

= James Russell Lowell =

James Russell Lowell ( / ˈloʊəl / ; February 22 , 1819 ? August 12 , 1891 ) was an American Romantic poet , critic , editor , and diplomat . He is associated with the Fireside Poets , a group of New England writers who were among the first American poets who rivaled the popularity of British poets . These poets usually used conventional forms and meters in their poetry , making them suitable for families entertaining at their fireside .

Lowell graduated from Harvard College in 1838 , despite his reputation as a troublemaker , and went on to earn a law degree from Harvard Law School . He published his first collection of poetry in 1841 and married Maria White in 1844 . He and his wife had several children , though only one survived past childhood . The couple soon became involved in the movement to abolish slavery , with Lowell using poetry to express his anti @-@ slavery views and taking a job in Philadelphia , Pennsylvania , as the editor of an abolitionist newspaper . After moving back to Cambridge , Lowell was one of the founders of a journal called The Pioneer , which lasted only three issues . He gained notoriety in 1848 with the publication of A Fable for Critics , a book @-@ length poem satirizing contemporary critics and poets . The same year , he published The Biglow Papers , which increased his fame . He went on to publish several other poetry collections and essay collections throughout his literary career .

Maria White died in 1853 , and Lowell accepted a professorship of languages at Harvard in 1854 ; he continued to teach there for twenty years . He traveled to Europe before officially assuming his role in 1856 . He married his second wife , Frances Dunlap , shortly thereafter in 1857 . That year Lowell also became editor of The Atlantic Monthly . It was not until 20 years later that Lowell received his first political appointment , the ambassadorship to the Kingdom of Spain . He was later appointed ambassador to the Court of St. James 's . He spent his last years in Cambridge , in the same estate where he was born , and died there in 1891 .

Lowell believed that the poet played an important role as a prophet and critic of society . He used poetry for reform , particularly in abolitionism . However , Lowell 's commitment to the anti @-@ slavery cause wavered over the years , as did his opinion on African @-@ Americans . Lowell attempted to emulate the true Yankee accent in the dialogue of his characters , particularly in The Biglow Papers . This depiction of the dialect , as well as Lowell 's many satires , was an inspiration to writers like Mark Twain and H.L. Mencken .

= = Biography = =

= = = Early life = = =

The first of the Lowell family ancestors to come to the United States from Britain was Percival Lowle , who settled in Newbury , Massachusetts , in 1639 . James Russell Lowell was born February 22 , 1819 , the son of the Reverend Charles Russell Lowell , Sr. ( 1782 ? 1861 ) , a minister at a Unitarian church in Boston , who had previously studied theology at Edinburgh , and Harriett Brackett Spence Lowell . By the time James Russell Lowell was born , the family owned a large estate in Cambridge called Elmwood . He was the youngest of six children ; his siblings were Charles , Rebecca , Mary , William , and Robert . Lowell 's mother built in him an appreciation for literature at an early age , especially in poetry , ballads , and tales from her native Orkney . He attended school under Sophia Dana , who would later marry George Ripley , and later studied at a school run by a particularly harsh disciplinarian , where one of his classmates was Richard Henry Dana , Jr .

Beginning in 1834 , at the age of 15 , Lowell attended Harvard College , though he was not a good student and often got into trouble . In his sophomore year alone , he was absent from required chapel attendance 14 times and from classes 56 times . In his last year there , he wrote , " During Freshman year , I did nothing , during Sophomore year I did nothing , during Junior year I did nothing , and during Senior year I have thus far done nothing in the way of college studies . " In his

senior year , he became one of the editors of Harvardiana literary magazine , to which he contributed prose and poetry that he admitted was of low quality . As he said later , " I was as great an ass as ever brayed & thought it singing . " During his undergraduate years , Lowell was a member of Hasty Pudding and served both as Secretary and Poet .

