Concord Hymn

POEM TEXT

Sung at the Completion of the Battle Monument, July 4, 1837

By the rude bridge that arched the flood,
Their flag to April's breeze unfurled,
Here once the embattled farmers stood
And fired the shot heard round the world.

The foe long since in silence slept;
Alike the conqueror silent sleeps;
And Time the ruined bridge has swept
Down the dark stream which seaward creeps.

On this green bank, by this soft stream,
We set today a votive stone;
That memory may their deed redeem,
When, like our sires, our sons are gone.

Spirit, that made those heroes dare
To die, and leave their children free,
Bid Time and Nature gently spare
The shaft we raise to them and thee.

SUMMARY

It was here by the crudely-built bridge over the river, with their flag rippling in an April breeze, that the farmers stood up to the British threat—and famously fired their guns, kicking off a world-renowned battle.

The enemy has now been dead for a long time; similarly, the victors sleep in the silence of the past. The forces of time have swept that wrecked bridge away, down the shadowy river that runs towards the sea.

Standing on this green riverside beside the gently flowing stream, we today set up a monument to honor that battle, so that the farmers' heroic actions will be kept alive in our memory, even when the next generation, like the generation before, is dead.

May the same spirit that made those heroes brave enough to sacrifice their lives and grant future generations their freedom now ask time and nature to kindly preserve this monument, which honors those soldiers (and that spirit of bravery itself).

THEMES

HEROISM AND REMEMBRANCE

"Concord Hymn" is a commemorative poem written for the 1837 dedication of a monument to the Battle of Concord. The stone obelisk was erected to celebrate the bravery and determination of a group of farmers who, in 1775, fought against the British in one of the earliest battles of the American Revolutionary War. The poem presents their heroism as something that should be remembered and honored as a historic blow against British colonial rule. But there is also a cautionary note here: heroic actions and the heroic dead, the poem suggests, are easily forgotten, and it takes conscious work and commitment to tend to their memory.

The speaker stands on the site of the battle, noting that there is little there to tell the farmers' story. Though the battle was a vitally important event in world history, the landscape itself doesn't record the momentous events that happened there. Both sides of the war, the speaker observes, now metaphorically "sleep" in the silence of death. And even the bridge near which the "embattled farmers" defiantly unfurled their flag no longer stands. The whole world is in a process of constant change, and so even things that seem momentous at the time can quickly "creep" into oblivion. On the same note, the speaker acknowledges how the crowd's forefathers are "gone," and likewise, "our sons [will be gone]" too. In other words, nothing lasts forever!

Precisely because the landscape shows no marks of the battle, the "generations" who have come after the revolutionaries must make a conscious effort to remember and honor their heroism. The effort to remember, the poem suggests, is a meaningful and important kind of gratitude. The speaker says that "memory may their deed redeem." In other words, as long as later generations honor the revolutionaries' sacrifice, it wasn't made in vain. The speaker notes that the stone monument around which a crowd now gathers is a "votive"—that is, an object offered to mark the fulfillment of a vow. The obelisk—and the poem itself—are a promise that future generations won't forget the farmers' heroic actions.

But the poem acknowledges that remembrance is not easy. Over time, the events of the past become more and more remote and seem less obviously relevant to those alive in the present. The speaker, therefore, asks the "Spirit" of courage that inspired the farmers to also aid in this ongoing remembrance, suggesting that efforts at remembrance might themselves require a kind of heroism. Only through the work of that "Spirit," the speaker suggests, is there any chance that

"Time and Nature" might "gently spare" the monument from oblivion and preserve the memory of the revolutionaries. Remembrance thus requires further acts of heroism by subsequent generations—and, perhaps, a little luck.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-16

TIME AND NATURE

Though "Concord Hymn" is meant as a lasting tribute, the poem acknowledges a simple, sad fact about life: nothing lasts. "Time" and "Nature," the poem suggests, work together to wear away even humanity's greatest achievements.

As a ceremonial work intended to be shared on a particular day, the poem creates a sense of occasion, making time a prominent theme. Before the poem even begins, the epigraph notes when and why it was written: for the 1837 dedication of a monument to the Battle of Concord. That battle is now distant to the poem's original audience—and this commemorative poem itself is distant from the modern-day reader! By drawing attention to the passage of time, the speaker reminds those present at the ceremony—and the reader, too—that they will all be captured by time's forces. Their "sires" (or fathers) are gone, and one day their "sons" will be gone too.

The poem presents this impermanence as a fact of life and a force of nature. In fact, it's *nature* that does much of time's destructive work. When the farmers fought back against the British at the battle of Concord, it was besides a bridge that "arched" over a "flood." On the one hand, this is a reference to a real bridge over a real river—but it's also a symbol for the flow of time. That "ruined bridge" was swept down "the dark stream which seaward creeps." Both literally and metaphorically, nature reclaims the world from humankind through the passage of time.

