IN DEFENSE OF BEAUTY: STEDMAN AND THE RECOGNITION OF POE IN AMERICA, 1880-1910

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In November 1878 Dr. Josiah Gilbert Holland, the powerful editor of *Scribner’s Monthly*, devoted the first portion of his “Topics of the Time” column to a proud analysis of the several factors that had contributed to the extraordinary success of the magazine that he had founded only eight years ago. In revealing that circulation was “crowding closely upon a hundred thousand,” Holland gave factual basis for the growing realization that *Scribner’s* was now pressing *Harper’s* for preeminence among American middle-class monthlies. Far and away the most important factor in the magazine’s popularity, Holland observed, was the unrivalled excellence of its pictorial department. After also crediting the magazine’s preference for serializing novels by American writers, which contrasted with *Harper’s* policy of relying on English imports, he boasted of the great popularity of its editorial section, which included columns on “Home and Society,” “Culture and Progress,” “The World’s Work,” and “Eric-a-Brac.” “Of a carefully prepared editorial department, treating political, social, and household matters, giving literary and art criticism, and detailing the progress of invention and discovery,” he asserted, “the characteristic popular magazine of Great Britain knows nothing.”

Through his own column he instructed his fellow Americans on these and many other subjects, becoming, as Edward Eggleston wrote after his death in 1881, “the most popular and effective preacher of social and domestic moralities in his age; the oracle of the active and ambitious young man; of the susceptible and enthusiastic young woman; the guide, philosopher and school-master of humanity at large, touching all questions of life and character.”

Also a best-selling poet and novelist and—as “Timothy Titcomb”—the author of such books of instruction as *Titcomb’s Letters to Young People, Single and Married* (1858), Holland well understood the power of literature to shape the character of a people. He demanded that all art serve an explicitly moral, even didactic purpose: “Art is not a master, but a minister,” he insisted in an 1872 column, and he forthrightly condemned the art-for-art’s sake movement: “All that is written about beauty being its own apology and art for its own justification—about ‘truth to art for art’s sake’—is the baldest nonsense. Art has no ‘sake’ . . . . All art that has its end in itself or in its author is a monstrosity.” The only creative expression worth attending to according to *Scribner’s* editor was that solidly based “on the revelations of The Great Book.”

For the most part, the American literary tradition as he knew it, New England in origin and continuing inspiration, was consistent with those expectations. In his column for October 1878, “Our Garnered Names,” which had been occasioned by Bryant’s death, he celebrated the moral purity of the national literature as a fitting expression of its lofty civilization. But in concluding, he launched a furious attack against three American writers who represented a challenge to the values of the tradition: Whitman, Poe, and Thoreau. Of Poe he fulminated, “Why an age which can produce such a poet as Bryant, who is as healthy and health-giving in every line as the winds that soar over his native hills, can be interested in the crazy products of a crazy mind, so far as to suppose that they have any poetry in them, or any value whatever, except as studies in mental pathology, we cannot imagine.” The intensity of Holland’s anger provides one indication of the growing popularity of Poe and Whitman. He had refused to allow any mention of Whitman in *Scribner’s*, and within the previous three years had published three major articles by other writers warning that, entrancing as Poe’s art might appear at first, in truth it was vitiated by the same immorality that had ruined its author’s disgraceful life.

The first, Francis Gerry Fairfield’s notorious “A Mad Man of Letters,” published in October 1875, is devoted to proving that Poe “was the victim of cerebral epilepsy, and that the majority of his later tales are based upon the hallucinations incident to that malady; furthermore, that he was always aware, in his later years, of impending dementia.” Making a show of enlightened generosity, Fairfield remarked that, since Poe’s incurable condition was responsible for a “perversion of the moral nature” which “fatally perverts our perception of reality,” he should not be held responsible either for the moral failures so evident in his life or the “deficiency in ethical emotion of his works.” Fairfield drew from Poe’s works to construct what he called “a kind of psychological biography” to trace the progressive degeneration of “his brain until sanity was only a recollection, and in the gutter he fell and died.”