Lowell was elected the poet of the class of 1838 and , as was tradition , was asked to recite an original poem on Class Day , the day before Commencement , on July 17 , 1838 . Lowell , however , was suspended and not allowed to participate . Instead , his poem was printed and made available thanks to subscriptions paid by his classmates . Lowell had composed the poem in Concord , Massachusetts , where , because of his neglect of his studies , he had been exiled by the Harvard faculty to the care of the Rev. Barzillai Frost . During his stay in Concord , he became friends with Ralph Waldo Emerson , and got to know the other Transcendentalists . The poem satirized the social movements of the day ; abolitionists , Thomas Carlyle , Emerson , and the Transcendentalists were treated .

Not knowing what vocation to choose after graduating , he vacillated among business , the ministry , medicine , and law . Having decided to practice law , he enrolled at Harvard Law School in 1840 and was admitted to the bar two years later . While studying law , however , he contributed poems and prose articles to various magazines . During this time , Lowell was admittedly depressed and often had suicidal thoughts . He once confided to a friend that he held a cocked pistol to his forehead and considered killing himself at the age of 20 .

= = = Marriage and family = = =

In late 1839 , Lowell met Maria White through her brother William , a classmate of his at Harvard , and the two became engaged in the autumn of 1840 . Maria 's father Abijah White , a wealthy merchant from Watertown , insisted that their wedding be postponed until Lowell had gainful employment . They were finally married on December 26 , 1844 , shortly after the groom published *Conversations on the Old Poets* , a collection of his previously published essays . A friend described their relationship as " the very picture of a True Marriage . " Lowell himself believed she was made up " half of earth and more than half of Heaven . " Like Lowell , she wrote poetry , and the next twelve years of Lowell 's life were deeply affected by her influence . He said his first book of poetry , *A Year 's Life* ( 1841 ) , " owes all its beauty to her , " though it only sold 300 copies . Her character and beliefs led her to become involved in the movements directed against intemperance and slavery . Maria was a member of the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society and persuaded her husband to become an abolitionist . James had previously expressed antislavery sentiments , but Maria urged him towards more active expression and involvement . His second volume of poems , *Miscellaneous Poems* , expressed these antislavery thoughts and its 1 @, @ 500 copies sold well .

Maria was in poor health , and thinking her lungs could heal there , the couple moved to Philadelphia shortly after their marriage . In Philadelphia , he became a contributing editor for the *Pennsylvania Freeman* , an abolitionist newspaper . In the spring of 1845 , the Lowells returned to Cambridge , Massachusetts , to make their home at Elmwood . They had four children , though only one ( Mabel , born 1847 ) survived past infancy . Their first , Blanche , was born December 31 , 1845 , but lived only fifteen months ; Rose , born in 1849 , survived only a few months as well ; their only son , Walter , was born in 1850 but died in 1852 . Lowell was very affected by the loss of almost all of his children . His grief over the death of his first daughter in particular was expressed in his poem " *The First Snowfall* " ( 1847 ) . Again , Lowell considered suicide , writing to a friend that he thought " of my razors and my throat and that I am a fool and a coward not to end it all at once . "

= = = Literary career = = =

Lowell 's earliest poems were published without remuneration in the *Southern Literary Messenger* in 1840 . Lowell , inspired to new efforts towards self-support , joined with his friend Robert Carter in founding a literary journal , *The Pioneer* . The periodical was distinguished by the fact that

most of its content was new rather than material that had been previously published elsewhere , and by the inclusion of very serious criticism , which covered not only literature but also art and music . Lowell wrote that it would " furnish the intelligent and reflecting portion of the Reading Public with a rational substitute for the enormous quantity of thrice @-@ diluted trash , in the shape of namby @-@ pamby love tales and sketches , which is monthly poured out to them by many of our popular Magazines . " William Wetmore Story noted the journal 's higher taste , writing that " it took some stand & appealed to a higher intellectual Standard than our puerile milk or watery namby @-@ pamby Mags with which we are overrun . " The first issue of the journal included the first appearance of " The Tell @-@ Tale Heart " by Edgar Allan Poe . Lowell , shortly after the first issue , was treated for an eye disease in New York , and in his absence Carter did a poor job of managing the journal . After three monthly numbers , beginning in January 1843 , the magazine ceased publication , leaving Lowell \$ 1 @,@ 800 in debt . Poe mourned the journal 's demise , calling it " a most severe blow to the cause ? the cause of a Pure Taste . "

