

The Tide Rises, The Tide Falls and A Psalm of Life



By Henry Wadsworth
Longfellow



STANZA 1 –What is the Rhyme Scheme?

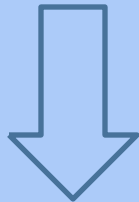
The tide rises, the tide falls.

The twilight darkens, the curlew calls;

Along the sea sands damp and brown

The traveler hastens toward the town,

And the tide rises, the tide falls.



To traveler, reason for the journey is:
Vitaly important
Worth the risk of racing the tide
to reach the other side.
He loses the race and the tide
reaches the traveler before he
is able to attain the important
goal.

THEMES:

(1) Man pitting himself against
nature

MAN LOSES

(2) Tide Rises and the
Tide Falls;

Nature will overcome
everything

(3) Tide will keep rising
and falling and the
traveler will be
forgotten

Darkness settles on the roofs and walls,
But the **sea**, the **sea** in **darkness** calls;
The **little waves, with their soft, white hands**
Efface the footprints in the sands,
And the tide rises, the tide falls.

*Creates a somber atmosphere

*Personification of a child's hand
Expressing the gentle, soothing
Affect of nature.

White is also the color of sea foam

Life is not about emotions
("enjoyment" or "sorrow"; rather, it
is about action—what we do with
our lives is what really counts.

"destined": We were
made with a purpose.
We have been
"destined" to live
meaningfully.



Alliteration: repetition of “s”

hostler = person who
takes care of horses

The morning breaks; the **s**teeds in their **s**talls
Stamp and neigh, as the hostler calls;
The day returns, but nevermore
Returns the traveler to the shore.
And the tide rises, the tide falls.

Symbolizes death and that life will go on even
when you are not there; the tide will continue to
rise and fall as people will come and go.
Nature is lasting; humans are not.

SOAPSTone

- Who is the speaker?
- What is the occasion?
- Who is the audience?
- What is the purpose?
- What is the subject?
- What is the tone?

SOAPSTone

- Who is the speaker? Middle-Aged to Older Man (probably the poet)
- What is the occasion? An observation of the inevitability of death.
- Who is the audience? Himself or human beings
- What is the purpose? Accept the inevitability of death and come to terms with it.
- What is the subject? The cycle of life & nature
- What is the tone? accepting, calm, matter of fact

The Title of the Poem

A Psalm of Life

- The word “psalm” in the title makes you think that the poem will be religious in nature. There is a book in the Bible called Psalms, many of which focus on the brevity of life. (e.g., Psalm 39:5, Psalm 90:12)



Rhyme scheme

Tell me not in mournful numbers,
Life is but an empty dream!
For the soul is dead that slumbers,
And things are not what they seem.

A

B

A

B

Empty dream: metaphor referring to the how life is not barren, vacant and futile.

Slumber: state of unconsciousness. You don't know what is going on around you.

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Longfellow uses a “sleep” metaphor in the first stanza. He starts out by saying that life is not an “empty dream.” This metaphor expresses that our lives have purpose. The idea of life being a dream suggests that it is only an illusion or that it will amount to nothing. The word “empty” emphasizes the idea of futility.

He continues that metaphor in line 3 with “the soul is dead that slumbers.” If we are not realizing our life’s purpose, i.e., “slumbering,” then we are not having the impact on the world that we are meant to have.

Exclamation points
show his “earnestness.”

Reminds me of the common
lines of funeral services:
“ashes to ashes; dust to dust.”

Life is real! Life is earnest!
And the grave is not its goal;
Dust thou art, to dust thou returnest,
Was not spoken of the soul.

Only the physical body will return
to dust. The soul is everlasting. The
soul is our true being, while the
body is only the vessel that holds
our soul.

The rhyme in lines 2 and 4 of this
stanza, emphasizes “goal” and “soul.”
This contributes to the serious and
religious tone of the poem. We must
set goals in your lives, and these goals
must be life-affirming and enriching.
The word “soul” appears again,
reiterating the spiritual nature of man.

Not enjoyment, and not sorrow,
Is our destined end or way;
But to act, that each tomorrow
Finds us farther than today.

“destined”: We were made with a purpose. We have been “destined” to live meaningfully.

Life is not about emotions (“enjoyment” or “sorrow”; rather, it is about action—what we do with our lives is what really counts.



Lasts a long time
(after we're long
gone)

We don't have
long on this
earth.

Stout = strong

Art is long, and Time is fleeting,
And our hearts, though stout and brave,
Still, like muffled drums, are beating
Funeral marches to the grave.

Simile: "like muffled drums" – The sound of drums suggest the beating of a heart, but the drums are "beating funeral marches," i.e., we will all die.

Longfellow wrote this poem after his first wife's death after a miscarriage. He was extremely depressed after her death. Later, he pursued and was rejected by Fanny Appleton, which also lead to some depression.



Bivouac: a temporary encampment of troops;
this metaphor again suggests the brevity of life

In the world's broad field of battle,
In the bivouac of Life,
Be not like dumb, driven cattle!
Be a hero in the strife!

Lots of alliteration in this stanza:

Broad	dumb
Battle	driven
Bivouac	
Be	
be	



These alliterations imitate the sounds of bombs dropping, appropriate for the battlefield metaphor.