The next April *Scribner’s* published “Poe, Irving, Hawthorne,” by George Parsons Lathrop, husband of Hawthorne’s daughter Rose. Lathrop conceded the magnetic force of Poe’s art: “As a mere poet, dissociated from qualities of beauty or truth, Poe must be rated almost highest among American poets; and high among prosaists; no one else offers so much pungency, such impetus and frightful energy crowded into such small space.” But Lathrop’s essential point was that art cannot be considered apart from moral categories, as Poe’s case
demonstrated so well: Poe’s “passionate search for the beautiful, unhelmed, erring, guided by no North Star of faith . . . is the very thing which drove him into such whirlpools of physical horror and ignoble wallowings in decay; because it issued from interior discord, and was not a normal, deep-seated desire.” 6 Lathrop then contrasted Poe’s lack of moral purpose with the sane, healthy moral vision of Hawthorne—a familiar point of comparison during this period. Lathrop seems to be responding to one of the few articles sympathetic to Poe to appear in a major American magazine in the post-Civil War years, Eugene Benson’s “Poe and Hawthorne,” published in the Galaxy, December 1868. This neglected, penetrating essay, mistakenly characterized in one bibliography as “unsympathetic to Poe,” 7 forcefully argued that Poe and Hawthorne were “the only two American literary men who have had the sense of beauty and the artist’s conscience in a supreme degree.” 8

Finally, in “Last Days of Edgar A. Poe,” published in Scribner’s for March 1877, Susan Archer Talley Weiss provided a pleasant report of Poe’s gracious behavior during his final visit to Richmond, where, as a young girl interested in poetry, she had come to know him. She admiringly recounted Poe’s gentlemanly manners and polite interest in her verse. But such was the censorious climate of the 1870s that Mrs. Weiss felt compelled to separate herself from his immorality. To do this, she resorted to the pseudo-scientific of phrenology:

The shape of his head struck me, even on first sight, as peculiar. There was a massive projection of the broad brow and temples, with the organ of casualty very conspicuously developed, a marked flatness of the top of the head, and an unusual fullness at the back. I had at this time no knowledge of phrenology; but now, in recalling this peculiar shape, I cannot deny that in Poe what are called the intellectual and animal portions of the head were remarkably developed, while in the moral regions there was as marked a deficiency. Especially there was a slight depression instead of fullness of outline where the organs of veneration and firmness are located by phrenologists. This peculiarity detracted so much from the symmetrical proportions of the head that he sought to remedy the defect by wearing his hair tossed back, thus producing more apparent height of the cranium. (15: 711-712)

Perhaps Holland, a medical not a theological doctor, felt the observations of Fairfield and Weiss on Poe’s neurological condition provided sufficient evidence for him to brand Poe’s work “the crazy product of a crazy mind.”

The Scribner’s essays, if perhaps extreme, reflect an attribute of much post-Civil War criticism of Poe: an inability to separate the work from the alleged failings of the man. 9 As Lathrop asserted: “The life and writings stand intimately connected, almost inseparable, in Poe.” (p. 803). Certainly, this is evident in Richard Henry Stoddard’s mean-spirited biographical sketch for Harper’s, published in September 1872. 10 The smug dismissal of Poe by most of the leading American men of letters is reflected in the comments of Henry James in an essay on Baudelaire published in the Nation in 1876. James, who would later modify his opinion, observed that

For American readers . . . Baudelaire is compromised by his having made himself the apostle of our own Edgar Poe. He translated, very carefully and exactly, all of Poe’s prose writings, and, we believe, some of his very valueless verses. With all due respect to the very original genius of the author of ‘Tales of Mystery,’ it seems to us that to take him with more than a certain degree of seriousness is to lack seriousness one’s self. An enthusiasm for Poe is the mark of a decidedly primitive stage of reflection. Baudelaire thought him a profound philosopher, the neglect of whose golden utterances stamped his native land with infamy. Nevertheless, Poe was vastly the greater charlatan of the two, as well as the greater genius. 11

