

Longfellow's Labor

“Be Up and Doing”: Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and Poetic Labor” by Jill Anderson, in *Journal of American Studies* (Apr. 2003), School of International Studies, Brunel Univ., Uxbridge, UB8 3PH, England.

Let us, then, be up and doing,
With a heart for any fate;
Still achieving, still pursuing,
Learn to labor and to wait.
—“Psalm of Life” (1838)

A poet “on his sound anvil forges the broad shield of Truth and weapons of her warfare,” Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807–82) declared in an 1838 lecture. Yet invoking, in “Psalm of Life” and other popular poems, a life of strenuous effort, Longfellow offered no specific truths or purposes to be pursued, only the moral necessity of pursuit itself. Beneath all the resolutely uplifting sentiments, it seems, was an attempt to maintain republican virtue in a new era of selfish individualism and rising capitalism.

“As the market economy and the developing [political] party system provided more opportunities for the pursuit of individual gain and influence [in the first half of the 19th century], Americans resisted the abandonment of republican values,” writes Anderson, an editor and historian at the International Center for Jefferson Studies, at Monticello in Charlottesville, Virginia. To sustain the idea of “virtuous self-interest”

consonant with those values, Longfellow and many other authors of the period stressed effort and service for their own sakes, obscuring in a cloud of rhetoric “the more material aspects of self-interest” now coming to the fore.

In his poem “The Village Blacksmith” (1840), says Anderson, Longfellow’s message is clear: “Learn from the blacksmith to fashion each ‘burning thought and deed’ into a solid, honest, hard-working life.” That life, she writes, was more important “than the actual objects forged by the blacksmith, which go unmentioned.”

In Longfellow’s poems and in an emerging body of literature directed at young men, Anderson observes, “the successful achievement of middle-class manhood, represented by the figure of the ‘self-made man,’ rested on the careful manipulation and presentation of one’s own inner life. The authors linked right thought and feeling to social and economic success, a connection perhaps more wishful than realistic.” After all his exhortations to action in “Psalm of Life,” Anderson points out, Longfellow concluded on a darker note: His closing injunction to wait implied that “labor might not necessarily bring desired results.”

Upstairs, Downstairs

“The World as India” by Susan Sontag, in *Times Literary Supplement* (June 13, 2003), Admiral House, 66–68 E. Smithfield, London E1W 9BX, England.

In an idealized world of literature—a vision now brought closer to reality, thanks to the Internet, than at any other time in history—all works in all languages would be available to all people. What stands in the way, says Sontag, the noted writer and critic, are the limitations of translation. Technology hasn’t vitiated the lament of St. Jerome, who translated from Greek to Latin the *Chronicle* of Eusebius in A.D. 381, that “it is an arduous task to preserve felicity and grace unimpaired in a translation.”

For Sontag, translation is a necessary and almost sacred function, the “circulatory system of the world’s literatures,” and perhaps of humanity itself. In what she calls the “evangelical incentive,” translation can “enlarge the readership of a book deemed to be important.” Although this can promote a kind of scorecard approach—the number of languages in which a book gets published represents its worth—translation often occurs in only one direction, with “many more books written in English being translated into for-

eign languages” than vice versa. Almost “inconceivable,” in Sontag’s view, is the possibility that a serious novel originally published in a non-English language could make it to the *New York Times* bestseller list, as Thomas Mann’s *Doctor Faustus* did in 1948.

This is literature’s loss. Citing 19th-century German philosopher, theologian, and translator Friedrich Schleiermacher, Sontag notes that there is “a value in connecting with something that is different from what we know, with foreignness itself.” Such an approach renders the translator’s task immensely more difficult than mere transference of meaning; unless the translation sticks closely to the original, the reader “will be deprived of the knowledge of otherness that comes from reading something that actually does sound foreign.”

“The prestige of the nation-state in the 19th century was fueled by the consciousness of having produced great ‘national’ writers,” says Sontag, and, taking a cue from Goethe’s pro-

gressive dream of *Weltliteratur* (world literature), she proposes that we should have seen “the natural development of literature from ‘provincial’ to ‘national’ to ‘international.’” What has occurred instead, she asserts, is that language has become an insurmountable barrier to the spread of ideas. While English and its immediate cousins occupy the coveted upper floors of literature, “other languages and their literary products are confined to lower floors, low ceilings, blocked views.”

But in Sontag’s view, “every language is part of Language, which is larger than any single language. Every individual literary work is a part of Literature, which is larger than the literature of any single language.” To her, literary translation ultimately “is preeminently an ethical task, and one which mirrors and duplicates the role of literature itself”: to “educate the heart and mind; to create inwardness; to secure and deepen the awareness (with all its consequences) that other people, people different from us, really do exist.”

OTHER NATIONS

Reforming Japan

“Koizumi’s Top-Down Leadership in the Anti-Terrorism Legislation: The Impact of Political Institutional Changes” by Tomohito Shinoda, in *SAIS Review* (Winter–Spring 2003), 1619 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

When Japan finally acted during the 1991 Persian Gulf War, its contribution of \$13 billion to help underwrite the war effort was widely derided as “too little, too late.” But 10 years later, in response to 9/11, Japan moved swiftly to back U.S. reprisals against Al Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan, rapidly enacted antiterrorism legislation, and, under it, dispatched—for the first time since World War II—part of its armed forces on a military mission overseas, providing rear support for a U.S. deployment in the Indian Ocean. The different responses, explains Shinoda, a professor at the International University of Japan, show how much progress has been made in removing factional and bureaucratic shackles and strengthening the office of prime minister.

The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which controlled the Diet from 1955 to 1993, was divided into large factions. Faction lead-

ers chose the party chief, who became prime minister, and they influenced his cabinet selections. And the cabinet was reshuffled almost every year, enhancing the power of the government bureaucracies. All this, notes Shinoda, made for a weak prime minister.

In 1994, however, a new government formed by eight opposition parties began altering Japan’s political foundations. Under the old system, each legislative district had three to five seats in the Diet’s lower house, which encouraged fierce factional fights among LDP candidates competing for the same bases of support. The 1994 reform introduced 300 single-seat districts and 200 other seats filled by proportional representation. That helped undermine the factions.

The government’s poor performance in a series of crises—the 1995 Great Hanshin (Kobe) earthquake, the 1996–97 hostage crisis in Peru, and a 1997 oil spill disaster in the