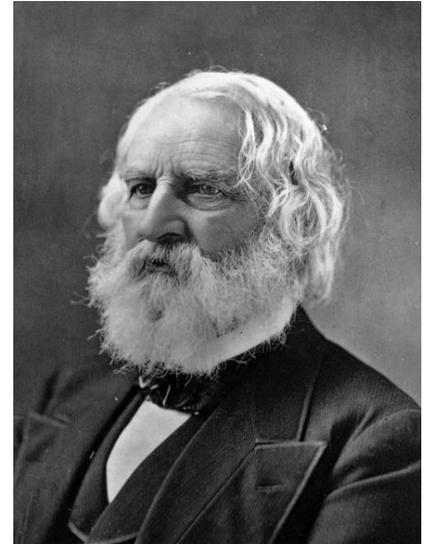




Comparing Frost and Longfellow With Longfellow Poetry Analysis



Robert Lee Frost and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow were both American poets. They are from different periods of time; Longfellow lived between 1807 and 1882, whereas Frost lived from 1874 to 1963. Each wrote poetry relevant to American life,



but used very different techniques. Frost is the more well known of the two, as would be expected given that his work is often noted as transcending time.

Both poets were well educated and taught at some point during their careers. Longfellow was educated at Bowdoin College and returned after a tour of Europe to accept a professorship there. Several years later he went on to teach at Harvard College. Frost was educated at Dartmouth College as well as Harvard University. Frost taught English at Pinkerton Academy as well as Plymouth State University.

The subject of Frost's poetry is often something natural or personal. Longfellow used a more globally responsive subject set, including a lot of elements from history, current events as well as from his travels in Europe. Frost's poetry defied the poetic standards of the time, and sought to challenge any ideals he could. Longfellow's poetry is more restrained and exemplifies the poetic standards of his time. Most of Frost's poetry is open in its interpretation, whereas most of

Longfellow's poetry has a decisive meaning, even if there is some symbolism left unresolved.

One of the most dramatic differences between Frost and Longfellow is how strongly they adhere to reality. Longfellow presents a lot of imagery in a dream state, or some form of hallucination.

Frost's poems are more lucid and firm.

Longfellow was a highly political writer in comparison to Frost. During Longfellow's time teaching at Harvard he was required to live near the campus, in Cragie House, which was the office of George Washington during the Siege of Boston in 1775². Longfellow's work shows a command of a large scope of topics and emotions, whereas Frost's work is mostly relevant to rural life, and seeks more to provoke thought than emotion.

The two poets were among the best of their time, and have left a large number of poems for future generations to enjoy.

Hymn to the Night

"Hymn to the Night" from Longfellow's Voices of the Night is an exceptionally expressive poem placed into a very rigid structure. With the timing of the poem, it is likely that the poem is speaking on Longfellow feeling the presence of his first wife, who died from a miscarriage. In the poem he compares the presence he feels to a calm night.

Longfellow uses repetition of the capitalized word "Night" throughout the poem to convey his subject. The fifth stanza is the only one to not utilize the "ight" sound to end any lines. The stanza seems to be the poet acknowledging the death and reaching an inner peace with it. It is in this stanza that he briefly changes from using "Night" to using "Care" as his noun of choice. He is very careful throughout the poem to avoid harsh sounds of words and any type of abrupt change in form. He selects words that are so light in meaning and perception that they seem to float off of the page. Words like "air", "flow", "repose", "light" and "flight" make the poem very soft and calm, keeping with the overall message being conveyed with the poem. Ironically, the peace of the regular meter and mood of the poem is broken in the last stanza with the exclamation of "Peace! Peace!" which comes across as a hurried statement with perhaps some sense of desperation, or excitement.

The aesthetic distance with this poem is very short. It is a cause for emotion, even if the reader knows nothing of the poet's life. The poem feels mournful and somber, pushing the reader to the same mood. This is accomplished primarily by vague imagery throughout the poem. The imagery is introduced with the personification of "trailing garments of the Night, Sweep through her marble halls" and is carried through the image of "My spirit drank repose". The almost impossible image of peace flowing like water into the poet's spirit gives an eerie feeling to an already dark poem.

Longfellow obviously poured a lot of himself into this poem. His grief and quest for peace are obvious. Throughout the poem it seems certain he will receive peace and be at rest, but the final stanza is more stressed and leaves his emotions uncertain.

Paul Revere's Ride

"Paul Revere's Ride" from Longfellow's Tales of a Wayside Inn uses a very traditional rhyme scheme with an alternating pattern of AABB as well as ABAB between the stanzas. The poem has a very pleasing tone, much like that of a bedtime story. The poem is formed to be a story, retelling of the historical events of the ride of Paul Revere to announce the arrival of the British during the Revolutionary War. One of the most interesting aspects of the poem is the integration of multiple points of view through the use of multiple line quotations.

A notable aspect of the poem is the vivid descriptiveness to each of the events portrayed. The description of the British ships as they cut across the river and then using words like "dread" and "dead" Longfellow pulls together the emotion of the night, portraying a fear in the watcher, and an anxiousness in Paul Revere. For a brief moment there is a pause between the sighting of the ships and Paul Revere's mounting of his horse, a moment of contemplation of the overall calmness of the night as the watcher stares at the moon and its reflections.