The critical situation was complicated by the appearance in the late 1870s of works by such English champions as John H. Ingram and William F. Gill which sought primarily to vindicate Poe’s behavior. The International Review published Ingram’s error-filled “Edgar Allan Poe” in March 1875 (pp. 145-173). The Atlantic recognized that Gill’s biography, published in 1877 by C. T. Dillingham, had set out to uphold the familiar position of Poe’s partisans, that he must “be regarded as a remarkably praiseworthy being, with slight faults, who has been the victim of wholly unaccountable criticism.” 12 A way had to be found to put aside the problem of Poe’s life—however fascinating—if American readers were to be able to appreciate his art.

The article that did precisely this—first demonstrate the irrelevance of biographical considerations to literary evaluation and then undertake an appreciative but critical analysis of the work—Edmund Clarence Stedman’s “Edgar Allan Poe”—appeared in May 1880, ironically in the magazine that had been most hostile to Poe, Holland’s Scribner’s. Born in 1833, Stedman was a member in good standing of the New York Stock Exchange and as both poet and critic he had been from the first a valued contributor to Scribner’s. 13 His series in the magazine
on the Victorian Poets, published in 1875 by Houghton, Mifflin, had been both a critical and popular success. Holland included Stedman on his list of "Garnered Names" of American poets, and he was anxious to have him begin a series on American poets similar to that on the Victorians. "You will do it for the literary class as well as Lowell, and for the popular reader a great deal better."14 Such was Stedman's standing that he was able to insist—over Holland's strenuous objections—on publishing in Scribner's favorable essays on the two American poets the doctor had attacked most vehemently; his "Walt Whitman" appeared in November 1880, just six months after the essay on Poe. Appearing in Holland's citadel of middle-class piety, these essays were responsible for a dramatic change in the reputations of both writers and so contributed to the evolution of a more cosmopolitan literary environment in America. We can be sure that Stedman's essay on Poe was for Holland, as he conceded of the Whitman, "a bitter pill" (p. 228).

Stedman recognized that he could not simply ignore the subject that had absorbed so much attention, Poe's life. But in briefly reviewing the biographical facts, he charted a middle course. He freely admitted that Poe's behavior was by no means blameless, that he did suffer from an "inherent lack of will."15 On the other hand, Stedman reminded his readers that as "poet and man of letters," Poe faced extraordinary difficulties in attempting to earn his living by his pen in a "new country" where conditions were decidedly unfavorable to the professional writer (p. 111). Stedman's essential purpose, however, was not to judge the man but to demystify the writer; Poe, he asserted, was "a man of like passions with ourselves,—one who, if weaker in his weaknesses than many, and stronger in his strength, may not have been so bad, nor yet so good, as one and another have painted him" (p. 107). Asserting that "the essential part of an artist's life is that of his inspired moments," Stedman sensibly argued that "from first to last he was simply a poet and man of letters, who rightly might claim to be judged by the literary product of his life" (p. 111).

Stedman's purpose in analyzing Poe's poetry was to draw attention away from such familiar works as "The Raven" and "To Helen" so as to demonstrate that the essential Poe is to be found elsewhere, in such poems as "The Sleeper," "The Conqueror Worm," "The Haunted Palace," and "The City in the Sea," its pictorial qualities suggestively compared to the paintings of Turner and "that sublime madman, John Martin." In describing these as poems of loss, of the "Irreparable," works in which "the tomb, the end of mortality, is voiceless still," Stedman explicitly recognized that they do not offer the expected consolation of Christian theology, that they are not based on the revelations, as Holland would have it, of "The Great Book." "If you would find the beginning of immortality," he asserted, "seek some other oracle" (pp. 113-115).

