

Ebenezer Bassett was appointed the U.S. ambassador to Haiti. Just like the droves of white and black reformers who took up the mantle “Carpetbagger” after the war, Webb hoped to profit from opportunities to acquire abandoned lands and perhaps start a career with the federal government. He betrays no suspicion whatsoever that the coming decade would witness the entrenchment of a white supremacist state that threatened to extinguish his highest aspirations. For the moment, he confidently walked the streets of Washington, looking forward to the hospitable home he would build for his family in the postbellum South.

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LONGFELLOW’S SERENITY AND POE’S PREDICTION: AN ANTEBELLUM TURNING POINT

PAUL LEWIS

We grant him high qualities, but deny him *the Future*.

—Poe, “Review of [Longfellow’s] *Hyperion*,” 1839

Who—but hey-day! What’s this? Messieurs Mathews and Poe,
You mustn’t fling mud-balls at Longfellow so. . . .
Deduct all you can that still keeps you at bay,
Why, he’ll live till men weary of Collins and Gray.

—Lowell, *Fable for Critics*, 1848

This essay builds on a paper written for a panel on Longfellow and modernity at the 2011 conference of the American Literature Association.

REGARDED by almost everyone at the time as both excessive and obsessive, Edgar Allan Poe's career-long engagement with his far more admired and successful contemporary Henry Wadsworth Longfellow marked a turning point in United States literary history: a dramatic shift toward modernity. With the exception of a brief note about *Outre-Mer* in June 1835, each of Poe's assessments of Longfellow moves from praise, often high praise, to harsh criticism—often based on the proposition that the bard of Cambridge was a literary scoundrel, undeservedly triumphant by virtue of his unacknowledged borrowings from other writers. My concern here, however, is not with Poe's persuasive indictment of Longfellow as the "GREAT MOGUL of the Imitators"¹ but with his brilliant prognostication, in his 1839 review of Longfellow's *Hyperion*, concerning the fate of the author's reputation. Perhaps provoked by *Hyperion*'s chapter-long discussion of "literary fame," Poe declares, "All Ethics lie, and all History lies, or the world shall forget ye and your works. . . . We grant him high qualities, but deny him *the Future*."²

Unaware of, and thus undisturbed by, the prophetic accuracy of Poe's prediction, Longfellow made the following observation in his diary entry on 24 February 1847: "In Hexameter sings serenely a Harvard Professor; / In Pentameter him damns censorious Poe."³ Longfellow again strikes his pose of serenity in his 28 September 1850 reply to an inquiry from editor and anthologist Rufus W. Griswold, who was soliciting his reaction to Poe's charge that Longfellow had plagiarized from Poe's "The Haunted Palace" when composing "The Beleaguered City."⁴ "If you should resume this subject in print," Longfellow wrote Griswold, "I wish you would contrive to leave me entirely out of it. I dislike all controversy and violent discussion; and never have taken part in any, and never intend to do so."⁵

Poe's repeated, detailed, and essentially accurate demonstrations of Longfellow's plagiarism are, however, less interesting for what they

¹Edgar Allan Poe, "Longfellow's Poems," *Aristidean*, April 1845, p. 131.

²Edgar Allan Poe, "Review of *Hyperion*," *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine*, October 1839, p. 227.

³Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *Life of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow with Extracts from His Journals and Correspondence*, 3 vols., ed. Samuel Longfellow (Boston: Ticknor and Company, 1886), 2:80.

⁴For Poe's charge, see his letter to Griswold, dated 29 May 1841, <http://www.eapoe.org/works/letters/p4105290.htm> (accessed 23 November 2011).