Despite the failure of The Pioneer , Lowell continued his interest in the literary world . He wrote a series on " Anti @-@ Slavery in the United States " for the London Daily News , though his series was discontinued by the editors after four articles in May 1846 . Lowell had published these articles anonymously , believing they would have more impact if they were not known to be the work of a committed abolitionist . In the spring of 1848 he formed a connection with the National Anti @-@ Slavery Standard of New York , agreeing to contribute weekly either a poem or a prose article . After only one year , he was asked to contribute half as often to the Standard to make room for contributions from Edmund Quincy , another writer and reformer .

A Fable for Critics , one of Lowell 's most popular works , was published in 1848 . A satire , it was published anonymously . It proved popular , and the first three thousand copies sold out quickly . In it , Lowell took good @-@ natured jabs at his contemporary poets and critics . Not all the subjects included were pleased , however . Edgar Allan Poe , who had been referred to as part genius and " two @-@ fifths sheer fudge , " reviewed the work in the Southern Literary Messenger and called it " ' loose ' ? ill @-@ conceived and feebly executed , as well in detail as in general . ... we confess some surprise at his putting forth so unpolished a performance . " Lowell offered the profits from the book 's success , which proved relatively small , to his New York friend Charles Frederick Briggs , despite his own financial needs .

In 1848 , Lowell also published The Biglow Papers , later named by the Grolier Club as the most influential book of 1848 . The first 1 @,@ 500 copies sold out within a week and a second edition was soon issued , though Lowell made no profit , having had to absorb the cost of stereotyping the book himself . The book presented three main characters , each representing different aspects of American life and using authentic American dialects in their dialogue . Under the surface , The Biglow Papers was also a denunciation of the Mexican ? American War and war in general .

= = = First trip to Europe = = =

In 1850 , Lowell 's mother died unexpectedly , as did his third daughter , Rose . Her death left Lowell depressed and reclusive for six months , despite the birth of his son Walter by the end of the year . He wrote to a friend that death " is a private tutor . We have no fellow @-@ scholars , and must lay our lessons to heart alone . " These personal troubles as well as the Compromise of 1850 inspired Lowell to accept an offer from William Wetmore Story to spend a winter in Italy . To pay for the trip , Lowell sold land around Elmwood , intending to sell off further acres of the estate over time to supplement his income , ultimately selling off 25 of the original 30 acres ( 120 @,@ 000 m2 ) . Walter died suddenly in Rome of cholera , and Lowell and his wife , with their daughter Mabel , returned to the United States in October 1852 . Lowell published recollections of his journey in several magazines , many of which would be collected years later as Fireside Travels ( 1867 ) . He also edited volumes with biographical sketches for a series on British Poets .

His wife Maria , who had been suffering from poor health for many years , became very ill in the spring of 1853 and died on October 27 of tuberculosis . Just before her burial , her coffin was opened so that her daughter Mabel could see her face while Lowell " leaned for a long while against

a tree weeping , " according to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and his wife , who were in attendance . In 1855 , Lowell oversaw the publication of a memorial volume of his wife 's poetry , with only fifty copies for private circulation . Despite his self @-@ described " naturally joyous " nature , life for Lowell at Elmwood was further complicated by his father becoming deaf in his old age , and the deteriorating mental state of his sister Rebecca , who sometimes went a week without speaking . He again cut himself off from others , becoming reclusive at Elmwood , and his private diaries from this time period are riddled with the initials of his wife . On March 10 , 1854 , for example , he wrote : " Dark without & within . M.L. M.L. M.L. " Longfellow , a friend and neighbor , referred to Lowell as " lonely and desolate . "

