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The Fireside Poets: Forerunners of a Rebirth of Poetry Appreciation in America

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Abstract

The fireside poets also referred to as the schoolroom poets or family poets were a group of New England-based American poets active in the 19th century. The first American poets whose fame rivalled that of British poets were Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, William Cullen Bryant, John Greenleaf Whittier, James Russell Lowell, and Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr. Their writing earned them the moniker "fireside poets," and families would congregate around the fire at their homes to enjoy it. American poets known as the "fireside poets" wrote for a mass readership in the present.Domestic life, mythology, and American politics were their main topics of discussion. They were suitable for memorizing and recitation in the classroom and at home because of their body of work.These poets generally favoured traditional forms to experimentation and because of their emphasis on rhyme and adherence to regular metrical cadences, their work was well-liked for memorization and recitation in both households and classrooms. This essay would discuss some of the fireside poets, their contributions and important characteristics.

Keywords: Fireside poets, Schoolroom poets,Household poets, neo-Victorian, Native American, Saturday Club.

Introduction

Five writers, William Cullen Bryant, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, John Greenleaf Whittier, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and James Russell Lowell, are together referred to as the "Fireside Poets" or "Schoolroom Poets" or "Household Poets." In the second part of the nineteenth century, the aforementioned poets had enormous fame in America. Their writings were studied during family gatherings, frequently read aloud by either parent to the gathered family, and in classrooms where they inspired feelings of nationalism in young Americans. They are now given a minor place in the noetic conceptions of individuals who are acclimated with poetry, despite efforts to renovate their critical reputations and position in the curriculum. The neo-Victorian turn toward public-spirited literature, which might be expected to reclaim them, has so far paid them little mind, though some attention has recently been given to their environmental and Native American themes.

These poets achieved a level of public acceptance in a time before radio, television, or the Internet, which is unmatched in the modern period. Their longevity and other prominent accomplishments, such as working as professors and academic chairs, editors of well-known newspapers, foreign ambassadors, public speakers, and translators of Homer and Dante, all contributed to their influence.(Lentricchia, ***Modernist Quartet***, 2) However, it was not wrong for their contemporaries to believe that they were forming a club that did not include poets like Emerson, Whitman, or Dickinson, to name just three whose notoriety in the 20th century has

obscured their own. All derived their understanding of poetry to varying degrees from eighteenth-century English verse, which had a less individual and more global perspective than Emerson's, Whitman's, or Dickinson's. Even as they tried their best to find an authentic American voice, they were formally restricted and maintained decorum.Despite the fact that Holmes, on the other hand, maintained his distance from life's bustle and that Whittier had once been beaten by a crowd in New Hampshire for his abolitionist views, all five of these individuals were liked by the average reader of the day. They were not alienated from society or humanity in the same way that, in their own unique ways, their contemporaries Emerson, Whitman, and Dickinson, as well as Poe, Hawthorne, Thoreau, and Melville, were.Their poems didn't ruin the cozy warmth of the campfire or the classroom's sincere efforts to advance student learning.

Rather than accommodating as a veridical assessment of their value to prevalent readers, this helplessness may instead be a reflection of the powerlessness of poetry in general in American society. Students no longer study Bryant's ***The Chambered Nautilus*** or Longfellow's ***Evangeline*** yet these authors could still be in the fore of a renaissance of poetry appreciation in America. They were well-relished in their day due to their posture toward verse and the frequently conspicuously discernible rectitude in their poetry.Their poetry rose to fame for its reassuring readability and expression of modern societal virtues. Some of the poems told the stories of American folklore, while others evoked nostalgic images of rural America, and still others dealt with current events. The Fireside Poets were the first to compare American and British poetry on an equal footing.

The Saturday Club, of which the Fireside Poets were former members, was another group. Women's poetry and anti-abolitionist essays were two things that the founders of this club felt were missing from publishing market and wanted to remedy. ***The Saturday Club*** members later founded the Atlantic Monthly to provide a venue for the genres of writing they wished were more widely read. The writings of the Fireside Poets are featured in these first issues of the Atlantic Monthly, which are accessible on HathiTrust.(***LibGuides: The Fireside Poets: Home***)

William Cullen Bryant

American poet and newspaper editor William Cullen Bryant was born in Cummington, Massachusetts, on November 3, 1794. His father, a famous surgeon, introduced him to American literature. He venerated the comeliness of nature in a manner that was reminiscent of the English romantics while additionally reflecting his own candour and majesty. In his ***Inscription for the Entrance to a Wood***, Bryant exalted the woodlands as spiritual havens at a time when his people were indiscriminately clearing them of trees: "The calm shade/Shall bring a kindred calm, and the sweet breeze/That makes the green leaves dance, shall waft a balm…"

