

## Haunted Houses

by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

### About the Poet

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807–1882) was one of the most celebrated American poets of the 19th century. Known for his lyrical and narrative poetry, Longfellow's works often explored themes of love, loss, and the passage of time. His most famous works include *The Song of Hiawatha*, *Paul Revere's Ride*, and *Evangeline*. Longfellow's poetry is characterized by its accessibility, emotional depth, and use of vivid imagery. In *Haunted Houses*, he reflects on the lingering presence of the past in our lives.

### Background of the Poem

*Haunted Houses* was written during a time when Longfellow was deeply reflective about life, death, and the spiritual connections between the living and the dead. The poem metaphorically explores the idea that every house is "haunted" by the memories and spirits of those who once lived there. It delves into the concept of the unseen world and its influence on our daily lives, blending philosophical musings with poetic elegance.

### Message of the Poem

The poem conveys the message that the past is ever-present in our lives, shaping our experiences and perceptions. Longfellow suggests that the memories and spirits of those who have lived before us continue to influence the spaces we inhabit. The poem encourages readers to reflect on the interconnectedness of life and the enduring impact of those who came before us.

### Themes

**The Presence of the Past:** The poem explores how the memories and spirits of the departed linger in the places they once inhabited.

**Spiritual Connection:** It reflects on the idea of an unseen world that coexists with the physical world.

**Mortality and Legacy:** The poem contemplates the transient nature of life and the lasting impressions we leave behind.

**Interconnectedness:** Longfellow emphasizes the interconnectedness of the living and the dead, suggesting that our lives are influenced by those who came before us.

### Summary

1. The poem begins with the assertion that all houses where people have lived and died are "haunted." Longfellow uses the term "haunted" metaphorically to describe the lingering presence of memories and spirits in these spaces.

2. Longfellow describes the "harmless phantoms" that glide through the houses, leaving "impalpable impressions" on the air. These ghosts are not malevolent but are quiet and inoffensive, representing the memories and influences of the past.
3. The poet suggests that there are more "guests" in a house than the hosts invite. These guests are the spirits of the departed, who silently observe and influence the living.
4. Longfellow reflects on how the past is visible to him in ways that others cannot perceive. He sees and hears the echoes of those who have lived before, while others only perceive the present.
5. The poet contemplates the idea of ownership, suggesting that we are merely temporary occupants of the spaces we inhabit. The true "owners" are the spirits of those who came before, who hold their estates in "mortmain" (a legal term meaning ownership by the dead).
6. Longfellow describes the spirit world as an ethereal realm that surrounds and influences the physical world. This realm adds depth and meaning to our lives, connecting us to something greater than ourselves.
7. The poet reflects on the balance between earthly desires and higher aspirations, suggesting that our lives are influenced by unseen forces, like an "undiscovered planet" in the sky.
8. Longfellow uses the metaphor of a "bridge of light" to describe the connection between the physical and spiritual worlds. This bridge allows our thoughts and imaginations to wander into the realm of mystery and the unknown.

### **Important Phrases**

**"All houses wherein men have lived and died / Are haunted houses":** Suggests that every house carries the memories and spirits of its past inhabitants. Highlights the central theme of the lingering presence of the past.

**"The harmless phantoms on their errands glide":** Describes the spirits as quiet and inoffensive. Emphasizes the peaceful coexistence of the living and the dead.

**"We have no title-deeds to house or lands":** Reflects on the transient nature of ownership. Suggests that the true owners of a place are those who have lived and died there.

**"The spirit-world around this world of sense / Floats like an atmosphere":** Describes the spiritual realm as an invisible presence that surrounds the physical world. Highlights the interconnectedness of the seen and unseen worlds.

**"A bridge of light, connecting it with this":** Refers to the connection between the physical and spiritual realms. Symbolizes the link between the living and the dead.

### **Poetic Devices**

**Imagery:** Longfellow uses vivid imagery to describe the spirits and their presence in the houses. **Example:** "The harmless phantoms on their errands glide."

**Metaphor:** The houses are metaphorically described as "haunted" by the memories and spirits of the past.

**Symbolism: The bridge of light:** Symbolizes the connection between the physical and spiritual worlds.

**The spirit-world:** Represents the unseen influences that shape our lives.

**Personification:** The spirits are personified as "harmless phantoms" with errands to complete.

**Tone:** The tone is reflective and contemplative, encouraging readers to ponder the themes of mortality and legacy.

**Alliteration: Example:** "Harmless phantoms on their errands glide."

Haunted Houses is a profound and thought-provoking poem that invites readers to reflect on the enduring impact of the past and the spiritual connections that shape our lives.