⁵*The Letters of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*, 4 vols., ed. Andrew Hilen (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1966), 3:272.

exposed about the Harvard professor's character than for what they suggest about the backward-looking nature of Longfellow's creative practice.⁶ In renewing his prophecy in an 1840 review of Longfellow's first book of poems, *Voices of the Night* (1840), Poe hinted that the brand of poetics Longfellow advocated was not sufficiently robust to ensure lasting literary fame. Conceding that Longfellow had "idiosyncratic excellences" and a "fitful (unsteady) imagination," Poe concluded that such qualities were nonetheless ultimately incapable of supporting "any well-founded monument—any enduring reputation. . . . [H]e appears to us singularly deficient in all those important faculties which give artistical power, and without which never was immortality effected."⁷

Although Poe's battle with the Boston literary establishment undoubtedly damaged his reputation among his contemporaries, it also supported his commitment to an alternative aesthetic, one that privileged originality over conventionality, effect over argument, subjectivity over common sense, and indeterminacy over faith.⁸ Longfellow's greatest, albeit unintended, contribution to values like these, which became central to the development of both popular culture and modernism, may well have been the way in which his serene singing served to goad Poe to push beyond the confines of established literary practice and craft new genres at the nexus of mystery, humor, and fear.

Dueling Poetics

Poe's review of *Hyperion* tells us at least as much about his critical stance at the end of the 1830s as it does about Longfellow's practice,

⁶Biographer and critic Christoph Irmscher remarks that "Longfellow's works, published and unpublished, were pervaded by borrowings, sometimes explicit, more often unacknowledged, from other authors—so much so that on occasion it even seemed to him they hadn't been written by anyone in particular" (*Longfellow Redux* [Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006], p. 50).

⁷Edgar Allan Poe, "Review of *Voices of the Night*," *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine*, February 1840, p. 100.

⁸On Poe's engagement with the Boston literati, see Kent P. Ljungquist, "Valdemar' and the Frogpondians': The Aftermath of Poe's Boston Lyceum Appearance," in *Emersonian Circles: Essays in Honor of Joel Myerson*, ed. Robert Burkholder and Wesley Mott (Rochester, N.Y.: University of Rochester Press, 1997), pp. 181–206, and my "Poe's Quarrel with Boston Writers," in an exhibit I curated for the Boston Public Library, *The Raven in the Frog Pond: Edgar Allan Poe and the City of Boston*, 17 December 2009–31 March 2010, available at <http://www.bc.edu/schools/cas/english/poebostonexhibit/poesquarrel/1.html> (accessed 25 November 2011).

as Poe's rhetorical question suggests: "In the present instance, without design, without shape, without beginning, middle, or end, what earthly object has his book accomplished?—what definite impression has it left?"⁹ Impressions, or effects, mattered a great deal to Poe; indeed, they were the cornerstone of his thinking about authorship and popularity as well as the primary weapon he wielded in his pitched battle against Boston's literary establishment. In "The Poet" (1844), Emerson insisted that "it is not metres, but a metre-making argument, that makes a poem," a point that would have seemed obvious to anyone who had been reading literary periodicals at the time, where meter-making arguments, or at least arguments in verse, were ubiquitous.¹⁰ Though Emerson intended these arguments to be transformative and visionary, his contemporaries often settled for quarrelsome, opinionated, political, domestic, or nitpicking. To Poe, the distinction was unimportant: it all came down to the "heresy of the didactic."¹¹ Rather than seeking to convey truths, writers of poems and stories should concentrate on "the excitement, or pleasurable elevation, of the [reader's] soul."¹² And this, in fine, is what Poe held against Longfellow: he regarded the inculcation of a moral as essential. "[D]idacticism is the prevalent tone of his song. His invention, his imagery, his all, is made subservient to the elucidation of some one or more points (but rarely of more than one) which he looks upon as truth."¹³

With the exception of a few short, intense verses, Longfellow, like most of his contemporaries, strove to strike the right note with his poetry, affirm accepted or progressive principles, and offer sound advice. In an essay he published in the *North American Review* early in his career, he endorsed Sidney's classic essay "The Defense of Poetry." Preferring Wordsworth to Byron, Longfellow regrets that the "spirit of the age [in the United States] is clamorous for utility, for visible, tangible utility,—for [a] bare, brawny muscular utility"—for an unrelenting industry that leads readers away from what they

⁹Poe, "Review of *Hyperion*," p. 227.

¹⁰Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays: Second Series* (Boston: James Munroe and Company, 1844), 10.