Stedman regrets that the literary marketplace did not allow Poe to devote himself more consistently and purposefully to poetry. Rather, Poe's "intellectual strength and rarest imagination are to be found in his 'Tales'" to which, along with "literary criticism, his main labors were devoted" (p. 117). Although primarily concerned as a critic with poetry, here Stedman wrote appreciatively and suggestively of Poe's fiction. In making the obligatory comparison, he does judge Hawthorne both the more "spiritual" and the more "masculine" of the two writers. However, in analyzing the great power of Poe's fiction, he found a serious purpose,

A feeling that in the realms of psychology we are dealing with something ethereal, which is none of the less substantial if we might but capture it. They are resolute attempts to find a clue to the invisible world. Were we living now, how much we would make of our discoveries in light and sound, of the correlation of forces! He strove by a kind of divination to put his hand upon the lines of mind and matter, and reach the hiding places of the soul. (p. 117)

As in his treatment of the poetry, Stedman argued that Poe's fiction embodies a vital imaginative quest for understanding of man's place in the universe, one which should be appreciated even though it could not be placed within the context of traditional religion.

Stedman based his primary argument for Poe's importance in American literature on aesthetic power of his work in both prose and verse. Responding directly to Dr. Holland's Christian didacticism, he urged his readers to "accept him, then, whether as poet or romancer, as a pioneer of the art of feeling in American literature. So far as he was devoted to art for art's sake, it was for art's sake as the exponent of beauty. No man ever lived in whom the passion for loveliness so governed the emotions and convictions. . . . This consecration to absolute beauty made him abhor the mixture of sentimentalism, metaphysics, and morals, in its presentation (of the New England writers)" (p. 121). Although Stedman argued that Poe's excessive concern with beauty at the expense of truth limited the scope of his achievement, his essay is a remarkably compressed and lucid exposition of the great power of Poe's art.

Stedman well understood the broader cultural significance of his battle for public acceptance of both Poe and Whitman. Poe, he wrote in Scribner's, "represents, or was one of the first to lead, a rebellion against formalism, commonplace, the spirit of the bourgeois. In this
movement Whitman is his countertype at the pole opposite from that of art; and hence they justly are picked out from the rest of us and associated in foreign minds” (p. 121). Stedman was attempting to change America’s familiar conception of itself, especially as that image had been formulated by the great high priest of the middle class, Dr. Holland. Stedman’s most basic message was directed to those who may have been intimidated by the condemnatory attacks on Poe’s character: “After every allowance, it seems difficult for one not utterly jaded to read his poetry and tales without yielding to their original and haunting spell” (p. 108).

With the publication of the essay in Scribner’s, Stedman felt, as he explained to John H. Ingram, that he had “done with Poe.”16 “I cannot, and will not, figure as a Poe specialist,” he wrote to William Winter in 1883 (LL 2: 219). As it turned out, of course, his “Edgar Allan Poe,” which has been called “probably the most comprehensive essay on Poe before 1900” (Hyneman, p. 51), marked the beginning of an involvement with Poe as critic, editor and advocate that would last until Stedman’s death in 1908. Whatever his intentions, Stedman became the best-known and most effective American Poe “specialist” of this period.

The response to the Scribner’s essay astonished Stedman. He “received over a score of letters about it,” as he wrote on 13 May 1880 to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, and it was favorably reviewed in such periodicals as the Nation, on April 29, and the New York Times, April 19th (LL 2: 212). So great was the interest in the essay that Houghton, Mifflin published it as a monograph the next year. In England it was released in this form by Sampson, Low.

Next, Stedman contributed an introductory “Comment on the Poem” to the deluxe edition of The Raven published by Harper and Brothers in 1884. This edition features twenty-six illustrations by the French artist, Gustave Doré. Sadly, Doré’s rather affected drawings reflect the well-known decline in artistic power of that prolific illustrator, who died before the publication of the book. Perhaps the best comment is to be found in the Atlantic:

The figure which stalks, or stiffens, or withres, through the varying scenes is the melodramatic Poe as he has been too often conceived,—a man of shattered nerves, haunted by phantasms of fear, half crazed . . . . Such a preconception of Poe, such romancing about his sorrows, probably underlie the misrepresentations of which the illustrations are guilty . . . . In opposition, however, to the impression of Poe given by the cuts stands Mr. Stedman’s remarkably just criticism and estimate of this particular poem among Poe’s other verse. As he says, it is not the poet’s best in

imagination, in passion, or in the lift of its melodies; it is nevertheless his greatest because of the wide reach of its power. The comment makes a complete monograph on the subject.17

The first critical history of American poetry, Stedman’s Poets of America (1885) became, like the earlier volume on the Victorian poets, the standard text. Placed between the chapters on Longfellow and Holmes, “Edgar Allan Poe,” a reprinting of the Scribner’s essay with slight revisions, clearly proclaimed the importance of its subject. Four years later, Stedman again gave public recognition to Poe’s status as a major American writer by featuring him prominently in volume six of the Library of American Literature, which Samuel Clemens’s publishing firm, Charles L. Webster, brought out in eleven volumes (1889-90).18

Poe figures centrally in Stedman’s next major publication, the Nature and Elements of Poetry (1891), a series of lectures which he delivered at Johns Hopkins and which were published in the Century before Houghton, Mifflin brought them together in book form. His purpose here is to mediate between two contrasting native traditions, the aesthetic, as represented best by Poe’s insistence that beauty is the sole aim of art, and the moral, as represented by Emerson’s emphasis on the spiritual or truth content of poetry. Stedman’s formal definition of poetry as “rhythmic, imaginative language, expressing the invention, taste, thought, passion, and insight, of the human soul” is confessedly based on Poe’s succinct statement that poetry is “the Rhythmic Creation of Beauty” (Nature and Elements, p. 44).

On 29 December 1893, Herbert Stuart Stone, one of the principals in the new publishing firm of Stone and Kimball, wrote to Stedman urging that he undertake the editorship of a new edition of Poe. Since in the course of outlining his expectations for the edition he also defines the publishing philosophy of this remarkable firm, the letter is given in full (and with Stone’s spellings allowed to stand):19

Cambridge, The 29th day.

Edmund Clarence Stedman, Esq.

New York City

Dear Sir:—We have in contemplation—almost in preparation a rather large undertaking in which we should like to have your aid. Taking a suggestion from the pretty little edition of Jane Austen’s novels which J. M. Dent & Co. of London, brought out last year: we have thought of
publishing an edition of the writings of Edgar Allan Poe. If you will stop to think a moment, we believe you will realize that there is not a decent edition of Poe's works in existence. The best is probably that edited by R. H. Stoddard which came out in 1883. At best that was no more than ordinary. It was gotten up with an absence of taste in manufacture quite usual and was far from adequate. We are trying to make good books—beautiful books—we are trying first of all to publish poetry in suitable form and it seems really very appropriate that we should attempt primarily to set off Poe's writings as well as possible. It has occurred to us that you might consent to undertake the editorship of the edition. As far as we had planned there would probably be eight volumes containing the writings as follows:

Volumes I and II  Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque

Volumes III  Humorous Tales
  "  IV  Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym
  "  V  Poems
  "  VI, VII  The Literati
  "  VIII  Miscellanies.

We are in hopes of having Volumes I and II illustrated by photogravures from sketches by that clever young English decorator, Mr. Aubrey Beardsley. We have also written to Mr. Elisha Vedder, regarding the illustrations for the poems. It seems to us that he is the most thoughtful—perhaps the most intellectual of our American illustrators. Mr. Howard Pyle might be able to do the work if Mr. Vedder did not care to. The books would be printed either at the DeVinne Press in New York or the University Press here in Cambridge. The paper used would be some rough laid paper and the edges would be deckled. In fact we should use all our endeavors to make the books beautiful—worthy first of memory of Edgar Allan Poe and secondly of the name and reputation of the Editor. We trust you may see your way clear to undertake this task, which ought, we think, to be rather a pleasant one. That we may not appear to be presumptuous in writing you thus—as strangers:—we beg to introduce ourselves by saying that we have in press books by Maurice Thompson, Eugene Field, Joaquin Miller, Grant Allen, Louise Chandler Moulton, Gilbert Parker, Hamlin Garland, and Stuart Merrill—all—with two or three exceptions—books of poetry. So far we have done nothing well—we have made several attempts and learned much. Before long we expect to make one book—at least—which will be—not bad. At present we send you a copy of Mr. Joaquin Miller's latest book which will—in a measure—show what we are trying to do.