= = = Professorship and second marriage = = =

At the invitation of his cousin John Amory Lowell , James Russell Lowell was asked to deliver a lecture at the prestigious Lowell Institute . Some speculated the opportunity was because of the family connection , offered as an attempt to bring him out of his depression . Lowell chose to speak on " The English Poets , " telling his friend Briggs that he would take revenge on dead poets " for the injuries received by one whom the public won 't allow among the living . " The first of the twelve @-@ part lecture series was to be on January 9 , 1855 , though by December , Lowell had only completed writing five of them , hoping for last @-@ minute inspiration . His first lecture was on John Milton and the auditorium was oversold ; Lowell had to give a repeat performance the next afternoon . Lowell , who had never spoken in public before , was praised for these lectures . Francis James Child said that Lowell , whom he deemed was typically " perverse , " was able to " persist in being serious contrary to his impulses and his talents . " While his series was still in progress , Lowell was offered the Smith Professorship of Modern Languages at Harvard , a post vacated by Longfellow , at an annual salary of \$ 1 @, @ 200 , though he never applied for it . The job description was changing after Longfellow ; instead of teaching languages directly , Lowell would supervise the department and deliver two lecture courses per year on topics of his own choosing . Lowell accepted the appointment , with the proviso that he should have a year of study abroad . He set sail on June 4 of that year , leaving his daughter Mabel in the care of a governess named Frances Dunlap . Abroad , he visited Le Havre , Paris , and London , spending time with friends including Story , Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Browning , and Leigh Hunt . Primarily , however , Lowell spent his time abroad studying languages , particularly German , which he found difficult . He complained : " The confounding genders ! If I die I shall have engraved on my tombstone that I died of der , die , das , not because I caught them but because I couldn 't . "

He returned to the United States in the summer of 1856 and began his college duties . Towards the end of his professorship , then @-@ president of Harvard Charles William Eliot noted that Lowell seemed to have " no natural inclination " to teach ; Lowell agreed , but retained his position for twenty years . He focused on teaching literature , rather than etymology , hoping that his students would learn to enjoy the sound , rhythm , and flow of poetry rather than the technique of words . He summed up his method : " True scholarship consists in knowing not what things exists , but what they mean ; it is not memory but judgment . " Still grieving the loss of his wife , during this time Lowell avoided Elmwood and instead lived on Kirkland Street in Cambridge , an area known as Professors ' Row . He stayed there , along with his daughter Mabel and her governess Frances Dunlap , until January 1861 .

Lowell had intended never to remarry after the death of his wife Maria White . However , in 1857 , surprising his friends , he became engaged to Frances Dunlap , who many described as simple and unattractive . Dunlap , niece of the former governor of Maine Robert P. Dunlap , was a friend of Lowell 's first wife and formerly wealthy , though she and her family had fallen into reduced circumstances . Lowell and Dunlap married on September 16 , 1857 , in a ceremony performed by his brother . Lowell wrote , " My second marriage was the wisest act of my life , & as long as I am sure of it , I can afford to wait till my friends agree with me . "

= = = The war years and beyond = = =

In the autumn of 1857 , The Atlantic Monthly was established , and Lowell was its first editor . With its first issue in November of that year , he at once gave the magazine the stamp of high literature and of bold speech on public affairs . In January 1861 , Lowell 's father died of a heart attack , inspiring Lowell to move his family back to Elmwood . As he wrote to his friend Briggs , " I am back again to the place I love best . I am sitting in my old garret , at my old desk , smoking my old pipe ... I begin to feel more like my old self than I have these ten years . " Shortly thereafter , in May , he left The Atlantic Monthly when James Thomas Fields took over as editor ; the magazine had been purchased by Ticknor and Fields for \$ 10 @, @ 000 two years before . Lowell returned to Elmwood by January 1861 but maintained an amicable relationship with the new owners of the journal , continuing to submit his poetry and prose for the rest of his life . His prose , however , was more abundantly presented in the pages of the North American Review during the years 1862 ? 1872 . For the Review , he served as a coeditor along with Charles Eliot Norton . Lowell 's reviews for the journal covered a wide variety of literary releases of the day , though he was writing fewer poems .