¹¹Edgar Allan Poe, "The Poetic Principle," in *The Works of the Late Edgar Allan Poe*, 5 vols., ed. Rufus W. Griswold (New York: J. S. Redfield, 1850), 3:1–20.

¹²Edgar Allan Poe, "The Philosophy of Composition," *Graham's Magazine*, April 1846, p. 164.

¹³Edgar Allan Poe, "Review of *Ballads and Other Poems* (Part II)," *Graham's Magazine*, April 1842, p. 248.

see as “the shady idleness . . . [of the] poet’s pastimes.” Properly understood, he contends, poetry too is useful because, at its best, it is edifying: “The legitimate purpose of poetry is to exalt, rather than to debase,—to purify, rather than corrupt. . . . [Poetry] may be made, and should be made, [into] an instrument for improving the condition of society, and advancing the great purpose of human happiness.”¹⁴

Poe’s critical statement, included in “Letter to Mr.—,” in the 1831 collection of his poems, announced a far more forward-looking aesthetic: “The end of instruction should be happiness; and happiness is another name for pleasure; —therefore the end of instruction should be pleasure [and] . . . he who pleases, is of more importance to his fellow men than he who instructs.” Whereas Poe defined poetry as “music . . . combined with a pleasurable idea,” Longfellow called on his countrymen to see that poetry need not be “effeminate,” incapacitating, enervating, or corrupting. Whereas Poe assailed the notion that poems should be useful (“I see no reason, then, why our metaphysical poets should plume themselves so much on the utility of their works”)—Longfellow insisted that the best poems, ones that “fill our hearts with veneration for all that is great in intellect, and godlike in virtue,” were instrumental to society’s advancement.¹⁵

Faithful Evangeline, Naughty Ligeia

Longfellow’s *Evangeline* (1847) and Poe’s “Ligeia” (1838) both deal with love and devotion, but whereas the Serene One sought to embody a familiar ideal or idea, the Master of Mystery sought to entrance, alarm, and terrify. The circumstances in which Longfellow first heard the story of *Evangeline*—at a dinner with Nathaniel Hawthorne and the Reverend Horace Conolly in Cambridge, Massachusetts, on 5 April 1840—are well known—as is Longfellow’s urging Hawthorne to work it up in fiction before taking it on himself.¹⁶ Calling the legend “the best illustration of faithfulness and the constancy of woman that I have ever heard of or read,”¹⁷ Longfellow produced a book-length epic crafted to appeal to the already persuaded:

¹⁴Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, “Defence of Poetry,” *North American Review*, January 1832, pp. 59, 63.

¹⁵Edgar Allan Poe, *Poems* (New York: Elam Bliss, 1831), pp. 19, 28; Longfellow, “Defence of Poetry,” pp. 62–63, 61.

¹⁶Charles C. Calhoun, *Longfellow: A Rediscovered Life* (Boston: Beacon Press 2004), p. 180.

¹⁷Quoted in Calhoun, *Longfellow*, p. 180.

Ye who believe in affection that hopes, and endures, and is patient,
 Ye who believe in the beauty and strength of woman's devotion,
 List to the mournful tradition still sung by the pines of the forest;
 List to a Tale of Love in Acadie, home of the happy.¹⁸

Preaching to the converted, the poem follows its eponymous character, a pious seventeen-year-old virgin from Grand Pré, Acadie, who is separated on her wedding day from her fiancé, Gabriel Lajeunesse, during the English expulsion of the French from Nova Scotia. To support his pious rendering of a story in which bad things happen to good people, Longfellow must suppress outrage, must ensure that no one asks the question Ahab puts to Starbuck in "The Symphony" chapter of *Moby-Dick*: "Who's to doom, when the judge himself is dragged to the bar?"¹⁹ Longfellow accomplishes this feat by shielding his undaunted heroine behind the impenetrable armor of faith, evident in her final comment to her soon-to-be-inaccessible betrothed: "Gabriel! be of good cheer! [she says] for if we love one another, / Nothing, in truth, can harm us, whatever mischances may happen!"²⁰

