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PUBLIC OBLIGATION AND POETIC VOCATION IN THE POETRY OF HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

by

MATTHEW GARTNER

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

1999

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in English in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

1.22.99
Date

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Abstract

PUBLIC OBLIGATION AND POETIC VOCATION
IN THE POETRY OF HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

by

Matthew Gartner

Advisor: Angus Fletcher

Longfellow was for his contemporaries a figure of immense reputation, a living icon who filled a central niche on the American scene. Best known today for having once been famous, he remains an epitome of the public poet in nineteenth-century America and of the literary artist of any epoch whose distinctive gifts have abruptly lost their currency. In my four chapters I develop four perspectives from which to view Longfellow's cultivation of his reading public. I explore the special place of the patrician poet in a nation founded on an egalitarian ideal, paying particular attention to the literary sleights by which Longfellow was able to vivify in his poetry his personal authority and dispense that authority toward social ends.

The dissertation's Introduction proposes that Longfellow be seen as an innovative poet, a major figure of American cultural history, and a challenge to contemporary criticism. Chapter One explores how Longfellow attained national eminence as author of such poems as "A Psalm of Life" and "The Village Blacksmith" by figuring himself as a populist poet but encoding his poems with a patrician subtext. Chapter Two shows how through "The Children's Hour" and other domestic poems of weariness and powerlessness Longfellow associated himself in the public mind with his famous Cambridge residence, Craigie House, a former headquarters of George Washington, in order to establish himself

as a new kind of unintimidating patriarch. William Charvat's remark that Longfellow's poetry often amounts to so many advertisements for poets and poetry prompts Chapter Three, a contextualizing of Longfellow's many poems about "song" within the nineteenth-century bifurcation of high and popular culture. Looming sectional crisis provides the background for my final chapter, in which the marriage theme in the epithalamial "The Building of the Ship" (the ship is named the "Union") leads to a discussion of the metaphorical link between marital union and national union in Longfellow's historical romance Evangeline. Longfellow's poetry shines forth in my readings not by virtue of its brilliant originality but, more mutedly, by its paternal solicitude and conservative restraint—qualities rarely valued by twentieth-century critics.

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to my teachers at the Graduate School of the City University of New York for their encouragement, guidance, and example. Professor Joan Richardson listened on many an occasion as I stumbled toward a dissertation topic; her devotion to poetry has helped keep me in mind of what matters. Professor William Kelly has over the years given me much excellent counsel, including a particularly helpful suggestion, made at a meeting of the CUNY Americanist Group where I first presented some of my thoughts on Longfellow, that I keep my sights on Longfellow's strengths as a poet. Professor David Reynolds has been a model of historical insight in literary scholarship.

I have been privileged to write this dissertation under the advisorship of Professor Angus Fletcher. The very least of my debt to him is that he never pushed his own interpretations of Longfellow on me, but allowed me slowly to tease out mine. His spirit is present wherever in these pages I am most in touch with my own thoughts.

Linda Sherwin, the Assistant Program Officer for the English Program at the CUNY Graduate School, has been unfailingly helpful with practical matters both large and small.

My family and friends have been very important to me during the time the dissertation was taking shape. I would especially like to acknowledge my mother, Crys Gartner, for her indispensable love and support. Special thanks also to my friend Dan Elish, for innumerable long phone conversations rarely having anything to do with Longfellow.

Beth Hassrick has talked about Longfellow with me at length and at all hours. She has helped me believe that I had something worth saying, and her clarity of reception has sharpened my ability to say it. Finally, she has given me a reason—and recently an even newer reason—for doing so. To her, with love and gratitude, this dissertation is dedicated.

Table of Contents

Shall it, then, be unavailing,
All this toil for human culture?

Longfellow, "Prometheus"

Introduction:
Why Read Longfellow?

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882) commands our attention for a number of interrelated reasons, which may for convenience be broken down into four categories: aesthetic, historiographic, professional, and personal. The distinctive qualities of Longfellow's literary art make his an important and underappreciated poetic voice; his virtually iconic role in nineteenth-century America places him as a central and emblematic figure for cultural history; his abrupt fall from the heights of critical favor, and the critical oblivion in which he now languishes, raise timely questions of literary value and critical practice; and finally, his poetry may be found to hold a unique power to instruct, to charm, and to console the contemporary reader. In this dissertation I concern myself explicitly only with the first two of these categories of reasons, Longfellow's undervalued literary achievement and often overlooked historical meaning. Beneath these explicit interests, however, I am everywhere concerned to ask the question, what does Longfellow have to teach us? The "us" here includes both academic literary critics and non-professional readers of poetry.

My title, "Public Obligation and Poetic Vocation in the Poetry of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow," calls for some clarification at the outset. Briefly, I use "public obligation" to refer to the ethic of social responsibility and civic duty that characterized the public attitude of prominent New England families from the Puritans onward, and "poetic vocation" to signal the manifold ways Longfellow's own literary aspirations, informed as they always are by his sense of the public obligations of authorship, enter

into and shape his poetry. My argument is that the gentry-class tradition of public service is fundamental in determining the forms, styles, and themes that Longfellow as a dutiful son of such a family could and did adopt as a literary artist. I show how Longfellow took advantage of the occasion of his poetry to develop the public persona for which he was famous, that of the benevolent patrician author, the beloved national father figure. When Thomas Bulfinch wrote to Longfellow in 1855 seeking permission to dedicate his Age of Fable to him "as a sort of guarantee to the public that nothing worthless or mischievous is offered to them," he was paying homage to the success of Longfellow's self-invention.[1] When during the Civil War in 1863 the beloved national poet rallied his countrymen with the words, "Listen, my children, and you shall hear/Of the midnight ride of Paul Revere," he was doing so from within the paternalistic role he had created for himself in the national imagination.

Longfellow is above all, to my mind, a poet of the social world. While exploring the public and social dimensions of Longfellow's poetry, I have sought to illuminate its poetic aspects by suggesting that the possibilities of Longfellow's art are always both liberated and contained by his sense of the responsible, the respectable, the useful. My approach has been to investigate what might be thought of as episodes in Longfellow's courtship of his reading public. The success of this courtship is amply documented in the extensive literature of tribute Longfellow has generated, above all in Samuel Longfellow's great monument to his brother, the three volume Life of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. In illustrating the mutual reciprocity of influence between Longfellow and his readers, between the values of Longfellow's poems and those of nineteenth-century

American culture, I have brought forward poems and literary works of many kinds from throughout Longfellow's career. Because I have not felt the need to account for the whole of Longfellow's oeuvre, I have been able to focus on themes and attitudes that contributed decisively to the meanings and values that in his poetry and in his person Longfellow came to instantiate. These meanings and values cluster around the notions of authority, patriarchy, and hierarchy, as well as those of equality, duty, and democracy.

One of the longstanding aesthetic criticisms of Longfellow, even among his advocates, is that he lacks originality. Although there is no critical consensus as to what it consists of and how it can be recognized, originality of some sort is still, I think, what even the most sophisticated readers demand of the writers they admire. Longfellow, under our prevailing Romantic construction of literary merit, falls short. "He was like an heir living on the inherited capital of a great estate, adding little but managing well," wrote the critic Odell Shephard of Longfellow.[2] Norman Holmes Pearson put a positive spin on Longfellow's creative limitations when he observed, "Longfellow's desire was to develop not so much a personal style as one correct in conformity."[3] Angus Fletcher has written of Longfellow's creative art as one modeled on translation rather than invention, and Lawrence Buell, in an introduction to a Penguin edition of Longfellow's selected poetry, has linked Longfellow with what he calls "the conservative aesthetics of restraint."[4] Generalizing upon the insights of these critics, it may well be asked: in what sense can a conservative poetry be inventive and, indeed, original?

In pondering this question with relation to Longfellow I have found it useful to keep in mind some sentences of Nathaniel Hawthorne's, written in a letter to his friend

and former college classmate on the publication of Longfellow's sentimental romance of New England village life, Kavanagh (1850): "Nobody but yourself could have written so quiet a book; nor could any other succeed in it. It is entirely original, a book by itself; a true work of genius if ever there were one. And yet I should not wonder if many people (confound them!) were to see no such matter in it."[5] Most readers have indeed seen no such matter in it, and perhaps rightly so; but the quietness of Kavanagh may be said to be typical of Longfellow's more successful efforts too. Hawthorne's remark wryly hints at Longfellow's perfect pitch for the predictable, his disarming and continually unexpected gift for staying within boundaries—a gift which won him immense gratitude from his readers. If his is a poetry of limits, it is one of limits generously accepted and observed; his evidently serene acceptance of self-imposed and tradition-endorsed strictures may have come as a great relief to nineteenth-century readers already intimidated and exhausted by original genius in poets. Longfellow's poetry may disappoint some readers today because it is in no sense transgressive, but amid the social, economic, political, and cultural transformations of nineteenth-century America his poems seemed bold and challenging in their authoritative calm. The benign poetry of the "humbler poets," Longfellow writes in "The Day Is Done," often partakes of this quiet power: "Such songs have power to quiet/The restless pulse of care,/And come like the benediction/That follows after prayer."

The subordination of ego involved in his quiet and calm poems, a subordination emerging in Longfellow out of the characteristic self-denials of New England religious and civic piety, may seem to bear an antagonistic relation to the burning literary ambition

that was his from even before he entered Bowdoin College at the age of fourteen in 1821. As a son of one of Portland's notable families, whose paternal grandfather was a judge and whose maternal grandfather was a General and a hero in the Revolutionary War, Longfellow seems, in retrospect at least, doomed to channel that ambition into socially acceptable forms. In the years of Longfellow's youth American society viewed poets and poetry with suspicion; the title of Joseph Stevens Buckminster's 1809 Phi Beta Kappa address at Harvard, "The Dangers and Duties of Men of Letters," suggests both the distrust that Longfellow as an aspiring poet was up against and the avenue by which he could allay it. Longfellow frequently struggled to find available and suitable subjects for his poetry in part because as a writer he subordinated his private wishes, and the perhaps threatening literary forms they might take, to his dutiful public role. His poetry was always poetry *for*, poetry with a civic aim, in which he became representative both of the elder and the villager, the mandarin and the common man.

As a threshold figure in American letters, Longfellow stands with one foot in the world of the pre-Revolutionary social elites and another in the world of the post-Jacksonian middle classes. He was of a generation after that of such once-eminent figures as Edward Everett and George Ticknor, two of the first Americans sent to Europe for advanced study, but he was sent to Europe like them and his career was fostered by them on his return. Yet unlike Everett and Ticknor, who put in sixteen-hour days of study in Göttingen and returned to Boston to take up important positions at Harvard and in government, Longfellow spent much of his European sojourn soaking up the charm of his situation and returned to teach at Bowdoin College and publish a sketchbook of his

travels, Outre-Mer: A Pilgrimage Beyond the Sea (1833). Though Longfellow went on to succeed Ticknor as Smith Professor of Modern Languages at Harvard, and though his anthology The Poets and Poetry of Europe (1845) could not in its scholarly breadth have been edited by any other American at that time, Longfellow's imagination was increasingly given over to the writing of popular lyrics and ballads and verse narratives. "I have a great notion of working upon people's feelings," he wrote his friend George Washington Greene in 1840, expressing impatience with the Whiggish *Knickerbocker Magazine* in which he had been publishing his poetry. He continued, referring to his ballad "The Wreck of the Hesperus," "I am going to have this printed on a sheet, and sold like *Varses*, with a coarse picture on it. I desire a new sensation, and a new set of critics."[6] Longfellow's subsequent success in the mainstream literary market may be suggested by the fact that in 1854, the year before the publication of the phenomenally popular The Song of Hiawatha, he was able to resign his position at Harvard and thereby become, in essence, America's first full-time professional poet. While a poet like Whitman identified with and sought the ear of the common reader, it turns out to have been the cosmopolitan Professor Longfellow, brought up amid the Unitarian-Whig orthodoxy of the New England gentry, who did so in poems like "A Psalm of Life," "The Village Blacksmith," and "Paul Revere's Ride."

Such incongruities need to be better understood. In spite of some excellent recent criticism of major Longfellow works like Evangeline and Hiawatha, some acute but basically apologetic surveys of Longfellow dating from the first decades of this century, and the voluminous commentary of the Longfellow idolaters and hagiographers,

Longfellow remains largely unknown to contemporary criticism. This is the case in part, I believe, because he poses formidable challenges to the textual exegete, the culture critic, the biographer, and the social historian. Longfellow is a very difficult author to write about. Hard as it is to pin down his elusive aesthetic accomplishments, so it is hard to specify his diffuse place in the nineteenth century—although one has the general impression that the effect of Longfellow's public role as guardian of the old virtues and herald of a new gentility must have been pervasive. Lawrance Thompson's biography Young Longfellow, Newton Arvin's critical reading Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: His Life and Work, and William Charvat's historical essay entitled simply "Longfellow" (collected in The Profession of Authorship in America, 1800-1870) are among the critical works on Longfellow that have been most helpful to me. Thompson shows Longfellow as a complex and often uncertain figure, saving him from his reputation as a Victorian saint; Arvin attends carefully to the weave of Longfellow's texts, placing him in the history of poetry in the West; and Charvat documents and interprets Longfellow's commercial success with nineteenth-century readers. It is perhaps uncharitable to criticize critics for failing to do what they never set out to do; yet these works, individually and collectively, suggest how difficult it is to put into a single conceptual framework the relation between Longfellow's peculiar brand of poetry and his unique historical role.

The literary history of nineteenth-century America is distorted without due recognition of this role. "Today there is no disputing the fact that Longfellow is more popular than any other living poet; that his books are more widely-circulated, command greater attention, and bring more copyright money than those of any other author, not

excepting Tennyson, now writing English verse," the publisher James T. Fields wrote late in Longfellow's life.[7] As early as 1853 the European visitor Fredrika Bremer testified to Longfellow's preeminence when she called him "the best read and the most popular of the poets of America."[8] Upon Longfellow's death Walt Whitman wrote, "I should have to think long if I were asked to name the man who has done more, and in more valuable directions, for America."[9] The famously bilious attacks on Longfellow by a writer outside the literary establishment like Edgar Allan Poe suggest something of the potency of Longfellow's public persona and literary reputation.

"It is incomprehensible today, the authority of these great reputations," V.L. Parrington wrote in 1935 of the stature of the so-called standard authors even in the post-Civil War years: "Great figures from the past—Emerson, Longfellow, Lowell, Whittier, Holmes, Motley, Parkman—still walked the streets of Boston, and their extraordinary reputations were little less than tyrannous in the inhibitions they laid on younger men."[10] The tyranny of some of these reputations is even further from the minds of most students of American literature today than in Parrington's time; Emerson stands alone among this group as an author whose formidable reputation has come down to us comprehensible and undiminished. It would seem a pressing task for Americanist criticism to imagine vividly once again the vanished authority of an author like Longfellow—not only to gain insight into the cultural meaning of his ascendancy, and not only to weigh his influence on the generation of genteel authors that followed, including Howells, Adams, and James, but also to experience his poetry as it might have been felt when it first appeared. Recent critics of nineteenth-century American literature

have paid particular attention to the voices of the marginalized and excluded, a development in criticism long overdue. Sufficient retrieval work has surely been done in this vein, however, to allow a fresh look at some of the monumental cultural figures against whom, and within whom, both the peripheral and the mainstream authors wrote.

Longfellow is central to the national literature of his period not only because he knew personally many if not most of its major figures—Bryant and Irving, Hawthorne and Emerson, Lowell and Holmes, Howells and Adams—but also because he embodied in virtually pure form a prevailing spirit of his age, one that found expression in the writings of all these authors. Indeed, starting from Longfellow allows one to see the literary history of nineteenth-century America in an unaccustomed and potentially very fruitful light. Major figures like Emerson, Fuller, Hawthorne, Poe, Whitman, and Dickinson, and minor figures like Bryant, Sigourney, Lowell, Whittier, and Holmes, are brought into new perspective when viewed against Longfellow's unrivaled prestige and popular authority. The preeminence of Longfellow suggests, for instance, that the conservative literary establishment may have had a far greater impact than is generally supposed—both on the "great" and "original" nineteenth-century authors and the marginalized and extra-canonical authors, many of whom are now being reevaluated.

Longfellow has never been entirely without his defenders, however low his reputation has sunk among literary critics. It is notable that in the last few decades poets like Howard Nemerov, Howard Gregory, and Dana Gioia have written appreciative essays on Longfellow. Praising such qualities of Longfellow's as his "emotional directness" and "lyrical charm," these poets may permit themselves greater freedom to enjoy

the oddities of a poet like Longfellow than do the critics, who tend to feel gravely accountable for their likes and dislikes. There may be no accounting finally for a liking for Longfellow, but this is not properly a critical position. I find the closing lines of The Courtship of Miles Standish to be almost shockingly effective as poetry, for instance, but it would be difficult to make an argument on the basis of such an impression. The larger context for the inability of Longfellow's poetry to gain any critical traction is the separation of criticism and evaluation. Literary critics in today's academic culture are not trained to make judgments as to literary quality and are often not comfortable doing so. Indeed many, on the authority of influential theorizing on the relativity of aesthetic value, consider aesthetic evaluations to be offensive on political grounds. The argument, roughly, is that any judgment as to the "literary quality" of an author or a work depends upon who is doing the judging and in the service of what set of beliefs the judgment is made. There are no objective criteria by which literary evaluations can be made, they have tended historically to enshrine white males in the canon and exclude other worthy authors, and they ought to be avoided wherever possible. The realm of the aesthetic has in this way been largely displaced by the political.

The subject of Longfellow allows the critic to cut to the heart of such debates, since it appears that simply to bring up his name is inescapably to prompt a conversation grounded in the aesthetic dimension of literature. The question "But is he any good?" that one immediately wants to ask with Longfellow, as with such other fallen idols as Thomas Chatterton and Walter Scott, is one literary critics seldom think to ask and have virtually no vocabulary for answering. Nonetheless, the widespread and mostly unexam-

ined belief among contemporary literary critics that Longfellow is aesthetically insipid points to the continued if unadmitted relevance of aesthetic judgment as a tool, however blunt, that critics like to have in their arsenal—and indeed find indispensable. Because of these aesthetic considerations, Longfellow's reputation has nowhere to go but up; and therefore, from the point of view of professional academic criticism, with its fierce drive to find the next new thing, the race to "recover" Longfellow is on. However long it may take to gather momentum, the important remaining question—a question of moment to literary studies generally—is on what grounds, and under what guiding presuppositions, he is to make his comeback. It is not sufficient, if indeed it ever was, to speak up for a poet like Longfellow simply by pointing to what appear to be some of the most characteristic and distinctive aesthetic attributes of his poetry. The upshot, to my mind, is that the critic who would make claims for the aesthetic merit of Longfellow's poetry, and who wishes these claims to be taken seriously by literary academics, must find a way to do so without relying on the rhetoric of belles lettres criticism.

In my scholarship I simply take it as axiomatic that Longfellow is an interesting and potentially important poet: he is as entitled to critical attention as the next author. From within this relatively value-neutral critical position, however, I have been emboldened to suggest that Longfellow's poetry distinguishes itself poetically in two overlapping ways. First, Longfellow can be said to have written his poems so as to create the public persona for which he was famous, that of the kindly patriarch who has mastered his own sorrows and can therefore soothe the sorrows of others. One of my overarching themes is that the invention of the figure of the poet Longfellow, an invention patiently—if not

entirely intentionally—built up in poem after poem, represents a genuine creative achievement. Second, Longfellow can be said to have forged a poetic that makes room for a host of dynamic internal contradictions and oppositions. Longfellow is to my mind at once conventional and idiosyncratic, impersonal and self-revelatory, plain and extravagant. He is a traditionalist on questions of poetic form and yet he experiments with meters, stanzas, rhyme schemes, and the like to a degree perhaps unmatched by any American poet. In his poetry he is at once a conservative and a populist, a representative of the New England gentry elite and a hero of the burgeoning American masses. To the extent that his poetry frequently appears—by design or by accident—to be divided against itself in such ways, Longfellow deserves to be credited as a poet of intriguing if elusive complexity.

The dedication to Horace Gregory's edition of Longfellow's poems speaks to an aspect of Longfellow's appeal that has nothing to do with academic politics, but that may finally have a greater impact on whether and how Longfellow continues to be read. Gregory wrote, "This edition of Longfellow is inscribed to the memory of my mother, Anna Catherine Gregory, whose readings of his Voices of the Night are among the charms of my earliest memories."[11] Although Longfellow is seldom taught in college classrooms, he is often remembered, and fondly remembered, even by those with little training in poetry—remembered from elementary school pageants or high school recitations, or, as with Gregory, from cherished scenes of family life. The famous lines from Hiawatha, "By the shores of Gitche Gumee,/By the shining Big-Sea-Water," still elicit recognition and, frequently, slightly abashed pleasure. One of the many curious

contradictions about Longfellow is that he is still known to us Americans, still familiar, even though he has been all but forgotten by the academy. His fame may well continue, then, popping up in surprising and out-of-the-way places, as in the five stanzas of "A Psalm of Life" that not long ago began appearing on the packaging of Celestial Seasonings' peppermint tea under the title, "Life's Purpose." If he is never taken up by academic critics for what he is, a major author of minor verse, Longfellow may end up, by a very odd twist of literary fate, an underground poet!

Notes

1. Letter of August 29, 1855, quoted in Kathleen Verduin, "Dante in America," in Michele Moylan and Lane Stiles, eds., Reading Books: Essays on the Material Text and Literature in America (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), p. 30.

2. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Repesentative Selections, With Introduction, Bibliography, and Notes, ed. Odell Shepard, "Introduction" (New York: American Book Company, 1934), p. xlix.

3. Norman Holmes Pearson, "Both Longfellows," in *The University of Kansas City Review,* XVI, No. 4 (Summer, 1950), reprinted in Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Evangeline and Selected Tales and Poems, ed. Horace Gregory (1964; New York: Signet Classic Edition, 1990), p. 271.

4. Angus Fletcher, "Two Types of the American Poet," in *Raritan* (Spring 1991), 10:4; Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Selected Poems, ed. Lawrence Buell (New York: Penguin USA, 1988).

5. Letter of June 5, 1849, quoted in Samuel Longfellow, ed., Life of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, with Extracts from His Journals and Correspondence, 3 Vols., Vols. 12-14 of The Works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (New York: AMS Press, Inc.), Vol. 2, p. 152.

6. Letter of January 2, 1840, in Andrew Hilen, ed., The Letters of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 6 vols. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1966), Vol. 2, p. 203.

7. James T. Fields, quoted in Annie Fields, Friends and Authors (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1897), p. 17.

8. Fredrika Bremer, The Homes of the New World; Impressions of America, trans. Mary Howitt, 2 Vols. (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1853), Vol. 1, p. 43.

9. Walt Whitman, "The Death of Longfellow," in The Collected Writings of Walt Whitman, ed. Floyd Stovall, Vol. 1 (New York: New York University Press, 1964), p. 285.

10. Vernon Louis Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought: An Interpretation of American Literature from the Beginnings to 1920 (1927; reprint New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1958), 3 Vols., Vol. 3, p. 52-53.

11. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Evangeline and Selected Tales and Poems, ed. Horace Gregory (1964; New York: Signet Classic Edition, 1990).

Chapter One

Becoming Longfellow: Work, Manhood, and Poetry

Longfellow's invention of himself as a poet was one with his coming into a leading place in the social order, an accession which would have seemed very natural to him. The time frame for this accession is roughly the mid- to late 1830s, when he left a professorship at Bowdoin College in the village of Brunswick, Maine to go to Cambridge where he followed the eminent George Ticknor as the Smith Professor of Modern Languages at Harvard College. Longfellow had since his youth in commercially prosperous Portland been ambitious to make a name for himself in letters; his biographer Lawrance Thompson shows how assiduously Longfellow worked as a young professor to master his discipline and, through an impressive variety of academic projects, to escape "this land of Barbarians—this miserable Down East."[1] In exchanging Brunswick for Cambridge, Longfellow was finally moving out and moving up. His father, a Harvard graduate and Bowdoin trustee who in Yankee fashion was both suspicious and cautiously supportive of Henry's literary career, continued to set goals for his thirty year-old son even as he expressed his congratulations:

> I rejoice, my dear son, that you are at length established in so very eligible a situation. With your literary tastes and habits, I can hardly conceive of a more pleasant location, and I most sincerely hope and pray it may remain permanent, and that no unfortunate circumstances may occur to mar your enjoyment or diminish your usefulness. I think your ambition must be satisfied, and your only object now will be to fill with eminence and distinction the office in which you are placed, and to become distinguished among the literary men of the age.[2]

Over the next several years, as he lectured on Dante and Goethe to classes made up of the sons of New England's elites, as he befriended the likes of Cornelius Felton and Charles Sumner, and as he moved easily in Cambridge and Boston society, Longfellow began writing poetry for the first time in years, perhaps in part to meet the formidable challenge his father had set him. These poems showed a new sense of public obligation, a determination to be useful and instructive as a poet, a desire to improve and uplift his readers. In moving to Cambridge and taking up his duties at Harvard, Longfellow entered a sphere from which the incipient paternalism of his poetry would receive added impetus and scope.

The New England gentry class to which Longfellow belonged was made up of respected families whose men became distinguished citizens in such professions as law, religion, medicine, education, and commerce, and who felt deeply their civic responsibilities.[3] Longfellow's father was a prominent Portland lawyer, a delegate to the Massachusetts legislature, and later a member of Congress; his father had been a Portland judge and likewise a delegate to the state legislature (Maine did not become independent until 1820), whose own father in turn had been a schoolmaster. On the maternal side, Longfellow's mother's father was General Peleg Wadsworth, a Revolutionary war hero who, too, had been elected to the Massachusetts legislature and to Congress.[4] When called upon late in life to account for a certain timidity in giving voice to passion in his poetry, Longfellow reportedly replied, "[E]ven had I the inclination, one could scarcely expect me to lie awake at night writing things that would set a bad example to a class of thirty young men whom I had to teach in the morning."[5] Whether true or not, the

anecdote captures a truth about Longfellow. James Russell Lowell, Longfellow's successor in the Smith Professorship, translated the moral imperative of gentry paternalism to the sphere of poetry when he urged, "To be sure! let no man write a line that he would not have his daughter read."[6] It was just this devotion to moral principle above all else that gave the so-called schoolroom poets their fatally respectable label. Longfellow could not but be paternalistic in his writings, could not but write from the high ground of the responsibilities that he had always been taught were his.[7] But the diverse poetics of Longfellow's social dutifulness, the sleights by which he was able to vivify in his poetry his personal authority and dispense that authority toward social ends, were not preordained; they furnish important and greatly overlooked exhibits in a survey of Longfellow's artistic achievements.