The poem carries very little historical accuracy, a fact that angers some historians¹. Longfellow's poem is more dramatic and heroic than any accurate historical fact ever could be of the events. The poem was written in 1860 and published in 1861, just before the beginning of the Civil War. Longfellow's poem provided a reminder to a stressed union of the difficulties that had been endured by the nation previously. With the election of Abraham Lincoln, it was expected that there may be some form of conflict. The poem instill patriotism and could have comforted some who were concerned about the nation.

The lacking historical accuracy does not prevent the poem's popularity, nor does it block its patriotic feeling. In this poem Longfellow crafted his own American tall-tale.

The Slave's Dream

"The Slave's Dream" is one of eight poems Longfellow wrote on the topic of slavery. Longfellow was an abolitionist and attempted to convey emotion with his poems on the topic of slavery.

"The Slave's Dream" is presented like many of Longfellow's poems, as a dream state. The poem is the unconscious reflections of an African slave, conjuring images of familiar people from the slave's earlier life and of the majestic landscape which was familiar to him. Initially it is unclear that the slave is dying, until the final stanza. The first stanza presents the slave laying in a restful state, asleep, perhaps like a lazy summer afternoon. The death of the slave is at first not noticed by the reader, but is then made directly obvious. Upon a first reading the death may seem abrupt, but further analysis reveals that the content of the dream moves further to the liberation of the spirit from the body as the slave falls from a sleep into death. The last stanza snaps to an external image of the driver whipping the slave, to which the slave does not feel pain or react.

The varying aspects of the slave's native land are linked in the poem by an irregular rhyme scheme. Unlike many of Longfellow's other poems, this poem does not have a rhyme for the last word of every line. The rhymes that are used are true rhymes, giving the poem a sense of having an even meter. The tone of the poem is varied. At the beginning the poem is very relaxed, towards the dream portion, it is more lofty, perhaps even gleeful, and the last stanza present a tone of peaceful release as the slave obtains his freedom from the pain of the whip and of the "burning heat of day".

The dream itself may be a symbol of the life that the slave never had because he was taken from his native land. The images that are part of the dream may have never had the chance to exist because of his absence, perhaps the reason for the tears shed in the sand. Longfellow draws a comparison between the life of the slave in the dream as well as in the setting of the poem. The dream represents all things unaccomplished in the slave's life, and Longfellow places the setting as "Beside the ungathered rice". In both versions of the slave's life, there is a symbol of his importance. As a slave his death represents rice that he will not gather, and in the dream, there are children and his "queen" who will miss him.

This poem showcases Longfellow's global consciousness, as he accurately portrays the landscape in the slave's native land.

Sundown

"Sundown" from Longfellow's In the Harbor is relatively short compared to his other poems. The poem's rhyme scheme is AABBA on all of his quintet stanzas, primarily composed of masculine rhymes. At only fifteen lines long, one might expect the poem to be lacking in substance, but it speaks volumes in its simplicity and directness. The obvious subject of the poem is the end of a summer day. On the more general sense it is a poem about all that happens within a summer day and the irreversible nature of time. Each stanza has its own purpose. The first is purely about the visual aesthetic of the sunset, which the poet captures elegantly into a well formed stanza. All of the most common elements are present, the setting of the sun, the red glow off of the atmosphere and on to the land, some objects reflecting enough to appear as though they are on fire and finally, the shadowing of all low places. It is something that most readers would be familiar with, thus it becomes a hook into the rest of the poem and into the

ideas that Longfellow wishes to express in the next two stanzas. The second stanza expresses the concept of the determination of whether a day was good, bad, beautiful or awful. In five simple lines, Longfellow expresses everything that is possible during a day through universal concepts. The second line expresses the concept of an exchange. The exchange is not specific, he could mean an exchanging of feelings, ideas or of physical things. There is no way for the reader to know. The concept of the exchange could also be carried to the next line, where he discusses life and death. Each day many people die and many are born. Life and death are mirrored against love and hate in third line as well. Love feeds into life as hate feeds into death. The poem was written during the Civil War, which gives more importance to the life and death events of a day. The fourth line speaks of homes that have been made happy, or homes that have been made desolate. The theme of life and death continues to this line. Homes are made happy by the arrival of new life, or desolate by a death, especially if the death is unexpected, such as in a war-related death. In the final line of the stanza Longfellow speaks of hearts that have been made sad or gay. The connection to life and death is less direct than other lines, but could still be carried logically. In the final stanza, Longfellow makes statements regarding the passage of time, in the form of a day. There is a metaphor in the first line, comparing life to a road and each day lived is another mile stone. The next line is a redundant metaphor comparing life to a book, and each day a new page to be turned. Both metaphors are fairly common in modern culture. Longfellow does not use them to be cliché, by using two metaphors he is reinforcing his point of the significance of the passage of each day. While every mile-stone on a road is not as notable as all of the others, without the ones between, it would be impossible to get where you are going, and while books often have plot elements the reader would prefer to skip, it is still important in the building of the overall plot. This message that Longfellow conveys is further enforced in the third line, which

throws a simile, wrapped in a metaphor, comparing the sun to a wax seal, a wax seal that seals the events of the day and denies any reentry. The fourth line clarifies the third line, by specifying the events being sealed as "the good and evil men have done". The final line of the stanza and the poem reasserts that nothing can restore what has happened during the day.

The poem is very simple in its structure and in its wording. The analogies and comparisons are easily understood by the common person. Longfellow conveys an important message about the passage of time. This poem is one of a few that Longfellow has written that may share some characteristics with Frost.

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