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intractable *non serviam*. Shrewdly she took to her bosom Milton's bristling dictum, "They also serve who only stand and wait." It was her salvation, her literary immortality.



LONGFELLOW'S CRITICAL PREFERENCES

By MARSTON LAFRANCE

IN a previous issue of the *Quarterly* (March 1963), I suggested that the most important aesthetic point of view discernible in Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's writings through 1835 derives from the associationist theory set forth in Archibald Alison's *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste* (1790), and that *Outre-Mer* (1835) is an excellent example of Longfellow's use of associationist techniques. While this youthful commitment helps account for certain romantic elements in the mature Longfellow's poetry—notably his interest in history and his preference for simplicity—Longfellow soon outgrew the bounds of Alison's theories. Hence, the critical position which merely stereotypes him as the romanticist is as misinformed as it is unjust. The difficult years from 1835 to 1843 ravaged Longfellow with emotional crises which could never have been surmounted by anything available to him in associationist theory, and thus he was forced to embrace a more strenuous doctrine. Fortunately, he began his study of German literature early in 1836 and, as J. T. Hatfield says, "Goethe, who penetrated his whole life and grew constantly in his esteem, undoubtedly helped him to turn, from a mere idyllic and romantic contemplation of life, to sterner issues."

Longfellow's debt to Goethe has been noted by Paul Morin, J. T. Hatfield, H. A. Pochmann, and others; briefly, he learned that the immense energy of passion assumes the form of strength once the emotions are dominated by the will, and that a kind of classic repose may be attained when this strength is directed, again by the will, to the pursuit of some worthy end. This doctrine provides the philosophical foundation for *Hyperion* (1839), and it can hardly be coincidence that the first volume

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of poetry, *Voices of the Night*, appeared the same year. This same doctrine also seems to provide the philosophical foundation for *Michael Angelo* (1882), the poem which, according to Edward Wagenknecht, Longfellow "kept by him during his later years and into which he poured a great deal of his maturest thinking and feeling about art and life." Thus, I should like to argue that the dominant ideas of *Michael Angelo* are either stated or implied in the works of 1839, and consequently that Longfellow—like William Cullen Bryant whom he admired—began his career as a poet with his basic critical preferences fairly well developed and functioning as the shaping force behind his work.

Let us begin by considering the concept from which Longfellow's other preferences appear to derive, the idea that passion dominated by the will is the source of strength. In *Michael Angelo* the aged artist's own strength and dedication to his work is, in part, the result of his mastering his passion for Vittoria (Standard Library Edition, VI, 61). More specifically, Benvenuto is unsuccessful before he learns this lesson (109-111, 113); but ten years later he returns to tell his master of the triumphant casting of the Perseus:

I have turned [my vices] all
To virtues. My impatient, wayward nature,
That made me quick in quarrel, now has served me
Where meekness could not, and where patience could not (154-5).

Paul Flemming in *Hyperion* has to learn precisely this same lesson after Mary Ashburton rejects him. This is stated without ambiguity:

weak minds make treaties with the passions they cannot overcome,
and try to purchase happiness at the expense of principle. But
the resolute will of a strong man scorns such means, and struggles
nobly with his foe to achieve great deeds (VIII, 217).

And, five pages later, Paul is reminded of this by Mr. Berkley: "He only is utterly wretched who is the slave of his own passions, or those of others."

It follows that one who accepts this doctrine will lead a life of action and accomplishment in a continuous present, and this concept runs like a bright thread throughout the entire

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tapestry of Longfellow's work. In "A Psalm of Life" he wrote "Let us, then, be up and doing," and his meaning is explicit:

Trust no Future, howe'er pleasant!
Let the dead Past bury its dead!
Act,—act in the living Present!
Heart within, and God o'erhead (I, 21)!

The moral of the *Christus* is that only the man who "doeth the will" actually follows the Master's teachings. In "Morituri Salutamus," in 1875, "Something remains for us to do or dare." And Michael Angelo, anxious to begin a cathedral in his old age, advises Benvenuto to

Have faith in nothing but in industry
Be at it late and early; persevere,
And work right on through censure and applause,
Or else abandon Art (VI, 108).

