you that (how or why we know not) this certain tint of sadness is inseparably connected with all the higher manifestations of true Beauty. It is, nevertheless,

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

The taint of which I speak is clearly perceptible even in a poem so full of brilliancy and spirit as the "Health" of Edward Coote Pinkney:

I fill this cup to one made up  
 Of loveliness alone,  
 A woman, of her gentle sex  
 The seeming paragon;  
 To whom the better elements  
 And kindly stars have given  
 A form so fair, that, like the air,  
 'Tis less of earth than heaven.

Her every tone is music's own,  
 Like those of morning birds,  
 And something more than melody  
 Dwells ever in her words;  
 The coinage of her heart are they,  
 And from her lips each flows  
 As one may see the burdened bee  
 Forth issue from the rose.

Affections are as thoughts to her,  
 The measures of her hours;  
 Her feelings have the fragrancy,  
 The freshness of young flowers;  
 And lovely passions, changing oft,  
 So fill her, she appears  
 The image of themselves by turns,—  
 The idol of past years!

Of her bright face one glance will trace  
 A picture on the brain,  
 And of her voice in echoing hearts  
 A sound must long remain;  
 But memory, such as mine of her,  
 So very much endears,  
 When death is nigh, my latest sigh  
 Will not be life's but hers.

I filled this cup to one made up  
 Of loveliness alone,  
 A woman, of her gentle sex  
 The seeming paragon—  
 Her health! and would on earth they stood  
 Some more of such a frame,  
 That life might be all poetry,  
 And weariness a name.

It was the misfortune of Mr. Pinkney to have been born too far south. Had he been a New Englander, it is probable that he would have been ranked as the first of American lyricists, by that magnanimous cabal which has so long controlled



the destinies of American Letters, in conducting the thing called "The North American Review." The poem just cited is especially beautiful; but the poetic elevation which it induces, we must refer chiefly to our sympathy in the poet's enthusiasm. We pardon his hyperboles for the evident earnestness with which they are uttered.

It was by no means my design, however, to expatiate upon the *merits* of what I should read you. These will necessarily speak for themselves. Boccacini, in his "Advertisements from Parnassus," tells us that Zoilus once presented Apollo a very caustic criticism upon a very admirable book:—whereupon the god asked him for the beauties of the work. He replied that he only busied himself about the errors. On hearing this, Apollo, handing him a sack of unwinnowed wheat, bade him pick out *all the chaff* for his reward.

Now this fable answers very well as a hit at the critics—but I am by no means sure that the god was in the right. I am by no means certain that the true limits of the critical duty are not grossly misunderstood. Excellence, in a poem especially, may be considered in the light of an axiom, which need only be properly *put*, to become self-evident. It is *not* excellence if it require to be demonstrated as such:—and thus, to point out too particularly the merits of a work of Art, is to admit that they are *not* merits altogether.

Among the "Melodies" of Thomas Moore, is one whose distinguished character as a poem proper, seems to have been singularly left out of view. I allude to his lines beginning—"Come, rest in this bosom." The intense energy of their expression is not surpassed by anything in Byron. There are two of the lines in which a sentiment is conveyed that embodies the *all in all* of the divine passion of love—a sentiment which, perhaps, has found its echo in more, and in more passionate, human hearts than any other single sentiment ever embodied in words:

Come, rest in this bosom, my own stricken deer,  
Though the herd have fled from thee, thy home is still  
here;  
Here still is the smile that no cloud can o'ercast,  
And a heart and a hand all thy own to the last.

Oh! what was love made for, if 'tis not the same  
Through joy and through torment, through glory and  
shame?

I know not, I ask not, if guilt's in that heart,  
I but know that I love thee, whatever thou art.

Thou hast called me thy angel in moments of bliss,  
And thy angel I'll be, 'mid the horrors of this,—  
Through the furnace, unshrinking, thy steps to pursue,  
And shield thee, and save thee,—or perish there too!

