

ART IN AMERICA

American than Battersea Bridge. The only other picture that rises to my mind is "The House of Usher," which sounds more like Germany or Norfolk.

Whitman is almost equally unconvincing as far as scenery goes. The secret of all Nature-poetry is *the interpretation of every phenomenon as a direct dealing of God with the soul*, and Whitman rarely reaches to be more than a recorder or reflector of Nature. It stirs him at times to big thoughts, but hardly ever in that intimate manner, that sense of necessity, which we see in Keats, Coleridge, and even Wordsworth.

And yet he does something better than all this. He gets, as none other ever got it, the sense of vast open space and the vigorous autochthon rejoicing in his strength—man made one with the biggest kind of Nature.

Most of Poe's best scenery is pure imagination; for example, the matter of ice-lands in *Arthur Gordon Pym*; of the realists Mark Twain is the only one worth a moment's consideration. The Mississippi really seems to have impressed him; but it is only in rare moods, and these poetic moods are by no means his best. I find it difficult to refrain from shouting for joy at the immensity of those swirling waters. I understand Beethoven roaring at the sunrise. But Mark Twain at his best is a profaner of these sublimities; the shallow criticism is usually uppermost in his mind. Indeed, one wonders whether his deeper passages were not written just to show us that he could do it. With the obvious result that he shows us that he couldn't.

In fact, if we are to take the loftiness of the habitual plane of thought to be the first qualification of a great artist, Poe and Whitman stand alone.

Of these Poe, philosophy and all, is little more than "Thoughts on Death," a limitation as bad as that of Degas or Gustave Moreau. There is more deep and more varied thought in a single sonnet of Baudelaire. Poe lives principally by the vividness of his imagery and the excellence of his style. But Europe, in the same century, can name in literature alone fifty artists with superior vision and equal execution.

As to Whitman, I confess that I praise him with an exceeding bad grace. I am cursed with a public school and university education, though luckily I was born with