As a gentry-class poet in a democratic land, Longfellow frequently recurs in his poetry to the subject of work. While a socially ambitious writer like Nathaniel Parker Willis affected an aristocratic leisure (though in actuality scribbling away quite feverishly), a socially privileged writer like Longfellow affected a laborer's industriousness (though in actuality enjoying much leisure and nursing a tendency to lassitude).[8] David Leverenz, in Manhood and the American Renaissance, has proposed what he terms three "ideologies of manhood" operative in the antebellum period; the schema may be helpful in thinking through Longfellow's relationship to the notion and performance of work. This relationship matters to Longfellow's poetic development and to American poetry because through work, or perhaps rather through the affectation and promotion of work, Longfellow was able to reimagine his own and his provincial society's lingering equation

of poetry with effeminacy.[9] For Leverenz, the "patrician paradigm" and the "artisan paradigm," the two prevailing ideologies of manhood through the early republican era, are supplemented by a third, that of the emerging, commercial middle class.[10] Longfellow's place in this schema, as with much in Longfellow, is perfectly clear and profoundly obscure. Certainly, the patrician values of patriarchy and citizenship were deeply lodged in the poet and are on display everywhere in the poetry. Yet Longfellow also was, in theory at least (for he seldom revised his poetry to any great degree), committed to artisanal ideals of hard work and pride of craft. Many poems proclaim his identification with these ideals. For instance, in the first of six sonnets on translating Dante, Longfellow compares his work to that of a laborer: every day he enters the great cathedral of the Divine Comedy not simply to pray, but to perform his prayer-like labors. Longfellow always sought to remind his readers of the "long days of labor,/And nights devoid of ease" ("The Day Is Done")[11] that go into the songs of even a humble poet, battling the perception of poetry as an effeminate art and underscoring its "democratic" qualities by insisting that the poet, too, is a worker. Though Longfellow seems to have quite sincerely felt himself to be trudging off to the poetry-mills every day, William Charvat makes clear in his study of "Longfellow's Income" that he was the most successful poet-entrepreneur of his generation, making an especially savvy move in 1845 to purchase the stereotype plates of all his individual volumes of original verse (thereafter he received significantly higher royalties for new printings).[12] Given that manhood for the swelling ranks of the middle-class was increasingly bound up with success in business, Longfellow's commercial success served, among other things, to help legitimize

poetry as an occupation fit for a man.[13] If Longfellow's ancestry and education allied him with the gentry class of New England, his love of the craft of poetry allowed him access (even if only in idealized fashion) to the cares of artisans, and his pursuit of a living through poetry gave him some awareness of the struggles of the middle class. Longfellow's success with the many different registers of American society was intimately connected to the complex ways he managed to inhabit his own work as a public figure representing both the elites and the masses.

The Work of the Master

Longfellow's poems often present images of master craftsmen, dedicated to excellence in their tradition-governed work, who as a kind of byproduct possess both social and aesthetic authority and age-old human wisdom. The pre-industrial and often medieval figure of the master in Longfellow belongs to a lost breed capable of bridging the growing chasm between labor and art, commerce and religion, skill and inspiration, humility and authority. In poems written over the span of his creative life, Longfellow sought to identify himself, as artist and as citizen, with this retrograde figure. The poem "Nuremberg" (1844), for instance, offers a beautifully conventionalized Middle Ages, in which the ancient city is home to such figures as Albrecht Dürer, "the Evangelist of Art," the Mastersingers, "chanting rude poetic strains," and Hans Sachs, "the cobbler poet, laureate of the gentle craft,/Wisest of the Twelve Wise Masters." Distinctions between high art and low are meaningless here; because the workers of every sort give themselves over to "[t]he nobility of labor,—the long pedigree of toil," all work-products end up

endowed with the aesthetic brilliance of art: "As the weaver plied the shuttle, wove he too the mystic rhyme,/And the smith his iron measures hammered to the anvil's chime," etc. In "The Builders" (1846), Longfellow again waxes nostalgic over the notion of work bound up with faith: "In the elder days of Art,/Builders wrought with greatest care/Each minute and unseen part;/For the Gods are everywhere."

The master craftsman, or simply the master, was for Longfellow a number of overlapping things: a repository of cultural values; a fulfillment of specifically masculine virtues; and a device for collapsing class distinctions while still preserving the notion of hierarchy. The values safeguarded by Longfellow's masters are at once the patrician ones of respect for tradition and the artisanal ones of pride in work. The master in Longfellow manifests both strength and feeling, thought and action, offering readers a sentimental and at the same time a neoclassic version of manhood. To the extent that these poetic figures represent artisans exalted by the praise of a patrician poet to symbolical positions of social importance, they raise the question of what qualifies an individual to hold and confer status. The poems in which master-figures explicitly appear represent only a portion of the poems of Longfellow's concerned with the broader theme: "A Psalm of Life" (1838), for instance, to take the most famous example, is surely a brief and very pointed course on self-mastery which, coincidentally, seemed to a generation of readers to announce the sudden arrival on the literary scene of a master of the art of poetry. The masters inhabiting Longfellow's poems may serve as indices to the kind of public persona Longfellow wished to construct and promulgate.

"The Building of the Ship" (1850) is overseen by an otherwise unnamed "Master," or "worthy Master." In his hands the planning, construction, and launch of the ship become a study in how attention to craft and love of family mitigate the sovereign and potentially destructive impulses of high art. Longfellow makes clear that the Master is not a solitary and abstruse genius but has passed on his practical wisdom to an apprentice, "The fiery youth, who was to be/The heir of his dexterity." The Master's dexterity is not just his skill in art but also his rightness, his righteousness, his sense of duty and decency, and his bestowing on the apprentice the hand of his daughter is meant to signal the safe transmission of these civic virtues to the next generation. Because the Master names the ship "The Union," and because the launch of the ship goes hand in hand with the union of the apprentice and the daughter that he has sanctioned, the Master symbolically oversees the safe passage of the American Union through the storm of sectional antagonism.

A different aspect of the figure of the master emerges in the story told in "The Building of The Long Serpent" (1863), one of the series of twenty-two linked poems that make up "The Saga of King Olaf" (eventually published as part of the Tales of a Wayside Inn). Thorberg Skafting, variously referred to as "the master-builder" and "the master," is a shipbuilder for King Olaf who is instructed to rebuild "The Dragon," a vessel built by Raud the Strong, and to make it twice the size of the original ship. As with "The Building of the Ship," the shipbuilder's mastery is at the thematic heart of this poem, though here the lesson is the master's absolute expertise and authority in matters of his art. When the new ship is finally unveiled before King Olaf (after a night that Thorberg

Skafting has mysteriously spent alone in the ship-yard), it is revealed that someone has cut countless deep gashes down the sides of the otherwise beautiful ship:

"Death be to the evil-doer!"
  With an oath King Olaf spoke;
"But rewards to his pursuer!"
And with wrath his face grew redder
  Than his scarlet cloak.

Straight the master-builder, smiling
  Answered thus the angry King:
"Cease blaspheming and reviling,
Olaf, it was Thorberg Skafting
  Who has done this thing!"

Then he chipped and smoothed the planking,
  Till the King, delighted, swore,
With much lauding and much thanking,
"Handsomer is now my Dragon
  Than she was before!"

Olaf is all the more a king because he so swiftly acknowledges the master-builder's greater wisdom in his proper domain, the artist's sovereign power to create new beauty even through acts of apparent desecration. The poem challenges readers to go beyond their notions of the pleasing and acceptable in art (in this sense serving perhaps as a poignant comment of Longfellow's on the all-too-predictable regularities of his own creations). Yet such audacious leaps of imagination as Thorberg Skafting's are contained and made less shocking by two considerations that Longfellow's poem insists on: (1) Skafting builds upon Raud the Strong's original vessel, so that the Long Serpent is a reworking of the Dragon rather than an entirely new thing, and (2) Skafting is repeatedly identified as a master, a master-builder. The label serves as a safeguard against complete lawlessness: in the responsible hands of the master, king and kingdom, patron and nation

may confidently undertake artistic experimentation without fear of overstepping the bounds of taste or threatening the social order.

In "Keramos" (1877), the figure of the master is personified in the Potter, a more elusive figure than the masters of the two poems just discussed. Unlike them he has no patron and no family and works without regard to end-product, the act of ceramic-making being for him, evidently, an end and a world in itself. Referred to as "magician" and "wizard" as well as "master," he represents a supreme culmination of serene wisdom. Singing as he works, this high priest of a humble craft transports his listener to all the famous places of the globe where ceramics are or have been made: Delft, Majorca, the Italy of the Renaissance with its master ceramicists, the Egypt of the pharaohs, China with its porcelain-factories, and Japan with its oriental jars. "Keramos" is a round-the-world tour of these places and artifacts, with the Potter at the still point of the turning world, the axis mundi, spinning his wheel and singing his eternal human truths. For instance:

> Turn, turn, my wheel! Turn round and round
> Without a pause, without a sound:
> So spins the flying world away!
> This clay, well mixed with marl and sand,
> Follows the motion of my hand;
> For some must follow, and some command,
> Though all are made of clay!

Though the Potter is clearly one who would "command" rather than "follow," he has been abstracted from the realm of everyday human activity. He appears to embody a kind of pure and disinterested state of mastery, having attained to a global, panoramic, god-like vision. Longfellow was approaching seventy when he wrote "Keramos," and it shows.

One has only to think of Emerson's sustained critique of tradition, delivered in notoriously difficult lectures in lyceums across the country, to appreciate the role Longfellow played in the antebellum period as a stable center of value.[14] Emerson replaces the figure of the master with the "representative man," the great historical original in whose work and life the self-reliant man recognizes his own volcanic powers; he would hang over his doorpost the slogan, "No masters." Emerson himself articulated a central strand of Longfellow's popular appeal in a letter thanking the poet for sending him a copy of The Song of Hiawatha:

> I have always one foremost satisfaction in reading your books,—that I am safe. I am in variously skilful hands, but first of all they are safe hands. However, I find this Indian poem very wholesome; sweet and wholesome as maize; very proper and pertinent for us to read, and showing a kind of manly sense of duty in the poet to write.[15]

The critic Nina Baym has argued that America's successful mid-century women novelists told over again one story, that of the orphaned girl or friendless adolescent who becomes self-sufficient as she survives encounters with abusive authority-figures. Though the heroine "looks to marry a man who is strong, stable, and safe," Baym writes, the suitor in these novels is overshadowed by the unreliable male figures of "fathers, guardians, and brothers."[16] As a kindly master and perhaps above all a safe one, Longfellow came to personify a gentle male paternalism that on the evidence of woman's fiction was already on the wane at mid-century; his poetry constructed safe places in which women and men seeking shelter could find it. The figure of the master served as the guardian spirit of these safe places. In providing his fellow-citizens with such shelter and in manning it

with such guardians, Longfellow was acting out of "a kind of manly sense of duty" as he understood it.

The Legitimation of Literature

Part travelogue, part autobiography, part sketch book, part sentimental romance, part essay in literary taste, Hyperion, A Romance (1839) may be seen as a portrait of an artist taking on the trappings of the master of culture. The essence of Hyperion lies in its most prominent thematic feature, the virtuoso displays of literary erudition that spangle the pages. Longfellow begins the novel as follows:

> In John Lyly's "Endymion," Sir Topas is made to say: "Dost though know what a poet is? Why, fool, a poet is as much as one should say,—a poet!" And thou, reader, dost thou know what a hero is? Why, a hero is as much as one should say,—a hero! Some romance-writers, however, say much more than this. Nay, the old Lombard, Matteo Maria Bojardo, set all the church-bells in Scandiano ringing, merely because he had found a name for one of his heroes. Here, also, shall church-bells be rung, but more solemnly.[17]

A number of qualities found throughout Longfellow's writing, poetry as well as prose, are present in the passage: a sustained awareness of his reader; a teacherly willingness to expose the reader to allusions and references which the reader may or may not get; and an impulse to meta-literary reflection on the difficulties and satisfactions of writing and reading. Hyperion sold well and caused something of a scandal in staid Boston because of its public airing of the young professor's courtship of and rejection by Fanny Appleton, whom Longfellow, as is well known, was to go on to marry. Yet Longfellow is seemingly more eager to show off his knowledge of authors both major and minor than to tell his story of rejection and redemption.[18] The introductory phrase "the old Lombard," for

instance, is meant to suggest the intimate terms on which Longfellow rubs elbows with evidently renowned and venerable, if infrequently remembered, Europeans. The prose of Hyperion, both in passages of description and of dialogue, leaps from one safe island of learning and lore, legend and literature, to another; it becomes uncomfortable if it must spend too much time sailing the open seas of plot and character, and hence the proper action of the romance—the hero's love for and rejection by the heroine—does not get going until the third of Hyperion's four books. Longfellow hesitates, sending Fleming careering through the Rhine Valley, which provides ample opportunities for literary observations on the part of Longfellow and literary chat on the part of his hero.

Hyperion has long been cherished by the Longfellow devotees as a highly personal document that tells of a period of great upset and disappointment in Longfellow's private life, with particular importance placed on the death of his first wife in Rotterdam in late 1835, his solitary wanderings through the Rhine valley that winter, his chance meeting of Nathan Appleton and his family in Interlachen the following summer, and Fanny Appleton's rejection of his love upon her return to Boston in late 1837. Yet William Charvat's shrewd comment that "Hyperion is a campaign by a man who wants to be a poet to make the poet respectable"[19] begins to prise Hyperion from out of the shadow of the autobiographical. Longfellow's critics have rarely been able to separate Hyperion from the story of his love for Fanny Appleton, and have therefore overlooked the fact that, on the basis of Hyperion, Longfellow seems from the first to have experienced his feelings for Fanny as a corollary to his expertise in poetry. Fanny did not at first inspire Longfellow to poeticize, so much as inspire him to demonstrations

of his own literariness. In Hyperion, where aesthetic discussions, poetry readings, and literary musings are the soil necessary for romantic love to blossom, Longfellow reflects on this distinctive mode of courtship:

> When the learned Thomas Diafoirus wooed the fair Angélique, he drew from his pocket a medical thesis, and presented it to her, as the first-fruits of his genius, and at the same time invited her, with her father's permission, to attend the dissection of a woman, upon whom he was to lecture. Paul Flemming did nearly the same thing; and so often, that it had become a habit. He was continually drawing from his pocket or his memory some scrap of song or story; and inviting some fair Angélique, either with her father's permission or without, to attend the dissection of an author upon whom he was to lecture. He soon gave proofs of this to Mary Ashburton . . . . (181)

The "real" Paul Flemming and Mary Ashburton spent their first moments alone together in Switzerland collaborating on a translation of "Das Schloss am Meere," a lyric by the German romantic poet Ludwig Uhland.[20] In his brief first note to Fanny, written upon his return to Cambridge, Longfellow recalls their translating Uhland while at Zurich and encloses a new translation of his of a poem by Friedrich von Matthison; the young Harvard professor ends the love-note by positioning himself as a guide and an authority: "It [the translation] will serve you likewise as a German lesson, during the master's absence. He hopes to resume hereafter his instructions in the *musical tongue*" (emphasis in original).[21]

If Hyperion begins with the question, what is it to be a poet?, and continues to pursue this question through its hero's various experiences and encounters, it also conducts a parallel investigation of the question, what is it to be a man? The two questions may be synthesized into the question that is perhaps paramount in Longfellow's romance: is poetry suitable work for a man? The question goes to conflicts in American

society in the years of the early republic, which still evidently lingered for Longfellow even after he had attained the Smith Professorship at Harvard and had proved that literature could make him a man of importance and reputation. In 1824, as a seventeen year-old college senior, Longfellow had written his father, "The fact is,—and I will not disguise it in the least, for I think I ought not,—the fact is, I most eagerly aspire after future eminence in literature, my whole soul burns most ardently after it, and every earthly thought centers in it." Stephen Longfellow, then serving in Congress, responded: "A literary life, to one who has the means of support, must be very pleasant. But there is not wealth & munificence enough in this country to afford sufficient encouragement and patronage to merely literary men."[22] Though the prospects for literary ventures had brightened considerably in the past decade, Hyperion shows that as late as 1839 Longfellow was still on the defensive, fighting the battle against the prejudice toward "merely literary men" and attempting to pave the way for his own emergence as a man, and as a man of letters, with socially useful lessons to teach. Chapters with titles like "Lives of Scholars" and "Literary Fame" are meant to enlist the reader to the view that eminent authors are indeed worthy of respect. Such an enlistment required perhaps above all that Longfellow's literary, melancholy, non-working hero, Paul Flemming, be made respectable.

If the romance's underlying and embracing structure charts Flemming's progress toward the self-mastery of manhood, his rejection by Mary Ashburton marks a pivotal and necessary moment in that progress. Formerly his companion had been the carefree young Baron; subsequently his companion is to be the eccentric "old bachelor" Mr.

Berkley.[23] The sequence of these travelers' relationships suggests that Flemming has made the journey from youth to old age without enjoying the kind of mature manhood that his brief relationship with Mary Ashburton seemed briefly to promise. Yet as he is traveling in company with Mr. Berkley, the prematurely aged Flemming experiences an epiphany that has the effect of shaking him out of his aesthetic revery and restoring him to his masculine potential. The epiphany comes in the form of a stern and blunt message that Flemming finds inscribed on a tablet on a chapel wall, after he has spent several lugubrious hours moping around the graveyard in the village of Saint Gilgen. The inscription reads, "Look not mournfully into the Past. It comes not back again. Wisely improve the Present. It is thine. Go forth to meet the shadowy Future, without fear, and with a manly heart" (2, 275). Longfellow placed these sentences at the beginning of Hyperion, too, where they serve as a motto and moral to the romance as a whole. Flemming takes the words to heart, and in so doing resumes his place in the republic of productive American men:

> [F]rom that hour forth he resolved that he would no longer veer with every shifting wind of circumstance,—no longer be a child's play-thing in the hands of Fate, which we ourselves do make or mar. He resolved henceforward not to lean on others, but to walk self-confident and self-possessed . . . . And from that moment he was calm and strong; he was reconciled with himself. His thoughts turned to his distant home beyond the sea. An indescribable sweet feeling rose within him.
>
> "Thither will I turn my wandering footsteps," said he, "and be a man among men, and no longer a dreamer among shadows. Henceforth be mine a life of action and reality! I will work in my own sphere, nor wish it other than it is. This alone is health and happiness. This alone is Life." (276-77)

Hyperion ends with Flemming renouncing the meanderings of the culture tourist and heading back to America to "work in my own sphere." The problem is that Longfellow's

hero is supremely "a dreamer among shadows" rather than, in conventional gender terms, "a man among men," and it is unclear what sphere of work, other than as a man of letters, Flemming is fit for. Flemming has proved himself not only a master of European culture but a master of himself; what he lacks is a project, an object, a goal. Longfellow has deprived his own hero and counterpart of these ennobling ends by making him above all a sensitive connoisseur of poets and scholars rather than a productive poet and scholar himself. Charvat is rightly impressed with the fact that in Paul Flemming, the American man of letters for the first time appears in a novel under his own name, as a "real" individual, and not under a cute title like Knickerbocker or Crayon or Pilgrim; but it should also be recalled that for all its sometimes extravagant and often guarded praise of the man of letters, Hyperion ends with the hero turning his back on his literary passions in favor of more tangible and practical realities. The American writer evidently cannot yet fully sanction the life of letters.

Paul Flemming "moves on high," as the title of Hyperion would have it, yet Longfellow is careful to make the point that his hero's rarefied diet of Alpine travel, high-flown discussion of German literature, and courtship of high-born Englishwomen is too rich for his blood. As Longfellow's fictional counterpart, Flemming must be brought back down to earth, so that Longfellow can show his readers that his sympathies lie ultimately with reality rather than art, work rather than leisure, the democratic rather than the aristocratic, the American rather than the European. Yet Hyperion is a romance, and as such it chiefly romanticizes the satisfactions of aristocratic leisure and European art. Longfellow emerges as all the more an authority on these matters because in the end he

(or rather his hero) has the good sense not to find them too seductive. Longfellow wrote Hyperion in an important sense to emerge as just this sort of authority, to justify his own decision to pursue a life of letters and to construct and confirm his own identity as a man of letters. With Hyperion, Longfellow was preparing the American reading public to receive the poetry lessons that the master intended to resume thereafter—lessons to be heeded not only because of what they were to say but because of who was to say them.

Populist Poetry, Patrician Subtext

Longfellow had written poetry as a college student and published prolifically in the Boston-based *United States Literary Gazette* under the editorship of Theophilus Parsons.[24] Yet in the decade or so following his graduation from Bowdoin in 1825 at the age of eighteen, though he was successfully pursuing a literary career on a number of fronts, his poetic output was negligible. The customary explanation for the revival of his poetic powers in the late 1830s has been a psychological one, that his recent experiences of loss (the death of his first wife and his rejection by Fanny Appleton) found outlet in a series of deeply personal "psalms"—as Longfellow called the poems he wrote during this period. These hortatory and consoling poems, the best-known of which was "A Psalm of Life," made his national reputation and revived his long-suppressed poetic ambitions.[25] While Longfellow's personal ordeal undoubtedly played a part in his return to poetry, sentimental interpretations of Hyperion have obscured the perhaps equally important influence of Longfellow's newly-won professional and social status on his conception of himself as a poet. Arriving in Cambridge in the fall of 1836, Longfellow was already an

eminently respectable scholar, translator, prose writer (he had published Outre-Mer, A Pilgrimage Beyond the Sea in 1833), and poet, whose solid future in the Cambridge/Boston literary establishment was all but assured. In Cambridge, Longfellow's well-developed sense of his personal, professional, and social responsibilities not only gave him breathing space from personal disappointments but found its way into the poetry itself.

In December 1838, Longfellow wrote to Lewis Gaylord Clark, the conservative editor of the *Knickerbocker*, acknowledging the public enthusiasm for "A Psalm of Life" and offering a new piece: "The Psalm of Life seems to have found a response in many hearts. This was what I hoped; and I hope this Psalm of Death may."[26] The new poem promptly appeared in the January 1839 number, under the title "The Reaper and the Flowers, a Psalm of Death." In bestowing the honorific title "psalm" upon his poems and in taking such abstract and encompassing entities as "Life" and "Death" as his subjects, Longfellow was promising his readers quasi-scriptural truths on the great existential and eschatological questions, i.e., what is the purpose of life, what is the meaning of death? Of course, poets have always addressed themselves to these mysteries. But rarely have they tackled them in such a head-on, blunt, and straightforward fashion as Longfellow did in these psalms, especially "A Psalm of Life." The platitudes and generalizations out of which the psalms are made struck so forcible a chord with Longfellow's readers not least because they are at once egalitarian and hierarchical, socially leveling and socially stratified, free of class markers and liberally strewn with them. In writing the psalms that

were later to be collected in Voices of the Night (1839), Longfellow mastered the art of encoding poetic populism with patrician subtext.

Before examining "A Psalm of Life" and its companion-piece the "Psalm of Death," it will be helpful to look at the "Prelude," the proem to Voices of the Night. "Prelude" takes as its self-referential theme the poet's quest for poetic themes that will be reconcilable with the social obligations entailed by manhood. In this introductory poem Longfellow recalls lying "[b]eneath some patriarchal tree" as a boy and giving free reign to his imagination, which had been fed on old legends, traditions and tales. The dramatized problem of the poem is whether the poet is to continue to lie pleasurably in the shadow of patriarchal others or have "heart" enough to take as his theme the grim disenchantments of the present-day world ("There is a forest where the din/Of iron branches sounds," etc.). To recapture the spirit of his childhood pilgrimages to the "holy land of song" the adult poet repairs to the countryside, as in Wordsworth's poem of the same name, where "distant voices" instruct him that the "visions of childhood" must be renounced:

> It cannot be! They pass away!
> Other themes demand thy lay!
> Thou art no more a child!

On one level, Longfellow's "Prelude" narrates a moment of artistic illumination: a poet finds his proper themes, rejecting the enchantments of the imagination for a more practical, socially-useful poetry of morality, inspiration, and consolation. He sees reflected in a river "the heavens all black with sin" and understands that the land of song rests upon a bedrock of loss and sorrow. Yet the final injunction of the stern paternal

voice clouds the question of just what Longfellow's themes are henceforth to be, even as it purports to resolve it:

> Look, then, into thine heart, and write!
> Yes, into Life's deep stream!
> All forms of sorrow and delight,
> All solemn Voices of the Night,
> That can soothe thee, or affright,
> Be these henceforth thy theme.

The allusion in the first line of "Prelude"'s last stanza is crucial. As aristocrat and artist, man of action and poet, Sir Philip Sidney seems to have played an important symbolic role in Longfellow's invention of himself as a literary man. When Sidney writes, at the end of the first sonnet of his Astrophel and Stella cycle, "Fool," said my muse, "Look in thy heart, and write!,'" it is meant to contrast the primacy of his love-feeling with the second-hand representations of love peddled by other poets. When Longfellow echoes the line in his "Prelude," it is meant in part to invoke the protective authority of Sidney himself.

In 1832 Longfellow had published in the *North American Review* an essay on a new edition of Sidney's "Defense of Poetry," in which he attempts to repudiate the notion, widespread in early American society, that poetry has an "effeminate and unmanly character," is associated with "ideas of effeminacy and inefficiency," and "begets a craven and effeminate spirit."[27] He refutes the equation of poetry with effeminacy by pointing to the many hero-poets of Western civilization ("men whose minds were bathed in song, and not weakened") and above all to the manly example of Sidney: "Sir Philip Sidney was the breathing reality of the poet's dream, a living and glorious proof, that poetry neither enervates the mind nor unfits us for the practical duties of life."[28]

Sidney's glorious place in the high aristocracy of Elizabethan England, and his early death on the field of battle, is cited as if to establish beyond a doubt that such a man could never manifest a "craven and effeminate spirit" and therefore that poetry itself could not partake of effeminacy. If social status measures masculinity, then Longfellow's long struggle to show that an American could be "literary" and still be a "man" was predicated on the male author's establishing his pedigree. Sidney authorizes and legitimates Longfellow's poetic practice, serving as a kind of banner of nobility under which the art of poetry might be pursued in a respectable, virtuous, and dignified way. The range of acceptable poetic themes could broadly include "[a]ll forms of sorrow and delight,/All solemn Voices of the Night," i.e. could appeal to a broad range of audiences, so long as the poet took pains to indicate that he was a gentleman.