As early as 1845 , Lowell had predicted the debate over slavery would lead to war and , as the American Civil War broke out in the 1860s , Lowell used his role at the Review to praise Abraham Lincoln and his attempts to maintain the Union . Lowell lost three nephews during the war , including Charles Russell Lowell , Jr , who became a Brigadier General and fell at the battle of Cedar Creek . Lowell himself was generally a pacifist . Even so , he wrote , " If the destruction of slavery is to be a consequence of the war , shall we regret it ? If it be needful to the successful prosecution of the war , shall anyone oppose it ? " His interest in the Civil War inspired him to write a second series of The Biglow Papers , including one specifically dedicated to the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation called " Sunthin ' in the Pastoral Line " in 1862 .

Shortly after Lincoln 's assassination , Lowell was asked to present a poem at Harvard in memory of graduates killed in the war . His poem , " Commemoration Ode , " cost him sleep and his appetite , but was delivered on July 21 , 1865 , after a 48 @-@ hour writing binge . Lowell had high hopes for his performance but was overshadowed by the other notables presenting works that day , including Ralph Waldo Emerson and Oliver Wendell Holmes , Sr. " I did not make the hit I expected , " he wrote , " and am ashamed at having been tempted again to think I could write poetry , a delusion from which I have been tolerably free these dozen years . " Despite his personal assessment , friends and other poets sent many letters to Lowell congratulating him . Emerson referred to his poem 's " high thought & sentiment " and James Freeman Clarke noted its " grandeur of tone . " Lowell later expanded it with a strophe to Lincoln .

In the 1860s , Lowell 's friend Longfellow spent several years translating Dante Alighieri 's Divine Comedy and regularly invited others to help him on Wednesday evenings . Lowell was one of the main members of the so @-@ called " Dante Club , " along with William Dean Howells , Charles Eliot Norton and other occasional guests . Shortly after serving as a pallbearer at the funeral of friend and publisher Nathaniel Parker Willis , on January 24 , 1867 , Lowell decided to produce another collection of his poetry . Under the Willows and Other Poems was released in 1869 , though Lowell originally wanted to title it The Voyage to the Vinland and Other Poems . The book , dedicated to Norton , collected poems Lowell had written within the previous twenty years and was his first poetry collection since 1848 .

Lowell intended to take another trip to Europe . To finance it , he sold off more of Elmwood 's acres and rented the house to Thomas Bailey Aldrich ; Lowell 's daughter Mabel , by this time , had moved into a new home with her husband Edward Burnett , the son of a successful businessman @-@ farmer from Southboro , Massachusetts . Lowell and his wife set sail on July 8 , 1872 , after he took a leave of absence from Harvard . They visited England , Paris , Switzerland , and Italy . While overseas , he received an honorary Doctorate of Law from the University of Oxford and another from Cambridge University . They returned to the United States in the summer of 1874 .