Though the monument the poem commemorates seems built to last, and the day seems beautiful and calm, time and nature thus lurk in the background waiting to have their way. In the poem's present, the crowd stands on a "green bank" beside a "soft stream." But the speaker implies that this pleasant scene offers a false sense of security. If the monument does survive, it will be through future generations' diligent efforts to fight time and nature—efforts that will, inevitably, eventually fail.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-16

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-4

By the rude bridge that arched the flood,
Their flag to April's breeze unfurled,
Here once the embattled farmers stood
And fired the shot heard round the world.

This poem, as its subtitle reveals, was written to commemorate a stone monument erected in 1837 to celebrate the Battle of Concord, an important event in the American Revolutionary War. In other words, "Concord Hymn" itself is a commemoration of a commemoration! This will be a poem about history, memory, and heroism.

The first stanza describes the Battle of Concord itself—a 1775 battle which, alongside the Battle of Lexington, kicked off the American Revolution. Lines 1-2 set the scene, describing how the "embattled farmers"—a rough-and-ready amateur army—placed a flag in the ground as an act of defiance. It's not certain what flag these revolutionaries "unfurled," but it certainly wasn't the British one! The battle took place near a crudely built bridge over a river, here described dramatically as a "flood."

It was on this very site—where the speaker now stands with a crowd—that the "embattled farmers stood," both literally and in the sense of standing their ground. The words "Here once" stress that this was one specific moment in the powerful flow of time, subtly setting up the idea that, unless people make a serious effort to remember them, the fighters' heroic deeds will be easily swept away and forgotten.

Line 4 uses hyperbole to describe the bullet the farmers fired at the British colonialist soldiers as the "shot heard round the world." Though it's not known for certain which side fired first, this one line has been so influential that many people assume it to be factual. The point is that this first shot sets in motion a chain of events that effectively ends colonial rule and gives birth to the U.S. as a free, independent, and powerful nation. This shot is not *literally* "heard round the world," but its consequences do *change* the entire world.

It's no exaggeration to say that this one line is by far Emerson's most famous. It has since been used to describe the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand—which sparked the First World War—and the slaying of President John F. Kennedy in 1963. The muted /d/ consonance in the line—"fired the shot heard round the world"—makes the sharp /sh/ and /t/ of "shot" jump out like a sudden explosion.

LINES 5-8

The foe long since in silence slept;
Alike the conqueror silent sleeps;
And Time the ruined bridge has swept
Down the dark stream which seaward creeps.

Though the Battle of Concord didn't happen that long before the completion of the monument and the composition of the poem, the speaker stresses that it's already a thing of the past. The poem makes this point metaphorically, depicting both sides of the war as silently asleep:

> The foe long since in silence slept;
> Alike the conqueror silent sleeps;

Notice the subtle difference between these two lines. The "foe"—that is, the British forces—sleep in the past tense, as if to suggest they've been gone for a longer time. There is something more final about this: American independence, the phrasing suggests, has consigned British colonial rule to history. The sibilant alliteration in "since in silence slept" makes this a hushed, sleepy line.

Meanwhile, the "conqueror"—the American side—sleeps in the present tense, implying that it could wake up if required. Perhaps the speaker feels that the long-gone farmers (or the rebellious spirit that inspired them) somehow remain at the ready.

In lines 7 and 8, the poem speaks both literally and metaphorically:

> And Time the ruined bridge has swept
> Down the dark stream which seaward creeps.

The literal bridge *isn't* there anymore, but its destruction also works as a metaphor for the power of time. Notice that "Time" is capitalized and personified. By foregrounding Time's destructive talents, the speaker highlights the need for people to actively tend to the memory of the Battle of Concord: otherwise, "Time" will snatch that too.

Dull /d/ sounds appear as alliteration and consonance here to evoke time's ability to sweep things—people, buildings, memories—permanently away:

> And Time the ruined bridge has swept
> Down the dark stream which seaward creeps.

The darkness of the stream suggests the murkiness of the past; perhaps the sea represents the total oblivion of being forgotten.

LINES 9-12

> *On this green bank, by this soft stream,*
> *We set today a votive stone;*
> *That memory may their deed redeem,*
> *When, like our sires, our sons are gone.*

Stanza 3 situates the poem firmly in the speaker's time and place, where a crowd gathers to witness the dedication of the battle monument:

> On this green bank, by this soft stream,
> We set today a votive stone;

Note the specific mention of "today," which reminds the crowd—and the reader—of the passage of time. The battle was once "today," and, of course, the poem's present is itself now in the past.

The placid scene, with its "green bank" and "soft stream," might show nature at its gentlest (helped along by the sibilant quiet of "soft stream"). But it's also a further reminder that nature will quickly reclaim this monument unless people look after it. That humble-looking stream could, literally or metaphorically, carry the monument's heavy stone off to the sea, just as it "swept" the "ruined bridge" away.

Lines 11 and 12 then expand on the purpose of the monument's "votive" offering—its role as a promise to remember:

> That memory may their deed redeem,
> When, like our sires, our sons are gone.

Through the monument—and, importantly, its upkeep—society can collectively remember the farmers' heroic "deed." If the monument continues to stand tall and proud, it means the farmers' sacrifice was worth it.