"Mischances"? Burning your toast is a "*mischance*"; losing the love of your life is a cruel joke inflicted randomly in an indifferent universe. Over the ensuing decades, Evangeline searches for her Gabriel, resisting suggestions that she settle for another man, pursuing her "work of affection." Thwarted but determined, she brings Christ-like constancy (and pure and simple motives) to the task: "Thus did that poor soul wander in want and cheerless discomfort, / Bleeding, barefooted, over the shards and thorns of existence." Gabriel is an old man on his deathbed when the couple is finally reunited. They have time remaining sufficient only for a flash of eye contact, a declaration of love, and a kiss. Apparently this suffices, since Evangeline's response is "meekly" to bow her head in prayer and say, "Father, I thank thee."²¹ Later she is buried beside Gabriel in a Catholic graveyard that is said to be far from "the forest primeval." I quote this phrase because, though long-dead generations of English students memorized parts of *Evangeline* and other Longfellow poems, today's students are unlikely to

¹⁸Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *Evangeline: A Tale of Acadie* (Boston: William D. Ticknor and Company, 1847), p. 7.

¹⁹Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick; or The Whale* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1851), p. 600.

²⁰Longfellow, *Evangeline*, p. 69.

²¹Longfellow, *Evangeline*, pp. 69, 89–90, 160.

get beyond “This is the forest primeval,” *Evangeline*’s once-famous opening line, and even less likely to know who wrote it.

As early as 1923, when Longfellow was sliding down the slippery slope of fame, D. H. Lawrence recognized that “Ligeia,” Poe’s story of dangerous passion and extreme marriages, was an early expression of a new American myth. Noting that Poe had “no truck with Indians or Nature,” Lawrence identified in “Ligeia,” especially, one half of an evolving cultural trend that consisted of “(1) A disintegrating and sloughing of the old consciousness [and] (2) The forming of a new consciousness underneath.” Determined to affirm the familiar, Longfellow had no standing in what Lawrence called the forward-looking “rhythm of American art-activity.” But “Ligeia,” Lawrence argued in detail, epitomized the first stage of the two-stage process: “the death of the old consciousness.”²² Though Lawrence does not make this point, “Ligeia” is also unsettling because it violates assumptions about domestic relations taken for granted in *Evangeline*. Shunning didacticism, “Ligeia” presents two marriages through the haunted and hallucinatory mind of the tale’s husband-killer-narrator. The unwavering loyalty that allows *Evangeline* calmly to bid her dying beloved adieu marks the height of Longfellow’s art, whereas Poe’s appears in a terrifying scene of a literally undying desire: an all-consuming and willful passion. Rising to a powerful climax, the mysteries that resonate in “Ligeia” pose questions about gender relations that continue to intrigue students and scholars alike.

And yet, according to the Maine Historical Society, “*Evangeline* . . . elevated Longfellow to be the most famous writer in America . . . cementing [his] reputation as the preeminent mythmaker of his country’s young history.” It’s true, as the society notes, that *Evangeline* “became a huge success,” that it: “went through six printings in the first six months after being published, and within ten years had been translated into a dozen languages”; was “made into two films, one in 1922 and the second, starring popular silent film actress Dolores Del Rio, in 1929”; and that “generations of American children read, memorized, and recited the poem as part of their schooling.”²³ But, even if we accept this upbeat account, the “cement” that ostensibly holds Longfellow’s reputation intact developed serious cracks sometime

²²D. H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1923; repr. 1977), p. 70.

²³Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, The Maine Historical Association Web site, <http://www.hwlongfellow.org/works-evangeline.shtml> (accessed 8 June 2011).

between World Wars I and II, just as Poe's reputation ascended to new heights. As modernity—with its deep suspicions about objectivity, truth, and piety—took hold, Poe's dark and startling narratives—his sense that mystery has a power that should not be denied or evaded, that the fixed ideals of antebellum America were unreliable—gained popularity as Longfellow continued his long, slow descent into obscurity.