= = = Political appointments = = =

Lowell resigned from his Harvard professorship in 1874 , though he was persuaded to continue

teaching through 1877 . It was in 1876 that Lowell first stepped into the field of politics . That year , he served as a delegate to the Republican National Convention in Cincinnati , Ohio , speaking on behalf of presidential candidate Rutherford B. Hayes . Hayes won the nomination and , eventually , the presidency . In May 1877 , President Hayes , an admirer of The Biglow Papers , sent William Dean Howells to Lowell with a handwritten note proffering an ambassadorship to either Austria or Russia ; Lowell declined , but noted his interest in Spanish literature . Lowell was then offered and accepted the role of Minister to the court of Spain at an annual salary of \$ 12 @, @ 000 . Lowell sailed from Boston on July 14 , 1877 , and , though he expected he would be away for a year or two , he would not return to the United States until 1885 , with the violinist Ole Bull renting Elmwood for a portion of that time . The Spanish media referred to him as " José Bighlow . " Lowell was well @-@ prepared for his political role , having been trained in law , as well as being able to read in multiple languages . He had trouble socializing while in Spain , however , and amused himself by sending humorous dispatches to his political bosses in the United States , many of which were later collected and published posthumously in 1899 as Impressions of Spain . Lowell 's social life improved when the Spanish Academy elected him a corresponding member in late 1878 , allowing him contribute to the preparation of a new dictionary .

In January 1880 , Lowell was informed he was appointed Minister to England , his nomination made without his knowledge as far back as June 1879 . He was granted a salary of \$ 17 @, @ 500 with about \$ 3 @, @ 500 for expenses . While serving in this capacity , he addressed an importation of allegedly diseased cattle and made recommendations that predated the Pure Food and Drug Act . Queen Victoria commented that she had never seen an ambassador who " created so much interest and won so much regard as Mr. Lowell . " Lowell held this role until the close of Chester A. Arthur 's presidency in the spring of 1885 , despite his wife 's failing health . Lowell was already well known in England for his writing and , during his time there , he befriended fellow author Henry James , who referred to him as " conspicuously American . " Lowell also befriended Leslie Stephen many years earlier and became the godfather to his daughter , future writer Virginia Woolf . Lowell was popular enough that he was offered a professorship at Oxford after his recall by president Grover Cleveland , though the offer was declined .

His second wife , Frances , died on February 19 , 1885 , while still in England .

= = = Later years and death = = =

He returned to the United States by June 1885 , living with his daughter and her husband in Southboro , Massachusetts . He then spent time in Boston with his sister before returning to Elmwood in November 1889 . By this time , most of his friends were dead , including Quincy , Longfellow , Dana , and Emerson , leaving him depressed and contemplating suicide again . Lowell spent part of the 1880s delivering various speeches , and his last published works were mostly collections of essays , including Political Essays , and a collection of his poems Heartsease and Rue in 1888 . His last few years he traveled back to England periodically and when he returned to the United States in the fall of 1889 , he moved back to Elmwood with Mabel , while her husband worked for clients in New York and New Jersey . That year , Lowell gave an address at the centenary of George Washington 's inauguration . Also that year , the Boston Critic dedicated a special issue to Lowell on his seventieth birthday to recollections and reminiscences by his friends , including former presidents Hayes and Benjamin Harrison and British Prime Minister William Ewart Gladstone as well as Alfred Tennyson and Francis Parkman .

In the last few months of his life , Lowell struggled with gout , sciatica in his left leg , and chronic nausea ; by the summer of 1891 , doctors believed that Lowell had cancer in his kidneys , liver , and lungs . His last few months , he was administered opium for the pain and was rarely fully conscious . He died on August 12 , 1891 , at Elmwood . After services in the Appleton Chapel , he was buried in Mount Auburn Cemetery . After his death , Norton served as his literary executor and published several collections of Lowell 's works and his letters .