Yet even as it appears to promote its own class associations, Longfellow's poetry appears to eschew class distinctions. The co-existence of these seemingly contradictory impulses enlivens poems like "A Psalm of Life" and "The Reaper and the Flowers, a Psalm of Death." The first of these poems alternates between inclusive first-person plural pronouncements ("Not enjoyment and not sorrow/Is our destined end or way") and imperious second-person injunctions ("Be not like dumb, driven cattle!/Be a hero in the strife!"). The alternation suggests the poet is both one of "us" and not one of "us," both a brother and a father, both a respected coach giving a pep talk and a dejected teammate who could use such a talk. The psalm is written in the manner of heroic confidence, a manner which announces itself from the start:

Tell me not, in mournful numbers,
  Life is but an empty dream!—
For the soul is dead that slumbers,
  And things are not what they seem.

Life is real! Life is earnest!
  And the grave is not its goal;
Dust thou art, to dust returnest,
  Was not spoken of the soul.

The overuse of "is" and "are" in these lines undoubtedly points to an aesthetic failure, the inability of the poet to move away from a rather numbing sequence of bald statements, even as it provides grammatical groundwork for the rhetoric of confidence so central to the poem's popular success.

"Trust no Future, howe'er pleasant," Longfellow counsels his countrymen with believable sincerity in stanza six, though his next piece of advice, "Let the dead Past bury its dead!" rings hollow when analyzed in relation to the psalm's concluding stanzas:

Lives of great men all remind us
  We can make our lives sublime,
And, departing, leave behind us
  Footprints on the sands of time;

Footprints, that perhaps another,
  Sailing o'er life's solemn main,
A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,
  Seeing, shall take heart again.

Let us then be up and doing,
  With a heart for any fate;
Still achieving, still pursuing,
  Learn to labor and to wait.

In these stanzas Longfellow's beloved "great men," the "grand old masters" of "The Day Is Done" (1844), make their appearance. The "dead Past" for Longfellow perhaps above all belongs to them, and hence he certainly has no real wish to see it buried; contemplat-

ing in gratitude the works that they have bequeathed us, Longfellow says, we "take heart again." This "we" includes Longfellow himself. Yet Longfellow's hope that "A Psalm of Life" would itself have an inspirational effect serves to put him in the same camp with the masters, the "great men" who have left behind them inspirational traces. The psalm cannily lays out the conditions for an author's elevation to the ranks of greatness, and behold, the conditions are precisely those fulfilled by the psalm itself! The gratitude the psalm's readers would feel for its author, then, would not exactly be that of one "forlorn and shipwrecked brother" for another, but rather that of a child for a father, a beginner for a master.

An inconsistent activation of fields of power within the poem is balanced by a similarly inconsistent evocation of ideals of social equality. "A forlorn and shipwrecked brother" contains the germ of the romantic notion that all men are united in a single brotherhood; "[w]ith a heart for any fate" proposes a helpful attitude for antebellum Americans faced with the extremes of economic uncertainty and social mobility brought about by the American system; and "[l]earn to labor and to wait" implies that the work done by all of Longfellow's readers has an equal, and an equally redemptive, value. "We can make our lives sublime" contains perhaps the heart of the psalm's democratic teaching, the claim that "we" too can become masters, given that work is the necessary and decisive factor in the attainment of this goal. The master, here and elsewhere in Longfellow, is simply the worker supremely exalted by dedication to work. "A Psalm of Life" may be seen as one of Longfellow's homages to the work of high manhood—"Excelsior" (1841), "The Builders" (1846), and "The Ladder of St. Augustine"

(1850) are other well-known examples—through which he both elevates and demotes himself in the eyes of his readers, identifying himself with a natural aristocracy of sublimely skillful workers and humble yet determined aspirants. In these poems, all of which rely on the vertical imagery of upward-striving, the poet's place among the upper reaches of New England society is at once elided and recalled.

"The Reaper and the Flowers," initially published with the subtitle "A Psalm of Death," likewise charts the intersection of social and poetic authority. The psalm tells a consoling fable offered to help ease the sting of death, especially the death of children. In the fable, death is a reaper who must harvest "for the Lord of Paradise" not only the "bearded grain" but also the "flowerets gay," not only the old but the young, who in the botanical terms of the poem do not die but are "transplanted":

> And the mother gave, in tears and pain,
> The flowers she most did love;
> She knew she should find them all again
> In the fields of light above.
>
> Oh, not in cruelty, not in wrath,
> The Reaper came that day;
> 'T was an angel visited the green earth
> And took the flowers away.

Longfellow does not make clear, nor could he, from what vantage point he has access to the linear yet oddly circuitous narrative told in the psalm—from what ground, for instance, he sees the Reaper tearfully eyeing the flowers and overhears the Reaper talking to himself. Longfellow's aim here and elsewhere is not to question but to answer; the sermon he preaches is simply asserted, not perhaps as literally true but as grounded in the undeniable truth of the Christian afterlife. Longfellow stakes out his privileged place by

the authoritative initial "There is" of the poem's first line,"There is a Reaper, whose name is death." The line exemplifies the unadorned directness of Longfellow's style of poetic statement, a style which gives the psalms a confident, if metaphorically impoverished, tone.

Though in this psalm, as in "A Psalm of Life," Longfellow attempts to win the respect and gratitude of his readers by posing useful "answers" to the largest human questions, his appeal rests on his counting himself, at strategic moments, subject to the same immense and overwhelming forces as his readers are. "The Reaper and the Flowers" imagines a democracy of death in which the flowers cut down by the reaper represent a horizontal and undifferentiated mass. Death could as easily take away the children of the high as the low, all of whom will "bloom in fields of light" after they are "transplanted." The homely universality of this fable serves to confuse the place of privilege Longfellow seems at first to be marking out for himself. Longfellow's social milieu never required that he apologize for his educational and social advantages, and it never would have occurred to him to do so. If Longfellow's poetry has the effect of raising its readers up to his genteel level of serene confidence rather than oppressing them with their own lowliness and anxiety, it may be due to the blithe and unexamined naturalness with which he accepted his self-ordained role as public poet. The strangely opaque surfaces and cloudy, drifting meanings of his poems reflect both a lack of self-consciousness concerning that role and a deeply-ingrained sense of the responsibilities that come with it.

Coda: "The Village Blacksmith"

"The Village Blacksmith" (1839) is worth looking at by way of a last word, since this much-beloved ballad quite efficiently bundles together the issues of work and manhood, public obligation and poetic vocation, that I have been concerned with. The authorial presence that enters in the last stanza of the ballad appears to me both to build on the poetic persona that Longfellow had been laboriously creating in the late 1830s and to supersede all previous versions of it. The figure of the blacksmith in the poem represents the first full-fledged master to appear in Longfellow's poetry, a master of life and death, an artisan dedicated to his pre-modern craft who serves (ambiguously in all cases) as a repository of virtue, an emblem of masculinity, and a symbol of democratic egalitarianism. Most importantly, "The Village Blacksmith" represents the first time that Longfellow explicitly creates a master-figure in a poem in order self-consciously to associate himself, as poet and artist, with that figure. By trumping his own creation in the last stanza of the poem, Longfellow rather breathtakingly and perfectly casually claims a place as a kind of father figure—a place that, as I show in the next chapter, his readers were eager to grant him. "The Village Blacksmith," quoted in full below, may be read as a promise of what Longfellow's poetry was to be after he fully grew into the public role he was destined for:

> Under a spreading chestnut-tree
> The village smithy stands;
> The smith, a mighty man is he,
> With large and sinewy hands;
> And the muscles of his brawny arms
> Are strong as iron bands.

His hair is crisp, and black, and long,
  His face is like the tan;
His brow is wet with honest sweat,
  He earns whate'er he can,
And looks the whole world in the face,
  For he owes not any man.

Week in, week out, from morn till night,
  You can hear his bellow blow;
You can hear him swing his heavy sledge,
  With measured beat and slow,
Like a sexton ringing the village bell,
  When the evening sun is low.

And children coming home from school
  Look in at the open door;
They love to see the flaming forge,
  And hear the bellows roar,
And catch the burning sparks that fly
  Like chaff from a threshing-floor.

He goes on Sunday to the church,
  And sits among his boys;
He hears the parson pray and preach,
  He hears his daughter's voice,
Singing in the village choir,
  And it makes his heart rejoice.

It sounds to him like her mother's voice,
  Singing in Paradise!
He needs must think of her once more,
  How in the grave she lies;
And with his hard, rough hand he wipes
  A tear out of his eyes.

Toiling,—rejoicing,—sorrowing,
  Onward through life he goes;
Each morning sees some task begin,
  Each evening sees it close;
Something attempted, something done,
  Has earned a night's repose.

Thanks, thanks to thee, my worthy friend,
  For the lesson thou hast taught!

Thus at the flaming forge of life
Our fortunes must be wrought;
Thus on its sounding anvil shaped
Each burning deed and thought.

Like "The Reaper and the Flowers," the narrative here is both linear and full of detours, both underdeveloped and redundant. The ballad appears to have as its dramatic goal the moment in the last stanza when Longfellow expresses his gratitude to the village blacksmith: "Thanks, thanks to thee my worthy friend." In spite of the poem's teleological drive, the first seven stanzas take place in a cyclical and universalized present: "Each morning sees some task begin,/Each evening sees it close." The blacksmith lives in a self-sufficient and timeless village world, in which the week is the largest horological unit.

Longfellow imposes no awareness of social class upon the blacksmith's timeless village, a workingman's paradise much like the pre-exilic Acadia of Evangeline, A Tale of Acadie (1847). The blacksmith "looks the whole world in the face,/For he owes not any man," i.e. he is anyone's equal. In stanza three the blacksmith swinging his heavy sledge is likened to the sexton ringing the village bell, an image that obscures the relative status of the different occupations. In stanza four the blacksmith is pictured as a role model and tolerant friend for village schoolchildren; his life and work are exemplary, and no parent could object to his wholesome influence. Longfellow's message is not only that the blacksmith is beneath no one, but that there is no social hierarchy in which such "beneathness" might make sense. The poem fudges the possibility that there might be social stratification in the village where the smithy stands.

By stanza five, which begins with the line "He goes on Sunday to the church," it appears that Longfellow is about to make claims regarding the blacksmith's role in his community; but the blacksmith is not seen in church sitting among his neighbors but sitting "among his boys." Here too the poem shies away from offering any sense of how the blacksmith fits into the life of his village. The blacksmith's visit to church, that most public of institutions in rural New England, sets the stage only for private revelations concerning his manly grief over the loss of his wife. The blacksmith's single tear, wiped out of his eye by his "hard, rough hand," is the last piece of information given about him, but it is enough to round out his qualifications for the part Longfellow has prepared for him by denying him a concrete place in the social life of his community. Longfellow's great-grandfather, the first Stephen Longfellow, was a blacksmith, and upon the publication of this poem in the *Knickerbocker*, the poet instructed his father to consider the poem "a song in praise of your ancestor at Newbury."[29] David Leverenz understands "The Village Blacksmith" as a patrician poet's paean to the artisan paradigm of manhood, yet Longfellow's class affiliations are not so easily made out. In light of Longfellow's blacksmith ancestor, the ballad becomes a tribute to the masculine potency of Longfellow's ancestors, an homage to patriarchal descent, and a celebration of the consolidation of social status; and the artisanal blacksmith himself, in a peculiarly American inversion in stanza eight, becomes the embodiment of patrician manhood.

"Thanks, thanks to thee, my worthy friend,/For the lesson thou hast taught," Longfellow writes, praising the blacksmith for teaching a lesson that inspires a sense of high destiny and great achievement—ideals that would be foreign to the blacksmith

himself. With this expression of gratitude, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, the poem's well-known and much-admired author, announces himself. He announces himself initially with his diction, with his "thee" and "thou" and "thus," meant to signal that a commanding, masterful, noble presence has entered the space of the poem. This presence will have the social authority to offer meaningful appreciation, to thank the blacksmith on behalf of a community of others, and to confer privilege in turn by judging the blacksmith "worthy." The lesson of this didactic poem, Longfellow generously suggests, is taught by the blacksmith himself—"Thanks, thanks to thee, my worthy friend,/For the lesson thou hast taught"—although it takes an even more masterful figure to interpret the lesson of the master. Longfellow nominates himself to fill that role.

Notes

1. Andrew Hilen, ed., The Letters of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1966), p. 352. Longfellow lodges the complaint in a letter to his friend James Berdan, dated Jan. 4, 1831. Quoted in Lawrance Thompson, Young Longfellow (1938; New York: Octagon Books, 1969), p. 167.

2. Quoted in Thompson, Young Longfellow, p. 241. Stephen Longfellow, whose own father was a judge in the Portland Court of Common Pleas, was himself a Portland lawyer who had filled with eminence and distinction a number of public offices, including (for one term) representative to Congress; he had every expectation that his sons, regardless of the profession they entered, would distinguish themselves through public service.

3. See Stow Persons, The Decline of American Gentility (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973). Persons's is the best analysis of America's nineteenth-century elites that I am aware of. See also Martin Green, The Problem of Boston: Some Readings in Cultural History (London: Longmans, Green and Co. Ltd., 1966) and Ronald Story, The Forging of an Aristocracy: Harvard & The Boston Upper Class, 1800-1870 (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1980).

4. Thompson, Young Longfellow, pp. 1-8; Newton Arvin, Longfellow: His Life and Work (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1963), pp. 4-11.

5. See Blanche Roosevelt Tucker Maccheta, The Home Life of Henry W. Longfellow: Reminiscences of Many Visits at Cambridge and Nahant, During the Years 1880, 1881, and 1882 (New York: Carleton, 1882), p. 102.

6. James Russell Lowell, Letters, Vol. I, p. 377, quoted in V.L. Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought: An Intepretation of American Literature from the Beginning to 1920 (1927; New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1958), Vol. II, p. 436.

7. See Persons, The Decline of American Gentility, passim, for historical overview of the noblesse oblige tradition among American gentry families.

8. See Sandra Tomc, "An Idle Industry: Nathaniel Parker Willis and the Workings of Literary Leisure," *American Quarterly*, Vol. 49, No. 4, December 1997. On Longfellow's proclivity to lassitude, see Horace Gregory, "Introduction," in Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Evangeline and Selected Tales and Poems, ed. Horace Gregory (1964; New York: Signet Classic Edition, 1990).

9. "The full history of the image of an interconnection between authorship and symbolic femininity, entrenched in American thought by the era of Emerson and Hawthorne, has yet to be traced," writes Lawrence Buell in New England Literary

Culture: From Revolution through Renaissance (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 429-30. Buell notes Emory Elliott's hypothesis, in Revolutionary Writers: Literature and Authority in the New Republic, 1725-1810 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), that "the conception of authorship as a feminine pursuit entered into American thinking as a consequence of a cult of 'republican manliness'" (p. 429) to which the Revolution gave rise.

10. "The patrician paradigm, which helped to sustain a relatively small colonial elite composed of merchants, lawyers, and landed gentry, expresses manhood as property ownership, patriarchy, and republican ideals of citizenship. The artisan paradigm, expressing the values of a much larger producing class upon which the elite depended, defines manhood as freedom, pride of craft and, to a lesser degree, citizenship, along with a good deal of ambivalence about patriarchal deference. Though a good many tensions emerge from the continuing interdependence of artisan and patrician classes, as Marxist historians have emphasized, . . . the basic class conflict between 1825 and 1850 comes with the rise of a new middle class, for whom manhood is based much more exclusively in work and entrepreneurial competition." David Leverenz, Manhood and the American Renaissance (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 74. See also E. Anthony Rotundo, American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era (New York: Basic Books, 1993).

11. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, The Works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Standard Library Edition, 14 Vols. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1891; reprint New York: AMS Press, Inc. 1966). All quotations from Longfellow's poetry are keyed to this edition.

12. William Charvat, The Profession of Authorship in America, 1800-1870: The Papers of William Charvat, ed. Matthew Bruccoli (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1968), p. 159.

13. See Charvat, The Profession of Authorship in America, passim.

14. Other gentry-class writers, such as James Russell Lowell and Oliver Wendell Holmes, also served in this public capacity. But Longfellow is distinguished by having been indisputably the most popular of the conservative New England poets.

15. Samuel Longfellow, ed., Life of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, with Extracts from His Journals and Correspondence, 3 Vols., Vols. 12-14 of The Works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (New York: AMS Press, Inc.), II, p. 294, quoted in Buell, New England Literary Culture, p. 411.

16. Nina Baym, Woman's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America, 1820-1870 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), pp. 40, 41.

17. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Hyperion: A Romance, in The Works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, VIII, p. 13. Page numbers for subsequent quotations

from Hyperion will appear in the text.

18. Orestes Brownson called Hyperion "such a journal as a man who reads a great deal makes from the scraps in his table-drawer." Quoted in Loring E. Hart, "The Beginning of Longfellow's Fame," *New England Quarterly*, 36 (1963), p. 71.

19. Charvat, Profession of Authorship in America, p. 121.

20. Longfellow included the translation of "The Castle by the Sea" in Hyperion, pp. 184-85.

21. Hilen, ed., Letters of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Vol. II, 1837-1843, p. 6.

22. Thompson, Young Longfellow, pp. 57, 59.

23. Longfellow, Hyperion, p. 157.

24. Longfellow's biographer reports that in his senior year Longfellow published in the *United States Literary Gazette* no less than sixteen poems, five prose essays, and two book reviews—"an amazing output, for a college student." Thompson, Young Longfellow, p. 62.

25. See Perry Miller: "I suppose no exercise of historical imagination can recapture the thrill that went through the literate public when an American poet at last chanted, in lines they could consider as authentically poetic as any ever written by an Englishmen, that life is real and life is earnest." The Raven and the Whale (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1956), p. 13-14. See also Hart, "The Beginnings of Longfellow's Fame."

26. Samuel Longfellow, Life, Vol. I, p. 214.

27. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "Defense of Poetry," in Longfellow, Outre-Mer: Defense of Poesy (New York: A.L. Burt, 1909), pp. 355-393.

28. Longfellow, "Defense of Poetry," p. 368.

29. Longfellow, Works, Vol. 1, p. 64.

Chapter Two

Longfellow's Place:
The Poet and Poetry of Craigie House

One of the enduring mysteries presented by Longfellow is that of the extraordinary popularity he enjoyed in his lifetime, a phenomenon expressed perhaps not so much in the quantity of books he sold (William Charvat calculates that by 1869 this number reached about one-third of a million[1]) as in the quality of the veneration he elicited. Any student of Longfellow's must account for such responses to Longfellow as this reminiscence by the Boston-born poet and journalist William Winter:

> I had read every line he had then published, and such was the affection he inspired, even in a boyish mind, that on many a summer night I have walked several miles to his house, only to put my hand upon the latch of his gate, which he himself had touched. More than any one else among the famous persons whom, since then, it has been my fortune to know, he aroused this feeling of mingled tenderness and reverence.[2]

The body of written commentary on Longfellow, always short on measured critical assessments, is swollen with appreciative statements both judicious and, as is more frequently the case, extravagant. This literature of tribute, which takes the form of biographies, essays, elegies, reminiscences, letters, and journal entries, testifies again and again to the deep imprint left by Longfellow and makes it clear that Longfellow himself became a symbol whose meanings bore a complex relation to the symbolic meanings constructed in his poetry. Indeed, part of the populist brilliance of Longfellow's domestic verse, whether intended or not, was to tie the character of his private life to the content of his poetry, so the life seemed to sanctify the poetry and the poetry to beatify the life. William Cullen Bryant, to take one example, was eminently respected as a public man

and a poet; but his poetry did not wrest from readers the kind of affection for its author that Longfellow's evidently did, in part because unlike Longfellow's his instructional poetry never sought to teach from the platform of his private life.

As a civic-minded poet, Longfellow seems to have felt that the lessons in virtue and refinement that were his to teach could best be taught, at times, with reference to scenes originating in his own home, the famous Craigie House on Brattle Street in Cambridge. In well-known and oft-repeated lyrics like "The Day Is Done" and "The Children's Hour," Longfellow opened the doors of his New England home. This hospitable gesture, though not made without an ambivalence that left its mark in the poetry, allowed readers of all classes a kind of access into a privileged domestic space and a famously happy family. Longfellow earned the love and respect, the tenderness and reverence of his readers not just as a poet but as a model husband and father, a father figure, with a particularly compelling life story that could be glimpsed, at times, in his writing. These glimpses, these brief and almost incidental sightings through the surface of the poems and into the life of the poet, could be relied on, it seemed, for authentic information as to the poet's character. As Charles Eliot Norton put it, "The accord between the character and life of Mr. Longfellow and his poems was complete."[3]

As a byproduct of its homiletic manner, all of Longfellow's writing contributed to the image of the author as himself a man of principle and goodness. In a moralistic age the very act of writing moralistic verse will be considered virtuous; and the force of the lessons taught in such verse will depend, to a greater or lesser degree, on the extent to which the life of the author seems to embody those lessons. Lurking behind and beneath

Longfellow's poems, then, was the character of Longfellow himself, a character that the poems both reticently and cannily constructed. The terms and means of this construction are the properly literary part of the history of Longfellow's cultural apotheosis. Craigie House figures largely in the Longfellow appreciations in part because the poet, wittingly or not, used it to advance his own glamour, status, and authority. The young William Winter's pilgrimages to touch the latch of the Craigie House gate may be said to epitomize a widespread response to Longfellow's poetry, a response that often found outlet in expressions of homage for the poet's home and home life.

Longfellow's poems frequently open onto domestic spaces, and in this respect they are typical products of mid-nineteenth century America's vaunting of the home as a kind of sacred space whose high priestess was the wife and mother. It would be difficult to find an American author of the period whose work does not reflect this burgeoning sense of the spiritual centrality of the private home; a public poet like Longfellow will be all the more susceptible to such a broadly-rooted ideology. Hence many of Longfellow's poems are fairly routine exercises in domestic apologia. In "The Hanging of the Crane" (1874), for instance, a virtually official statement for which the poet was paid $3,000 by the publisher of the New York Ledger, Longfellow imagined the predictably prosperous life-course of an idealized American family. Yet at other moments in his career he was able to give voice to a more idiosyncratic domesticity than would seem, on the evidence of the impersonal pieties of "The Hanging of the Crane," to be in his repertoire. A brief survey of a posthumous Longfellow collection, The Hanging of the Crane and Other Poems of the Home (1894)[4], shows that many of Longfellow's domestic poems express a

melancholy, a morbidity, and above all an exhaustion at odds with the simplistic affirmations of the collection's title poem. These themes helped lay the foundation for what Oliver Wendell Holmes called "that almost unparalleled homage which crowned [Longfellow's] noble life."[5] Longfellow earned such homage and wielded such potent cultural authority in part as a result of a disarming lack of authoritarianism in his authorial manner—given that he was, in the final analysis, a New England moralist. The maneuvers by which he managed these contradictions deserve to be better appreciated.

The Exhaustion of the Poet

If "The Hanging of the Crane" is a pro forma pageant of domestic ideology, "The Day Is Done" (1844) is a much more intimate domestic poem that reads like the prompt verbalization of a moment's wish for household succor. The poem establishes a powerful intimacy between the speaker and the beloved companion whom he addresses, an intimacy perhaps most decisively expressed through the speaker's indifference to hiding his exhaustion. Home, in this poem, is where one can finally give in to fatigue. The speaker is overwhelmed at end of day with "[a] feeling of sadness and longing," and gently commands that he be read a "simple and heartfelt" poem that will "quiet/The restless pulse of care":

> 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,

And as silently steal away.

The image of the last stanza is one of restlessness and homelessness; the poem suggests that without a permanent home, without a restorative place in which to give in to exhaustion, the Arabs' fatigue must be as unending as their wanderings. The easily folded and removed tents of the nomads counterbalance the absent construct at the center of "The Day Is Done," the fixed and anchored American home.

In part because of the identity of its author, "The Day Is Done" is more than simply a vision of home as a place of retreat from the fatiguing world, a characteristic statement on the divergence of work-life and home-life for men in antebellum America. Whether or not the poem has any autobiographical content, it is surprising to find the author of "A Psalm of Life" (1838) and "Excelsior" (1842), those famous anthems to male energy triumphant, giving voice to such seemingly heartfelt weariness. For a celebrated poet like Longfellow, whose stock in trade was the poetry of reassurance, a poem like "The Day Is Done" represented a virtual breach of etiquette: the author ought to be supplying consolation, not requesting it. Though the poem may well have been written for the ears of a single beloved, Longfellow's wife, as a published work it turns the tables on the relationship between author and audience, poet and reader. Nor would this sort of inversion, amounting merely to a poetic conceit, be remarkable were it not for the moral authority that went with Longfellow's public reputation from "A Psalm of Life" on. If "The Day Is Done," then, were an authentic glimpse into the great poet's home life, as it tantalizingly *could* be, then how completely fascinating and how poignant—poignant precisely because of the exhaustion and the deflation the poem makes manifest. Is this

care-worn depletion what it is like to be privileged and famous and well-to-do?, a contemporary reader of Longfellow's might well wonder. Whether due to his fabled lack of self-consciousness, or to his Yankee public-spiritedness, or to some calculation regarding the cost of the literary fame he so craved, Longfellow appears never to have thought twice about allowing himself to become a public figure. A poem like "The Day Is Done" does not exactly encourage the building-up of Longfellow the private man as a cultural symbol, but by possibly or probably opening a window upon the intimacies of his home neither does it do anything to discourage it.