It has been the fashion, of late days, to deny Moore imagination, while granting him fancy—a distinction originating with Coleridge, than whom no man more fully comprehended the great powers of Moore. The fact is, that the fancy of this poet so far predominates over all his other faculties, and over the fancy of all other men, as to have induced, very naturally, the idea that he is fanciful *only*. But never was there a greater mistake. Never was a grosser wrong done the fame of a true poet. In the compass of the English language I can call to mind no poem more profoundly—more wierdly *imaginative*, in the best sense, than the lines commencing—"I would I were by that dim lake,"—which are the composition of Thomas Moore. I regret that I am unable to remember them.

One of the noblest—and, speaking of fancy, one of the most singularly fanciful of modern poets, was Thomas Hood. His "Fair Ines" had always, for me, an inexpressible charm.

O saw ye not fair Ines?  
She's gone into the West,  
To dazzle when the sun is down,  
And rob the world of rest;  
She took our daylight with her,  
The smiles that we love best,  
With morning blushes on her cheek,  
And pearls upon her breast.

O turn again, fair Ines,  
Before the fall of night,  
For fear the moon should shine alone,  
And stars unrivalled bright;

And blessed will the lover be  
That walks beneath their light,  
And breathes the love against thy cheek  
I dare not even write!

Would I had been, fair Ines,  
That gallant cavalier,  
Who rode so gaily by thy side,  
And whispered thee so near!  
Were there no bonny dames at home,  
Or no true lovers here,  
That he should cross the seas to win  
The dearest of the dear?

I saw thee, lovely Ines,  
Descend along the shore,  
With bands of noble gentlemen,  
And banners waved before;  
And gentle youth and maidens gay,  
And snowy plumes they wore;  
It would have been a beauteous dream,  
—If it had been no more!

Alas, alas, fair Ines,  
She went away with song,  
With music waiting on her steps,  
And shoutings of the throng;  
But some were sad and felt no mirth,  
But only Music's wrong,  
In sounds that sang farewell, farewell,  
To her you've loved so long.

Farewell, farewell, fair Ines;  
That vessel never bore  
So fair a lady on its deck,  
Nor danced so light before,—  
Alas, for pleasure on the sea,  
And sorrow on the shore!  
The smile that blest one lover's heart  
Has broken many more?

“The Haunted House,” by the same author, is one of the truest poems ever written—one of the *truest*—one of the most unexceptionable—one of the most thoroughly artistic, both in its theme and in its execution. It is, moreover, powerfully ideal—imaginative. I regret that its length renders it unsuitable for the purposes of this Lecture. In place of it, permit me to offer the universally appreciated “Bridge of Sighs.”

One more Unfortunate,  
Weary of breath,  
Rashly Importunate,  
Gone to her death!

Take her up tenderly,  
Lift her with care;—  
Fashioned so slenderly,  
Young, and so fair!

Look at her garments  
Clinging like cerements;  
Whilst the wave constantly  
Drips from her clothing;  
Take her up instantly,  
Loving, not loathing.—

Touch her not scornfully;  
Think of her mournfully,  
Gently and humanly;  
Not of the stains of her,  
All that remains of her  
Now, is pure womanly.

Make no deep scrutiny  
Into her mutiny  
Rash and undutiful;  
Past all dishonour,  
Death has left on her  
Only the beautiful.

Still, for all slips of hers,  
 One of Eve's family—  
 Wipe those poor lips of hers  
 Oozing so clammyly.

Loop up her tresses  
 Escaped from the comb,  
 Her fair auburn tresses;  
 Whilst wonderment guesses  
 Where was her home?

Who was her father?  
 Who was her mother?  
 Had she a sister?  
 Had she a brother?  
 Or was there a dearer one  
 Still, and a nearer one  
 Yet, than all other?

Alas! for the rarity  
 Of Christian charity  
 Under the sun!  
 Oh! it was pitiful!  
 Near a whole city full,  
 Home she had none.

Sisterly, brotherly,  
 Fatherly, motherly,  
 Feelings had changed;  
 Love, by harsh evidence,  
 Thrown from its eminence;  
 Even God's providence  
 Seeming estranged.