You don't have to take my word for it; let's look at the numbers. On 24 April 2011, Google searches for "Henry Wadsworth Longfellow" yielded 1,410,000 hits, whereas "Edgar Allan Poe" yielded 22,900,000. An Amazon.com search for the word "Poe" returned 23,703 pages hawking items including comics, toys, dolls, bobble heads, and action figures as well as books, CDs, and films, while a similar search for "Longfellow" found 1,005 pages, essentially all of which were for books. None of the 24 pages selling toys referred to our Longfellow, and no HWL bobble heads or action figures were on offer. MLA Bibliography searches with a 1960–2011 date range for publications of all types that included either "Poe" or "Poe's" in their titles yielded 3,572 hits versus 334 for works that included either "Longfellow" or "Longfellow's." Number of members in the Poe Studies Association as of April 2011: 230; number of members in the Longfellow Society as of April 2011: 6. And, finally, a Books Ngram Viewer search for the appearance of the two authors' full names in the Google Books collection of approximately four million books instantly produced the following graph.

Fuller, Lowell, and Holmes

We don't need Rufus Griswold, who slandered Poe in an obituary he published under the name Ludwig, to tell us that, on a personal level, Poe can look pretty shabby.²⁴ He obviously resented Longfellow's success. Even during his moments of comparative career stability, Poe was always scrambling for and worried about money. He married into his own impoverished paternal family, and he tended to alienate people he needed to cultivate in the publishing industry. All of these festering afflictions emerge as subtext in the opening of Poe's provocative review essay published in the April 1845 issue of the *Aristidean*, which attributes Longfellow's "present celebrity—such as it is" to "the adventitious influence of his social position as [a] Professor . . .

²⁴*New York Tribune*, 9 October 1849.

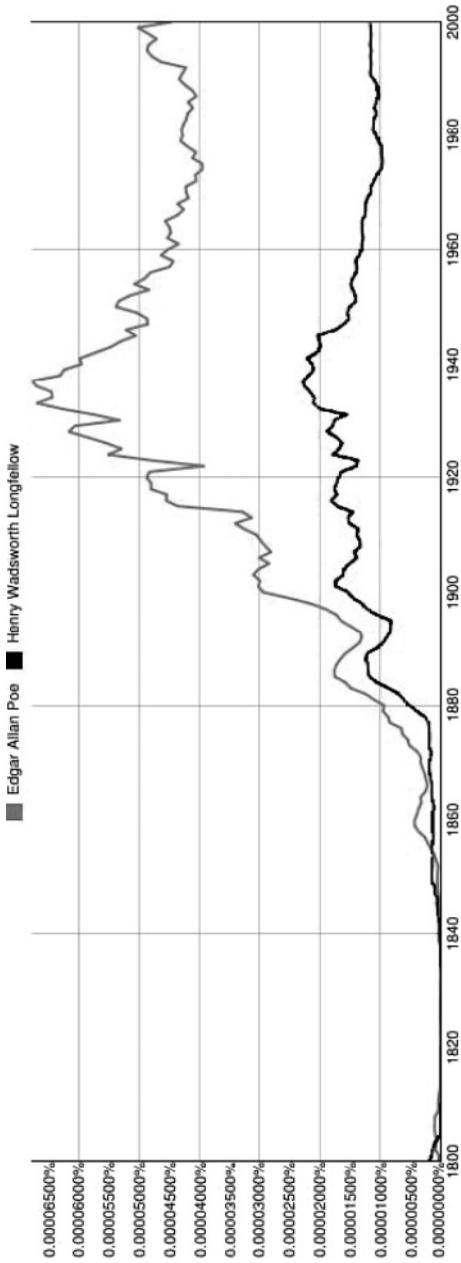


FIG. 1.—Comparative occurrence of the two author's names in the Google Book collection.