Longfellow never presents himself in his public poetry as an individual, but precisely because it does not occur to him to do so, he feels more at liberty to make use of himself in an exemplary way than might a poet for whom "personality" matters.[6] In such melancholy domestic pieces as "Children" (1849), "Weariness" (1863), and "Song" (1877) (all included in The Hanging of the Crane and Other Poems of the Home), Longfellow sees fit to bring some of the moodiness, tiredness, and anxiousness he experienced into his poetry and to make them expressive of common emotional states in which his readers might share. The poems are in no sense autobiographical or confessional, literary modes that would have been meaningless to Longfellow. The well-known sonnet "The Cross of Snow" (1879), usually held to be the only poem in which he does speak personally about the calamity of Fanny's death, was first found among Longfellow's remains after his death. "Michael Angelo," an unfinished closet drama on which Longfellow worked off and on for over thirty years, includes a passage in which, under the cover of a dramatic monologue from a bereaved widow to her late husband Francesco,

Longfellow appears to speak to his late wife Fanny (her given name was Frances)[7]; this work Longfellow also chose never to publish. Longfellow's lack of interest in calling attention to himself as an individual is balanced by his literary proclivity to resort to scenes, persons, and feelings from his own life, and both sides of this antinomy are filtered through Longfellow's basically non-self-reflective and un-self-conscious nature; in consequence, Longfellow's "self" as found in the poems is at once remote and public.[8]

Hence Longfellow inhabits many of his more interesting domestic lyrics with a kind of double unconsciousness. "Children," for instance, appears to be a poem celebrating the joyfulness of the home, but it reads like one denouncing the joylessness of the world. The author is "perplexed" with questions, in his heart howls "the wind of Autumn," and he seeks solace in the children without whom "[w]e should dread the desert behind us/Worse than the dark before":

> For what are all our contrivings,
> And the wisdom of our books,
> When compared with your caresses,
> And the gladness of your looks?
>
> Ye are better than all the ballads
> That ever were sung or said;
> For ye are living poems,
> And all the rest are dead.

"Children" concludes on a sour note, the final word "dead" sounding flat and remorseful, and Longfellow's tiredness with the literary artifacts that he elsewhere indefatigably promotes casting a black shadow over even the "sunny atmosphere" of familial contentment.

"Weariness" may have been considered a domestic poem by the editor of The Hanging of the Crane and Other Poems of the Home because on the surface it takes up the theme of childhood; but within Longfellow's oeuvre it is more properly so because its underlying theme is exhaustion. "I . . . /am weary, thinking of your road," the poet says at the end of the first stanza, thinking of the long and wearisome life-journeys still before the young; "I . . ./am weary, thinking of your task," he says at the end of the second stanza, thinking of the many labors they must still perform. If the first two stanzas voice the poet's weariness, the third and fourth are given to a kind of lugubrious, end-of-life self-scrutiny:

> O little hearts! that throb and beat
> With such impatient, feverish heat,
> Such limitless and strong desires;
> Mine, that so long has glowed and burned,
> With passions into ashes turned,
> Now covers and conceals its fires.

In a typically self-contradictory movement, such a stanza both "covers and conceals" the fires in Longfellow's heart and allows his readers a brief glimpse of them; the poem is at once revealing and so generalized as to reveal nothing. This is the kind of paradox of self-disclosure that one discovers everywhere in Longfellow, whose often incompatible imperatives are that of generous frankness on the one hand and that of genteel reticence on the other.

In Kavanagh, his 1849 novel of New England village life, Longfellow at one point has his title character speak of his three years spent in Italy in "that broad style of handling in which nothing is distinctly defined, but everything clearly suggested."[9] Longfellow himself knew well how to manage this "broad style." As with his Bowdoin

classmate Hawthorne, Longfellow lived within the culture of New England taciturnity and had to work out for himself the contradictions of being a writer in a social climate in which forthcoming self-articulation was not encouraged. Charles Eliot Norton shows himself an inheritor of this Puritan mindset when he states with the air of expressing a commonplace, "The deepest experiences of life are too sacred to be shared with any one whatsoever."[10] "With me all deep feelings are silent ones," Longfellow noted in an early letter in particularly Hawthornean mode; elsewhere in his journal Longfellow says, of some poetry he had received from a stranger, that he would not send his correspondent his "'real opinion'"— for that, wrote Longfellow, "I shall never make known to any man, except on compulsion and under the seal of secrecy."[11] Lawrance Thompson quotes a letter from Mary Appleton Mackintosh congratulating Longfellow on his engagement to her sister, in which she says she "almost feared [Fanny] was too aloof in her goodness and deep directness of Soul from us poor ones to ever find a fitting mate."[12] These paradoxical qualities of aloofness and deep directness belong also to Longfellow. The marriage of two such people must not have been as tidy and textureless as the authorized story has made it out to be. (In the absence of a genuinely critical biography of Longfellow, the authorized story remains the only one.) Annie Fields, in an unguarded moment, perhaps begins to get at some of the actual texture of the Longfellows' habitation of Craigie House: "Neither Longfellow nor his wife was a brilliant talker; indeed, there were often moments of speechlessness; but in spite of mental absences, a habit of which he got the better in later years, one was always sure of being taken at one's best."[13] Thomas Wentworth Higginson, who studied French under Longfellow at Harvard,

touches on both sides of the dynamic when he recalls that Longfellow was "the first Harvard professor who addressed his pupils as 'Mr.'" but nonetheless found him to have an "underlying stratum of coolness" that made him not the most approachable of teachers.[14] Norton says simply of Longfellow, "He was a man of deep reserves."[15]

Another domestic lyric included in the Poems of the Home collection, "Song," is so short that it may be quoted in full:

> Stay, stay at home, my heart, and rest;
> Home-keeping hearts are happiest,
> For those that wander they know not where
> Are full of trouble and full of care;
> To stay at home is best.
>
> Weary and homesick and distressed,
> They wander east, they wander west,
> And are baffled and beaten and blown about
> By the winds of the wilderness of doubt;
> To stay at home is best.
>
> Then stay at home, my heart, and rest;
> The bird is safest in its nest;
> O'er all that flutter their wings and fly
> A hawk is hovering in the sky;
> To stay at home is best.

Here, again, home is where the weary can find rest, a place of refuge from the near-hysterical wandering suggested in the second stanza. The line from this "Song" that still survives as part of our common fund of phrases, "Home-keeping hearts are happiest," is in its cheerfulness atypical of the poem as a whole, which is dominated by images of confusion and panic. Longfellow in his youth had traveled much abroad, and throughout his rather sedentary Cambridge life the polyglot author often dreamed of foreign travel; in that light, the poem may be an aging poet's attempt to persuade himself to be satisfied

with the comforts of home. Though on the surface "Song" appears to be a lyric in praise of home, under the surface it appears to be, undecidably, either a lyric written out of frustration with home or out of terror of homelessness. In either case, the repetition "To stay at home is best" acts like a mantra, controlling anxiety, stabilizing thought, and sanctioning rest.

William Charvat suggests that Longfellow spoke for "a world which increasingly hated its work, in which machines were rendering the making of things meaningless for the maker, in which farming was less and less the source of a well-rounded subsistence and more and more a struggle with the market, banks, and railroads, and in which Arthur Miller Salesmanship not only increased but took the forms of Barnum, Bonner, and Beecher in the fields of amusement, publishing, and religion"[16]; he might also have suggested that Longfellow spoke for a world which increasingly valued the home as a place of refuge from the frustrations of work and the uncertainties of economic competition, a world in which liberal Christian movements like Unitarianism provided relatively little cohesion to communities and life-direction to individuals, and a world in which the public sphere was increasingly diverse, clamorous, and strife-torn. The famous antebellum American afflatus of energy, while responsible for the creation of enormous wealth, the propagation of a host of transformative ideas on social reform, and the nourishment of such cultural flourishings as the so-called American Renaissance in literature, evidently left in its wake many people taking refuge at home, exhausted. Longfellow's weariness, in part perhaps an affectation and in part likely an expression of genuine symptoms, had

about it at all times the flavor of defeat and retreat; and as such it had the power to address and legitimate the lives of quiet exhaustion that the mass of men lived:

> O suffering, sad humanity!
> O ye afflicted ones, who lie
> Steeped to the lips in misery,
> Longing, and yet afraid to die,
> Patient, though sorely tried,
>
> I pledge you in this cup of grief,
> Where floats the fennel's bitter leaf,
> The Battle of our Life is brief,
> The alarm,—the struggle,—the relief,
> Then sleep we side by side.

Though not among his most distinguished lines, these from "The Goblet of Life" (1841) voice a longing for rest that Longfellow assumed to be widespread and shared. Sleep is the final image of the poem, an image of release, and the sleep of death is imaged as a kind of peaceable cohabitation, a long-awaited brotherly relaxation: "Then sleep we side by side." How disarming it must have been that in poems like this one the eminently successful Harvard professor, the privileged son of an old New England family, the famous author of the "Let us then be up and doing" psalm of life, should manifest such bitter weariness, the weariness not of the victor in the "Battle of our Life" but of the vanquished.

Side by side with the aristocratic rhetoric of care-giving that Longfellow could not but at times adopt (as in the rather lordly "I pledge you" of the second stanza quoted above) could also be found in Longfellow the fraternal rhetoric of social equality (as in "Then sleep we side by side"). Stow Persons in The Decline of American Gentility shows that the elite classes in the early republic saw no contradiction between privileged

social standing and democratic principle; on the contrary, social standing led to a sense of public obligation that could be fulfilled through public service.[17] It was expected of Longfellow from childhood that he would grow up to take his place as one of society's standard-bearers, a guardian of Puritan virtue and Christian morals, and so in his chosen vocation as man of letters he did; and yet he refused in principle to avail himself of the hardened armature of male authority. Longfellow's protestations of weariness may be seen as a principled letting-down-the-guard in a distinctly unpatriarchal way, an instructive and teacherly refusal to be always at instruction and teaching. The father figure is properly the one who says, "The heights by great men reached and kept/Were not attained by sudden flight,/But they, while their companions slept,/Were toiling upward in the night" ("The Ladder of St. Augustine," 1850), not the one who says, "And to-night I long for rest." Yet precisely because Longfellow could both promote the Protestant work ethic of "toiling upward in the night" and confess his complete exhaustion at day's end, because Longfellow in a poem like "The Day Is Done" could both affirm the incomparable greatness of the "bards sublime" and admit his transitory wish for a simple poem by "some humbler poet," his societal role as a new type of humanized father figure could be made possible.

The Craigie House Aura

In growing into this public role it helped that Longfellow had a house, the famous Craigie House, with which he came to be associated in the popular imagination to an extraordinary degree, particularly in his later years. Craigie House was bound up in the proliferat-

ing Longfellow lore with that most touching period of the author's life, the years following the death in 1835 of his first wife when he rented two rooms from the eccentric Mrs. Andrew Craigie, and bound up also with his wonderfully happy but ultimately tragic marriage to Fanny Appleton, the Mary Ashburton of Hyperion, whose industrialist father purchased the house for the couple upon their marriage in 1843. (To be precise, Nathan Appleton bestowed the house upon his daughter.) A formal two-story New England manse dating from 1759, rectilinear and dignified, painted a proper yellow with white trim and black shutters, Craigie House epitomized Longfellow's genteel decorum while at the same time serving in his writing as the locus of many household scenes that readers of all classes could identify with. As a young widow, as a rejected suitor, as a loving husband and father, and as a grieving widow once more (since Fanny died of burns in this house in 1861 after her dress caught fire while she was melting wax to seal up lockets of her children's hair)—in all of these phases of Longfellow's domestic life, publicized to some extent in his poetry and widely known, in any event, because he was such a beloved public figure, Craigie House loomed large.

Though Longfellow was in no sense a writer of "personal" poetry, his poems throughout his career made reference to his life—if not frequently to its inner drama, then more frequently to its external circumstances. In the early poem "To the River Charles," for instance, published in *The Ladies Companion* in 1842, Longfellow alludes to his residence at Craigie House, from whose windows he can see the river ("Four long years of mingled feeling,/Half in rest, and half in strife,/I have seen thy waters stealing/Onward, like the stream of life"). The river's name puts him in mind of "three friends, all true and

tried" named Charles who have dwelt by the river, and for that reason the river's name, "like magic, binds me/Closer, closer to thy side." Such a poem as this in no way indulges in confidential depths of revelation, but nonetheless helped to establish in readers' minds an image of the privileged if at times care-worn professor-poet in Cambridge among beloved friends. A late occasional poem like "From My Arm-Chair," subtitled "To the Children of Cambridge, Who Presented to Me, on my Seventy-second Birthday, February 27, 1879, this Chair Made from the Wood of the Village Blacksmith's Chestnut Tree," further developed this public image by showing the privileged if aging professor-poet at home in Cambridge among schoolchildren who idolize him. As a cumulative result perhaps of such allusions strewn through many poems, the public seems at times to have assumed that Longfellow's poetry had reference to Craigie House even when the poetry did not authorize such an interpretation. In The Home Life of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, for instance, Blanche Roosevelt Tucker-Machetta recalls on her first visit to Craigie House having pointed to the grandfather clock on the front stairs and recited some lines from the well-known lyric "The Old Clock on the Stairs" (1845). Longfellow gently corrected her, explaining that the poem was suggested by a clock at the Pittsfield, Massachusetts house of a relative of his wife's.[18]

Longfellow was embraced by nineteenth-century Americans not merely as the author of "household poems" but as a living emblem of the domestic life whose famous house added luster and prestige to his domestic poetry. The hold of Craigie House on the imaginations of Longfellow's readers may be seen in such tributes as the Longfellow Remembrance Book, A Memorial for the Poet's Reader-Friends (1888), whose first

chapter begins with the following revealing if inelegant sentence: "From a house built in Revolutionary days to a house rich in Revolutionary memories; from a home graced with the culture known but to few American households in those opening years of the nineteenth century to a home from which have gone out creations that have helped to refine a world; from . . .—such was the record of the life-progress of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow."[19] Longfellow's brother Samuel authored a chapter in the Longfellow Remembrance Book entitled "Longfellow and the Children" in which, writing of the Longfellow birthday celebrations begun by schools in the West in the 1870s, he quotes some verses sent to Longfellow one year by "a young lady in Alabama": "In his stately home in Cambridge,/Girt with treasures rich and rare,/Does he hear the children's voices/As they vibrate in the air?"[20] How, one wonders, does this "young lady" know of Longfellow's "stately home," and why does it get pride of place in her poem? John Greenleaf Whittier likewise begins his elegy, "The Poet and the Children," with a stanza that burnishes the romance of Longfellow's famous residence: "With a glory of winter sunshine/Over his locks of gray,/In the old historic mansion/He sat on his last birthday." As late as 1957 a volume entitled The Amazing Mr. Longfellow could regret that "today there is no publication of recent date that covers the poet's life, his literary accomplishments, and his historical homes together in one volume."[21] But even during his lifetime the fame of the house could rival the fame of the poet. Newton Arvin tells the following anecdote of Longfellow's later years: "As he was standing at the front door one August morning, a woman in black came up to him and inquired whether this was the house in which Long-

fellow had been born; when he explained that it was not, she went on to ask, 'Did he die here?'"[22]

Because he did not always trouble to hide from his readers the basic outlines of his feelings, Longfellow's emotional life during his sojourn at Craigie House became to some extent available as the stuff of legend. "Born with especial love of home and all domesticities, the solitary years moved on, bringing him a larger power for soothing the grief of others because he had himself known the darkest paths of human experience," wailed the usually incisive Annie Fields of Longfellow's first years at Craigie House, the years of his widowhood and unprospering courtship of Fanny Appleton.[23] The poet "early chose Craigie House as the most desirable place for his abode in all the world," she continued, and it was here that after his marriage in 1843 "his life took shape and his happiness found increase with the days."[24] The happiness of Longfellow's marriage to Fanny came to be an integral part of the lore of Craigie House and, for generations of Longfellowites, a measure of the poet's personal merit. "One could rarely find a happier marriage," writes one such acolyte.[25] "That it was a perfect marriage there is no doubt, for they were beautifully mated, not common in the history of poetical lovers," burbles another.[26] Still another proclaimed that the marriage gave rise to "as perfect domestic happiness as we have the record of in the life of any man of letters."[27] No less an observer than Longfellow's Cambridge neighbor Charles Eliot Norton extolled "[t]he traditions, the associations, the surroundings" of Craigie House and recalled that "the home within was exceptionally happy."[28] Even Newton Arvin unquestioningly accepts the legend: "[F]or nearly twenty years, except for the death of one child, his personal and

domestic existence was one of almost pure felicity."[29] If the Longfellow' domestic idyll at Craigie House has been made much of by the poet's "reader-friends," the domestic tragedy of Fanny's death in 1861 is invariably mentioned only briefly and allusively, out of genteel respect. The final phase of Longfellow's domesticity, the years of "The White Mr. Longfellow," when honors kept pouring in and visitors dropping by, is perhaps the most amply documented, chiefly in the form of anecdotes that have become lore. "[O]utside his own house Longfellow seemed to want a fit atmosphere," wrote William Dean Howells of Longfellow's later years, capturing what appears to have been the popular sense of Longfellow's almost physical connectedness with Craigie House, "and I love best to think of him in his study, where he wrought at his lovely art with a serenity expressed in his smooth, regular, and scrupulously perfect handwriting."[30] Perhaps the most fantastic homage to Craigie House and its poet is to be found in the house built in 1907 by the industrialist Robert F. Jones in Minneapolis at the corner of Minnehaha Parkway and Hiawatha Avenue. The two-thirds-scale replica of Craigie House was situated amid extensive private grounds featuring a zoo (stocked with such fauna as hippos, kangaroos, and tigers) and botanical gardens that included a sandstone sculpture of Longfellow.

Of those who were not taken in by the Craigie House aura, Emerson is often mentioned. A well-known journal entry from August 1853 reads, "If Socrates were here, we could go & talk with him; but Longfellow, we cannot go & talk with; there is a palace, & servants, & a row of bottles of different coloured wines, & wine glasses, & fine coats."[31] Emerson's frustration with his friend's quasi-royal "palace" and its aristocratic

pretensions echoes frequently-heard complaints about the allegedly excessive devotion to Europe and its literary models in Longfellow's poetry; the resentment finally seems as much about the forms and formality of Longfellow's poetry as about any deficiencies in his conversation. A more modulated displacement of Longfellow's residence and his poetic lies in the comments Walt Whitman makes in a section on "Old Poets" in "Good-Bye My Fancy": "Longfellow, reminiscent, polish'd, elegant, with the air of finest conventional library, picture-gallery or parlor, with ladies and gentlemen in them, and plush and rosewood, and ground-glass lamps, and mahogany and ebony furniture, and a silver inkstand and scented satin paper to write on."[32] This verbless sentence, representing the entirety of Whitman's remarks on Longfellow in "Old Poets," equivocates as to whether the Victorian interior with which "Longfellow" is typified is to be related to the man or the poetry. Whitman's instinct to clothe this "old poet" in the metaphors of drawing rooms and heirloom furniture and fine household paraphernalia appears to be both an acknowledgement of the social place of "Longfellow" (the man or the poetry, emblematized in either case by the interior of a proper Victorian home like Craigie House) and a tribute to the obsolescence of that place, a Victorianism already "reminiscent," on the wane. As direct as Whitman's characterization is, the equation of Craigie House with Longfellow's poems is more explicitly made by Bliss Perry, the editor of the *Atlantic* and later a Harvard professor:

> To open Dante is like passing within the solemn portal of a cathedral; to read Longfellow is like entering the Craigie House. The fine dignity of the vanished eighteenth century is here. From the doorway stretches a gentle landscape, with its winding river and low hills. All around there is quiet beauty, with lilacs and elms and green lawns sweet with children's voices; within the old mansion wait hospitality, and gracious courtesy, and

> the long savor of worn books, and the sanctities of long, intimate converse with all lovely and honorable things. It is a friend's roof, and it welcomes us in hours when the cathedral oppresses and appals.[33]

As with the large body of commentary on Longfellow that owes its mood of genteel reverence to the influence of Longfellow's own genteel and reverential temperament, Perry's imagery here borrows from Longfellow himself. In the first of six sonnets gathered under the title "Divina Commedia," Longfellow compares his reading Dante to that of a pilgrim entering a cathedral. Perry transposes the analogy, making the reader of Longfellow the pilgrim and Craigie House the shrine that the reader, by reading Longfellow, enters.

Since well before the poet's death in 1882 the Longfellowites idealized all the phases of their hero's life in Craigie House and indefatigably circulated a host of usual anecdotes, which make it difficult even now to weed out the facts from the hype about Longfellow's "home life." A proper untangling of the ideology and influence of that great shrine to Longfellow's apotheosis, Samuel Longfellow's Life of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, would require a chapter of its own. Originally published in 1886 in two volumes, the Life is not so much a biography as it is a chronologically-arranged scrapbook of letters and journal entries, principally by Longfellow but occasionally by the poet's friends and correspondents, with introductory comments and periodic interjections by his brother. A third volume of miscellaneous Longfellow material entitled Final Memorials was published in 1887, and in 1891 this material was combined with that of the original two volumes to form a three-volume Life, with all entries in chronological order, concluding with a section of "Tributes" (including a chapter on "The Study at Craigie

House," a laboriously detailed description of the decor and arrangement of Longfellow's study). This new edition of the Life, as a "Publisher's Advertisement" notes, was "made to conform externally to the latest Riverside Edition in eleven volumes of Mr. Longfellow's complete writings."[34] Henceforth the standard Houghton, Mifflin edition of Longfellow was to comprise fourteen volumes, the final three of which contained Samuel's Life of Henry and the first eleven of which contained Henry's poems and prose as filtered through Samuel's running biographical commentary. With its expurgations and bowdlerizations, the Life presented Longfellow as a Victorian saint. Bundled together in a single package with the collected writings, this hagiography has been enormously successful in establishing the "official" Longfellow.[35] Perhaps more insidious, however, have been Samuel Longfellow's "critical notes" to his brother's poetry, since in non-critically presenting the poetry as the work of a saint they make the poetry subsidiary to the life.

Samuel's remarks, appended as headnotes to a large majority of the poems in the standard edition, relentlessly personalize the poetry. In front of the well-known poem "Resignation," for instance, he finds it relevant to affix this insipid note: "Written in the autumn of 1848, after the death of his little daughter Fanny. There is a passage in the poet's diary, under date of November 12th, in which he says: 'I feel very sad today. I miss very much dear little Fanny. An inappeasable longing to see her comes over me at times, which I can hardly control.'" The poem that follows, beginning "There is no flock, however watched and tended,/But one dead lamb is there!/There is no fireside, howsoe'er defended,/But has one vacant chair!," takes on the coloring of Longfellow's own loss; yet

in "Resignation" Longfellow never mentions or even alludes to his daughter or his loss. The actual poem strikes a characteristic balance between the impersonal and the personal, so that Longfellow seems both a paternal ministrant to the grief of others and, largely through the use of the third person plural "we," a sharer in the universal experience of loss. Many such examples could be cited of the interpretive mischief done by Samuel Longfellow's interference in his brother's collected poems. One more example, of note in part for the light it sheds on the growth of the Craigie House legend, will suffice. In "The Open Window" (1849), a brief sentimental lyric, a first-person narrator tells of walking with a young boy past "[t]he old house by the lindens" where, for some undisclosed reason, the "little playmates" who once lived there are gone forever—"shadow, and silence, and sadness/Were hanging over all"; and though the mystery of their absence is never cleared up, the last stanza hints that the adult narrator knows that something terrible has happened from which he would protect the child who accompanies him: "And the boy that walked beside me,/He could not understand/Why closer in mine, ah! closer,/I pressed his warm, soft hand!" The poem is completely without personal reference; the "I" could be any child-loving adult and the "old house by the lindens" could be in any village or town. Here is the entirety of Samuel Longfellow's glaringly supercilious headnote to this poem:

> Published in *The Southern Literary Messenger*, November, 1849. The old house by the lindens is what is known as the Lechmere house on Brattle Street, corner of Sparks Street, in Cambridge. It has been altered since the poem was written, but belongs to a group of houses, of which Mr. Longfellow's was one and Mr. Lowell's another, standing on what was sometimes called Tory Row, since these houses, built before the war for independence, were the spacious homes of rich merchants who held by the king. There is a picture of the Lechmere house from a pencil-sketch by

> Mr. Longfellow in Lossing's *Field-Book of the Revolution*, I. 557. It was in this house that Baron Riedesel was quartered as prisoner of war after the surrender of Burgoyne, and the window-pane is shown on which the Baronness wrote her name with a diamond.

The note has nothing to do with the poem whatsoever! It nonetheless serves Samuel Longfellow's essentially didactic purpose of exalting his brother's life while underplaying or indeed, as in this case, negating the poetry. The Cambridge house with its pre-Revolutionary origins not only makes "Mr. Longfellow" more picturesque as a poet, but it affiliates him with the landed gentry class and hence, for Samuel Longfellow, enhances his brother's extra-literary respectability. The important point, as will be suggested in the pages to follow, is that Samuel Longfellow's clumsy attempts to twine the poetic texts with the life and thereby to preserve his brother's moral legacy are not completely unlike the poet's own far more artful if more ambivalent attempts to establish such a legacy.