Where the lamps quiver  
 So far in the river,  
 With many a light  
 From window and casement,

From garret to basement,  
 She stood, with amazement,  
 Houseless by night.

The bleak wind of March  
 Made her tremble and shiver;  
 But not the dark arch,  
 Or the black flowing river:

Mad from life's history,  
 Glad to death's mystery,  
 Swift to be hurled—  
 Anywhere, anywhere  
 Out of the world!

In she plunged boldly,  
 No matter how coldly  
 The rough river ran,—  
 Over the brink of it,  
 Picture it,—think of it,  
 Dissolute Man!  
 Lave in it, drink of it  
 Then, if you can!

Take her up tenderly,  
 Lift her with care;  
 Fashioned so slenderly,  
 Young, and so fair!  
 Ere her limbs frigidly  
 Stiffen too rigidly,  
 Decently,—kindly,—  
 Smooth, and compose them;  
 And her eyes, close them,  
 Staring so blindly!

Dreadfully staring  
 Through muddy impurity,  
 As when with the daring  
 Last look of despairing  
 Fixed on futurity.

Perishing gloomily,  
 Spurred by contumely,  
 Cold inhumanity,  
 Burning insanity,  
 Into her rest,—  
 Cross her hands humbly,  
 As if praying dumbly,  
 Over her breast!  
 Owing her weakness,  
 Her evil behaviour,  
 And leaving, with meekness,  
 Her sins to her Saviour!

The vigour of this poem is no less remarkable than its pathos. The versification, although carrying the fanciful to the very verge of the fantastic, is nevertheless admirably adapted to the wild insanity which is the thesis of the poem.

Among the minor poems of Lord Byron, is one which has never received from the critics the praise which it undoubtedly deserves:

Though the day of my destiny's over,  
 And the star of my fate hath declined,  
 Thy soft heart refused to discover  
 The faults which so many could find;  
 Though thy soul with my grief was acquainted,  
 It shrunk not to share it with me,  
 And the love which my spirit hath painted  
 It never hath found but in *thee*.

Then when nature around me is smiling,  
 The last smile which answers to mine,  
 I do not believe it beguiling,  
 Because it reminds me of thine;  
 And when winds are at war with the ocean,  
 As the breasts I believed in with me,  
 If their billows excite an emotion,  
 It is that they bear me from *thee*.

Though the rock of my last hope is shivered,  
 And its fragments are sunk in the wave,

Though I feel that my soul is delivered  
 To pain—it shall not be its slave.  
 There is many a pang to pursue me:  
 They may crush, but they shall not contemn—  
 They may torture, but shall not subdue me—  
 'Tis of *thee* that I think—not of them.

Though human, thou didst not deceive me,  
 Though woman, thou didst not forsake,  
 Though loved, thou forborest to grieve me,  
 Though slandered, thou never couldst shake,—  
 Though trusted, thou didst not disclaim me,  
 Though parted, it was not to fly,  
 Though watchful, 'twas not to defame me,  
 Nor mute, that the world might belie.

Yet I blame not the world, nor despise it,  
 Nor the war of the many with one—  
 If my soul was not fitted to prize it,  
 'Twas folly not sooner to shun:  
 And if dearly that error hath cost me,  
 And more than I once could foresee,  
 I have found that whatever it lost me,  
 It could not deprive me of *thee*.

From the wreck of the past, which hath perished,  
 Thus much I at least may recall,  
 It hath taught me that which I most cherished  
 Deserved to be dearest of all:  
 In the desert a fountain is springing,  
 In the wide waste there still is a tree,  
 And a bird in the solitude singing,  
 Which speaks to my spirit of *thee*.

Although the rhythm, here, is one of the most difficult, the versification could scarcely be improved. No nobler *theme* ever engaged the pen of poet. It is the soul-elevating idea, that no man can consider himself entitled to complain of Fate while, in his adversity, he still retains the unwavering love of woman.