SOURCE: Jean-Baptiste Michel, *Yuan Kui Shen, Aviva Presser Aiden, Adrian Veres, Matthew K. Gray, William Brockman, The Google Books Team, Joseph P. Pickett, Dale Hoiberg, Dan Clancy, Peter Norvig, Jon Orwant, Steven Pinker, Martin A. Nowak, and Erez Lieberman Aiden, "Quantitative Analysis of Culture Using Millions of Digitized Books," *Science* (published online ahead of print), 16 December 2010; see <http://books.google.com/ngrams/info> (accessed 2 December 2011).

at HARVARD, and an access of this influence by marriage with an heiress." Nowhere is Poe's comparative loneliness more clearly revealed than in his characterizations of Longfellow's friends and supporters as "the Longfellow junto" and a "knot of rogues and madmen." His response to Longfellow's Bostonian politics in this review is particularly unappealing in retrospect. Longfellow's abolitionist volume, "Poems on Slavery" (1842), Poe claimed, was "intended for the especial use of those negrophilic old ladies of the north, who form so large a part of Mr. LONGFELLOW'S friends."²⁵ Nor could Poe praise Longfellow (or anyone else, really) without quickly appending a qualification. In his 1841 "Autography" sketch, he begins as follows: "H. W. LONGFELLOW, (Professor of Moral Philosophy at Harvard,) is entitled to the first place among the poets of America." But Poe then moves on to say, "certainly to the first place among those who have put themselves prominently forth as poets. His good qualities are all of the highest order, while his sins are chiefly those of affectation and imitation—an imitation sometimes verging upon downright theft."²⁶ The ironic implication of Longfellow's supposed command of "moral philosophy" could hardly have escaped anyone's notice.

Still, whatever his personal and political limitations, Poe understood the nature of popularity well enough to recognize that Longfellow's mid-century appeal would not hold up. In this, as in many of his well-argued positions, Poe was not only correct but he stood outside the mainstream. At least one other writer stood there with him. The independent reviewer Margaret Fuller, at the time working in New York as well, also took aim at Longfellow. Fuller focused on Longfellow in the wake of what Poe called the "Little Longfellow War," which had climaxed in his *Aristidean* essay. In her December 1845 review of the Carey and Hart edition of Longfellow's *Poems* (1845), Fuller accepted Poe's familiar charge of plagiarism and took it to be a sign of Longfellow's status as a poet whose work fell well below the level of genius but also above the level of hack. Longfellow, Fuller observed in the version of the review included in her 1846 volume *Papers on Literature and Art*, belonged to the "middle class" of poets, unworthy of the "exaggerated praises that have been bestowed upon him[,] . . . a person of moderate powers." Like Poe before her, Fuller mocks the opulence of the physical book under consideration, calling

²⁵Poe, "Longfellow's Poems," pp. 130 (2) and 131.

²⁶Edgar Allan Poe, "A Chapter on Autography [part I]," *Graham's Magazine*, November 1841, p. 229.

attention, for instance, to the flattering and idealized portrait of the poet with its out-of-place, because too soulful, emphasis on his eyes. “There is an attempt at adorning it by expression thrown into the eyes with just that which the original does not possess, whether in face or mind.” And Fuller is drawn, like Poe but with less predictive force, to speculate about how Longfellow will be regarded in the future: “Twenty years hence, when he stands upon his own merits, he will rank as a writer of elegant, if not always accurate taste, of great imitative power, and occasional felicity in an original way, where his feelings are really stirred.”²⁷

In August 1845, four months before her review appeared, Fuller had published a satirical, feminist poem in the *Broadway Journal*, which Poe was coediting at the time. In a letter not in Fuller’s handwriting but attributed to her, which accompanied the poem and was addressed to “The Editor of the *Broadway Journal*,” Fuller explained her intent:

The object of the present communication speaks for itself. It is to ridicule a style of writing very common in your sex, when discoursing of ours, but which deserves no better epithet than ineffable silliness. I am aware that Longfellow is a popular poet & deservedly so, but I am sure he will not be offended at such a mere piece of pleasantry, coming as it does from one of the party to whom such soft nonsense is addressed.

Pushing sexist ideas to comic extremes, Fuller’s “The Whole Duty of Woman” deploys a style of *reductio ad absurdum* currently associated with satirists like Sasha Baron Cohen and Stephen Colbert. Although it both quotes from and alludes to several strikingly sexist works, it opens with a canon blast at Longfellow:

“What I most prize in woman
Is her affection, not her intellect.”
So says the poet Longfellow—and in saying this
He but repeats the sentiments of all the nobler sex.
“Pooh! We don’t want sense in women!
It only injures, and renders them more difficult to manage.
We have enough for both. . . .”