Under Washington's Roof

An indispensable part of the history of Craigie House, never neglected in any of the homages to Longfellow's residence there, is that the house served for nine months early in the Revolutionary War as George Washington's military headquarters. Longfellow himself did not neglect this fact, either in his home decorating or in his writing. In 1844 the poet bought a bust of Washington by the French sculptor Houdon and placed it in the front hallway of Craigie House, beside which he hung the Washington family coat of arms. On a wall by the front stairs was hung an engraving of Washington on his white horse, along with an oil sketch of Washington by Gilbert Stuart. Portraits of Martha and George Washington adorned Longfellow's study, which had once served as Washington's

private room. An 1841 letter of Longfellow's to his father reports that he has just begun reading the letters Washington wrote from the house that was later to be Craigie House: "It will be very pleasant to read them, here in Headquarters, the letters he wrote sixty-six years ago, perhaps in this very room,—certainly in this very house."[36] According to Tucker-Machetta, who received a tour of Craigie House from Longfellow in 1880, the poet described his study in the following terms: "This was Washington's own private room; and where my writing-desk now stands, there stood his table. These walls, lined with books, also shelved his literary lore. In fact, I think the arrangement of the room is exactly the same as when in his time."[37]

Even well before Longfellow acquired the house through marriage, he was not loathe to associate himself both with "Headquarters" and with its most honored former occupant. In Hyperion, A Romance, written in 1838-39 in the upstairs rooms rented from Mrs. Craigie, the young Harvard professor told of the restless European wanderings of the ex-patriot American Paul Flemming, culminating in Book Three in his rejection by the Englishwoman Mary Ashburton and his decision in Book Four to return to America: "His thoughts turned to his distant home beyond the sea. An indescribable sweet feeling rose within him. 'Thither will I turn my wandering footsteps," said he, "and be a man among men, and no longer a dreamer among shadows'" (277). Flemming's transatlantic homelessness is implicitly contrasted with Longfellow's own rootedness in the quintessentially American soil of Craigie House, to which the author explicitly calls attention in the chapter entitled "A Miserere." Longfellow refers to himself throughout Hyperion, of course, to the extent the romance is a roman á clef with Flemming as Long-

fellow and Mary Ashburton as Fanny Appleton; yet in the first chapter of Book Four Longfellow situates himself in "this leafy, blossoming, and beautiful Cambridge" (215), pictures himself sitting "here at my pleasant chamber-window" (214), and imagines that the fields behind "this old mansion" (215) are like those of the Aare Valley:

> Thus the shades of Washington and William Tell seem to walk together on these Elysian Fields, for it was here that, in days long gone, our great patriot dwelt; and yonder clouds so much resemble the snowy Alps, that they remind me irresistibly of the Swiss. Noble examples of a high purpose and a fixed will! (215)

The transnational imagery at once delocalizes Craigie House and affirms its particular history as a place of patriots and patriarchs, of father figures both legendary and historical. Longfellow admires these figures as "Noble examples of a high purpose and a fixed will" and links himself with them by assuming the familiar role of moral authority; but immediately thereafter, in the next paragraph, he characteristically gets very tired:

> Nothing can be more lovely than these summer mornings, nor than the southern window at which I sit and write, in this old mansion, which is like an Italian villa. But oh, this lassitude,—this weariness,—when all around me is so bright! I have this morning a singular longing for flowers, a wish to stroll among the roses and carnations, and inhale their breath, as if it would revive me . . . . Yes; this morning I would rather stroll . . . among the gay flowers, than sit here and write. I feel so weary! (215)

The thought of Washington's "high purpose" and "fixed will" seems to increase young Longfellow's fatigue, his need to rest. The public virtues that Washington eminently embodied, duty and service, Longfellow in his public self could not help but represent; but in his more private self he craved a home like Craigie House in which he could he could give in to the earned exhaustion of the upstanding and upright. By invoking a house associated with the memory of Washington, Longfellow in Hyperion connects

himself with the ur-myth of the American republic even as he guides his literary-minded hero through the river valleys of Germany and Switzerland. The figure of Washington serves to bolster the "high" and "fixed" masculine authority Longfellow wishes to lay claim to in the very face of his drooping feminine fatigue. Having established his credentials as an American male, Longfellow can publicly assert his prerogative to be worn out in private.

"To a Child" (1845), an ode written after Longfellow had taken possession of the whole of Craigie House, further develops this conjunction of the themes of weariness and home with the historical person of George Washington. The poem makes casual mention of the features, the setting, and the history of Craigie House without actually naming or identifying the place, as if it were written for a limited audience of cognoscenti. Samuel Longfellow's headnote declared the poem to be where his brother "first strongly expressed that domestic sentiment which was to be so conspicuous in his after work" (207); "To a Child" in any event is the first poem in which Longfellow writes explicitly as a father. As such the poem, like "The Open Window," is primarily concerned with fatherly knowing: the father knows so much that the child does not know; the father knows so little about what the future will hold. The child's "gladness" as he patters through "these once solitary halls" is contrasted with the "shadows of sadness" that the all-too-memorious father feels emerging from "the sombre background of memory":

> Once, ah once, within these walls,
> One whom memory oft recalls,
> The Father of his Country, dwelt.
> And yonder meadows broad and damp
> The fires of the besieging camp
> Encircled with a burning belt.

Up and down these echoing stairs,
Heavy with the weight of cares,
Sounded his majestic tread;
Yes, within this very room
Sat he in those hours of gloom,
Weary both in heart and head.

But what are these grave thoughts to thee?
Out, out! into the open air!
Thy only dream is liberty,
Thou carest little how or where.

Longfellow's own "grave thoughts" in "To a Child," thoughts of the heavy responsibilities of great men in times of crisis, echo Washington's "grave thoughts" as he contemplated the future of the nation. Longfellow's still new role as father finds its counterpart in Washington's venerable role as "Father of his Country," and Longfellow's tiredness is prefigured and authorized by Washington's own. Craigie House is not named in the poem, though its Revolutionary history and views of the Charles and even its chimney tiles are referred to, and an uninformed reader would probably infer that Longfellow's house was once Washington's headquarters while wondering if this were a fact he should have known before, so much for granted does Longfellow seem to take it. That Longfellow took for granted his right to own such a house, that he seems never to have doubted that he belonged there, allowed him to use Craigie House in an almost incidental way as a foundation and anchor for his own paternalistic teachings. In the nineteenth-century's pedestalizing of the home, Longfellow could be all the more a father figure with Craigie House to call his own.

One indication of Longfellow's poetry's currency is that so many of his "reader-friends" borrow from the poetry while discussing the poet. For instance, the poet Richard

Henry Stoddard in an 1882 essay on Longfellow leans heavily on the patriarchal weariness trope of "To a Child" when he declares, "In [Longfellow's] chamber are still the gay-painted tiles peculiar to fine houses of the period; and upon their quaint and grotesque images the glancing eyes of the Poet's children now wonderingly linger, where the sad and doubtful ones of Washington must have often fallen as he meditated the darkness of the future."[38] Julia Ward Howe, in defending Longfellow against the charge of bookishness, uses of Longfellow the same image that Longfellow uses of Washington in "To a Child": "Mr. Longfellow did, indeed, dwell in the beautiful house of culture, but with a heart deeply sensitive to the touch of the humanity that lay encamped around it."[39] And a memorial address delivered not long after Longfellow's death suggests that his casual association of himself with Craigie House was indeed paying dividends in his public reputation. On July 12, 1882, before gathered Bowdoin alumni, the Reverend Daniel R. Goodwin had this to say of the late poet:

> His greatness was like that of our Washington, with whom his Cambridge residence associates his name. To some, this may seem overstrained panegyric. But I do not so intend or regard it. I say it because it forces itself upon me as simply and strikingly true. What Washington was in his sphere, such was Longfellow in his. What Washington was as a general, a statesman and a man, Longfellow was as a man, a writer and a poet; equal to his work, equal with himself, a leader in all, serene, solid, symmetrical, *teres atque rotundus*, good in his greatness, and great in his goodness. And this is the greatest kind of goodness. Proud may America be to produce more of the same type—men that are men.[40]

Early in his career as a literary man Longfellow had struggled to overcome his provincial society's ready identification of poetry with effeminacy. In his "Defense of Poetry" (1832), for instance, the young poet had felt the need to insist, "It does not, then, appear to be the necessary nor the natural tendency of poetry to enervate the mind, corrupt the

heart, or incapacitate us for performing the private and public duties of life."[41] The posthumous comparison of him with Washington, and the characterization of both as "men that are men," suggests that his argument that poetry could be socially useful and therefore unashamedly masculine had won the day. It would be hard to imagine greater evidence of Longfellow's ascendancy to a place as one of the nation's elders than this comparison of him with America's most mythically potent patriarch.

Coda: "The Children's Hour"

Longfellow's poetry is distinguished on the one hand by elevated diction, ubiquitous didacticism, esoteric allusiveness, and frequent glimpses into his own quasi-aristocratic lifestyle; it is distinguished on the other by metaphorical impoverishment (scarcity of figurative language), prosodic deflation (the flatness or limpness of so many of his poetic lines, including many of his best), narratological resourcelessness (a kind of blindness to possible plot complications that makes his verse narratives often baldly linear), and frequent glimpses into commonplace feelings of melancholy, weariness, and the like. Longfellow's place in the nineteenth-century imagination, in short, owed to some large degree to his ability to be at once a poet of power and powerlessness. Readers could revere him for his potency and feel tenderly toward his impotence; they could admire the strength and excuse the weakness, not least because the weakness was their own. Longfellow managed to be at once of the people and not of the people, and this paradox seems to have made him dearer to the people than if he had been more immediately of them.

Longfellow wished his poetry to be welcoming, hospitable, and unintimidating—even while he kept it, through perhaps not-so-intentional strategies, the slightest bit aloof and superior, as Craigie House itself was figured in the poetry as an ordinary American home, yet one elevated by its architectural distinctions, its historic associations, and the highmindedness of its present occupant. The superiority of the poet, as exemplified by the superiority of the house, made the democratic spirit of Longfellow's poetry seem all the more a generous if not strictly requisite gesture. Longfellow's "reader-friends" were grateful to the poet not least for his forbearance: his often high-sounding, moralistic, and learned poetry hinted that he could be terrible, but instead he practiced a sympathetic restraint, a paternal condescension, as voiced in the famous line, "Listen, my children, and you shall hear/Of the midnight ride of Paul Revere." This Washington-like "leader in all" did not perhaps have to write such pleasing, soothing, and available verse; that he did so seemed to show a paternal consideration for his readers, a consideration that was for Longfellow the duty of the democratic poet, and the duty perhaps even more imperatively of the gentry-class poet in a democracy.

Hence the family tableau of a poem like "The Children's Hour" (1859), a poem that mentions Longfellow's daughters by name, grows out of a democratic ethic of opening the doors and letting the reader in. Once in, the reader may be both awed by her proximity to the perfectly ordinary and therefore strikingly intimate scene the poem enacts and touched by the emotions such a scene could trigger in the poem's first-person narrator, the great poet himself. "The Children's Hour" is dominated by images of power and powerlessness, siege and captivity, that are used to question the alternately powerful

and powerless role of father. The poem begins with the narrator/father sitting by lamplight in his study at dusk, an hour that, the poem suggests, he customarily devotes to his children. These mannerly children, "[g]rave Alice, and laughing Allegra,/And Edith with golden hair," know that the hour has come when they may have their father's attention, and they seize it:

> A sudden rush from the stairway,
> A sudden raid from the hall!
> By three doors left unguarded
> They enter my castle wall!

The daughters appear initially to overwhelm the father ("[t]hey almost devour me with kisses"), but his power is such that he can make captive his capturers simply by reframing the game they are playing:

> Do you think, O blue-eyed banditti,
> Because you have scaled the wall,
> Such an old mustache as I am
> Is not a match for you all!
>
> I have you fast in my fortress,
> And will not let you depart,
> But put you down into the dungeon
> In the round-tower of my heart.
>
> And there will I keep you forever,
> Yes, forever and a day,
> Till the walls shall crumble to ruin
> And moulder in dust away!

Though the father manifests almost unlimited power in relation to the daughters, his fantasy of that power ("And there will I keep you forever,/Yes, forever and a day") suggests how limited his power really is. The father as jailor is a playful trope born out of the daughters' playful attempt to encircle and imprison him; yet underneath this

playfulness, "The Children's Hour" hints at the actual fragility of the father's hold on his daughters and his ultimate powerlessness to protect and safeguard them.

That indirect admission of powerlessness on the part of Longfellow is of a piece with his expressions elsewhere of his weariness; these gestures appear typically to emerge in relation to the poet's adopting the stance of father, patrician, authority. Despite recent arguments about the "feminization" of nineteenth-century culture, the mass of readers in nineteenth-century America sought out and clung to the voice of paternalistic, indeed patriarchal authority, mostly in the form of evangelical Christianity. Through his poetry Longfellow volunteered to fill what he felt to be the necessary, public role of father as he conceived it in essentially secular, moralistic terms. Yet Longfellow could not for long allow himself to be a poet of power without seeking to broaden the poetry's appeal to mass audiences by establishing his own humbling lack of power and identification with the powerless.

Conversely, he could not hold to the principled and democratic openness of a poem like "The Children's Hour" without hinting at his dividedness and ambivalence about its openness. For Longfellow's readers, the picturesque domestic episode of "The Children's Hour" was inevitably associated with the poet's own home, and family, and feelings. The anonymous author of A Day with the Poet Longfellow, for instance, quotes the poem in full immediately after praising Longfellow for "the love he bore to his own dear, motherless children"[42]—conveniently forgetting the fact that when the poem was written the mother was still very much alive. In anticipation perhaps of such crudely personalized responses, Longfellow turns this simple household lyric into a rather fierce

statement of his unwillingness to give his daughters up. Yet at the same time that Longfellow personalizes "The Children's Hour" by bringing his daughters into it, he generalizes the poem's meanings by linking them up with what he took to be the universal sentiments of fatherhood in his home-centered culture. The thematic paradoxes here, of openness and protectiveness, revelation and obfuscation, are characteristic of a poet whose essential literary dynamic is one of bifurcation, of duality without dialectic, of having it both ways at once without any loss of feeling or conviction.

Notes

1. William Charvat, The Profession of Authorship in America, 1800-1870, ed. Matthew J. Broccoli (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1968), p. 150.

2. William Winter, untitled reminiscence, in Samuel Longfellow, ed., Life of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, with Extracts from His Journals and Correspondence, 3 Vols., Vols. 12-14 of The Works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1891), Vol. 14, p. 352.

3. Charles Eliot Norton, untitled reminiscence from a speech given at the Massachusetts Historical Society, in Life, Vol. 14, p. 341.

4. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, The Hanging of the Crane and Other Poems of the Home (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Company, 1894).

5. Oliver Wendell Holmes, untitled reminiscence, in Life, Vol. 14, p. 340.

6. Cf. T.S. Eliot: "The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality." "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in The Sacred Wood (London: Faber, 1920), p. 53. Such a modernist sentiment would be completely alien to Longfellow.

7. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, The Poetical Works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Vol. 6 (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1966), Part Second, II, pp. 101-102.

8. William Charvat is of the opinion that Longfellow's lyrics, especially those written after his settling in at Craigie House, seldom speak personally. Of the first-person mode in "Weariness," for instance, Charvat says, "the weariness of 'I' is expressly an official and vicarious fatigue for you and me." Charvat notes that as his career progressed Longfellow resorted less and less to the first-person, save within the formalized conventions of the sonnet, and attributes this to the same lack of ego that makes this poet's private letters "the most barren of all literary letters in the nineteenth century." Charvat, The Profession of Authorship in America, p. 137. Longfellow's biographer Lawrance Thompson writes that not long after publication of the scandalously autobiographical Hyperion, Longfellow "came to his Yankee senses—and never again did he step from behind his ingrained reticences." Thompson, Young Longfellow, 1807-1843 (1938; New York: Octagon Books, 1969), p. xvi.

9. Longfellow, Works, Vol. 8, p. 412.

10. Ibid., Vol. 14, p. 342.

11. Quoted in Annie Fields, Friends and Authors (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1897), pp. 33-34.

12. Thompson, Young Longfellow, p. 339.

13. Fields, Friends and Authors, p. 26. Cf. Horace Gregory in the introduction to his Signet Classic paperback edition of Longfellow's poems: "It was all too apparent that [Longfellow] had his nearly mindless moments, when his desires, if anything, were all too clear, and therefore seemed nakedly naive." Gregory is referring principally to Longfellow's strategic "lapse" in thinking he might win Fanny by publishing Hyperion. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Evangeline and Selected Tales and Poems, ed. Horace Gregory (New York: Penguin Books, 1964), p. xii.

14. Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Old Cambridge (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1899), pp. 142, 144.

15. Samuel Longfellow, Life, Vol. 14, p. 342.

16. Charvat, Profession of Authorship in America, p. 142.

17. Stow Persons, The Decline of American Gentility (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973).

18. Blanche Roosevelt Tucker-Machetta, The Home Life of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Reminiscences of Many Visits at Cambridge and Nahant, during the years 1880, 1881, and 1882 (New York: G.W. Carleton and Co., Publishers, 1882). Tucker-Machetta gives a most extravagant account of her impressions of Longfellow at Craigie House: "One must visit the poet many times before realizing that the four walls contain objects of luxury many and rare, and that here are scattered the thousand and one beautiful things that a man of taste instinctively gathers round him. While the house in Cambridge is replete with *chef-d'oeuvres* inestimable in the world of art, yet never, with a single visit, could one carry away other souvenirs than that of a beautiful home and a harmonious household. It is the home of a poet, with the poet a dweller therein, himself the most perfect creation among his household gods" (p. 73).

19. Longfellow Remembrance Book, A Memorial for the Poet's Reader-Friends (Boston: D. Lothrop Company, 1888), p. 9. The "house built in Revolutionary days" and "graced with the culture known but to few American households" is Longfellow's boyhood home in Portland, Maine. Elsewhere fulsomely described as "a home-house full of hospitality" [Harriet Louis Bradley, "An Old House," in Longfellow Remembrance Book, p. 83], the memorialization of this early Longfellow abode points to a desire on the part of readers to connect Longfellow as a domestic poet with particular Longfellow residences.

20. Ibid., p. 76.

21. Herbert G. Jones, The Amazing Mr. Longfellow, Little Known Facts About a Well-Known Poet (Portland, Maine: The Longfellow Press, 1957), p. 1.

22. Newton Arvin, Longfellow: His Life and Work (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1963), p. 146. See Samuel Longfellow, Life, Vol. III, p. 302.

23. Fields, Friends and Authors, pp. 19-20.

24. Ibid., pp. 24-26.

25. Ella May Corson, Glimpses of Longfellow (Columbus, Ohio: Press of Fred J. Heer, 1903), p. 76.

26. Jones, The Amazing Mr. Longfellow, p. 30.

27. Edward Wagenknecht, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, His Poetry and Prose (New York: The Ungar Publishing Company, 1986), p. 11.

28. Charles Eliot Norton, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, A Sketch of His Life (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1907), pp. 26-27.

29. Arvin, Longfellow: His Life and Work, p. 54.

30. William Dean Howells, "The White Mr. Longfellow," in Literary Friends and Acquaintance, A Personal Retrospect of American Authorship (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1901), p. 196.

31. Emerson in his Journals, ed. Joel Porte (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 447.

32. Walt Whitman, The Collected Writings of Walt Whitman, ed. Floyd Stovall, Vol. II (New York: New York University Press, 1964), p. 659.

33. Bliss Perry, Park-Street Papers (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1905), p. 113.

34. Longfellow, Life, in Longfellow, Works, Vol. 12, p. 8.

35. See Thompson, Young Longfellow, "Introduction," pp. xviii-xxi, for a rather extensive overview of the injustices done to Longfellow's reputation by the Life. "[T]he official Life has stood alone for over fifty years as the most important source of biographical information concerning Longfellow. From it the general reader, the student, and the literary historian alike have been too prone to construct their view of the poet's character. And this Life gives an inaccurate, distorted picture which can no longer be used as a fair basis for interpretation" (xix). Written as a Harvard doctoral dissertation completed in 1938, Thomson's biography can amend the errors and limitations of the Life only through the year 1843, the year at which his narrative breaks off. Further, as Thomson's endnotes make abundantly clear, the Longfellow family repeatedly refused him permission to quote from crucial letters and journal entries, thereby leaving his tale of the young Longfellow only partly told. Since the publication of Young Longfellow, Longfellow's collected letters have been published in six volumes by Harvard University Press under the editorship of Andrew Hilen. Longfellow's unexpurgated journal has not yet been published. Hence sixty years after Thomson's lament that the Life has stood "for over fifty years as the most important source of biographical information concerning Longfellow," this "inaccurate, distorted picture" remains—in the absence of a better biography—an indispensable

tool to the student of Longfellow. As such it continues to distort Longfellow's work and life.

36. Letter dated July 5, 1841, in Andrew Hilen, ed., The Letters of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press), Vol. II, 1837-1843, p. 312. For Longfellow's home decorating, see Henry Wadsworth Longfellow Dana, "The Longfellow House," in Old-Time New England, the Bulletin for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, Vol. XXXVIII, July 1947-April 1948, p. 84.

37. Tucker-Machetta, The Home Life of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, pp. 23-24.

38. Richard Henry Stoddard, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, A Medley in Prose and Verse (New York: George V. Harlan & Co., Publishers, 1882), p. 69.

39. Julia Ward Howe, Margaret Fuller (Marchesa Ossoli) (1883; rpt., Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1970), p. 167.

40. Rev. Daniel R. Goodwin, Longfellow Memorial Address, before the Alumni of Bowdoin College, July 12, 1882 (Portland: Stephen Berry, Printer, 1882), p. 10.

41. Longfellow, "Defense of Poetry," North American Review, XXXIV, quoted in Thompson, Young Longfellow, p. 175.

42. A Day with the Poet Longfellow (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, undated), p. 40.

Chapter Three

Poetry Lessons:
Longfellow's Cultivation of a Readership

William Charvat, the great statistician of nineteenth-century American authors, calculated that ninety percent of Longfellow's poems contain "some favorable reference to poetry, poets, artists, art, scholars, or literature."[1] Whether this extraordinarily high figure is accurate or not, it gets at an essential element of Longfellow's self-reflexively literary poetry. Longfellow can call children "living poems" ("Children"), and can call a snowfall "the poem of the air" ("Snow-Flakes"), because he saw the world through the prism of poetry—or, as he often preferred to call it, "song." "Song" is for Longfellow a multi-functional term, broadly helpful because it serves to soften the often intimidating concept of "poetry." Longfellow can speak in poem after poem of "the holy land of Song," "a new land of song," "[t]he shining city of song," "sweet illusions of Song," "the gift and ministry of Song," "the flight of song," "[s]ome tower of song," "stately argosies of song," "the art of song," "the breath of song," a "miracle of song," the "right divine of song," etc.[2] He can entitle a poem "The Singers," "The Poet and His Songs" or, simply, "Song." An 1873 collection of poems is called Three Books of Song (1873). An earlier collection, The Belfry of Bruges and Other Poems (1845), presents a block of poems under the heading "Songs." The title of The Song of Hiawatha (1855) points to one way in which that sing-song poem may be read. "Song" was a fortuitous term for Longfellow quite obviously because it points to one of his poetry's great strengths, its euphony. Less obviously, it takes advantage of another of Longfellow's temperamental gifts, his fatherly

ability to exhort and challenge even as he soothes and reassures. "Song" is associated for Longfellow at once with immortal aesthetic achievement and simple heart-felt outpouring, with honorable social ideals and everyday household comforts; comprehending both "high" poetry and "popular" poetry, the term aims at some democratic meeting-place or middle ground between the two.

Some twentieth-century critics have suggested that Longfellow established his reputation by targeting his literary productions at two sets of readers: the culturally privileged on the one hand and the demotic masses on the other. Dana Gioia, for instance, divides Longfellow's lyric poetry along these lines: "There are the songlike poems written in a popular style, which is smooth, direct, and quick moving, and there are the crafted literary poems, which are stately, complex, and densely textured."[3] Norman Holmes Pearson argues a similar case in his essay "Both Longfellows." For Pearson, Longfellow was at once the coterie poet of "the court of Cambridge and of the Harvard Yard" and the "familiar bard" who could "through periodicals and collected-editions sing to the people by their firesides."[4] When Longfellow fails, therefore, it is due to an unfortunate intermingling of court poetry and popular poetry, the high and the low. Pearson finds his authority for this social bifurcation of Longfellow's poetry in a passage written by Longfellow himself:

> The same remark is true of the Middle Ages as of our own and of every age. If the state of society is shadowed forth in its literature, then this literature must necessarily represent two distinct and strongly marked characters: one, of the castle and the court; another, of the middle classes and the populace;—the former, elegant, harmonious, and delicate; the latter, rude, grotesque, and vulgar. Each of these classes has its own peculiar merits . . . .[5]

In these sentences from a survey essay on "Ancient French Romances" written while he was still in his twenties, Longfellow lays out a schema of literary making to which his poetry never conformed. Longfellow's nineteenth-century American audience was made up neither of a highly cultured aristocracy nor of a boorish rabble, but rather of readers from somewhere in between. Likewise, his poetry was neither purely "elegant" nor wholly "vulgar," but rather some unprecedented mixture of the two. Indeed, Longfellow's great popular success in his lifetime can be shown to stem from just the "confusion of audiences" that Pearson finds to be "[w]hat is chiefly disturbing in Longfellow's poems."[6] The poems seek both to popularize art poetry and to suffuse popular poetry with the aura of art.

The poems about "song" are therefore, in one fundamental sense, poems about cultural hierarchy—a subject that would naturally be central in the thinking of an author like Longfellow who is at once a conservative and a populist. Recent criticism has amply shown how all the great mid-nineteenth century American writers had to come to terms with the emergence of a vigorous popular culture.[7] As a professor at the premiere New England college and a public poet, a contributor to the Boston-based *North American Review* and to mass-market periodicals out of Philadelphia and New York, a son of an old New England gentry family and an arriviste in clannish Boston society,[8] Longfellow filled a unique niche in the social history of nineteenth-century America. Contrary to Pearson in "Both Longfellows," Longfellow's was never, strictly speaking, poetry for the elites or the masses but always rather a poetry of the refined, genteel, and aspiring middle classes.[9] This broad swath of American society was made up of the respectable folk who

borrowed from lending libraries, attended lyceum lectures, and piously dedicated themselves to the pursuit of self-culture and the moral improvement of their children. "Excelsior," indeed, that "banner with the strange device" that adorns one of this poet's best-known poems, might be taken as the motto of these readers: higher! On the other hand, Longfellow understood that were he to aim too high he would risk leaving his readers behind. Fortunately for his career as a middlebrow poet,[10] Longfellow's literary receptivity, though impressively catholic, was ever so slightly obtuse, so that he sometimes could not get much out of the "bards sublime" beyond the evident fact that their poetry was "thrilling" or "wondrous" or "mysterious" or "beautiful." Longfellow's sonnet on Milton, for instance, with its interest restricted to the "majestic cadence" of Milton's lines, reveals a disappointing lack of interest in the content of Milton's thought. Roy Harvey Pearce ties Longfellow's limitations as a reader to his limitations as a writer: the author of The Continuity of American Poetry found Longfellow, like James Russell Lowell and Oliver Wendell Holmes, to be "an upper-class academic whose feeling of *noblesse oblige* was so full as to dull his sensibility to art which might be beyond the capacities of the great audience to which he was obliged."[11] The very same *noblesse oblige* that curbed his own aesthetic powers seemed to require of Longfellow that he set himself to develop the aesthetic powers of his readers. This was a congenial assignment, since it allowed him to expound poetically upon the subject that came most naturally to him: poetry.

