

“His sense of form was good, but seldom to be depended on at first; if he reached the perfection for which he strove it was only after repeated trials and failures. No poet who wrote so little ever re-wrote that little so often, and so successfully.” All his stories are gruesome and strike terror to the heart of the reader.

Poe posed as a critic, but his want of honesty and his prejudice made him an unfair judge and little regarded. “His critical faculty was more sure of itself in correction than in composition.” He knew his power and what he could do with it. His criticisms are sharp and biting, and his satire is cutting; he feigned great learning and erudition, and liked to parade it; his reference knowledge was excellent; his intellect was sharp, electric, and powerful; he had a keen sense of melody, of just proportion in structure, and of proprieties of style. In short, Poe was deficient as a critic. “His criticisms are distinguished for scientific precision and coherence of logic. They have the exactness and, at the same time, the coldness of mathematical demonstrations.” He liked to detect discrepancies, but could not grapple with principles.

Poe’s influence may be treated of under: first, his place in literature; and second, the effect on his readers. As has been said Poe stands alone. In his own particular province he is without a peer. It is his genius and peculiar line of work, in which he excelled, that place him among the first of American authors. His stories can be compared to nothing in English or American literature. “He took no hold-up on the life about him and cared nothing for the public concerns of his country. His poems and tales might have been written *in vacuo* for anything American in them. Perhaps for this reason, in part, his fame has been so cosmopolitan.” So writes F. H. Underwood. His writings have taken especially well in France. On the other hand, “he affects different natures differently, and, unlike many poets, he affects all who are capable of being touched by poetry.” To the optimist he is hateful and gloomy; “to the melancholy, he is the melodious laureate of dead hopes. To those to whom poetry is an art he is at once attractive and repulsive.” His stories often affect us with terror and we are apt to ask whether we too are not mad. It is due then to his peculiar genius that his work has such a hold upon us as individuals, and stands alone and conspicuous in American Letters.