And Fuller returns to Longfellow’s lines later in the poem:

The feeling most becoming in a woman
Is “just as my husband wishes”—

²⁷Sarah Margaret Fuller, *Papers on Literature and Art* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1846), pp. 153, 157.

And as affection is the thing we crave,
 Be liberal in the outward demonstration.
 Think not of self, nor call your soul your own;
 But when the loved one steps within his bower
 Be sure and meet him with a raptured smile,
 E'en if he's cross and snappish.²⁸

While Poe and Fuller were flinging mud-balls, Longfellow's friends and admirers were closing ranks to safeguard his reputation. Lowell's 1848 prediction that Longfellow would "live till men weary of Collins and Gray" was true only because men wearied of Collins and Gray before they wearied of Longfellow. In 1882, following Longfellow's death, Oliver Wendell Holmes's "Our Dead Singer" appeared in the June issue of the *Atlantic Monthly*. It is laden with both grief and conviction: "Oh, for our vanished Orpheus once again! / The shadowy silence hears us call in vain! / His lips are hushed; his song shall never die." In an introductory note to Holmes's poem, the editors recalled that "In America, multitudes of children, in city and village, had just given [Longfellow] the honor of their voices upon the celebration of his seventy-fifth birthday, and the memory of a poet is secure which rests in the praise of children."²⁹ "In 1884, Holmes revisited the matter of his friend's reputation in a nostalgic recollection of "The Saturday Club." Insisting that Longfellow still wore the "POET Laureate" wreath, Holmes wrote, "What tranquil joy his friendly presence gives! / How could I think him dead? He lives! He lives!"³⁰ Driven less by personal affection than by the desire to identify and herald a great American poet, some reviewers hailed Longfellow as early as the 1840s, a trend that extended into later reviews, obituaries, career overviews, and the preferences demonstrated in anthologies of United States literature through the early decades of the twentieth century.³¹

²⁸Margaret Fuller, "The Whole Duty of Woman," *Broadway Journal*, 23 August 1845, p. 10.

²⁹Oliver Wendell Holmes, "Our Singer Dead," *Atlantic Monthly*, June 1882, p. 722; introduction, p. 720.

³⁰Oliver Wendell Holmes, "At the Saturday Club," *Atlantic Monthly*, January 1884, p. 69.

³¹In its 25 March 1882 obituary, the *New York Times* observed that "With *Evangeline* (1847) Longfellow may be said first to have acquired something of that fixed and enduring place in our literature . . . really and permanently achieved by *Hiawatha* nine years later." Similarly, the obituary that ran in *Zion's Herald* on 29 March 1882 observed that Longfellow had "saluted the coming generation in sentences that will not be forgotten." In his introduction to a 1900 anthology of American literature, Edmund Clarence Stedman defends the inclusion of so many of Longfellow's poems by

And yet, we require no Ngram search to demonstrate that Longfellow's appeal to a wide reading public, so often touted in defense of his legacy, has diminished in recent decades. Of course, reputations rise and fall; taste alters. But Poe's observations about his era's beloved contemporary focus our attention on an antebellum crisis: a shift away from certainty and toward mystery. Certainty builds on conviction; it supports duty, clarity, advocacy, assertion, and reform. Shining light into dark places, it can accomplish great things. Indeed, it can change the world by teaching us to live up to the ideals we already affirm or should affirm. But mystery stops us where we're standing and forces us to reconsider, to feel and think in new ways. As Todorov observed, it plunges us into confusion, hesitation, speculation.³² As I noted in an early essay on gothic sub-genres, mystery can give way to laughter (as in getting a joke), problem solving (if it challenges comprehension), or fear (if it seems dangerous).³³ Unresolved, mystery holds our attention, leaves us "wondering, fearing, / Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before."³⁴