The Teacher as Poet

As early as 1827, the twenty-year old writer, already two years out of Bowdoin, was publishing in the *Atlantic Souvenir* gift-book on "The Spirit of Poetry." This exercise in blank verse, whose heavy debts to Wordsworth and Bryant are evident in the very first line ("There is a quiet spirit in these woods"), is recognizably Longfellow's because the sylvan world it depicts is ruled by poetry. Many of the familiar tropes that Longfellow draws on throughout his career make their first appearance in these lines: the "gifted bards," who here seek out the woods for their meditations; the "old poetic legends" that are here repeated "[i]n many a lazy syllable" by the groves, mountains, vales, lakes, and trees; the ennobling "spirit of poetry" whose presence, as described here, "shall uplift thy thoughts from earth,/As to the sunshine and the pure, bright air/Their tops the green trees lift." Poetry is already not only the vehicle but the freight, not only the form but the subject. Its moral powers, aesthetic charms, and capacity to uplift are not left implicit in the poem's function and purpose, but are made explicit in the poem's rhetoric.

Longfellow's first collection of poems, Voices of the Night (1839), represents his return to poetry-writing after a hiatus of some ten years while he traveled in Europe and established himself as a teacher of European language and literature first at Bowdoin and later at Harvard. The "Prelude" to this collection picks up where "The Spirit of Poetry" leaves off, imagining the poetry-minded author fleeing the city and seeking the "wood-lands wide" in search of "the green land of dreams,/The holy land of song." Yet in the "solemn wood" the author experiences a crisis of vision: are the "themes" of his "Song" to be primarily literary ("old legends," "traditions," and "tales") or are they to be primar-

ily social and moral ("the heavens all black with sin," "the fearful wintry blast" of disappointment and death)? Typically, Longfellow's resolution to the dilemma is not one of either/or but both/and:

> "Look then, into thine heart, and write!
> Yes, into Life's deep stream!
> All forms of sorrow and delight,
> All solemn Voices of the Night,
> That can soothe thee, or affright,—
> Be these henceforth thy theme."

His poetry, in other words, could be both self-reflexively literary and socially beneficial. Whether any given poem emphasized a moral or aesthetic "theme," it could have a salutary effect on the reader. In this way Longfellow found his social justification for going on to write poetry which included so many fables of poetic power, versified defenses of poetry, and panegyrics to particular poets. Longfellow's poems on "song" were perhaps never as widely read as the handful of poems that became household bywords, treasured possessions; but they were crucial in contributing to his cultural authority and intellectual prestige, which in turn laid the groundwork for his fame in the nineteenth century.

The felt responsibility of handing down the literary treasures of the past informed Longfellow's work as a teacher, scholar, editor, and translator. Early in his career, in reviewing a new edition of Sidney's "Defense of Poetry" for the *North American Review*, Longfellow had sought to argue against the widely-held equation of poetry with effeminacy by claiming that the great heroic poets—Homer, Dante, Milton—were men "whose minds were bathed in song, and not weakened."[12] In sonnets written late in his career Longfellow returns to the "gifted bards" of the great tradition and praises Dante's "sacred

song" ("Dante") and Keats's "sweet singing" ("Keats"); he hears in Milton "[t]he might undulations of thy song" ("Milton") and remarks Chaucer's "old age/Made beautiful with song" ("Chaucer"). (In another sonnet, "Woodstock Park," he declares Chaucer "supreme" "in the realm of Fiction and of Song.") In a sonnet to Tennyson, "Wapentake," Longfellow admires "the mastery, which is thine,/in English song." At the other end of the cultural spectrum, Longfellow put his stamp of approval on "song" of a less elevated sort. It is a commonplace that he introduced into American poetry an enormous range of meters and stanzas, many of them based on European models; this experimentation led to the writing of poems which forsake iambics in favor of relaxed trochaic lines, such as "My Lost Youth": "I remember the black wharves and the slips,/And the sea-tides tossing free;/And Spanish sailors with bearded lips,/And the beauty and mystery of the ships,/And the magic of the sea." The unrhymed refrain of this poem ("A boy's will is the wind's will,/And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts"), adapted from what Longfellow in the poem refers to variously as "a verse of a Lapland song," "that sweet old song," and "the strange and beautiful song," suggests the emotional force of recollected song, even if that song does not come with the pedigree of the name of a famous author. Professor Longfellow evidently did not need to confine his admiration to the established and great authors or saddle his poetry with what Dana Gioia calls "metrical puritanism."[13] In this poem, as everywhere in his poetry, Longfellow was teaching his readers what poetry—what "song"—could be.

His translations, too, offered instruction in the art of poetry.[14] The Poets and Poetry of Europe (1845), perhaps Longfellow's most important contribution to the spread

of European culture in the new world, shows Longfellow working to broaden American readers' appreciation of poets and poetry both minor and major. In this catch-all volume art poetry promiscuously rubs elbows with folk poetry, the standard authors with the unheralded, and the great European national literatures (German, French, Italian) with the less celebrated (Portuguese, Dutch, Swedish). In his perfectly conventional introductions to the respective literatures and to the individual authors, Longfellow finds virtues abounding in all. German literature, for instance, is "illustrious with the names of Herder, Wieland, Goethe, and Schiller," but "the great mass of Popular Songs, of uncertain date, and by unknown authors" must also be noticed:

> Among their thousand sweet and mingled odors criticism often finds itself at fault, as the hunter's hounds on Mount Hymettus were thrown off their scent by the fragrance of its infinite wild-flowers. They exhibit the more humble forms of human life, as seen in streets, workshops, garrisons, mines, fields, and cottages; and give expression to the feelings of hope, joy, longing, and despair, from thousands of hearts which have no other records than these.[15]

The great authors are in no sense overshadowed by the humble, but the complete literary record, as Longfellow would have it, requires that the voices of both be heard. Longfellow in this anthology as well as in his poetry devoted himself to expanding the taste and judgment of readers by advocating works of less than the very first rank; in so doing, perhaps inescapably, he lent his considerable authority to bolstering the very notion of cultural rank.

Longfellow's lyrics on poetic subjects frequently ask readers to make distinctions between "high" poetry and "popular" poetry; yet they are also shaped by the consideration that too pronounced a division between these poetic registers might undermine the

democratic ethos to which Longfellow was deeply committed and to which his socially ambitious readers also wished to subscribe. Whether out of aristocratic largesse or democratic principle (or both at once) on Longfellow's part, the term "song" as he uses it gives the appearance of gathering a heterogeneous body of works embracing all of Western literature into a unified and harmonious polis, a "shining city of song." On the other hand, Longfellow's numerous poems about "song" frequently have the effect of reminding readers of stratification within that polis. Hence even as he attempted to repair invidious comparisons by imagining a realm of song which would include "all bards" ("Prometheus") on an equal footing of honorable aspiration, Longfellow participated in the great nineteenth-century bifurcation of "high" and "low" culture, brought on to some large degree in America as a reaction to widespread literacy. The founder of the *North American Review*, William Tudor, formulated the paternalistic mission of that influential periodical in these terms: "We are fully aware that the publick stands in need of literary guardians, and that it will not answer in any province of learning, to trust entirely to individual self-government."[16] The old gentry elite, in other words, would out of civic duty take in hand the cultivation of the public, but would increasingly rely on cultural distinctions to reenforce social hierarchies.[17] Longfellow's poetry underscored these cultural distinctions, but did so with such a light touch, with so much sympathy for those who found high culture hard work, that it could appeal to broad audiences while still addressing itself to aesthetic and literary concerns. America could not only feel proud of its native son's elevated learning but grateful for his willingness to share it with them without making them feel ignorant and inadequate.

High Poetry and Humble Poetry

In 1844 Longfellow edited an anthology of anonymous poems, The Waif, and wrote for it a proem, "The Day Is Done." Although in one sense this poem is a typical domestic lyric, idealizing the home as a sanctified space apart from the increasingly chaotic public sphere, in another sense the poem may be read as a primer on literary hierarchy. The two, in fact, were not unrelated, since in promoting domestic ideology as well as in affirming the indelible greatness of the great authors while legitimizing the minor authors, Longfellow was contributing to social order and stability. The narrator of "The Day Is Done," experiencing at dusk "[a] feeling of sadness and longing," asks his beloved to read him a poem:

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

The songs of the "humbler poet" have a utility and a simple piety that make them, if not quite the equals, then at least not the lowly inferiors of the "strains" of the "bards sublime." Indeed, "The Day Is Done" insists on a kind of aesthetic egalitarianism, whereby the lessers are made equal to their acknowledged betters through an aesthetic transvaluation. All the poets, the great as well as the small, the waifs as well as the well-established, may have a voice as citizens in Longfellow's republic of song. At the same time, contradictorily, the traditional categories and hierarchies will go fundamentally unchallenged. "The Day Is Done" never doubts the grandeur of the "grand old masters," never disputes the sublimity of the "bards sublime," and above all never calls into question the usefulness of terms like "grandeur" and "sublimity" in speaking of certain kinds of literary work.

Even though the term "song" as he employs it is often meant to obscure distinctions between "sublime" poetry and "humble" poetry, Longfellow's poems thus typically celebrate poetry by drawing on hierarchical imagery. The towering achievement of the great poet is figured in "Prometheus, or the Poet's Forethought" (1854), for instance, as the "heavenward aspiration" of "the Poet, Prophet, Seer": Dante, Milton, and Cervantes are named as examples of those whose "darkened lives" have been crowned with a "transcendent" glory. Yet "Prometheus" ends by acknowledging that though many know "the rapture of creating," few poets are genuinely "heaven-scaling":

> Though to all there is not given
> Strength for such sublime endeavor,
> Thus to scale the walls of heaven,
> And to leaven with fiery leaven
> All the hearts of men for ever;

Yet all bards, whose hearts unblighted
  Honor and believe the presage,
Hold aloft their torches lighted,
Gleaming through the realms benighted,
  As they onward bear the message!

The "onward" of the last line displaces the "upward" that the poem had seemed headed for, as if Longfellow in the last stanzas pulls back from the vision of an elect company of poetic greatness that had initially inspired him. "[A]ll bards" may carry on in the Promethean tradition, says Longfellow, so long as their "hearts unblighted/Honor and believe the presage": in this genteel formulation, the poet's elevation to the status of "bard" depends not so much on his genius as on his decency.

In the companion poem, "Epimetheus, or the Poet's Afterthought" (1854), Longfellow continues ambivalently to speak of poetic creativity in terms of soaring and sinking. He considers the catastrophic gap between the "wild, bewildering fancies" of the poet's ecstatic journey through "the land of the Ideal" and the "[j]arring discord, wild confusion" that the poet finds in the actual poems he produces. Addressing his own poems ("O my songs!") Longfellow finds in them "Disenchantment! Disillusion!," a disastrous falling-off from the "secret rapture" that had supported him during their composition:

Not with steeper fall nor faster,
  From the sun's serene dominions,
Not through brighter realms nor vaster,
In swift ruin and disaster,
  Icarus fell with shattered pinions!

The poet's experience may be that his poems fall flat, but "Epimetheus" joins "Prometheus" in suggesting that poetry is an inherently noble and ennobling art: "Weary hearts

by thee are lifted,/Struggling souls by thee are strengthened," etc. In "Epimetheus" Longfellow modestly associates himself with those poets whose achievements fall short of their ambitions, but whose poetry nonetheless is personally rewarding and socially beneficial. Longfellow proposes in "Prometheus" and "Epimetheus" that he, like his readers, can only marvel at and admire the monumental achievements the great poets have handed down to "us" mere mortals. By suggesting his own middling stature as compared with these giants, he is able to position himself as intermediary between the Promethean poets he sings of and the middle-class Americans he sings to.

These Promethean poets sing from on high. In "Birds of Passage" (1845), Longfellow indulges the fantasy that the songs of migrating birds are not their own but are rather "the throngs/Of the poet's songs," raining down from above: "This is the cry/Of souls, that high/On toiling, beating pinions, fly." In "Carillon," the proem to an 1845 collection, The Belfry of Bruges and Other Poems, Longfellow imagines that "the poet's airy rhymes" emerge from "the belfry of his brain" and are "[s]cattered downward" upon the city below. "Rain in Summer" likewise celebrates the power of the poet, who in his imagination follows the raindrops downward "through chasms and gulfs profound,/To the dreary fountain-head/Of lakes and rivers under ground" and then sees them transformed, on high, into "the bridge of colors seven/Climbing up once more to heaven." Not surprisingly, Longfellow also uses these hierarchical metaphors in speaking of individual poets. "Thy fame is blown abroad from all the heights," Longfellow writes in the sonnet sequence "Divina Commedia," addressing Dante, and in the sonnet "Shakespeare" Longfellow joins many another reader in calling this author "the Poet paramount." The

late poem "Possibilities" (1882), a revery about the poetic wonders that the unknown future might hold, begins with the question, "Where are the Poets, unto whom belong/The Olympian heights?" Longfellow never doubted that such heights were real, or rather that the perdurable myth of "Olympian heights" reflected sound and unshakeable aesthetic facts.

As "The Day Is Done" suggests, Longfellow was also able to sing the praises of less lofty poetry. "Oliver Basselin" (1855) pays homage to the ribald and earthy poetry of the medieval French folk poet: "True, his songs were not divine,/ Were not songs of [a] high art," Longfellow writes, but commends Basselin for writing "Songs that rang/Another clang,/ Songs that lowlier hearts could feel." In the unrhymed poem "To An Old Danish Song Book" (1845), Longfellow imagines that the time-worn old book of songs he is musing upon has been thumb-marked and wine-stained "by hands that clasped thee rudely/At the alehouse"; the book is to be treated as an "old friend" all the more because its "ballads" and "ditties" have been sung by both the high-born of old Denmark (the Vikings, the "court of old King Hamlet," "Prince Frederick's Guard") and the low-born ("Peasants in the field,/Sailors on the roaring ocean,/Students, tradesmen, pale mechanics,/All have sung them.") Robert Burns is commemorated in the late poem "Robert Burns" (1879) as a poet-ploughman who "[s]ings at his task/So clear, we know not if it is/The laverock's song we hear, or his,/Nor care to ask." Burns's poetry is of the practical, local, neighborly sort whose virtues are celebrated in "The Arrow and the Song" (1845):

> I shot an arrow into the air,
> It fell to earth, I knew not where;

For, so swiftly it flew, the sight
Could not follow it in its flight.

I breathed a song into the air,
It fell to earth, I knew not where;
For who has sight so keen and strong,
That it can follow the flight of song?

Long, long afterward in an oak
I found the arrow, still unbroke;
And the song, from beginning to end,
I found again in the heart of a friend.

The "friend" in whose heart the arrow-like song has landed was perhaps not a friend before its arrival, but certainly is one afterward. Indeed, the reader of this poem is participating in the very process the poem articulates, a process that by the poem's logic makes the reader Longfellow's friend. "Song" in this sentimental lyric is an instrument of social bonding, a means by which individuals can be knit together in communities. And this can be so because the poet here is not chanting sublime strains from the heights but rather, seemingly, sending out poems directed at friends and potential friends at his own social and intellectual level. "The Arrow and the Song" in this way seeks to demystify and domesticate "song," acknowledging the difficulty of tracking a poem's trajectory but reassuring readers that the best poems will not be ethereal but terrestrial and even mundane.

If Longfellow's poems about "song" use hierarchical imagery to introduce readers to distinctions between different registers of poetry, Longfellow could never make his own poetry fit neatly into either the higher or the lower registers. Pearson's view that Longfellow pitched one strain of his poetry to the educated elite and another to the masses, while not entirely incorrect, needs to be revised to take account of the ways

Longfellow's poetry seems always to veer, and often to sag, toward the middle. The popular ballad "The Skeleton in Armor" (1840) and the artistically ambitious closet drama The Golden Legend (1851) will serve to exemplify this tendency. In correspondence with his father Longfellow referred to "The Skeleton in Armor" as a "national ballad," like "The Wreck of the Hesperus," which dates from the same period. To another correspondent Longfellow wrote, "The *National Ballad* is a virgin soil here in New England; and there are good materials. Besides, I have a great notion of working upon *people's feelings*."[18] The emphasis on "people's" is Longfellow's, but "The Skeleton in Armor" turns out to be a thoroughly middlebrow performance, enshrining a characteristic mixture of middle-class norms and high art references. The principle reference is to "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner": a "fearful guest" appears in the first stanza and insists upon telling his sea-narrative, which he does in "a dull voice of woe." As first printed in the *Knickerbocker*, "The Skeleton in Armor" even came with marginal notes á la Coleridge, although unlike Coleridge's amplificatory notes, Longfellow's mechanically restate the sense of the stanza to which they correspond. Longfellow's narrative, which begins with the old Viking's boasts of youthful feats, soon deteriorates into a story of the importance of home and family: the Viking tells how he steals a "blue-eyed maid" from her disapproving father ("She was a Prince's child,/I but a Viking wild," etc.) and sails with her westward across the sea to the new world, where they settle down in a tower with a good view and contentedly raise a family. The "dull voice of woe" with which the Viking's ghost is said to tell his tale is finally quite unbelievable, since this tale meant to

work "upon the *people's* feelings" is in fact one of bourgeois contentment, not dissimilar from Longfellow's own life experience.

In a journal entry toward the end of 1849 Longfellow denigrates his recently-issued volume of poems, The Seaside and the Fireside, as "[a]nother stone rolled over the hill top!," but much more warmly turns to the subject of his next project: "And now I long to try a loftier strain, the sublimer Song whose broken melodies have for so many years breathed through my soul in the better hours of life, and which I trust and believe will ere long unite themselves into a symphony not all unworthy the sublime theme."[19] This "sublimer Song" was to be Christus: A Mystery, a trilogy of dramatic poems intended to illustrate the history of Christianity in the age of Christ, the middle ages, and the modern age, and exemplifying, respectively, the virtues of Hope, Faith, and Charity.[20] Longfellow worked first on the drama set in the middle ages, The Golden Legend, which he completed and published in 1851 (the full series given the collective title Christus did not come out until 1872 when, Charvat notes, "It was a flat failure"[21]). The Golden Legend is a Faust story whose hero, Prince Henry, does not aspire to esoteric learning or extremes of experience or even immortal life, but suffers rather from a vague malaise, overseen somehow by Lucifer, which can be cured only if a maiden willingly gives her life for his: "The only remedy that remains/Is the blood that flows from a maiden's veins." Although Elsie, a young peasant, freely volunteers for such a fate out of love for the Prince, and travels with him through a medieval landscape peopled by minnesingers, monks, and scholastics to meet her demise at the appointed place, at the last minute he cannot go through with it and marries her instead. This "sublimer Song," despite its lofty

intentions, turns out to be of a piece, thematically and ideologically, with "The Skeleton in Armor," the "national ballad" that Longfellow evidently hoped would appeal to the masses. Both are romances that wend their way toward a marriage between a noble and a commoner through which the haughtiness of the one and the lowliness of the other are mutually corrected, with apparently happy outcomes.

Courting the Middle-Class Reader

As magazine and book publishing thrived in the antebellum period and reading material of all sorts proliferated, the prestige of poetry as the "highest" of literary forms made it incumbent upon the socially ambitious to have some glancing familiarity with the famous poets.[22] Beneficiaries of a public or academy education, who had come to associate reading with the acquisition of refinement and the moral duty of self-culture, could feel especially virtuous while reading Longfellow's poetry about "song": meta-poetically pondering the high mysteries of poetic lore, this poetry seemed all the more "genuinely poetic" for its overtly literary subject matter. Hence Longfellow's learning enhanced his status and authority among a middle class reading public learning to value the appearance of highmindedness as a mark of social distinction, especially if it did not give rise to highfalutin jargon or revolutionary formulations. Not the least of Longfellow's achievements in his poems about "song" was that of mixing together potentially arcane literary lore and reassuringly safe sentimental platitudes. The same audience that found Emerson incomprehensible found Longfellow challenging exactly to the right degree: not in the clouds but firmly anchored on the ground—on a substantial hill, say, rather than a

mountaintop. "This only is reading, in a high sense," wrote Thoreau in Walden, "not that which lulls us as a luxury and suffers the nobler faculties to sleep the while, but what we have to stand on tip-toe to read . . . ."[23] Longfellow's poems about "song" were permissible output for a public poet in part because they made readers believe they were in fact reading "in a high sense," standing on tip-toe to fathom the deep poetic lore to which the poetry constantly referred, even though the more sophisticated might suspect they were being spoon-fed predigested literary morsels. In "The Ladder of St. Augustine" (1850) Longfellow wrote, "We have not wings, we cannot soar;/But we have feet to scale and climb/By slow degrees, by more and more,/The cloudy summits of our time." The poems about "song" gave Longfellow's readers the edifying impression that they were—perhaps ever so gradually—climbing.

Longfellow's cultivation of a middle-class readership comes into clearer focus if he is contrasted with his Cambridge neighbor and Harvard successor James Russell Lowell, who in the dialect poem The Biglow Papers spoke out plainly against the war with Mexico in the voice of the uneducated but commonsensical New England villager. Lowell had the literary reputation and the social status to allow him safely to invoke the provincial persona of Hosea Biglow, but it still evidently created anxieties. In his poem "James Russell Lowell," for instance, John Greenleaf Whittier makes sure to pay homage to Lowell's high learning before praising his sympathies with the folk: "From purest wells of English undefiled/None deeper drank than he, the New World's child,/Who in the language of their farm-fields spoke/The wit and wisdom of New England folk,/Shaming a monstrous wrong."[24] In Whittier's view, Lowell's "English undefiled," the pure English

of Spenser's Chaucer, acts as a shield to keep him uncontaminated during his linguistic slumming.

Lowell had a more robust, less dichotomous view of poetry's possibilities than either Longfellow or Whittier, and in the whimsically-rhymed doggerel couplets of "A Fable for Critics" he sets himself to defending Longfellow's controversial use of hexameters in Evangeline, A Tale of Acadie (1847). Lowell first establishes his own preference for the classical meters in the original ("I may be too partial, the reason, perhaps, o't is/That I've heard the old blind man recite his own rhapsodies"), but finds that Longfellow's translation represents a high achievement: "But, set that aside, and 'tis truth that I speak,/Had Theocritus written in English, not Greek,/I believe that his exquisite sense would scarce change a line/In that rare, tender, virgin-like pastoral Evangeline."[25] Lowell's self-deprecating prosody in The Biglow Papers and "A Fable for Critics" contrasts with Longfellow's self-consciously weighty prosody in Evangeline and shows something of the brittleness of Longfellow's poetizing, a condition traceable to the precarious status of poetry at the time of Longfellow's advent. Indeed, the comparative freedom of Lowell, twelve years Longfellow's junior, is a sign that as America's leading poet Longfellow had instructed the reading public well, paving the way for poetic spirits to come. Longfellow had to devote himself so fully to making poetry and poets respectable—even by such aesthetically questionable feats as the adaptation of classical hexameter to English—that he could little afford to make poetic use of "the language of [the] farm-fields."

Longfellow as a writer, in short, was attuned to the fact that his readers represented a potential readership, a class of individuals who sought cultivation and who could be cultivated. Typically, he encouraged their habits of reading by figuring himself, in his poetry, as a reader. The poetry guides readers in the kind of uncritical, appreciative reading that he favored.[26] Longfellow's journal entry for November 6, 1849, for instance, notes that that day he had written a poem called "The Singers" "to show the excellence of different kinds of song."[27] This short poem postulates three types of poets: the first Orpheus-like "[p]laying the music of our dreams" on a lyre as he wanders through the woods, the second Homer-like singing "in the marketplace" to "the listening crowd," the third Dante-like singing "in cathedrals dim and vast." Which is the greatest of the three? The final stanzas of the poem introduce a "great Master," a kind of magisterial and God-like reader, to pronounce upon the problem:

> But the great Master said, "I see
> No best in kind, but in degree;
> I gave a various gift to each,
> To charm, to strengthen, and to teach.
>
> "These are the three great chords of might,
> And he whose ear is tuned aright
> Will hear no discord in the three,
> But the most perfect harmony."

The divine plan requires not only these "great chords of might" but also an audience whose ears are "tuned aright," who will know in what attitude of reverence and gratitude the "great chords" are best received. Longfellow's many verse tributes to individual authors propound and exemplify the spirit in which literary greatness was to be honored. "How our hearts glowed and trembled as she read," Longfellow wrote in his "Sonnet, On

Mrs. Kemble's Readings from Shakespeare" (1849), after a series of dramatic readings in Boston given by the actress Fanny Kemble Butler. Longfellow puts himself in the position of reader or audience in such poems, modeling for his readers—like a professor in the classroom for his students—the sort of appreciative statements a sophisticated audience might make in response to literary matter both sublime and humble.

In addition to cultivating connoisseurship of poetry among middle-class readers, Longfellow's poems sought to develop the consumer market for poetry by modeling a love of books as cherished household objects. "To an Old Danish Song Book" presents the author musing upon a well-worn volume: "Welcome, my old friend,/Welcome to a foreign fireside . . . ." "Dedication" (1850), the proem to The Seaside and the Fireside which was strategically placed in *Graham's* and in the *Boston Transcript* to coincide with the publication of that collection, contains this ungrammatical stanza plugging book ownership: "The pleasant books, that silently among/Our household treasures take familiar places,/And are to us as if a living tongue/Spake from the printed leaves or pictured faces!"[28] In "Travels by the Fireside" (1874), written as proem to the thirty-one volume anthology Poems of Places that Longfellow edited, Longfellow again extolls the genteel pleasures of a private library: "It [the rain] drives me in upon myself/And to the fireside gleams,/To pleasant books that crowd my shelf/And still more pleasant dreams." The book, as these poems suggest, was an indispensable ornament to the middle-class home, a symbol of domestic refinement and fireside leisure. As the proud owner of a historic home whose study housed the sizeable book collection that he had built up over a lifetime, Longfellow was highly attentive to the material form in which his own books

were published. Edgar Allan Poe enviously attributed the popular success of Longfellow's writings to "the luxurious manner in which, as merely physical books, they have been presented to the public"[29]; while this charge carries a grain of truth, it fails to acknowledge the range of editions which Longfellow and his publishers brought out to appeal to a range of audiences. For instance, in 1845 the Philadelphia publishers Carey and Hart brought out the first edition of Longfellow's collected poems, a deluxe illustrated volume priced at $3.50. Longfellow urged the issuance of a "cheap" edition, and in 1846 the Harper brothers published a paper-covered collected poems priced at fifty cents. It is typical, however, that the most successful of the collected editions issued in Longfellow's lifetime, the Blue and Gold edition of 1856, which sold 40,000 copies through 1864, was priced at a mid-range $1.75.[30] Though Longfellow's books, as well as his "content," appealed both to elite and to mass readers, it was to the upwardly-aspiring middle that they were primarily addressed. Whitman's remark that Longfellow "struck a splendid average" nicely suggests the cultural middle ground that Longfellow staked out as his own, with unprecedented success.[31]

Coda: "The Secret of the Sea"

Longfellow was often moved to lyric outpouring by the fullness of feeling awakened in him by literary reflection; and perhaps the strongest of Longfellow's poems of literary response is "The Secret of the Sea" (1848), first published in the 1850 collection The Seaside and the Fireside:

Ah! what pleasant visions haunt me
  As I gaze upon the sea!
All the old romantic legends,
  All my dreams, come back to me.