Bryant encourages his readers in works like ***Inscription for the Entrance to a Wood***, ***Autumn Woods***, ***After a Tempest***, and ***A Forest Hymn*** to set aside their woes, grievances, and cares to join him in the wild woods to enjoy nature. He was a strong proponent of free trade, the abolition of slavery,

and other changes. He also stood up for human rights. He was well-traveled and gave numerous lectures in front of crowds, all the while continuing to create a few poems. As the first American poet's thinker, he occupies an important place in literature**.**

The most well-known of Bryant's poems is ***Thanatopsis***, which was composed in the greatest blank verse before Robert Frost. ***Thanatopsis*** is a reflection on nature's icy response to human mortality, somewhat softened by lines added to the beginning and end after its initial publication. It takes a broad view of nature and the world, referring only once to specifically American nature—the Northwest forest.

A Winter Piece, which substitutes unrhymed blank verse for the heroic language of British Augustan poetry, is a classic example of Bryant's Americanism. ***A Winter Piece***, however, achieves a modest, domestic, blank verse in narratingNew England's woods in winter rather than aiming for the minor Miltonic grandeur of ***Thanatopsis***. It culminates with a recount of March maple sugaring, wreaths of smoke ascending from the sugar houses in the morning sunshine as the woods ring with puerile voices and the stroke of the axe.

Bryant's understanding of the natural world combined science and philosophical. He has knowledge of chemistry, geology, especially, botany and medicine He became one of the one of his generation's most accomplished horticulturists, and sourced exotic species from other nations and conducted experiments at his residence in Cedarmere, Long Island, with their culture. The poem ***The Fountain*** which describes an organized world and the geologic changes that take place in it is an example of how this scientific knowledge was incorporated into his poetry. Bryant, however, did not let the fact of the sciences overpower his philosophical observations about nature.

Bryant maintained that native poetry must be rooted in the local culture. He did, however, see the emptiness of an American vision that shuns the long-cultivated attractiveness of English traditions, much as Lowell would in the following generation. Bryant laments the loss of kinship with nature that the American cemetery, exhibited in ***The Burial-Place*** by contrasting an English churchyard cemetery with its American counterpart. With the wild brier rose and strawberry that garnish the drab green grass spikes surrounding the headstones, nature herself chastises this desolation.

Bryant preserves the allure and propinquity of the English tradition in the fairies that dwell even in the winter forests of his New England; a presence that Whitman, Dickinson, and the American poets who came after them abnegated, just as the Puritans who came afore them had abnegated it. Bryant suggests that this affinity might be recuperated in the customs of America's native Indians, which he celebrates throughout his poetry, albeit too frequently incoherently.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Another renowned poet for the Fireside was Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. In the month of February of the year 1807, Longfellow was born in Portland. The second of seven siblings, he was born. Being a prodigal kid, Longfellow could read, spell, and do the math before the age of six. He also learned Latin grammar. He was also a gifted

pianist and flute player. After enrolling at Bowdoin College to pursue his education, he received an opportunity to work as the school's first Modern Languages professor. After being hired as a professor of modern languages at Harvard University, he travelled to Europe once more with a focus on the literature and languages of the north.

He was well-versed in the entire European legacy, both technically and culturally, when he commenced composing his poetry. He adored inditing about the alfresco. He gained notoriety as the best-kenned fireside poet. Longfellow took a little longer to launch his vocation as a poet than Bryant, who inscribed some of his best poetry and conceptions of poetry when he was still a teenager.

A voice of the Night, his first accumulation of poetry**,** wasn't relinquished until he was in his thirties; ***Evangeline: A Tale of Acadie***, the poem that established him as a literary icon, was relinquished when he was forty. But his early years laid the substructure for his lengthy vocation. His readings grew to encompass Middle Ages literature, and he translated a plethora of European poetry as his adeptness ameliorated.

Evangeline: A Tale of Acadie, is an epic poem that tells the tale of an Acadian girl, Evangeline, and her quest for her love, Gabriel. It is set at the time of the expulsion of the Acadians, i.e., the forced eviction of French colonists by the British from the present-day province of Maine and several Canadian provinces during 1755-1764. It had a strong effect on not only defining Acadian history but also its identity throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century's. The poem was published in 1847 and became Longfellow's magnum opus.