Awaiting your reply, we are, Sir,

Very truly yours

Stone and Kimball

Herbert Stuart Stone

Worn out by the unexpectedly great effort required to bring out the Library of American Literature, Stedman had determined never to undertake demanding editorial projects again. But he had broken his resolve and agreed to edit, as a companion to his Victorian Poets, a major collection for Houghton, Mifflin, A Victorian Anthology. He was at work on this project when Stone's letter came. We must remember that since he spent his days on Wall Street, he was forced to find time for literary work during the evenings and weekends. But he simply could not reject this proposal. Long a lover of beautiful books, he no doubt was moved by the efforts of Herbert Stone and Ingalls Kimball, both still Harvard undergraduates, to bring to America a dedication to printing as an art similar to that which had been inspired by William Morris's work with the Kelmscott Press in England. And of course Stedman would have been taken immediately by the appropriateness of this firm's selection of Poe as the American author whom it would honor by publishing a complete illustrated edition in the new style. He did, however, set two conditions before accepting the project: that George Edward Woodberry, author of a cold but scholarly biography of Poe published in 1885, be hired as co-editor and that the edition be a complete re-editing of the text (LL 2: 225). In a letter of 10 January 1894 Stone agreed to Stedman's stipulations, and expressed the hope that "finally . . . the 'ideal edition of Poe' is a possibility—we trust a probability. We are quite ready to do anything in our power to bring it to a successful event." 20

Working closely and harmoniously with Stone, Stedman and Woodberry were able to bring out all ten volumes of The Works of Edgar Allan Poe within two years of undertaking the project, 1894-95. Woodberry served as the primary "text expert" and supplied the biographical "Memoir," published in the first volume (pp. 3-87). Expanding his compressed essay for Scribner's, Stedman wrote introductory essays on the tales (1: 91-121), the literary criticism (6: xii-xxvi), and the poetry (10: xii-xxxv). A reprint of The Works is available today from Arno at $250.00.
In addition to the regular trade edition, Stone and Kimball published a large paper edition limited to two hundred and fifty copies. Four drawings by Aubrey Beardsley, commissioned by the publisher, appeared in this edition only: "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," "The Black Cat," "The Masque of the Red Death," and "The Fall of the House of Usher." Since these drawings are not widely known, they have been reproduced here.\textsuperscript{21}

Elizur Vedder, the publisher's first choice for general illustrator, had created the frontispiece for Harper's deluxe The Raven, which was illustrated by Doré. He had scored a great success with his illustrations for an edition of The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam, published in 1884. Regretfully, he declined the project. Stone explained his position in the letter to Stedman of 10 January 1894: "It is a question whether he can ever get the "Rubaiyat" out of his mind, sufficiently, to create a comparatively new style for himself." The selection of the popular Albert Edward Sterner came about as a result of a suggestion of Richard Watson Gilder, who had succeeded Holland as editor of Scribner's (now the Century). Stone explained to Stedman in a letter of 12 March 1894: "Did you know that the Century Company had thought of doing a Poe—and that Sterner would have been its illustrator? I am anxious to know what you think of him for he is enthusiastic over Poe and wants to do the work?"\textsuperscript{22} Evidently Stedman consented, and Sterner was hired. The New York Times in its enthusiastic review of the edition observed that "Mr. Sterner’s pictures show that he worked himself thoroughly into the Poe mood when he made them."\textsuperscript{23} D. L. Mahrshly, in an extended review for the Dial, "The Renascence of Poe," called Sterner’s illustrations "a distinct addition," showing "great sympathy with the weirdness and beauty that gave tone to the tales."\textsuperscript{24} Much closer to the truth, however, is the understated comment of the Atlantic, that "the imaginative illustrations have scarcely the quality of Poe’s own creative genius."\textsuperscript{25}