Sails of silk and ropes of sandal,
  Such as gleam in ancient lore;
And the singing of the sailors,
  And the answer from the shore!

Most of all, the Spanish ballad
  Haunts me oft, and tarries long,
Of the noble Count Arnaldos
  And the sailor's mystic song.

Like the long waves on a sea-beach,
  Where the sand as silver shines,
With a soft, monotonous cadence,
  Flow its unrhymed lyric lines;—

Telling how the Count Arnaldos,
  With his hawk upon his hand,
Saw a fair and stately galley,
  Steering onward to the land;—

How he heard the ancient helmsman
  Chant a song so wild and clear,
That the sailing sea-bird slowly
  Poised upon the mast to hear,

Till his soul was full of longing,
  And he cried, with impulse strong,—
"Helmsman! for the love of heaven,
  Teach me, too, that wondrous song!"

"Wouldst thou,"—so the helmsman answered,
  "Learn the secret of the sea?
Only those who brave its dangers
  Comprehend its mystery!"

In each sail that skims the horizon,
  In each landward-blowing breeze,
I behold that stately galley,
  Hear those mournful melodies;

Till my soul is full of longing
For the secret of the sea,
And the heart of the great ocean
Sends a thrilling pulse through me.

At the center of this poem is a retelling of an episode from an anonymous Spanish ballad concerning "the noble Count Arnaldos" which itself tells of the "wondrous song" of an "ancient helmsman." The song of this helmsman fills the "soul" of Count Arnaldos with "longing," even as it does the narrator of "The Secret of the Sea" each time, the narrator claims, he sees a "sail that skims the horizon" or feels a "landward-blowing breeze." The narrator of Longfellow's poem, wrought to a pitch of longing by this poem within a poem, celebrates both a literary artifact that he is enchanted by (the ballad of Count Arnaldos) and, embedded within that artifact, a fictional representation of poetry-making (the helmsman's "chant[ing] a song so wild and clear"). Longfellow's soul-thrilled narrator (call him Longfellow himself) is at two orders of remove from the "sailor's mystic song" that so moves him, a distance that he perhaps tries to bridge by associating his own urgent and admiring response with that of Count Arnaldos, who can't refrain from calling out, "Helmsman! for the love of heaven,/Teach me, too, that wondrous song!"

The helmsman's song, "so wild and clear" that even the sea-birds pause to listen, voices the primordial, wild, vital essence of poetry, and in identifying his own response with that of Count Arnaldos, Longfellow finds himself imploring some sort of insight into the untrammeled ocean of poetic creativity. Yet Count Arnaldos is himself radically separated from that realm, standing upon the shore and overwhelmed with impotent admiration for the song whose mystery can be comprehended only by those who brave

the sea; and Longfellow's narrator, an admirer of the Spanish ballad who in his own poem can offer only a second-hand description of "the sailor's mystic song," must be content with claiming for himself a momentary understanding, "a thrilling pulse." "The Secret of the Sea" appears to be a poem about how to gain access to "the origin of all poems," in Walt Whitman's phrase, but the upshot poignantly suggests the unbridgeable distance between Longfellow and the great mysteries of poetry. Longfellow too stands longingly upon the shore ("Ah! what pleasant visions haunt me/As I gaze upon the sea!"), a stranger to the mariners' deep secrets, a foreigner. Just as "the noble Count Arnaldos" is forever separate from the secrets of the sea of literature, so the noble poet Longfellow may be. But that does not mean they each will not be properly moved by, and know how properly to appreciate, "wondrous song" when they hear it.

Here, as elsewhere, Longfellow knows how to turn his limitations into strengths. The hyper-literary poem is finally satisfying precisely because it so fully acknowledges its own irrecoverable distance from the "sailor's mystic song" that, remotely and silently, haunts both the Spanish ballad (included in translation in Longfellow's Poets and Poetry of Europe under the title "Count Arnaldos") and Longfellow's lyrical homage to that ballad. Yet even while "The Secret of the Sea" concedes Longfellow's alienation from the hidden roots of "song," it bolsters his public identity as a connoisseur of poetry who knew how to communicate his own dignified and suitable ardor. The important point is that Longfellow's ardor never breaks the bounds of genteel decorum. Norman Holmes Pearson diagnoses in Longfellow what he calls "a tragedy of connoisseurship," an artistically inhibiting appreciation of the great cultural monuments—"as though the

importation itself was enough, and the mere possession of these things had brought their virtues with them."[32] From the point of view of the creation of poetry of the very highest order, Longfellow's saturation in literature might be held to be counterproductive. Yet it is doubtful whether the audience in whose service Longfellow wrote was up to truly original poetry (the reception of Leaves of Grass in 1855 suggests it wasn't), even had Longfellow been capable of it. From the point of view of the creation of poetry that could enlist a popular audience as potential connoisseurs of poetry themselves, Longfellow's saturation in literature served him well. He established and cultivated his reading audience by allowing them to imagine, through his own responses, the kind of "pleasant visions" and "thrilling pulse[s]" that poetry—including his own poetry—might fittingly produce in them.

Notes

1. William Charvat, The Profession of Authorship in America, 1800-1870, ed. Matthew J. Bruccoli (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1968), p. 136.

2. Textual references are as follows: "the holy land of song" ("Prelude," 1839); "a new land of song" ("Tegner's Drapa," 1847); "[t]he shining city of song" and "sweet illusions of Song" ("Fata Morgana," 1870); "the gift and ministry of Song" ("The Poets," 1876); "the flight of song" ("The Arrow and the Song," 1845); "[s]ome tower of song" ("Mezzo Cammin," 1842); "miracle of song" ("Divina Commedia," 1864); "breath of song" ("Moods," 1876); "the art of song" ("Walter von der Vogelweid," 1845); the "right divine of song" ("From My Arm-Chair," 1879). Stanley T. Williams, The Beginnings of American Poetry (1620-1855) (1951; rpt. Uppsala, Sweden: The Folcroft Press, Inc., 1969), p. 83-85, notes Longfellow's repeated use of the rhetoric of "song." For Longfellow, writes Williams, "the true poet was primarily a *singer*" (83) (italics in original).

3. Dana Gioia, "Longfellow in the Aftermath of Modernism," in Columbia Encyclopedia of American Poetry, in Jay Parini, ed., The Columbia History of American Poetry (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 82. Gioia analyzes the stylistic differences between Longfellow's "popular" mode and "high" mode and offers this helpful qualification: "A contemporary reader must, however, remember that in the nineteenth century the two modes were not seen in opposition; there was not yet a gulf between highbrow and lowbrow art" (83).

4. Norman Holmes Pearson, "Both Longfellows," in *The University of Kansas City Review*, XVI, No. 4 (Summer, 1950), reprinted in Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Evangeline and Selected Tales and Poems, ed. Horace Gregory (1964; New York: Signet Classic Edition, 1990), p. 271.

5. Originally published under the title "Ancient French Romances" in January, 1833 in the first issue of *The Select Journal of Foreign Periodical Literature*, a Boston journal edited by Andrews Norton and Charles Folsom. Reprinted in Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, The Works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1891), Vol. 7, p. 289. Pearson incorrectly identifies the passage as belonging to Longfellow's Outre-Mer, A Pilgrimage Beyond the Sea (1835).

6. "What is chiefly disturbing in Longfellow's poems is his confusion of audiences, the frequency with which a poem for the court is turned by simile into a poem for the people. To serve both at once is a democratic concept, but it makes for awkward poetical relationships." Pearson, "Both Longfellows," p. 280.

7. See, for instance, David Reynolds, Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville (New York: Knopf, 1988).

8. William Dean Howells, an outsider himself, was the very man to note the impossibility of Longfellow's ever entirely becoming a Bostonian (or Canterbridgian): "But he spoke almost as rarely of his friends as of himself.... This was rather strange in Cambridge, where we were apt to take our instances from the environment. It was not the only thing he was strange in there; he was not to that manner born; he lacked the final intimacies which can come only of birth and lifelong association, and which make the men of the Boston breed seem exclusive when they least feel so; he was Longfellow to the friends who were James, and Charles, and Wendell to one another." Howells, "The White Mr. Longfellow," in Literary Friends and Acquaintance, A Personal Retrospect of American Authorship (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1901), p. 200.

9. On the social aspirations of the emerging American middle class in the nineteenth century, see, for instance, Stow Persons, The Decline of American Gentility (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973) and Karen Halttunen, Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).

10. The notions of "middlebrow" and "midcult," as these terms have been influentially used by Dwight Macdonald, are of course germane to this discussion of Longfellow's poetic art and in particular his cultivation of a middle-class audience. Dwight Macdonald, Against the American Grain (New York: Random House, 1962), pp. 3-75. I have not insisted on Longfellow as a specifically "middlebrow" writer, however, because the culture of the age in which he lived had not yet polarized into opposing camps of "highbrow" and "lowbrow" and in fact would not have recognized such distinctions. Still, a central contention of this chapter is that in Longfellow's poetry one can begin to see the outlines of such distinctions coming into focus.

11. Roy Harvey Pearce, The Continuity of American Poetry (1961; rpt., Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1987), p. 213-14.

12. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "Defense of Poetry," in *North American Review*, XXXIV, January 1832, quoted in Lawrance Thompson, Young Longfellow (1807-1843) (1938; rpt., New York: Octagon Books, 1969), p. 175.

13. Gioia, "Longfellow in the Aftermath of Modernism," p. 94.

14. For thoughts on Longfellow as a poet that take as their point of departure his work as a translator, see Angus Fletcher, "Two Types of the American Poet," in *Raritan* (Spring 1991), 10:4, pp. 131-45.

15. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, The Poets and Poetry of Europe (Philadelphia: Carey and Hart, 1845), p. 187.

16. *North American Review* 3 (September 1816), p. 355. Quoted in Jean V. Matthews, Toward a New Society: American Thought and Culture, 1800-1830 (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991), p. 65.

17. This is, roughly, the argument of "Order, Hierarchy, and Culture," the last chapter of Lawrence W. Levine, Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988). In the antebellum period "the sense of anarchic change, of looming chaos, of fragmentation, which seemed to imperil the very basis of the traditional order, was not confined to a handful of aristocrats. Indeed, the elites had more allies than they were ever comfortable with, for to many of the new industrialists as well as many members of the new middle classes, following the lead of the arbiters of culture promised both relief from impending disorder and an avenue to cultural legitimacy" (176).

18. Emphases in original. Andrew Hilen, ed., The Letters of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1966), Vol. II, p. 203.

19. Journal entry November 19, 1849, quoted in Samuel Longfellow, ed., Life of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, with Extracts from His Journals and Correspondence, 3 Vols., Vols. 12-14 of The Works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1891), Vol. 13, p. 163.

20. For a cogent overview of Longfellow's thematic ambitions in Christus and a useful analysis of the reasons for the work's failure, see Charvat, The Profession of Authorship in America, pp. 146-152. For a sensitive close reading of The Golden Legend, see Newton Arvin, Longfellow: His Life and Work (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1963), pp. 86-99.

21. Charvat, Profession of Authorship in America, p. 146. "In spite of Longfellow's reputation, and in spite of the publisher's expert marketing of it in six different editions to suit every pocketbook, less than six thousand were printed, and no one knows how long it took to sell these."

22. A magazine like *Harper's* saw fit to rescue readers from any uncertainties they might have by spelling out for them the aesthetic facts of life: "Homer, Shakespeare, Dante, Raphael, Michael Angelo, Handel, Beethoven, Mozart, they are towering facts like the Alps or the Himalayas. They are the heaven-kissing peaks, and are universally acknowledged. It is not conceivable that the judgment of mankind upon those names will ever be reversed." *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, 34 (January 1867), quoted in Levine, Highbrow/Lowbrow, p. 146. On the prestige of poetry in Longfellow's era, see Lawrence Buell, New England Literary Culture: From Revolution through Renaissance (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 105: "Of the three major fictive genres, poetry alone was held in anything like high regard throughout our period. The writing of poems was respectable to an extent that the writing of prose fiction and stage plays definitely was not."

23. Henry David Thoreau, Walden, ed. Sherman Paul (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, Riverside Edition, 1957), p. 72.

24. John Greenleaf Whittier, "James Russell Lowell," The Complete Poetical Works of John Greenleaf Whittier (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1892), p. 622.

25. James Russell Lowell, "A Fable for Critics," in The Complete Poetical Works of James Russell Lowell (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, Cambridge Edition, 1925), p. 140.

26. As a teacher of literature Longfellow had occasion to develop his literary responses in characteristic and idiosyncratic directions. Hyperion, A Romance (1839), with its many chapters on German authors adapted from his college lectures on Goethe, Jean Paul, et al., offers useful glimpses of Longfellow's enthusiasms and priorities as a reader. Of Longfellow's manner as a teacher of literature at Harvard, Newton Arvin writes, "He aimed much less at the transmission of information than at the contagion of personal enthusiasm." Arvin, Longfellow, p. 47. Van Wyck Brooks (to whom Newton Arvin dedicates his book on Longfellow) characteristically paints the scene with a novelist's warmth: "Beside the round mahogany table in University Hall, he sat among his pupils, discoursing with a silvery courtesy,—how different from the harsh, monastic fashion of most of the older professors,—in a style that was far too flowery, the older professors thought, but with a feeling for the romance of letters that was much more intimate than Ticknor's. In Ticknor one felt the glow of a marble surface. This lecturer was a painter and a poet. All the tones of his voice were soft and warm. He was a master of the pastel shades, whose mind was suffused with the light of Claude Lorrain. The facts, the details, the philology he left to his large corps of young instructors,—for the university, having abandoned itself to these degenerate modern languages, wished to do it handsomely. His task was to provide the general outlines, to give the aroma, the bouquet; and in what corner of the house of song was there a chamber where he had not lived?" Brooks, The Flowering of New England, 1815-1865 (1936; rpt., New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, 1952), p. 156.

27. Samuel Longfellow, ed., Life, in Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Works, Vol. 13, p. 162.

28. For the publicity methods used by Ticknor & Fields to promote major authors like Longfellow, see "James T. Fields and the Beginnings of Book Promotion, 1840-1855," in Charvat, Profession of Authorship in America, p. 179.

29. Quoted in Kenneth Silverman, Edgar A. Poe: Mournful and Never-ending Remembrance (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), p. 253.

30. See Charvat, The Profession of Authorship in America, p. 162.

31. "He strikes a splendid average, and does not sing exceptional passions, or humanity's jagged escapades." Walt Whitman, "The Death of Longfellow," in The Collected Writings of Walt Whitman, ed. Floyd Stovall, Vol. 1 (New York: New York University Press, 1964), p. 285.

32. Pearson, "Both Longfellows," p. 276.

Chapter Four

Union and Reunion: A Meditation on Evangeline

The decline of Longfellow's reputation, one of the most abrupt reversals in the history of literary fame, was brought on in part by the modernists' perception of his failure to engage with the issues of his age. "Longfellow's door shut securely against all intrusion," wrote V.L. Parrington, voicing a view that had quickly become the orthodox one. "The winds of doctrine and policy might rage through the land, but they did not rattle the windows of his study to disturb his quiet poring over Dante."[1] In recent decades, though the much-heralded expansion of the canon of nineteenth-century American literature has not included Longfellow, a number of critical essays have begun to show that Longfellow's major poems do indeed have a topical and, more specifically, a political dimension that requires and rewards exegesis. Robert A. Ferguson's "Longfellow's Political Fears: Civic Authority and the Role of the Artist in Hiawatha and Miles Standish" finds that Longfellow's long poems of the 1850s give voice, often in veiled and conflicted ways, to concerns about an author's societal responsibilities in a time of political crisis.[2] John Seelye's "Attic Shape: Dusting Off Evangeline" similarly attempts to find in this long poem of the 1840s Longfellow expressing the national anxieties and political mood of that decade.[3] My own sense of Evangeline is that the poem is closely woven around the idea of union. Part of the public work the poem performs is to develop, in the figure of Evangeline, a unifying symbol for an increasingly divided nation.

Despite James Russell Lowell's rhyming pronouncement upon Evangeline, A Tale of Acadie (1847)—"'Tis a shrine of retreat from Earth's hubbub and strife,/As quiet and chaste as the author's own life"[4]—Longfellow's poem engages, at least peripherally or subliminally, some of the great public issues of the day: territorial expansion, racial and ethnic integration, sectional crisis. For a writer who had established his literary reputation as an evangel of European culture, Evangeline is surely a heady venture into American "themes." The critics, early and late, have been drawn to the American aspects of the poem and have celebrated Evangeline as a national statement. William Dean Howells wrote in 1907 that "this most American, and hitherto first American, poem of anything like epic measure, remains without a rival, without a companion."[5] Theodore Parker writing in the *Massachusetts Quarterly Review* proclaimed the poem "wholly American in its incidents, its geography, and its setting," and the *North American Review*, from a slightly loftier perch, found it "purely American, enough so to satisfy the most fanatical prater about Americanism in literature."[6] If Evangeline taps into the 1840s vogue of literary nationalism, it does so both because the West in that turbulent decade was a subject of relentless public interest and in order to point the way beyond what Longfellow saw as the simple-minded parochialism of the "fanatical prater[s]."

As a public poet, what Longfellow always understood best was the needs of the present moment. Although fastidiously historical in many respects,[7] Longfellow departs from the strictly historical underpinnings of his story—the 1755 expulsion by the British of the Acadians from their villages in what is today Nova Scotia—as he tells the story of his fictional Acadian heroine. Separated from her husband Gabriel on their wedding day,

the day of the expulsion, Evangeline devotes her life to finding him again, wandering across the North American continent to the farthest corners of what was, in the 1840s, the United States. Her search takes her down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers into the bayou country of Louisiana, across the prairies and into the Ozark Mountains, and up to the banks of the Saginaw River in Michigan, before coming to an end in Philadelphia. Indeed, Evangeline's residence in the capital city of the new nation during the years of the Continental Congress, and her eventual reunion with Gabriel in a Philadephia boarding-house, hints that Longfellow means the union of Evangeline and Gabriel to have a symbolic connection to the "more perfect Union" of the United States—a union that in the 1840s was beginning to seem ever more imperfect. The fear of national fragmentation and disunion haunts Evangeline and leads, in my view, to Longfellow's making his heroine into a symbol of union, unification, and universality. Whether Longfellow exactly intended such symbolism is here, as elsewhere in his poetry, not to the point. Longfellow the poet of fatherly reassurance instinctively felt his readers' wish to be pandered to and at the same time their need to be challenged. His success in Evangeline, as elsewhere, lies in his proving himself able to do both at once, to offer civic reassurance and moral instruction simultaneously.

Searching for an American Self

Like all of Longfellow's poetry, Evangeline lacks strong and acute meanings; rather, it is awash in weak and general meanings. Still, the themes of union and division may be found everywhere in Evangeline. The poem itself is divided in two parts: "Part the First"

(in Longfellow's self-consciously archaic locution) shows the union of Evangeline and Gabriel in marriage and their almost instantaneous division; "Part the Second" shows their long separation and final reunion. They are divided from each other in one of the decisive episodes in the struggle between England and France to divide up the North American continent. The many rivers which flow through the poem, including most notably the Mississippi, are symbols of the dividedness which the poem seeks constantly to present and resolve. Even Evangeline's hexameters, which organize each line into two balanced and balancing hemistiches, reproduce the theme. The challenge Longfellow felt in writing Evangeline surely contributes to this root dynamic: "In materials for this part there is superabundance," he wrote in his journal as he prepared to write Part Two. "The difficulty is to select, and give unity to variety."[8]

Though Evangeline's spirit of union is plainly found in the very motive of her continent-spanning quest, her singleness is centrally in question even before she is divided from her husband. Evangeline and Gabriel "from earliest childhood/Grew up together as brother and sister" (120), and the subsequent lines telling of their shared childhood amusements and pasttimes, narrated in the "they" of the third person plural, admit no separation between them. Even before they marry, Evangeline and Gabriel are a single entity, fused and indissoluble. As such, they represent an ideal of relatedness bound up for Longfellow with the meaning of Acadia:

> Thus dwelt together in love these simple Acadian farmers,—
> Dwelt in the love of God and of Man. Alike were they free from
> Fear, that reigns with the tyrant, and envy, the vice of republics.
> Neither locks had they to their doors, nor bars to their windows;
> But their dwellings were open as day and the hearts of the owners;
> There the richest was poor, and the poorest lived in abundance. (52-57)

Acadia represents not just an extreme of egalitarianism but a transcendence of individual identity. Evangeline and Gabriel, both curiously motherless, come as it were out of the same womb. Longfellow originally experimented with naming his heroine Gabrielle; that he did not stray far from Evangeline's ur-name in naming her lover suggests how primordially interlinked the two characters are.[9] Similarly, the members of the Acadian community, with their "dwellings as open as day," are virtually undifferentiated one from another. Longfellow's weakness at characterization serves here to enrich the poem's themes. The men of Grand-Pré, summoned to the village church by the British and informed they are to be exiled, react to the news uniformly, as one. "[B]y one impulse moved" (450) the Acadian men together rush to flee the church, but the way is blocked by the British; together they cry out; and together their cries are silenced by the entrance of Father Felician, who chastizes them for their anger and has them repeat after him, "O Father, forgive them!" (481), which they do as with one voice. As in the lines on Evangeline's and Gabriel's childhood, the "they" of the third person plural conveys a picture of the Acadians as an ensemble, a collective. The one exception is Basil the Blacksmith, who later in the poem, resettled in Louisiana, becomes symbolically important as a model of independence.

The Acadians, descendants of the first settlers of French North America, have transplanted their Norman houses, costumes, and customs to a fertile new land where they dwell apart from and outside of history. Evangeline's people in their pre-fallen state are ethnically and culturally pure, and such a marriage as Evangeline's and Gabriel's is meant to provide for that purity into posterity. The separation of Evangeline and Gabriel

thus represents the Acadians' introduction into the travails of historical time. Expelled from the timeless paradise of Acadia into an America about to be born, Eve-angeline's quest is precisely to regain the blissful at-oneness she had with Gabriel in Grand-Pré. Part Two of the poem shows Gabriel and Evangeline each awaking painfully to their aloneness. No longer do they belong, as they did in Part One, to the fused dyad of their lifelong mutual love and the organic collectivity of Acadian society. In the land that is to be America, Longfellow hints, the two lovers undergo a process of individuation, a realization of selfhood. Gabriel seeks to jettison his new unwanted self; he strikes off into the wilderness seeking "oblivion of self and of sorrow" (835). In her pursuit Evangeline, the richer figure and more complex symbol, accrues a highly symbolical self. The nature of Evangeline's self, as it develops in Part Two, becomes the crux of Longfellow's poem.

From his first hearing the story that was to be the germ of his poem, Longfellow evidently saw the heroine as a symbol: "It is the best illustration of faithfulness and the constancy of woman that I have ever heard of or read," he is reported to have remarked to his friend Hawthorne, who narrated to him one evening a story he had heard about a "wandering Acadian maiden."[10] Yet Evangeline becomes an illustration of much more than "faithfulness and the constancy of woman." In Gabriel's prolonged absence, Evangeline's constancy and faithfulness create a kind of vacuum in her character. By refraining from filling this vacuum with particularizing details ascribed to his heroine, Longfellow keeps Evangeline largely unformed and indeterminate. Her uncertain identity finds a correlative in her lack of a definite address or association with a particular

part of the country. As an incoherent or only partially coherent figure, mostly free of specifying traits, lacking psychological depth, whose career devolves into "abnegation of self, and devotion to others" (1282), Evangeline ends up as a kind of cipher. She is at once disembodied and monolithic, diffuse and encompassing. The reader gradually sees that the character who in Part One promised to be so full and fulfilled is fated now to be so empty. The very emptiness of his heroine, guaranteed and safeguarded by the singlemindedness of the quest that her life becomes, allows Longfellow to develop her as an enigmatic and multivalent symbol.

Basil Lajeunesse, Gabriel's father, who is after Evangeline the most carefully drawn of all the characters in the poem, represents a model of assimilation into American society quite different from Evangeline's. Basil the Acadian blacksmith metamorphoses neatly into Basil the American herdsman. The resilient Basil has resettled in Louisiana; he is first pictured in his new milieu without an identifying name, as if to show how complete his absorption has been:

> Just where the woodlands met the flowery surf of the prairie,
> Mounted upon his horse, with Spanish saddle and stirrups,
> Sat a herdsman, arrayed in gaiters and doublet of deerskin.
> Broad and brown was the face that from under the Spanish sombrero
> Gazed on the peaceful scene, with the lordly look of its master.
> Round about him were numberless herds of kine . . . . (911-16)

The picturesque Basil is almost unrecognizable to the travel-weary Evangeline and her guide, Father Felician, upon their coming to his shores. Dwelling in the predominantly Spanish Louisiana territory, he rides a Mexican horse with Spanish saddle and stirrups, wears a sombrero, and smokes Natchitoches tobacco. His newly-built American house, made "of timbers/Hewn from the cypress-tree, and carefully fitted together" (893-94), is

rough and rustic compared with the old world Acadian houses made "of oak and of chestnut,/Such as the peasants of Normandy built in the reign of the Henrys" (33-34). Basil, in short, having fully left behind his old life, has become an archetypal American new man, reinventing himself in the image of the people among whom he has come to dwell. Evangeline follows a different path: she becomes a kind of national presence, a continent-spanning spirit. Her diffuse, union-seeking self haunts the far-flung places and locales named in the poem, serving as the connecting link between them. A central paradox arises, however, from the Evangeline/America equation. The American land-scape and peoplescape become, over the course of Evangeline's progress, more highly specified, articulated, and particularized. The travelogue cantos of Part Two are rich in such place names as "Opelousas," "Bayou Plaquemine," "Attakapas," "Bayou Têche," "St. Maur," "Natchitoches," and "Atchafalaya," bearing in their very syllables some of the exotic fabric of the romantically-imagined West. The lush descriptions of Western scenes and the character portraits of Western types—Basil the Herdsman, the Shawnee woman, the Black Robe Chief—generate details with which to fill in the blank spaces of the map of America. Yet while the poem accomplishes this cartography, Evangeline grows less distinct, less featured, less chartable. How is the vividness of America to be reconciled with the vagueness of Evangeline?

