



the authors who were significant in their own time are obscure to today's readers. It, therefore, takes familiar knowledge and effort to get into the entirety of Lowell's joke. I wish that I could have appreciated it more fully. I disliked the kindle edition, which was a scan on a library book. It had writing in the printed text and my digital copy had function problems, which caused it to repeatedly close on me. This wouldn't have bothered me if it had been a free e-book, but I purchased it.

Lowell's critical abilities are well displayed in "A Fable for Critics," a humorous jeu d'esprit written, as Lowell says, "at full gallop," from time to time in 1847 and 1849. In spite of the playful badinage and the bantering tone of the satire, the criticism of the various authors was meant to be serious. The piece is composed in a curious four-stressed anapestic rhythm with many ludicrous rimes to fit this unusual meter. So well did Lowell strike off the characteristics of Emerson, Bryant, Whittier, Hawthorne, Cooper, Poe, Longfellow, Irving, Holmes, and even Lowell himself, that lines from the poem are still frequently and approvingly quoted by modern critics. For example, There is Bryant, as quiet, as cool, and as dignified, As a smooth, silent iceberg, that never is ignifed. There comes Poe, with his raven, like Barnaby Rudge, Three fifths of him genius and two fifths sheer fudge. There is Lowell, who's striving Parnassus to climb With a whole bale of isms tied together with rhyme. As a whole, "A Fable for Critics" is fantastically conceived and loosely thrown together, and it is by no means a work of art. Still it is not too much to say that it is the finest example of satiric criticism in our literature. It may be favorably compared with Byron's "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers," though it certainly is not written in the revengeful and caustic mood of its English predecessor. —History of American Literature [1919]