From Alfred Tennyson—although in perfect sincerity I regard him as the noblest poet that ever lived—I have left myself time to cite only a very brief specimen. I call him, and *think* him the noblest of poets—*not* because the impressions he produces are, at *all* times, the most profound—*not* because the poetical excitement which he induces is, at *all* times, the most intense—but because it *is*, at all times, the most ethereal—in other words, the most elevating and the most pure. No poet is so little of the earth, earthy. What I am about to read is from his last long poem, “The Princess:”

Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,  
Tears from the depth of some divine despair  
Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes,  
In looking on the happy Autumn-fields,  
And thinking of the days that are no more.

Fresh as the first beam glittering on a sail,  
That brings our friends up from the underworld,  
Sad as the last which reddens over one  
That sinks with all we love below the verge;  
So sad, so fresh, the days that are no more.

Ah, sad and strange as in dark summer dawns  
The earliest pipe of half-awakened birds  
To dying ears, when unto dying eyes  
The casement slowly grows a glimmering square;  
So sad, so strange, the days that are no more.

Dear as remembered kisses after death,  
And sweet as those by hopeless fancy feigned  
On lips that are for others; deep as love,  
Deep as first love, and wild with all regret;  
O Death in Life, the days that are no more.

Thus, although in a very cursory and imperfect manner, I have endeavoured to convey to you my conception of the Poetic Principle. It has been my purpose to suggest that, while this Principle itself is, strictly and simply, the Human Aspiration for Supernal Beauty, the manifestation of the Principle is

always found in *an elevating excitement of the Soul*—quite independent of that passion which is the intoxication of the Heart—or of that Truth which is the satisfaction of the Reason. For, in regard to Passion, alas! its tendency is to degrade, rather than to elevate the Soul. Love, on the contrary—Love—the true, the divine Eros—the Uranian, as distinguished from the Dionæan Venus—is unquestionably the purest and truest of all poetical themes. And in regard to Truth—if, to be sure, through the attainment of a truth, we are led to perceive a harmony where none was apparent before, we experience, at once, the true poetical effect—but this effect is referable to the harmony alone, and not in the least degree to the truth which merely served to render the harmony manifest.

We shall reach, however, more immediately a distinct conception of what the true Poetry is, by mere reference to a few of the simple elements which induce in the Poet himself the true poetical effect. He recognises the ambrosia which nourishes his soul, in the bright orbs that shine in Heaven—in the volutes of the flower—in the clustering of low shrubberies—in the waving of the grain-fields—in the slanting of tall, Eastern trees—in the blue distance of mountains—in the grouping of clouds—in the twinkling of half-hidden brooks—in the gleaming of silver rivers—in the repose of sequestered lakes—in the star-mirroring depths of lonely wells. He perceives it in the songs of birds—in the harp of Æolus—in the sighing of the night-wind—in the repining voice of the forest—in the surf that complains to the shore—in the fresh breath of the woods—in the scent of the violet—in the voluptuous perfume of the hyacinth—in the suggestive odour that comes to him, at eventide, from far-distant, undiscovered islands, over dim oceans, illimitable and unexplored. He owns it in all noble thoughts—in all unworldly motives—in all holy impulses—in all chivalrous, generous, and self-sacrificing deeds. He feels it in the beauty of woman—in the grace of her step—in the lustre of her eye—in the melody of her voice—in her soft laughter—in her sigh—in the harmony of the rustling of her robes. He deeply feels it in her winning endearments—in her burning enthusiasms—in her gentle charities—in her meek and devotional endurance—

but above all—ah, far above all—he kneels to it—he worships it in the faith, in the purity, in the strength, in the altogether divine majesty—of her *love*.

Let me conclude—by the recitation of yet another brief poem—one very different in character from any that I have before quoted. It is by Motherwell, and is called “The Song of the Cavalier.” With our modern and altogether rational ideas of the absurdity and impiety of warfare, we are not precisely in that frame of mind best adapted to sympathize with the sentiments, and thus to appreciate the real excellence of the poem. To do this fully, we must identify ourselves, in fancy, with the soul of the old cavalier.

Then mounte! then mounte, brave gallants, all,  
And don your helmes amaine:  
Deathe's couriers, Fame and Honour, call  
Us to the field againe.