Conclusion

Both Longfellow and Poe reviewed Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales*, his first collection of short stories for adult readers—the former in 1837, the latter in 1842. In his anonymous appreciation, Longfellow described his fellow Bowdoin College alumnus as an upbeat, Romantic visionary: "The book, though in prose, is written nevertheless by a poet. He looks upon all things in the spirit of love, and with lively sympathies. . . . The true poet is a friendly man. . . . To his eye all things are beautiful and holy."³⁵ Celebrating the stories' less sunny side in his two-part review of the 1842 edition, Poe observed that the

calling him "the people's 'artist of the beautiful'" (*An American Anthology, 1787–1900* [Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company], p. xvi). In *Longfellow Redux*, Irmscher follows the decline of this much-defended reputation, a decline that deepened as modernism ascended (pp. 14–20).

³²Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1975), pp. 25–29.

³³See my "Mysterious Laughter: Humor and Fear in Gothic Fiction," *Genre* 14 (1981): 309–27.

³⁴Edgar Allan Poe, "The Raven," *Evening Mirror*, 29 January 1854, p. 4.

³⁵Henry Wadsworth Longfellow [unsigned], review of *Twice-Told Tales*, *North American Review*, July 1837, p. 60.

“tone is singularly effective—wild, plaintive, thoughtful, and in full accordance with his themes.”³⁶

Poe also defended the short story, “as Mr. Hawthorne has here exemplified it,” as an ideal genre for moving readers:

In the brief tale . . . the author is enabled to carry out the fullness of his intention, be it what it may. During the hour of perusal the soul of the reader is at the writer’s control. There are no external or extrinsic influences—resulting from weariness or interruption.

And Poe saw and celebrated something new in Hawthorne: “Mr. Hawthorne’s distinctive trait is Invention[—]creation, imagination,—a trait which, in the literature of fiction, is positively worth all the rest.”³⁷

Straddling Longfellow’s and Poe’s poetics, Hawthorne showed his face to each critic in turn. Whereas Longfellow detected serenity and friendliness in Hawthorne’s gaze, Poe saw something anxious and wild—something original. Valuing mystery over faith, effect over argument, surprise over reassurance, innovation over conformity, and edginess over predictability—Poe was ideally positioned to predict that Hawthorne’s (and his own) work would survive their time; Longfellow’s, as he foresaw, would not.

In rejecting didacticism, Poe understood that certainty provides comfort, but mystery stirs the soul. Despite his early death, Poe’s international popularity equals, and may well exceed, that of any other antebellum author. Henry James’s comparison of Emerson and Hawthorne reverberates in the juxtaposition I have developed here, with Longfellow as the “spiritual sun-worshipper” and Poe as the writer whose “catlike faculty” allowed him to see into “the dark.”³⁸ Or consider W. H. Auden sitting in “one of the dives on Fifty-second Street” contemplating the outbreak of World War II.

All the conventions conspire
To make this fort assume
The furniture of home;
Lest we should see where we are,
Lost in a haunted wood,

³⁶Edgar Allan Poe, “Review of Hawthorne—*Twice Told Tales*,” *Graham’s Magazine*, April 1842, p. 254.

³⁷Poe, “Review of *Twice-Told Tales*,” p. 298.

³⁸Henry James, *Hawthorne* (London: John Macmillan and Company, 1879), p. 91.

Children afraid of the night
 Who have never been happy or good. . . .³⁹

If Poe continues to haunt us, it is in part because he destabilized antebellum ideals of piety and domesticity. Perhaps not coincidentally, at the historical moment when the Ngram Books search shows Poe hovering at his highest point above Longfellow (1939), “a low dishonest decade” was ushering in war and genocide. Conventional and reassuring, Longfellow dedicated his art to producing what Auden called “the furniture of home,” whereas Poe was intent on reminding us of “who and where we are”—fearful children, never happy, never good, “lost in a haunted wood.”

³⁹W. H. Auden, “September 1, 1939,” in *The Broadview Anthology of British Literature: The Twentieth Century and Beyond*, ed. Joseph Laurence Black (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2006), p. 582.

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