However, Longfellow's sensibility is conspicuous in the characters and stories he culls, as well as the moral macrocosm they inhabit. He frequently conjures up estimable characters who are introduced in straightforward, everyday language, as in ***The Village Blacksmith*** and ***Paul Revere's Ride***, which instantly makes Bryant or even Wordsworth's posture seem archaic and coerced. When the Protestant sermon accommodated as the most prevalent literary form in American culture, the presentation of these figures infrequently included sententious moral didacticism.

Longfellow's poetry frequently deviates from Protestant moralizing to convey the adequate feeling of subsistence that Longfellow discovered on his peregrinates around Europe rather than in Puritan New England. The iconic American tale by Longfellow, ***Evangeline***, is not about Puritan New Englanders but rather about the French Acadians who were driven out of their communal world of farming, fiddle music, and nut-brown ale by English tyranny. The magnificent world of the Louisiana bayous, the woodlands of Michigan and the western plains make up the America that Evangeline explores in search of her sweetheart.

According to Ireland, before the term "multiculturalist" even existed, Longfellow was one. He considered studying abroad was a valuable educational experience and that the many European influences on American literature were the best way to understand it. Longfellow established the nation's first comparative literature program at Harvard and popularized the notion that modern languages need to be taught by native speakers.(Ireland, 2007)

James Russell Lowell

James Russell Lowell was born in 1819 in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He was a poet, a critic, and an editor. Lowell received his education at Harvard and later became a professor of modern languages there. He left law for literature and started a literary magazine named ***The Pioneer***. He was influential in the intellectual circles of New England. He was a passionate abolitionist and was completely against slavery. Some of his best-known works were ***A Fable for Critics***, ***The Vision of Sir Launfal***, and ***The Bigelow Papers***. All through his life, James Russell Lowell grappled with rotating spells of achievement and inactivity.

His biography has become a new front in the North and South's ongoing conflict, with Horace E. Scudder, Ferris Greenslet, and others praising him for his contributions to New England culture and Richmond Croom Beatty and Leon Howard decrying him for the same reasons. Martin Duberman, who was drawn to Lowell more recently because of the city's abolitionist efforts, later became weary of Lowell's moderation and developed a mistrust of organized reform organizations. While the New Humanists, including Norman Foerster and Harry Hayden Clark, correctly saw Lowell as a forerunner of their philosophical perspective, Lowell's detractors attacked him and referred to him as "Victorian," "genteel," "conservative," and "academic," the same terms they used to describe the New Humanists. Finally, despite the fact that Walter Blair, Jennette Tandy, and H. L. Mencken noted that Lowell made a significant contribution to "native" American literature with The Biglow Papers, the cosmopolitan viewpoint that characterized Lowell's later life and much of his best work found few admirers during the "national period" of American literary criticism in the 1930s and 1940s. (***Dictionary of Literary Biography, 2022***)

When the Civil War broke out, Lowell's friends convinced him to read ***The Bigelow Papers*** again and this time support the North's war effort. Although the second series preserves the political aspect of the first, it goes much beyond it in terms of establishing the Yankee accent voice as a vehicle for poetry as well as satire.

But it's not Lowell's voice. A portion of an unfinished poem, ***Fitz Adam's Story***, features a Yankee character eerily similar to Lowell who tells the story of Deacon Bitters and the Devil. The story's brevity, in contrast to Lowell's eager New England poetry, contributes to its hilarity. The odes in irregular poetry that Lowell spoke at various civil ceremonies in praise of people like Washington, Lincoln, the goddess of freedom, and others who helped create and sustain America's national character are more noteworthy.

The odes attempt to achieve new prosodic freedom, but they retain the flavour of fading public oratory despite being only partially modern. Lowell's entire talent only becomes apparent in ***Under the Willows***, ***The Cathedral***, and a select few late poems; it is sluggish in ***Under the Willows*** and tinged with doubt and skepticism in ***The Cathedral***. The erstwhile creates the most authentic pastoral poem in American literature by fusing observations of the bobolink and oriole with reflections on the limitations of America's Puritan heritage. The poem is neither romantic in attitude nor puritanically severe, but is

genuinely enthusiastic about a summer afternoon.

The blank verse of ***The Cathedral*** is occasionally more exhausting, but the way of thinking is elevated as Lowell, visiting the cathedral at Chartres, turns over in his mind the gulf between himself and an old woman fingering her rosary beads, coming to question both his American Protestant legacy and modernity itself, without giving in to any thought that the gulf he feels can or even should be closed. The poem is neither full of intensity nor lacking in conviction, but it is rather grateful to benign nature.

We can sum up by noting that Lowell, in integration to presenting his readers to the modern quiddity's predicament subtly, withal exhorts that we tap into the masses of underappreciated humanity in order to make the most of them.

Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr

Oliver Wendell HolmesSr was born on the twenty-ninth of August in the year 1809 in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He was a physician, poet, and humorist. He studied law at Harvard and continued his higher studies in Europe, earning a degree as a doctor in medicine. Many of his sayings can be considered the finest examples of American wit and humor. Known to possess a very brilliant and original mind, some of his renowned poems were Terpsichore, ***Urania***, ***Astraea***, ***The Balance of Allusions***, and ***The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table***. His essays were full of fancy and humour and were successful both in the New and Old World.

In a Wikipedia article, the following has been written about him:

> Surrounded by Boston's literary elite—which included friends such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and James Russell Lowell—Holmes made an indelible imprint on the literary world of the 19th century. Many of his works were published in The Atlantic Monthly, a magazine that he named. For his literary achievements and other accomplishments, he was awarded numerous honorary degrees from universities around the world. Holmes's writing often commemorated his native Boston area, and much of it was meant to be humorous or conversational. Some of his medical writings, notably his 1843 essay regarding the contagiousness of puerperal fever, were considered innovative for their time. He was often called upon to issue occasional poetry, or poems written specifically for an event, including many occasions at Harvard. Holmes also popularized several terms, including Boston Brahmin and anesthesia. He was the father of Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. of the Supreme Court of the United States.(***Wikipedia contributors***)

Holmes is best remembered for his close social relationship with the other poets of this group and the acclaimed three short lyrics: ***Old Ironsides***, ***The Chambered Nautilus***, and ***The Deacon's Masterpiece: or The Wonderful 'One-Hoss Shay'***. Holmes's lasting contribution to American literature was in prose, the pique conversational essays of boardinghouse urbanity first published in the Atlantic and collected in ***The Autocrat at the Breakfast-Table***, ***The Professor at the Breakfast-Table***, and ***The Poet at the***

Breakfast-Table, into which Holmes interpolated many of his poems.

Supplementally, he was a charming yet distinguished presence at congregations and banquets held in accolade of different occasions, for which a plethora of his poetry was inscribed. Three novels by Holmes remain intriguing because of the clinical, as opposed to the moral approach they take to human suffering and abnormality.One of these, ***Elsie Venner: A Romance of Destiny*** put forward the idea of the Boston Brahmin, an aristocracy not of inborn wealth or status but of inborn learning, a broad-minded and reformist class to which not just the author, but the author's son, the Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., belonged.

The fact that only two of ***The Works of Oliver Wendell Holmes*** thirteen volumes are devoted to poetry demonstrates how seriously Holmes took verse composition. An American who carried Alexander Pope's academic polish from the eighteenth century, he enjoyed in playing around within the confines of traditional forms, only sometimes evoking the passionate emotion of romantic poets from either England or America, as in the patriotic ***Old Ironsides***.

Despite being a native New Englander who felt compelled to have Cotton Mather's ***Magnalia Christi Americana*** on his bookshelf, Holmes rejected the Calvinism of Mather and Jonathan Edwards in favour of a more compassionate and loving religion. ***The Deacon's Masterpiece*** has been criticized for being Holmes' sardonic conclusion to a theological idea that had persisted in America for a century. The sole lengthy poem in blank verse by Holmes takes the guise of a young astronomer reflecting on the spiritual implications of contemporary science in ***Wind-Clouds and Star-Drifts***.Holmes was interested in astronomy and frequently wrote about the sky as they were seen through telescopes, which were both beautiful and a sign of how far humanity had come in understanding. A growing nation's belief in the advancement of not just material comfort but also of knowledge, beauty, and love was conveyed by Holmes at his best, despite the fact that his amicable intellect led him more and more to the cliched platitudes of birthday poems, anniversary toasts, and versed society speeches. Holmes, a humanitarian scientist, was committed to eradicating unconsciousness and creating a world of pleasant humour, companionship, and gentle love.

John Greenleaf Whittier

John Greenleaf Whittier was born on the seventeenth of December in the year 1807, was the second child of his parents, and grew up on a farm. He was introduced to poetry by one of his teachers when he attended Haverhill Academy. He was also an abolitionist, and after the Civil War, he turned away from politics forever and dedicated himself completely to poetry. He wrote nearly 100 hymns, which are best known as ***Dear Lord and Father of Mankind***. Some of his famous works were ***Newburyport Free Press***, ***Atlantic Monthly Magazine***, ***Leaves from Margaret Smith's Journal,*** and ***Legends of New England***. He was known for being a great supporter of women's writing of poetry.

