

# Narrative response to poetry

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The poem “ A Psalm of Life”, written by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, is said to have been published in 1838. Longfellow is one of the famous Fireside Poets. “ A Psalm of Life” is an encouraging poem which advises the reader not to allow their lives to waste away. He attempts to establish the thought in his audience that life’s duration is considerably short.

Longfellow displays that he possesses a very deep and insightful outlook on life. Analyzing the poem further, the reader will discover that embodies a much deeper meanings in his figurative language than as it appears. One of the most prevalent figures of speech he uses personification, and he does not fail to fuse it with something insightful. For example, he personifies time as a person in the fourth stanza when he writes “ Art is long, and Time is fleeting” (Longfellow 13). He describes time as “ fleeting” to make readers come to the realization that life is not permanent and is instead extremely temporary.

Personification is not only method of insight, he also uses metaphors. The most powerful simile he used was when he compares life to a battlefield, saying: 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! (Longfellow 17-20) The “ bivouac of Life” symbolizes the struggle for life, and he is telling his readers to be a “ hero in the strife”, meaning one should excel and rise above in the struggle. The clear purpose of his figurative language is to keep consistent with the supportive tone of the poem. In “ A Psalm of Life”, the tone and theme are closely conjoined with each other. The theme of the poem is not positive nor negative, but simply honest. He does not sugarcoat things when telling that “ life is real! Life is earnest! / And the grave is not its goal” (Longfellow 5).

Longfellow simply does this to appear as if he is a close friend or family member of the reader giving them encouraging and frank advice. The overall theme of the poem is reiterated constantly throughout the poem but most clearly expressed in the sixth stanza. In that stanza, he tells his audience to “Act, — act in the living Present/ Heart within, and God o’erhead!” (Longfellow 23-24) To summarize it, he is saying do not worry about the past or the future, just live in the present and everything will fall in its place. Longfellow creates a very consistent message through his tone and theme together. After analyzing and researching this poem, one can gain some extremely insightful views on life.

Longfellow was consistent through the entire poem, and there was not even the slightest change of tone. Reading his poem was extremely uplifting even though his tone was neither positive nor negative. One thing I have learned from reading this poem was that I must better myself and be more patient and not rush things in life. Overall, “A Psalm of Life” was very encouraging and makes the reader feel like they are talking to someone close rather than a poet they have never met.