A Case of Plural Identity

Longfellow allows Evangeline to take shape as a national symbol in part by loosely associating her with those figures of forlorn wandering across the American landscape,

the American Indian and the African American. The association begins as early as the poem's prologue, which refers to the Acadians in intriguingly inapposite language:

> This is the forest primeval, but where are the hearts that beneath it
> Leaped like the roe, when he hears in the woodland the voice of the
> huntsman? (7-8)

"Where are the Acadians?" is the sense of these lines. Yet, as Longfellow knew from his source material on Acadia, the actual Acadians had little to do with the forests near their settlements. The great meadow of Grand-Pré lay in a dyke-fringed valley, where the pastoral Acadians cultivated their fields and tended their flocks. Still, despite the historical error, the poem's epilogue returns to and again insists on the image of the primeval forest:

> Still stands the forest primeval; but under the shade of its branches
> Dwells another race, with other customs and language.
> Only along the shores of the mournful and misty Atlantic
> Linger a few Acadian peasants whose fathers from exile
> Wandered back to their native land to die in its bosom. (1390-94)

The epilogue appears to grieve that the few returning Acadians have not returned to the forest. Yet the forest was never theirs! If "another race" now inhabits it, it is not because the forest was ever vacated by the Acadians. The rhetoric of the abandonment of the forests by a native and aboriginal race whose hearts had "leaped like the roe" beneath it, and of subsequent resettlement of the forest-lands by "another race, with other customs and language," was widespread in Longfellow's America.[11] The forced removal of the Acadians from their land may have overlapped in Longfellow's thoughts with the native American removals, producing this confused and bifurcated image.

If Evangeline's people are confounded with American Indians through representational obfuscation, Evangeline is more overtly identified with them. A turning point in Evangeline's quest and in her life as a symbol is her encounter, at the base of the Ozark Mountains, with a Native American woman of the Shawnee tribe. The Shawnee's features, writes Longfellow, "wore deep traces of sorrow, and patience as great as her sorrow" (1118): like Evangeline, she is a figure of suffering and patient endurance. Her husband is a coureur-des-bois, [a woodsman,] as is Evangeline's, and he too has left his wife a widow. The Shawnee's solitary journey "home to her people" recalls Evangeline's wish to return to her tribe, from which she has been separated. The Shawnee tells Evangeline "All the tale of her love, with its pleasures, and pains, and reverses" (1131), and Evangeline "in turn related her love and all its disasters" (1136). In her lonely quest to re-merge with Gabriel, Evangeline unexpectedly merges with a mirror image of herself in the form of an American Indian. In the encounter, individual identities are confused in a mist of sentiment and pathos. Most significantly, it is in the wake of her meeting with her Shawnee double that Evangeline experiences a crisis of self-identity.

The morning following their meeting, the Shawnee happens to mention a Mission on the western slope of the Ozarks that she knows of, and Evangeline, "with a sudden and secret emotion," exclaims, "Let us go to the Mission, for there good tidings await us!" (1171) The intuition that prompts her sudden excitement is not that Gabriel himself will be at the Mission—she has been disappointed too often to find this likely. Rather, the line "Let us go to the Mission, for there good tidings await us!" may be read, "Let us go to the Mission, for there Evangeline awaits us!" Evangeline, etymologically the herald of

good tidings, has no good tidings to herald, and instead must look for good tidings, i.e. must look for herself. Her encounter with her Native American counterpart, who has frightened her with Indian legends of disappearing husbands, leads immediately to this crisis of identity. (At the Mission, Evangeline finds only that Gabriel has indeed been there but departed six days earlier, heading up north for the winter, where because of the season she cannot follow.) From a different point of view, the crisis is Longfellow's: now the poet must reimagine his heroine on her own, without the supporting apparatus of Acadia and Gabriel.

Evangeline's composite self incorporates, too, the experience of the African American. In "The Slave Singing at Midnight," one of his Poems on Slavery (1842), Longfellow reminds his readers of the liberating message of Christianity and asks mournfully, "Alas! What holy angel/Brings the slave this glad evangel?" Evangeline does not bring the slave the good news of Christ as she travels down the Mississippi, past "the houses of planters, with negro-cabins and dovecots"; but through her very name Evangeline is connected with the evangelical movement of the 1830s and 40s, whose moral fervor in turn underlay the abolition movement. John Seelye suggests that Evangeline's quest to find Gabriel may be seen as a "vicarious vehicle for emotions aroused by the plight of enslaved black people, involving the breakup of families and homeless wandering as perpetual aliens"[12]; indeed, a strong analogy can be made between the Acadians and the Africans, both of whom were separated from their families, removed from their homeland, and brought in ships to a hostile land. But the strongest link between Evangeline and African Americans may be found in Evangeline's large-

scale, quasi-political themes of union and division. These themes inevitably grew out of the sectional crisis, and hence are bound up, whether Longfellow meant it or not, with the slavery question.

During the period of the writing of Evangeline Longfellow's close friend Charles Sumner, later Senator Sumner, was becoming increasingly active in abolitionist politics.[13] Longfellow's journal in the mid-1840s shows the poet sympathetic to his friend's activism, and in the fall of 1845, just before starting Evangeline, Longfellow published a short poem in blank verse in the abolitionist gift-book The Liberty Bell.[14] Longfellow evidently never thought enough of "The Poet of Miletus" to include it in any volume of poems published in his lifetime, and it remains outside all complete editions of his posthumously published Works.[15] Its subject, most generally, is the constraints placed on the poet by parochial public opinion. In the first stanza the poem tells of a poet from the ancient city of Miletus in Asia Minor, who wished to add an additional four chords to his seven-chorded lyre only to be forbidden by the popular vote of the Ephesians who employed him. In the second stanza Longfellow adduces the topical moral:

> Here, too, the popular voice forbids the poet
> To add a single chord unto his lyre,
> Although he takes no gold from the Ephesians,
> And would but give an utterance more complete
> To all the voices of humanity,
> Even the swart Ethiop's inarticulate woe.
> And this is eighteen centuries after Christ!

The poet of Miletus, though he practices his art in the service of a narrow-minded people, owes his allegiance to the universal rather than the particular, the whole rather than the part. The poet of America likewise owes his allegiance to "all the voices of humanity,"

and hence Longfellow may be obliged to create a composite figure like Evangeline through whom multiple voices and experiences can be figured forth.

Politics and the Public Poet

Longfellow's most overtly political poem is generally thought to be "The Building of the Ship," with its famous peroration which once, reportedly, brought tears to the eyes of Abraham Lincoln.[16] Written not long after Evangeline and included in The Seaside and the Fireside (1849), this poem is an essential companion piece to Evangeline. "The Building of the Ship" tells of the construction of a ship to be known as the Union (or, as written, the "UNION"). The building of the ship is overseen by "the Master," a beneficent patriarch, who has made a promise to his trusted young assistant:

> Cedar of Maine and Georgia pine
> Here together shall combine.
> A goodly frame, and a goodly frame,
> and the UNION be her name!
> For the day that gives her to the sea
> Shall give my daughter unto thee.

As in Evangeline, marriage here is the archetype and epitome of all union. The marriage of the master's disciple and his daughter is the corollary to the marriage of Maine cedar and Georgia pine in the UNION. The ship represents the harmonious blending of all different kinds, not just from north and south; its builder shares Longfellow's faith in the salutary effects of universal inclusiveness: "every climate, every soil/Must bring its tribute, great or small/And help to build the wooden wall."

At the end of the poem the ship is launched, the marriage is made, and Longfellow spells out his meanings:

Sail forth into the sea of life
O gentle, loving, trusting wife,
And safe from all adversity
Upon the bosom of that sea
Thy comings and thy goings be!
* * *
Thou, too, sail on, O Ship of State!
Sail on, O UNION, strong and great!
Humanity with all its fears,
With all the hopes of future years,
Is hanging breathless on thy fate!

In keeping with antebellum gender expectations, the wife here is the ship and the husband is the sea on which she sails. She is the union, or rather the UNION; and this symbolization sheds light on how Evangeline too represents in her sole person the union of her marriage with Gabriel. "The Building of the Ship" emerges out of the same symbolic complex through which Evangeline could come to embody (I) her union with Gabriel, (ii) the spirit of union, and (iii) the "more perfect Union" of the United States.

It is worth recalling from what a position of confident authority the author of "The Building of the Ship" addresses his nation. Because of Longfellow's family history, personal associations, professional position, and public reputation, he felt himself able—if rarely obliged—to add his voice to national debates. William Charvat nicely suggests the patriotic upshot of Longfellow's family inheritance: "A boy whose paternal grandfather was a state senator; whose maternal grandfather was squire of 10,000 frontier acres in Maine, himself a distinguished Revolutionary War general and a representative to Congress from Maine; whose father was a Harvard graduate and a lawmaker for both his state and his nation—such a boy knew he 'belonged' not only to the present but to the American past."[17] Add to this his acceptance by the Cambridge intellectuals and by

Boston society, his marriage to the daughter of Nathan Appleton, his ownership of Craigie House, his Harvard professorship, and the near-universal adulation his poetry elicited, and one understands how Longfellow in his chosen role as public poet might feel empowered to speak both to and for the Union. Indeed, all of Longfellow's poetry may be said to progress toward the moment when the patriarchal poet, at the height of the Civil War, reminds his countrymen of the nation's heroic beginnings and addresses them from a privileged position of age, fame, and status: "Listen my children and you shall hear/Of the midnight ride of Paul Revere . . ."

In "The Building of the Ship" Longfellow embraced the public role his New England upbringing as the son of an elite family had prepared him for. The crisis that the conjugal "UNION" of "The Building of the Ship" is sent out symbolically to avert, the fragmentation of the Union, haunts Evangeline as well. If the poem speaks to the worsening crisis of the 1840s, an ambiguous allusion in Part Two becomes freshly available to interpretation. Evangeline has made her way to the house of Gabriel's father on the Bayou Têche, in Louisiana, only to find that Gabriel has left a day earlier. Basil promises to help Evangeline pursue Gabriel beginning in the morning, but that night throws a welcome feast for Evangeline and the fellow Acadians she has arrived with, inviting "the neighboring Creoles and small Acadian planters" (1009). The feast is the scene of many reunions:

> Merry the meeting was of ancient comrades and neighbors:
> Friend clasped friend in his arms; and they who were before as
> strangers,
> Meeting in exile, became straightway as friends to each other,
> Drawn by the gentle bond of a common country together. (1011-14)

Distressed over Gabriel, Evangeline withdraws from the party and passes outside through the garden "to the edge of the measureless prairie" (1038):

> Over her head the stars, the thoughts of God in the heavens,
> Shone on the eyes of man, who had ceased to marvel and worship,
> Save when a blazing comet was seen on the walls of that temple,
> As if a hand had appeared and written upon them, "Upharsin." (1041-44)

The reference is to the mysterious writing that appears on the wall of the palace during Belshazzar's feast in Chapter Five of the Book of Daniel. Daniel alone can decipher the word *Upharsin*, which means, according to the prophet, "Thy kingdom is divided."[18] The passage in Evangeline suggests that mankind has so neglected nature that only some sensational providence, like a comet, can elicit wonder. Yet the blazing comet in itself does not reinspire "Man" to marvel and worship, but it does so only insofar as it calls to mind a blazing message written on a famous wall. Longfellow, through such self-consciously sublime passages as this one, worked to inspire his readers to marvel and worship as if he himself were writing such a text on such a wall. Evangeline itself may be meant as a blazing, wonder-inspiring, comet-like text which, when deciphered, yields the warning of "Upharsin": "Thy kingdom is divided."

Undoubtedly the best-known appearance of heavenly hieroglyphics in American literature occurs in the scaffold scene in The Scarlet Letter (1850), when the "cope of heaven" is illuminated with a symbol, the letter A, that seems to speak to the Reverend Dimmesdale with a peculiarly personal meaning. Hawthorne contrasts the personal import of the celestial writing to Dimmesdale with the national import read into such wonder-working providences by Puritans like Cotton Mather. Longfellow is working here too in the post-Puritan tradition of a sign-riddled universe; typically, he invokes the

tradition much more obliquely than his friend Hawthorne. Wandering in Gabriel's backyard, Evangeline does not see a comet, nor does she witness a hand appearing and writing Upharsin on the walls of the temple-like skies. Longfellow embeds the comet image in a conditional inside a parenthetical, as much as to say, "If I, as author of these lines, were to make a comet appear, it would be reminiscent of the chapter in the Book of Daniel when mysterious handwriting appears, and furthermore it would illustrate how we generally don't much notice the glory of the night sky." Unlike Hawthorne, Longfellow partially withholds and represses the prophetic impulse which motivates such a passage, leaving it off-center and unbalanced. The impulse to illustrate cosmic meanings remains, even if ideological confusion frustrates their expression.

Despite Evangeline's long wandering over the divided kingdom of America, Longfellow suggests that he has only given his readers a taste of the geographical breadth of her journeyings:

> Thus did the long sad years glide on, and in seasons and places
> Divers and distant far was seen the wandering maiden;
> Now in the Tents of Grace of the meek Moravian Missions,
> Now in the noisy camps and the battlefields of the army,
> Now in secluded hamlets, in towns and populous cities.
> Like a phantom she came, and passed away unremembered.
> Fair was she and young, when in hope began the long journey;
> Faded was she and old, when in disappointment it ended.
> Each succeeding year stole something away from her beauty,
> Leaving behind it, broader and deeper, the gloom and the shadow.
> Then there appeared and spread faint streaks of gray o'er her forehead,
> Dawn of another life, that broke o'er her earthly horizon,
> As in the eastern sky the first faint streaks of the morning. (1239-51)

Evangeline finally merges into and becomes one with the American landscape which is the focus of so much of Part Two. The "[d]awn of another life" that breaks over

Evangeline's "earthly horizon" is on the one hand a conventional reference to the notion of the afterlife. Yet the "faint streaks of gray" that spread over Evangeline's forehead, like the "first faint streaks of the morning" in the eastern sky, paint Evangeline unconventionally as a kind of continent herself. This is not inappropriate, since according to the poem's fiction she has spent her life crisscrossing the continent, and not surprising, since Longfellow has all along associated her with the North American continent. Hence through her long wanderings in the land that was to be the America of the 1840s, Evangeline becomes identified with the diverse populace as a kind of ethnic composite and with the land as a kind of chthonic emanation and force.

Evangeline's grand vision of the North American continent is not only of a picturesque and sublime landscape, but also of a moralized one. The expulsion from Acadia constitutes the loss of a new world Eden, and the vast continent upon which the Acadian exiles are made to wander expresses their homelessness, restlessness, and barrenness. The American West of Part Two is almost invariably "the Western desert" (687), though waters and rivers abound. The Bayou of Plaquemine resounds with "the mysterious sounds of the desert" (803). A description of the Ozark Mountains begins, "Far in the West there lies a desert land . . . ." (1078) Even the "wondrous, beautiful prairies" (1089) are a waste region: "Over them wander the scattered tribes of Ishmael's children,/Staining the desert with blood" (1095-96). The continent must be a desert, since Evangeline's life is: "Before her extended,/ Dreary and waste and silent, the desert of life" (684).

The travelogue cantos of Evangeline map a desert land waiting to be brought back to verdant and fruitful life, and the reunion of Evangeline and Gabriel in Philadelphia, 1793, effects such a renewal. When the dying Gabriel hears the voice of his long-lost Evangeline, "he beheld, in a dream, once more the home of his childhood;/Green Acadian meadows, with sylvan rivers among them" (1364-65). Evangeline has settled in Philadelphia because the "thee" and "thou" of the Quakers' speech "recalled the past, the old Acadian country,/Where all men were equal, and all were brothers and sisters" (1265-66). The reunion in the capital of the new United States does not make the American desert a green Acadian garden; but it does allow some of the garden of Acadia into America. This garden, is significantly, Jeffersonian—"all men were equal"—and the promise of its reviving the American desert gives hope to the poem's ending, and offered hope to the poem's antebellum readers.

Notes

1. Vernon L. Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought: An Interpretation of American Literature from the Beginnings to 1920 (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1927), 3 Vols., Vol. 2, p. 440.

2. In The Courtship of Miles Standish, for instance, as Ferguson reads it, the friendship between the civic leader Miles Standish and the artist John Alden is pushed to the breaking point when Standish makes a request that Alden can't refuse but also can't happily carry out: that the eloquent artist propose marriage to Priscilla Mullins on behalf of the inarticulate soldier (in making the request Standish does not know that Alden loves Priscilla). Ferguson emphasizes "the depth of John Alden's communicated anxieties" (204) and relates it to Longfellow's "feelings of inadequacy and helplessness" (209) in the face of political strife: "Alden's on-going agony in the last five chapters of Miles Standish appears absurd and incomprehensible without a clear understanding of Longfellow's own position regarding the conflict so central to the poem between writer and community leader." Robert Ferguson, "Longfellow's Political Fears: Civic Authority and the Role of the Artist in Hiawatha and Miles Standish," *American Literature* 50 (1978), p. 208.

3. John Seelye, "Attic Shape: Dusting Off Evangeline," *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, 60:1, 1984, pp. 21-44.

4. James Russell Lowell, "A Fable for Critics," in The Complete Poetical Works of James Russell Lowell (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, Cambridge Edition, 1925), p. 140.

5. William Dean Howells, "The Art of Longfellow," in *The North American Review*, Vo. CLXXXIV, No. DCS, March 1, 1907, p. 479.

6. *Massachusetts Quarterly Review*, Vol. 1, No. 1, December 1847, p. 135; *North American Review*, LXVI (1848), p. 216.

7. For instance, the speech of Longfellow's unnamed British commander ordering the Acadians into exile is an almost word-for-word transcription of the proclamation of Colonel John Winslow delivered on September 5, 1755. For this and other aspects of the historical background, see Manning Hawthorne and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow Dana, Origin and Development of Longfellow's Evangeline (Portland: The Anthoensen Press, 1947).

8. Samuel Longfellow, ed., Life of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, with Extracts from His Journals and Correspondence, 3 Vols., Vols. 12-14 of The Works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (New York: AMS Press, Inc.), Vol. 13, p. 67.

9. Journal entry dated November 28, 1845: "Set about Gabrielle, my idyl (sic) in hexameters, in earnest. I do not mean to let a day go by without adding something to it, if it be but a single line." Samuel Longfellow, Life, Vol. 2, p. 26.

10. For a full account of Longfellow's first hearing the story of Evangeline, see Manning Hawthorne, "Hawthorne and 'The Man of God,'" in *The Colophon*, New Series, II, 1937, pp. 262-282.

11. William Gilmore Simms, for instance, on the disappearance of the Indian from Kentucky, wrote in his 1856 novel Charlemont: or, the Pride of the Village: "The savage had disappeared from its green forests for ever, and no longer profaned with slaughter, and his unholy whoop of death, its broad and beautiful abodes. A newer race had succeeded; and the wilderness, fulfilling the better destinies of earth, had begun to blossom like the rose" (p. 14). See, more generally, Lucy Maddox, Removals: Nineteenth-Century American Literature and the Politics of Indian Affairs (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

12. John Seelye, "Attic Shape," suggests that Evangeline's long quest to find Gabriel may be seen as a "vicarious vehicle for emotions aroused by the plight of enslaved black people, involving the breakup of families and homeless wandering as perpetual aliens." In support of this claim Seelye brings together various items of evidence. Poems on Slavery (1842), for instance, contains a poem ("The Slave Singing at Midnight") in which Longfellow, recalling the emancipatory message of Christianity, asks, "Alas! what holy angel/Brings the slave this glad evangel?" The singing slave who has no access to Christian evangel, the song of the mockingbird as the Acadian exiles descend the Mississippi river in Evangeline, and, by a quite circuitous route, Hiram Powers's celebrated statue *The Greek Slave* converge for Seelye into a "complex metaphor" concerning "the condition of the Negro in America" (p. 43).

13. See Frederick Blue, "The Poet and the Reformer: Longfellow, Sumner, and the Bonds of Male Friendship, 1837-1874," Journal of the Early Republic v.15 n.2, Summer 1995, pp. 273-297.

14. Liberty Bell, 1846, pp. 25-26.

15. An exception to this view is Aaron Kramer, The Prophetic Tradition in American Poetry (Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1968). Kramer is aware of "The Poet of Miletus" and argues that Longfellow took a principled stance against slavery not only in this poem, but in the much-maligned Poems on Slavery. Kramer praises Longfellow's courage for publishing the poems at all in the climate of the early 1840s. He cites Samuel Longfellow's mention, in the Life (Vol. I, p. 445), of a letter from the editor of *Graham's Magazine* apologizing to Longfellow for a perfunctory notice of the Poems on Slavery on the grounds that "the word *slavery* was never allowed to appear in a Philadelphia periodical, and . . . the publisher objected to having even the name of the book appear in his pages." Kramer also calls attention to Longfellow's 1845 poem about manumission, "The Norman Baron."

16. Lincoln's eyes were supposed to have watered when the journalist Noah Brooks recited the final lines of "The Building of the Ship." For the full story see, for instance, Merill D. Peterson, Lincoln in American Memory (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 112-13.

17. Charvat, Profession of Authorship in America, p. 117.

18. See Daniel 5:25-28, King James Bible: "25. And this is the writing that was written, MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN. 26. This *is* the interpretation of the thing: MENE; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it. 27. TEKEL; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. 28. PERES; Thy kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians."

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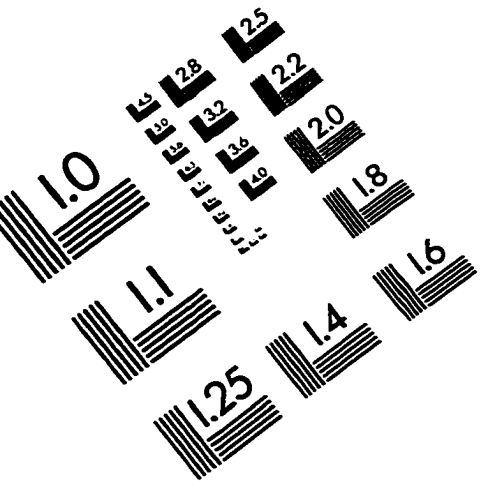

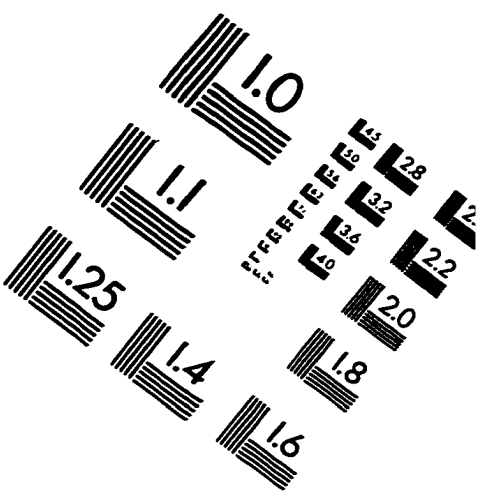

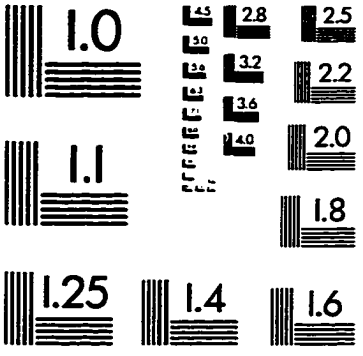

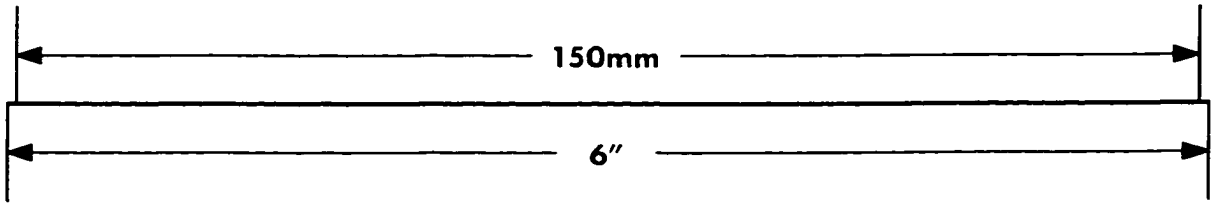

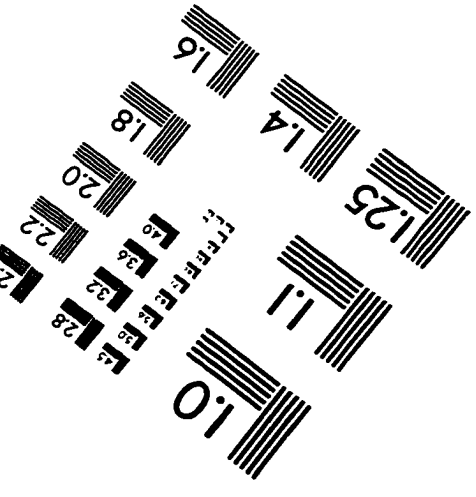

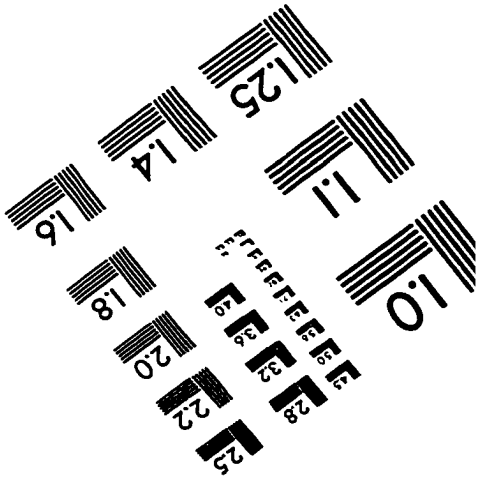

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