Whittier's resistance to slavery stemmed from his Quaker family history. The Quakers were oppressed in both Old and New England and were early opponents of slavery, a fact on which Whittier elaborated in The Pennsylvania Pilgrim. He also edited an edition

of the Journal of John Woolman, the eighteenth-century Quaker whose courage in going against the standards of his society when reminded by his conscience, the "inner aura" of Quakerism, made him a pioneer not just in the campaign to eradicate slavery but to bring progressive reforms of every kind, from pacifism to animal rights. Whittier's poetry continuously commemorates such spirit, very often in direct and affecting language, as when in Cassandra Southwick the sea captains of Boston refuse to carry a condemned Quaker woman into slavery, or when in Mable Martin: A Harvest Idyl, the thriving farmer reprimands his neighbours for ridiculing the daughter of a woman hanged for witchcraft. ***The Pennsylvania Pilgrim*** is noteworthy for its affirmative presentation of community, strongly contrasting with Emersonian autarky. The same is true of ***Snow-Bound: A Winter Idyl***, Whittier's first-rate accomplishment and conceivably the single finest poem of the Fireside Poets.

His antislavery poems, including ***A Sabbath Scene*** which employs an aesthetic reminiscent of Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852), to which the poem may be responding, are particularly aware of gender concerns. Whittier's many friendships with women authors of the time like Harriet Prescott Spofford, Celia Thaxter, the Cary sisters (Alice and Phoebe), Rose Terry Cooke, Lucy Larcom, Gail Hamilton, Ina Coolbrith, Annie Fields, and Sarah Orne Jewett undoubtedly sprang from his Quaker-derived recognition of female equality. All of these authors praised Whittier and his poetry on a personal and professional level, which raises the possibility that their methods may not have been so dissimilar after all.Whittier's reputation had never been better and seemed to be more secure than it did at the time of his passing. His birthdays had been celebrated all over New England and the West for years, making them essentially public holidays. Whittier was effectively a public poet, communicating to a sizable portion of the American populace, many of whom did not often read poetry. They frequently visited his works to take in the moral tone, pay attention to the heroic or prophetic voice, or find solace in his distinctive optimism.(***Poetry Foundation, "John Greenleaf Whittier"***)

Like ***Telling the Bees***, Whittier's most successful short poem, ***Snow-Bound*** refurbishes the rural New England life of Whittier's youth, a way of life already largely archaic after the Civil War and the arrival of industrialism, but pertinent to the criticism it implicitly makes of the post-Civil War world that follows. The snowstorm and farm are perfectly portrayed, but it is the small community that waits out the storm around the fire that most matters.

Whittier's poetry preserves, even when it is at its finest, the attributes of his beginning when he penned verses for the poet's corner of country newspapers. Whereas Bryant took refuge in Wordsworth and Renaissance blank verse for his main poetic models and Holmes took refuge in the Augustan couplets of Pope and Dryden, Whittier took refuge in the Scottish country poet Robert Burns. More commonly, he adopted the style of naïve newspaper verse and imitative folk balladry.
Barrett Wendell writes about Whittier:

> Amid the extreme diversity of religious views that marks our own time, and the efforts now so general among the New England clergy to emphasize the few things that religious people believe in

> common, and to neglect the many concerning which they radically differ, we are apt to think of religious divergences as verbal or formal. In general, I think, we are right. Modern Yankees, at all events, are not profound theologians. They are disposed either to take religion as they find it, or else, without much ado, to select in place of their ancestral faith some creed or form of worship which they find socially or aesthetically more congenial. Sectarian differences nowadays certainly do not dis play themselves in obvious differences of character; and with people of ordinary parts, I take it, this has generally been the case at all times. With really serious natures the case is different. Those few people in any generation who seem instinctively aware of the tremendous seriousness of religion -the people whose presence in this world was perhaps the real basis of the Calvinistic doctrine of Election are inevitably affected, often permanently, by the religious doctrine that surrounds their early years. Whatever else Whittier was, he was a profoundly religious man, who could not help taking life in earnest. To understand him at all, then, we must know something of the peculiar religious views which he never relinquished. (Wendell, 357-358)

Conclusion

To conclude the essay, it may be stated that the Fireside Poets had a consequential impact on American literature. Their poetry had estimable, soothing, and comforting qualities. The abolitionist kineticism, withal kenned as the antislavery kineticism, which campaigned to culminate the enslavement of Africans and people of African inception, was in full swing when the Fireside Poets were inditing. The readers' faculty to relax was availed by their poetry. They were exceptional in much veneration, and there were no others like them.

Their influence on society during the 1800s and into the present day has endured, and despite their relative obscurity, their works continue to be venerated.

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