No shrewish teares shall fill our eye  
When the sword-hilt is in our hand,—  
Heart-whole we'll part, and no whit sighe  
For the fayrest of the land;  
Let piping swaine, and craven wight,  
Thus weepe and puling crye,  
Our business is like men to fight,  
And hero-like to die!

*Sartain's Union Magazine*, October 1850

## Chronology

- 1809 Born January 19, the second of three children, in Boston, where parents, David and Elizabeth Arnold Poe, are actors in a theatrical company. Elizabeth Poe, of English descent, is a well-known leading lady whose mother, Elizabeth Smith Arnold, was also prominent in the early American theater. David Poe, son of an Irish-born Revolutionary War patriot, soon after abandons the family.
- 1811 Mother dies December 8 in Richmond, Virginia. The children, William Henry, Edgar, and Rosalie, become wards of different foster parents. Edgar is taken into home of Frances and John Allan, a prosperous Richmond tobacco merchant born in Scotland. Although not legally adopted by the childless couple, he is renamed Edgar Allan and reared as their son.
- 1815–20 John Allan, planning to set up a branch office abroad, moves family to Scotland for a brief period and then to London. Edgar attends academy run by the Misses Dubourg, and in 1818 becomes boarding student at the Manor House School in the Stoke Newington section of suburban London.
- 1820–25 Allan family returns to Richmond in July 1820, where Edgar's schooling continues at private academies. Shows aptitude for Latin, amateur theatricals, and swimming. Composes verse satires in couplets, all now lost except “O, Tempora! O, Mores!” Becomes devoted to Jane Stanard, mother of a schoolboy friend, describing her later as “the first, purely ideal love of my soul” and as the inspiration for the 1831 lyric “To Helen.” Allan's firm is dissolved in 1824 following a two-year period of financial trouble, but death of uncle in 1825 leaves Allan a rich man, and he buys a house in the fashionable quarter of town. Edgar becomes engaged to Elmira Royster despite strong objections from both families.
- 1826 Enters University of Virginia (founded by Thomas Jefferson the year before) and distinguishes himself in ancient

- 1372.4 No . . . gallows.] From Samuel Butler, *Hudibras*, Part II (1664), I, 272ff.
- 1373.3-5 examination . . . backwards?] In 1841, while Dickens' novel *Barnaby Rudge* was still appearing serially, Poe predicted who the murderer would be. Godwin's statement about writing *Caleb Williams* (1794) backwards occurs in the preface.
- 1380.12 Aidenn] Muslim term for paradise, *Adn* (Eden).
- 1386.1 *The Rationale of Verse*] This essay incorporates most of the shorter treatment, titled "Notes upon English Verse," published in *The Pioneer*, March 1843.
- 1387.31-34 "When a . . . hypermeter.]" Gould Brown, *The Institutes of English Grammar* (1833).
- 1388.21-28 Bacon . . . Leonicensus.] This Bacon seems to have made an abridgment of Lindley Murray's influential *English Grammar: Comprehending the Principles and Rules of the English Language*; Alexander Miller, *A Concise Grammar of the Language* (1795); Allen Fisk, *Murray's English Grammar Simplified* (1822); Jeremiah Greenleaf, *Grammar Simplified; or, An Ocular Analysis of the English Language*, 10th ed. (1824); Charles M. Ingersoll, *Conversations on English Grammar*, 4th ed. (1824); Samuel Kirkham (for Kirkland), *English Grammar in Familiar Lectures*, 53rd ed. (1841); Joab Goldsmith Cooper, *An Abridgement of Murray's English Grammar* (1828); Abel Flint, *Murray's English Grammar Abridged* (1810); Hugh A. Pue, *A Grammar of the English Language* (1841); John Comly, *English Grammar*, 15th ed. (1826); William Lily, *Brevisissima institutio, seu ratio grammatices cognoscendae, ad omnium puerorum utilitatem prescripta; quam solam regia majestas in omnibus scholis docendam praecipit* ["in all schools by royal injunction"] (1776); Omnibonus Leonicensus, *De octo partibus orationis* (1473).
- 1390.5-9 Fallis . . . umbram.] From *Punica*, II, 342-46. "You are wrong if you believe he sits at table unarmed; / This lord is armed with the eternal greatness gained / From so many wars, so many slaughtered victims. / If you come close to him you will be astonished: / Cannae and Trebia will be before your eyes, the Trasimene graves / And Paulus' monstrous shade." (Translation by Anthony Kemp.)
- 1391.20 a little ballad] By Henry B. Hirst.
- 1392.5-6 *les moutons de Panurge*] The sheep of Panurge, a character in François Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (1532-52); this is a recurrent reference in Poe's criticism.
- 1392.31-32 *Ex uno disce omnia.*] "From one thing learn all."
- 1392.36 Parturiunt . . . mus.] "The laboring mountain gives birth to a ridiculous mouse." Horace, *Ars Poetica*, V, 139.