To act upon this advice is to give up one's associationist daydreams and idle concern with the past as ends in themselves; such interests have value only so far as they contribute actively to creation in the present. This thought is expressed in the epigraph to *Hyperion*, and in the Baron's telling Paul that love of the past is "like falling in love with one's own grandmother" (VIII, 384). Mr. Churchill of *Kavanagh* (1849) has not learned this maxim, and thus he daydreams without accomplishment. In *Michael Angelo* the master is distinguished from other men only by what he creates:

Ah, were to do a thing
As easy as to dream of doing it,
We should not want for artists. But the men
Who carry out in act their great designs
Are few in number (VI, 143).

Although strength of will and a life of strenuous effort may not in themselves account for the creation of beauty, the poet who relies upon these qualities will tend to consider himself a maker, a craftsman; and what appear to be the remaining tenets of Longfellow's working creed follow directly from this view of the poet's activity. The practice of his art, to such a poet, is only in a rather limited sense an end in itself; the significant end is the accomplishment, and the poet's labor is

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the means to this end of bodying forth the ideal. In short, such a poet's process of creation consists of removing the irrelevant, of hewing away the excess material, from the ideal which the poet 'sees' embedded within. When this process is successful, the ideal stands revealed, according to *Michael Angelo*, "without confusion, simple, clear, well-lighted." As Paul Flemming says,

Art is the revelation of man; and not merely that, but likewise the revelation of Nature, a speaking through man. Art preëxists in Nature, and Nature is reproduced in Art (VIII, 173).

But perhaps this concept is stated more clearly in *Table-Talk*:

The highest exercise of imagination is not to devise what has no existence, but rather to perceive what really exists, though unseen by the outward eye,—not creation, but insight (XIV, 409).

To accept this view of the poet's function is to recognize and cope with tensions which are foreign to the passively responsive consciousness of the Pilgrim in *Outre-Mer*. Life ceases to be a dream of observation and association, and becomes a struggle. The mature point of view first appears in *Hyperion* which, unlike *Outre-Mer*, has a dramatic structure founded upon the tension between the romantic ideal and reality. Paul Flemming's misty romanticism is balanced by Mr. Berkley's common-sense humor and the Baron's critical awareness. Paul is presented as mildly grotesque, like the cloud-land transcendentalist, like Brother Bernardus, all of whom have excessively indulged a particular tendency until the personality has become deformed. But Paul's preoccupation with the myth of Paracelsus (VIII, 208-9) implies that he will eventually overcome his own weakness. And *Michael Angelo* fairly bristles with more overtly recognized and defined tensions; to cite only a few, the sweetness of Raphael versus the strength of Michael Angelo, the master's "woman's heart of tenderness" versus his rough masculinity, "the color of Titian with the design of Michael Angelo" (VI, 121-4).

Thus, it seems reasonable to claim that Longfellow became aesthetically mature between 1835 and 1839; and, more important, that this coming of age corrected his youthful associationist bias through his acceptance of concepts which are more classic

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than romantic. Some of the older critics were well aware of Longfellow's classic stability. R. H. Hutton, for example, in 1894 called him "a singularly classical poet, who knew how to prune away every excrescence of irrelevant emotion" (*Criticisms of Contemporary Thought and Thinkers*, I, 86). In 1886, C. F. Johnson declared that "the main characteristic of Longfellow is not so much grace as balance" (*Three Americans and Three Englishmen*, 243). And later, in 1929, G. R. Elliott stressed the "firm, sweet, and laborious living of the man Longfellow," and stated that "he experienced Poetry, and life, not mainly as an outpouring but as an arduous shaping" (*The Cycle of Modern Poetry*, 75).

Perhaps it is not entirely accurate to call the concepts examined here critical preferences; they are clearly more general than specific, they apply to the poet's approach rather than to any particular poem, and instead of limiting Longfellow they seem to have liberated him. The man who wrote the works of 1839 dealt successfully with both ideas and techniques which can hardly have been known to the man who wrote *Outre-Mer*, and Longfellow was as unconfined in his breadth of subject matter as he was—according to G. W. Allen's *American Prosody*—in his mastery of verse forms and prosodic devices. Nevertheless, these concepts functioned critically in the forging of the aesthetic and emotional stability which was needed to begin, and then to sustain, some forty years of unremitting work. Hence, it is of some importance to realize that these critical preferences were present and in operation when Longfellow's career as a poet began.