= = = Writing style and literary theory = = =

Early in his career , James Russell Lowell 's writing was influenced by Swedenborgianism , a Spiritualism @-@ infused form of Christianity founded by Emanuel Swedenborg , causing Frances Longfellow ( wife of the poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow ) to mention that " he has been long in the habit of seeing spirits . " He composed his poetry rapidly when inspired by an " inner light " but could not write to order . He subscribed to the common nineteenth @-@ century belief that the poet was a prophet but went further , linking religion , nature , and poetry , as well as social reform . Evert Augustus Duyckinck and others welcomed Lowell as part of Young America , a New York @-@ based movement . Though not officially affiliated with them , he shared some of their ideals , including the belief that writers have an inherent insight into the moral nature of humanity and have an obligation for literary action along with their aesthetic function . Unlike many of his contemporaries , including members of Young America , Lowell did not advocate for the creation of a new national literature . Instead , he called for a natural literature , regardless of country , caste , or race , and warned against provincialism which might " put farther off the hope of one great brotherhood . " He agreed with his neighbor Longfellow that " whoever is most universal , is also most national . " As Lowell said :

I believe that no poet in this age can write much that is good unless he gives himself up to [ the radical ] tendency ... The proof of poetry is , in my mind , that it reduces to the essence of a single line the vague philosophy which is floating in all men 's minds , and so render it portable and useful , and ready to the hand ... At least , no poem ever makes me respect its author which does not in some way convey a truth of philosophy .

A scholar of linguistics , Lowell was one of the founders of the American Dialect Society . He used this interest in his writing , particularly in *The Biglow Papers* , presenting a heavily ungrammatical phonetic spelling of the Yankee dialect . In using this vernacular , Lowell intended to get closer to the common man 's experience and was rebelling against more formal and , as he thought , unnatural representations of Americans in literature . As he wrote in his introduction to *The Biglow Papers* , " few American writers or speakers wield their native language with the directness , precision , and force that are common as the day in the mother country . " Though intentionally humorous , this accurate presentation of the dialect was pioneering work in American literature . For example , Lowell 's character Hosea Biglow says in verse :

Lowell is considered one of the Fireside Poets , a group of writers from New England in the 1840s who all had a substantial national following and whose work was often read aloud by the family fireplace . Besides Lowell , the main figures from this group were Longfellow , Holmes , John Greenleaf Whittier , and William Cullen Bryant .

= = Beliefs = =

Although he was an abolitionist , Lowell 's opinions on African @-@ Americans wavered . Though Lowell advocated suffrage for blacks , he noted that their ability to vote could be troublesome . Even so , he wrote , " We believe the white race , by their intellectual and traditional superiority , will retain sufficient ascendancy to prevent any serious mischief from the new order of things . " Freed slaves , he wrote , were " dirty , lazy & lying . " Even before his marriage to the abolitionist Maria White , Lowell wrote : " The abolitionists are the only ones with whom I sympathize of the present extant parties . " After his marriage , Lowell at first did not share White 's enthusiasm for the cause but was eventually pulled in . The couple often gave money to fugitive slaves , even when their own financial situation was not strong , especially if they were asked to free a spouse or child . Even so , he did not always fully agree with the followers of the movement . The majority of these people , he said , " treat ideas as ignorant persons do cherries . They think them unwholesome unless they are swallowed , stones and all . " Lowell depicted Southerners very unfavorably in his second collection of *The Biglow Papers* but , by 1865 , admitted that Southerners were " guilty only of weakness " and , by 1868 , said that he sympathized with Southerners and their viewpoint on slavery . Enemies and friends of Lowell alike questioned his vacillating interest in the question of slavery . Abolitionist Samuel Joseph May accused Lowell of trying to quit the movement because of his association with

Harvard and the Boston Brahmin culture : " Having got into the smooth , dignified , self @-@ complacent , and change @-@ hating society of the college and its Boston circles , Lowell has gone over to the world , and to ' respectability ' . "

Lowell was also involved in other reform movements . He urged for better conditions for factory workings , opposed capital punishment , and supported the temperance movement . His friend Longfellow was especially concerned about his fanaticism for temperance , worrying that Lowell would ask him to destroy his wine cellar . There are many references to Lowell 's drinking during his college years and part of his reputation in school was based on it . His friend Edward Everett Hale denied these allegations and , even then , Lowell considered joining the " Anti @-@ Wine " club and later , during the early years of his first marriage , became a teetotaler . However , as Lowell gained notoriety , he became popular in social circles and clubs and , away from his wife , he drank rather heavily . When he drank , he had wild mood swings , ranging from euphoria to frenzy .