- 1397.38 Litoreis . . . sus.] "You will find an immense sow under the oaks of the shore." Virgil, *Aeneid*, III, 390.
- 1402.30-33 ôh thôu . . . chaîr.] Alexander Pope, 1st *Dunciad* (1728), II.19-22.
- 1407.5 Christopher Pease Cranch] Poe consistently misspelled the name of Christopher *Pearse* Cranch (1830-92).
- 1407.7-12 Many are . . . losing.] "My Thoughts," printed in Rufus Wilmot Griswold, *Poets and Poetry of America* (1842) and Cranch's *Poems* (1844).
- 1407.23-24 Coleridge . . . system.] In his preface to "Christabel" (1816), Coleridge explains that the meter of the poem is "founded on a new principle: namely, that of counting in each line the accents, not the syllables"; four accents per line and any number of syllables from seven to twelve.
- 1409.24 αστρολογος] An apparent error on Poe's part, derived from his misreading of Charles Anthon, *A System of Greek Prosody and Metre* (1842), where αστρολογος (astrologer) is used as an example of a word that scans as the foot called *peon primus*; αστρολογος, or *astrologos*, is not a term of Greek prosody.
- 1421.28-33 Mæcenas . . . Deos.] Horace, *Odes*, I, 1. "Mæcenas, sprung from royal progenitors, / Oh, my protector and my dear glory, / There are those who delight in gathering / Olympic dust upon the racing-car, / Who cleared the turning-post with burning wheel. / Lords of earth, they carry to the gods / The celebrated palm." (Translation by Anthony Kemp.)
- 1423.1-1 His sinuous . . . round.] "The Lost Hunter," printed in Griswold.
- 1423.16 hudsonizing] A reference to Henry Norman Hudson, author of *Lectures on Shakspeare*, the second edition of which had just been published (1848).
- 1426.21-24 Integer . . . retra.] Horace, *Odes*, I, 21. "He whose life is upright, purified / From guilt, needs no Moorish darts nor bow, / Nor quivers, Fuscus, full of / Poisonous arrows." (Translation by Anthony Kemp.)
- 1426.25 bastard iambus] Here Poe seems to mean "bastard dactyl."
- 1428.38 Felton . . . Frogpondian] Cornelius Conway Felton had defended Longfellow's "bastard" hexameters in the *North American Review*, 55 (1842), 114-44. "Frogpondian" is Poe's name for the Boston intelligentsia and Harvard professors, derived from the frogpond on the Boston Common, and apparently alluding to the tale of the frogs and the Log King in Aesop's *Fables*.
- 1431.1 *The Poetic Principle*] In this essay Poe makes extensive use of his review of Longfellow's *Ballads and Other Poems* (1842).

1432.28–29 Lamartine . . . Pollock] The French poet Alphonse de Lamartine was notoriously prolix. Robert Pollock of Scotland was known for a long didactic, religious poem, *The Course of Time* (1827).

1436.22–23 Pure . . . Sense.] The tripartite paradigm of Immanuel Kant, Introduction to *The Critique of Judgment* (1793).

1440.23 Down] Cf. stanza 5 of the poem just quoted (1439.26).

1441.29 I know . . . see] In Bryant's *Poetical Works*, this line reads: "I know that no more should see."

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