From the first Stedman recognized that Griswold’s text was inadequate, and he accepted the responsibility of attempting to perfect it. He and Woodberry wrote in the "General Preface" for the edition (1: xvii), dated 28 October 1894, that after the lapse of nearly half a century, something more may be exacted from those who have had the custody of a great writer's works, and something more is due from those who care for the literature of the country. Poe’s fame has spread as widely through the world as that of any imaginative author of America; and longer neglect of the state of his text would be discreditable to men of letters among us, now that his works have passed by law into the common property of mankind.

The editors accepted the responsibility of explaining their editorial procedures fully, and they did so both in the "General Preface" and in notes to individual works. They adopted the sound editorial principle of printing the "authentic text" the "last form having Poe’s authority." They were able to make use of Poe’s textual notes in the margins of his own copies of three works: the Tales, The Raven and Other Poems, and Eureka. Wherever possible, they consulted his manuscripts, and collated works published by Poe in more than one place during his lifetime. Volume ten is a variorm edition of the poetry. In these matters it would be hard to fault the editors' principles, and one must admire their dedication and diligence in attempting to discover and reproduce Poe’s final intention.

Strictly committed to honoring Poe’s intentions in substantives, the editors nevertheless confess to what is, from the perspective of modern editorial practice, an unacceptable freedom in dealing with accedentials. They report that "the punctuation, and all that concerns typographical style, has been modified to accord with later usage and taste, and generally the editors have exercised free judgment in all matters not affecting the integrity of the text" (1: x). In 1903 Stedman reported to one correspondent that "I repunctuated the entire writings" (his emphasis; LL 2: 230). Similarly, the editors adopted the scheme of rearranging the tales and presenting them under headings of their own devising. Although Stedman and Woodberry deserve credit for producing "the first American collected edition having any serviceable notes and critical apparatus," they generously left a good deal of work for later textual scholars to do and—to undo.\textsuperscript{26}

The true significance of the edition, however, lies elsewhere, in what it accomplished for Poe’s reputation. The reviewer in the Athenaeum, after pointedly identifying a number of representative textual errors—primarily mistakes of omission—concludes: "Take it for all in all, however, this is the best edition of Poe’s works which has yet been published, and as regards typography and general ‘get-up’ it is in every way a desirable acquisition."\textsuperscript{27} The New York Times used the occasion of its review of an edition which promised to be "final" and which seemed to carry "the stamp of authority," to certify Poe’s status as a major American writer: "The time of conflict over the poet and his poetry has passed, and his fame and influence are living."\textsuperscript{28} Similarly, in her "Chicago Letter" for the Critic Harriet Monroe asserted that it would be...
difficult to exaggerate the importance of this edition to our conception of Poe. For the first time his work has careful editing, all irregularities of the text and eccentricities of punctuation being removed. And what is more important, Mr. Stedman gives the tales a symphonic unity by his orderly arrangement. . . . A great writer is at last sympathetically presented, so that the phases of his mind develop harmoniously in the reader’s imagination. The gain to Poe’s reputation will be incalculable. His biography is, perhaps, yet to be written; but this edition of his works will probably establish its claim to be definitive. No more sympathetic interpreter of the mystic harmonies of this man of genius will ever appear to challenge Mr. Stedman’s masterly presentation of his work.

Monroe’s review suggests that in judging this edition we should keep in mind at least two criteria: its success in meeting the most exacting standards of modern textual scholarship and its ability to meet the needs of its own time for an edition which would make Poe’s work accessible. Clearly, it met the second requirement, if not the first.

A number of reviewers expressed dismay over what Monroe termed the “liest New England formalism” of Woodberry’s “Memoir.” The great warmth of Stedman’s essays, however, struck a responsive chord with these and other reviewers. As the Athenaeum predicted in its review of the first four volumes, “A revulsion of feeling will be created in the minds of those who have hitherto regarded Poe as some monstrousity of nature. Such words as these, coming from a man of Mr. Stedman’s eminence, cannot miss their aim.”

