

Longfellow's blacksmith

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March 27, Longfellow's Blacksmith The Village Blacksmith (Longfellow) can be used as a mirror to project political, economic, and social agendas. Although he was surely aware of and influenced by his culture and the events of his time, Longfellow was transparent in his message. That message was contained in the final stanza, and gains its significance in being contrasted with earlier stanzas.

Throughout the poem, Longfellow presents a highly idealized, stylized, and romantic notion of the blacksmith. He positions him as a man's man, physically strong, well-muscled, sweaty, dark-haired, tanned, rough, virile (having sons and a daughter). He is virtuous, being a hard worker, earning his night's rest through his daily accomplishments, socially confident, a magnet for young children, honest and reliable, attending church, a family man, proud of his daughter, still in love with his dead wife. He is sensitive, unafraid to shed a tear in public, when it comes from love and loss.

In the final stanza, however, Longfellow sees the blacksmith as modeling a very real lesson about life. He sees the hardship, sorrow, and joy that define anyone's life. We are shaped by the challenges we confront, and it is a fire that tests us. The blacksmith is amazingly attractive, masculine, virtuous, and sensitive because of the depth of challenge he has faced. To admire him is to admire the fire that is life. Longfellow was not trying to reveal his political views, the economic or social crises in society. He was contrasting the superficiality of romantic idealism with the overwhelming depth of reality.

Today's common man might be the unemployed middle class, who are actively looking for work, or the seriously underemployed. They can be seen in a romantic, idealized light also, like the blacksmith. They have lost homes,
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jobs, status, and lifestyles to the economic crisis. They sold boats, recreational vehicles, second cars, timeshares, and toys. Their PhD is put to use, part time, as a bookstore clerk, walking dogs, or babysitting, yet they persevere. They manage by creatively scrounging resources or doing without. They raise children in campgrounds, shelters, or a relative's basement, doing what has to be done. Rising to the challenge is what defines them, just like with the blacksmith of Longfellow's day.

Works Cited

Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth. "The Village Blacksmith." ND. Poets Corner. 27 March 2013 .