= = Criticism and legacy = =

In 1849 , Lowell said of himself , " I am the first poet who has endeavored to express the American Idea , and I shall be popular by and by . " Poet Walt Whitman said : " Lowell was not a grower ? he was a builder . He built poems : he didn 't put in the seed , and water the seed , and send down his sun ? letting the rest take care of itself : he measured his poems ? kept them within formula . " Fellow Fireside Poet John Greenleaf Whittier praised Lowell by writing two poems in his honor and calling him " our new Theocritus " and " one of the strongest and manliest of our writers ? a republican poet who dares to speak brave words of unpopular truth . " British author Thomas Hughes referred to Lowell as one of the most important writers in the United States : " Greece had her Aristophanes ; Rome her Juvenal ; Spain has had her Cervantes ; France her Rabelais , her Molière , her Voltaire ; Germany her Jean Paul , her Heine ; England her Swift , her Thackeray ; and America has her Lowell . " Lowell 's satires and use of dialect were an inspiration for writers like Mark Twain , William Dean Howells , H. L. Mencken , and Ring Lardner .

Contemporary critic and editor Margaret Fuller wrote , " his verse is stereotyped ; his thought sounds no depth , and posterity will not remember him . " Duyckinck thought Lowell was too similar to other poets like William Shakespeare and John Milton . Ralph Waldo Emerson noted that , though Lowell had significant technical skill , his poetry " rather expresses his wish , his ambition , than the uncontrollable interior impulse which is the authentic mark of a new poem ... and which is felt in the pervading tone , rather than in brilliant parts or lines . " Even his friend Richard Henry Dana Jr . , questioned Lowell 's abilities , calling him " very clever , entertaining & good humored ... but he is rather a trifler , after all . " In the twentieth century , poet Richard Armour dismissed Lowell , writing : " As a Harvard graduate and an editor for the Atlantic Monthly , it must have been difficult for Lowell to write like an illiterate oaf , but he succeeded . " The poet Amy Lowell featured her relative James Russell Lowell in her poem A Critical Fable ( 1922 ) , the title mocking A Fable for Critics . Here , a fictional version of Lowell says he does not believe that women will ever be equal to men in the arts and " the two sexes cannot be ranked counterparts . " Modern literary critic Van Wyck Brooks wrote that Lowell 's poetry was forgettable : " one read them five times over and still forgot them , as if this excellent verse had been written in water . " Nonetheless , in 1969 the Modern Language Association established a prize named after Lowell , awarded annually for " an outstanding literary or linguistic study , a critical edition of an important work , or a critical biography . "

Lowell 's poem " The Present Crisis , " an early work that addressed the national crisis over slavery leading up to the Civil War , has had an impact in the modern civil rights movement . The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People named its newsletter The Crisis after the poem , and Martin Luther King , Jr. frequently quoted the poem in his speeches and sermons . The poem was also the source of the hymn Once to Every Man and Nation .

= = List of selected works = =

Poetry collections



A Year 's Life ( 1841 )  
Miscellaneous Poems ( 1843 )  
The Biglow Papers ( 1848 )  
A Fable for Critics ( 1848 )  
Poems ( 1848 )  
The Vision of Sir Launfal ( 1848 )  
Under the Willows ( 1869 )  
The Cathedral ( 1870 )  
Heartsease and Rue ( 1888 )  
Essay collections  
Conversations on the Old Poets ( 1844 )  
Fireside Travels ( 1864 )  
Among My Books ( 1870 )  
My Study Windows ( 1871 )  
Among My Books ( second collection , 1876 )  
Democracy and Other Addresses ( 1886 )  
Political Essays ( 1888 )