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Metaphor

- The battle metaphor suggests the struggles and conflicts of the world. Longfellow experienced some personal struggles right around the time of his writing this poem. Examples of conflicts during this time in America are slavery, economic struggles related to industrialism, and the fight for women's rights.



Metaphor

- The cattle metaphor states that we are not just dumb animals. We have minds and souls. We should NOT just go wherever outside forces “drive” us; rather, we should live with purpose.



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Makes me think of the saying, “Don’t count your chickens before they hatch.” We sometimes think that everything’s going to turn out okay in the end, but the speaker is saying not to place our trust in what might happen. We must seize the day: Act in the present! This reminds me of Ben Franklin’s aphorism: One today is worth two tomorrows.

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 noticed the contrast of the *living* Present and the *dead* Past.

Connects again with the religious tone of the poem; it's a Psalm of life. We are accountable to God for what we do with our lives. He's watching us.

Romantic Ideals:
Intuition and
Individualism

Personification of the Past: the past should bury its dead, meaning we should not let the past hinder us in the present. We need to leave the past behind us: the mistakes and pain.



Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time;

Heavenly

When I think of the footprints in the sand, I also think about how they are easily washed away. Is our mark on the world that superficial?

Who are some of these “great men”? Who are our inspirations in life and what makes them great?

The use of the same word for the rhyme in lines 1 & 3 in this stanza suggests the universal meaning of the poem—the lesson is for all of US, not just the speaker of the poem.

Next Stanza



Footprints, that perhaps another,
Sailing o'er life's solemn main,
A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,
Seeing, shall take heart again.

Here, Longfellow uses the extended metaphor of the ship on the ocean: The person's journey is characterized as "sailing," and his journey is on the "main," or the open ocean. Also, the person is "shipwrecked," indicating that are facing a great struggle, which threatens to destroy him.

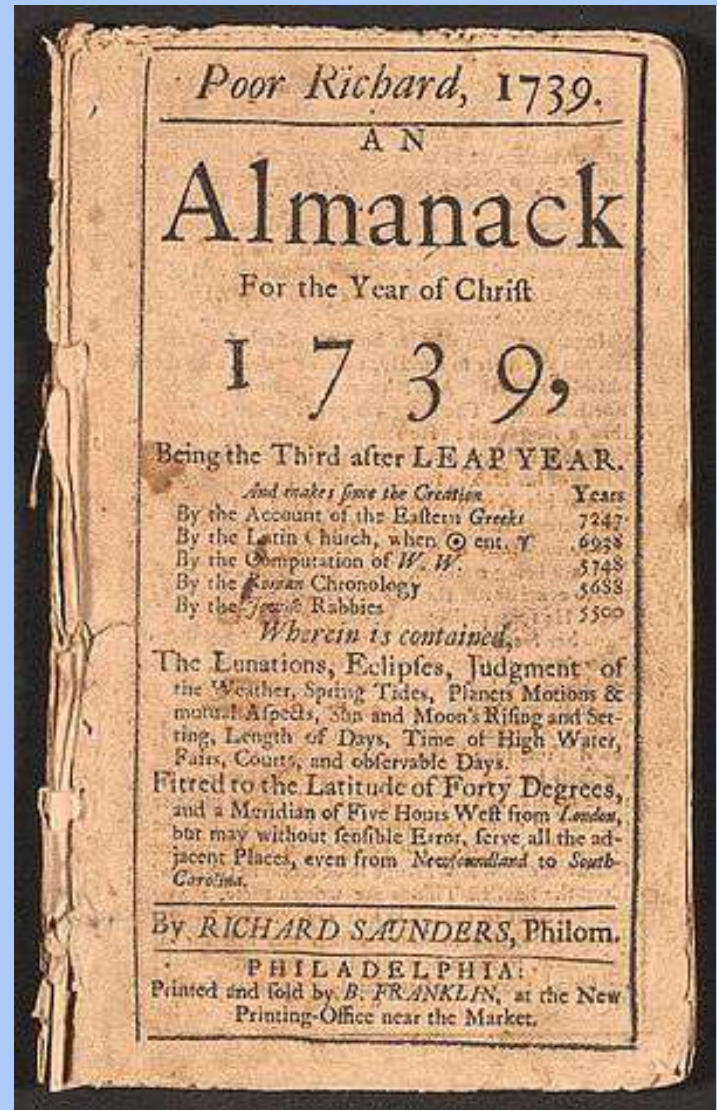
The lives we live can be an inspiration to others.

The poem advocates action, regardless of what the result may be.

Let us, then, be up and doing,
With a heart for any fate;
Still achieving, still pursuing
Learn to labor and to wait.

Longfellow says to “be up and doing,” but he never says *what* we are to be doing. In Puritan days, the reward for hard work was evident: success and wealth. However, by Longfellow’s day, industrialization made work much more repetitive and less rewarding. No reward is promised in Longfellow’s poem. We are to labor and wait. “Just keep working,” he seems to say, “for the sake of working.”

If time be of all things the most precious, *wasting time* must be, as Poor Richard says, *the greatest prodigality*, since, as he elsewhere tells us, *lost time is never found again*, and what we call *time-enough*, always *proves little enough*: let us then be up and be doing, and doing to the purpose; so by diligence shall we do more with less perplexity. *Sloth makes all things difficult, but industry all easy.*



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Works Cited

Peck, David R. "'Let us, then, be up and doing'.
(Essays)." *ANQ* 16.3 (2003): 30+. *General
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