As the leading critic and historian of American poetry, Stedman edited a major anthology to mark the turn of the century. In the introduction to An American Anthology, 1787–1899, published by Houghton, Mifflin in 1900, he insisted even more strongly than before on Poe’s centrality: “Has any singer of our time more demonstrably affected the rhythmical methods of various lands than Poe with his few but haunting paradigms? . . . It is now pretty clear, notwithstanding the popularity of Longfellow in his day, that Emerson, Poe, and Whitman were those of our poets from whom the old world had most to learn . . . . Years from now, it will be a matter of fact that their influences were as lasting as those of any poets of this century” (xiiiv).

Evidently, Stedman’s words in praise of Poe had not been universally convincing. In 1900 and again in 1905 he was not chosen by the select group of one hundred electors to join the newly-established Hall of Fame for Great Americans in New York City. President Hadley of Yale, one of the electors, explained why Poe had been kept out:

“Poe wrote like a drunkard and a man who is not accustomed to pay his debts.”

There is evidence, however, to suggest that the opinion of the people at large at this time was far more favorable than that of the distinguished electors. In an article published in the Independent on 16 August 1900, “Guesses at Fame,” Thomas Wentworth Higginson reported on two newspaper polls requesting readers to name the best American writer. Poe topped the ballot in the survey of the Brooklyn Eagle and came in a close second (behind Jonathan Edwards) in the poll of the Minneapolis Times (Hubbell, p. 94). After Poe failed of election the second time, Stedman, who normally avoided such controversies, went public. In “Poe, Cooper and the Hall of Fame,” published in the North American Review, 16 August 1907, he chastised his fellow electors in an impassioned tribute to Poe’s genius:

On your conscience, fellow judges, whether you are realists or dreamers, jurists, scholars or divines, pay some slight regard to that voice of the outer world, which one of our own writers termed the verdict of ‘a kind of contemporaneous posterity’; note that there is scarcely an enlightened tongue into which Poe’s lyrics and tales have not been rendered . . . . That he was poor and headstrong is true; that he was the congenial victim of an abnormal craving for stimulants, now accounted a disease, is true; but what of all this beside the gift that made its shining way against such odds—beside one’s gratitude for his crystallization of our inchoate taste and for the recognition which his poetry and romance did so much to gain for the literary product of his native land. (pp. 805–805)

Perhaps—at last—this appeal succeeded; Poe was elected to the Hall of Fame on the next ballot in 1910 (Hubbell, p. 94). But that honor came after Stedman’s death on 18 January 1908. Stedman’s thirty-year campaign for Poe had—at last—achieved its goal. He had explained the motive for his life-long advocacy of Poe in a letter to John H. Ingram written after the publication of his essay in Scribner’s: “Poe exercised a great fascination over me, in my youth. I knew his works by heart, and as you see, have analyzed them closely and with more than ordinary critical reverence” (LL 2: 216-217).

NOTES


2Century Magazine, 23[n.s. 1](1881), 164.
Robert J. Scholnick


His faults were many, his virtues few.

... He glimmered apart
In solemn gloom,
like a dying lamp in a haunted tomb.
He touched his lute with a magic spell,
But all his melodies were filled with}
Raising Aths and the Golems,
And the divided ghosts
of the damned souls.

19This letter is owned by Columbia University and is quoted with the permission of the University.

20This letter is owned by Columbia University and is printed by permission of the University.


22These letters are owned by Columbia University and are printed by permission of the University.


24"The Renascence of Poe," Dial, 1 March 1895, p. 139.

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29 Critic, 5 January 1895, pp. 15-16.

30 Untitled review, 21 December 1895, p. 86.


The Murders in the Rue Morgue (Plate 337)
The Black Cat (Plate 338)

The Fall of the House of Usher (Plate 339)
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