Line 12 implies that preserving that monument is an intergenerational responsibility. Just as many of the fathers—"sires"—of those in attendance at the ceremony are "gone," so too will their "sons" perish before too long—and so will their children after that! Memory, the speaker insists, must be *collectively* upheld, passed down from one generation to another like a tradition. The anaphora of "our sires, our sons" emphasizes this link between one generation and another.

Notice, too, how the poem's form upholds these ideas of remembrance and endurance. The firm quatrains, sturdy iambic pentameter (lines of five iambs, metrical feet with a da-DUM rhythm), and singsong ABAB rhyme scheme make the poem feel both like the solemn "hymn" it is, and like a mirror of the monument itself: a solid, foursquare piece of art meant to help later generations to remember what happened in Concord.

LINES 13-16

> *Spirit, that made those heroes dare*
> *To die, and leave their children free,*
> *Bid Time and Nature gently spare*
> *The shaft we raise to them and thee.*

Stanza 4 brings the poem to a dramatic climax.

Here, it's worth remembering that this poem had a ceremonial purpose and was read at the dedication of the monument. So far, the speaker has been addressing the crowd that has gathered to unveil the monument. Now, the speaker instead

begins to talk to a mysterious "Spirit" in a grand apostrophe:

> Spirit, that made those heroes dare
> To die, and leave their children free,

This "Spirit," the speaker suggests, is the same one that inspired "those heroes" to sacrifice their lives and win America's freedom from colonial rule, leaving their "children"—both their literal kids and, more broadly, the generations to come—a country of their own.

But the speaker has already artfully weaved into the earlier stanzas the threat that "Time and Nature" pose to *all* things: people, memories, ideas, buildings. These forces, working together, seem almost like like two impish gods who have the power to undo anything humankind creates. So the speaker—and the monument—asks the same "Spirit" that inspired the heroic farmers to stand up to the personified forces of "Time and Nature." In other words, remembrance might itself be a heroic act, one that takes bravery and endurance.

The poem's last line focuses on the monument itself, which, after all, is the reason the poem exists. The "shaft" (in this case, an obelisk) stands against the sky to honor not just the farmers themselves, but their courageous "Spirit" too. Though the farmers themselves are long gone, then, the poem implies that the "Spirit" lives on—and that it remains a vital part of American identity.

SYMBOLS

THE RIVER

The river symbolizes the relentless flow of time, which sweeps everything away in its currents. Just as the river's waters carry off the "rude bridge" that once crossed them, the poem suggests, all of human life—people, ideas, structures, entire civilizations—eventually gets swept towards the "sea" of non-existence.

And as the speaker notes, only this symbolic river itself is permanent here! First, it was present as a witness to the shift in power from British colonial rule to American independence as set in motion by the Battles of Concord and Lexington. But in the poem's present, the speaker and the crowd gather on its banks, which now seem eerily calm, almost as if nothing ever happened.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "By the rude bridge that arched the flood,"
- **Lines 7-8:** "And Time the ruined bridge has swept / Down the dark stream which seaward creeps."
- **Line 9:** "On this green bank, by this soft stream,"

THE MONUMENT

The monument in this poem symbolizes exactly what monuments stand for in the real world: remembrance and honor. Here, it commemorates the bravery of the "embattled farmers" who were ready to fight against the British colonial army. The tall, sturdy obelisk shape of the monument suggests the hope that future generations will remember those farmers. As long as the monument stands proud, the poem implies, then the "embattled farmers" will be part of America's collective memory.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Lines 9-16:** "On this green bank, by this soft stream, / We set today a votive stone; / That memory may their deed redeem, / When, like our sires, our sons are gone. / Spirit, that made those heroes dare / To die, and leave their children free, / Bid Time and Nature gently spare / The shaft we raise to them and thee."

POETIC DEVICES

ALLITERATION

Alliteration creates intensity and drama, making the poem's images more vivid.

For instance, listen to the /d/ alliteration in line 8:

> Down the dark stream which seaward creeps.

The thumping /d/ sound here evokes erosion and destruction. All things, the poem suggests, are carried towards oblivion by the river of time. The two /d/ sounds here make the line feel heavier and darker, helping to support the speaker's argument that memory and commemoration require conscious effort.

This /d/ sound reappears across lines 13 and 14:

> Spirit, that made those heroes dare
> To die, and leave their children free,

Here, alliteration links the farmers' heroic actions with their willingness to make the ultimate sacrifice and pay with their lives. Indeed, their heroism stems from the fact that they gave their lives. The /d/ alliteration also makes the phrase more dramatic and memorable—which, of course, is what the poem wants to achieve.

Note that much of the alliteration here is sibilance (e.g., "soft stream"). These sounds create a quiet atmosphere and evoke

the sound of water.

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "flood"
- **Line 2:** "flag," "unfurled"
- **Line 5:** "since," "silence slept"
- **Line 6:** "silent sleeps"
- **Line 8:** "Down," "dark," "stream," "seaward"
- **Line 9:** "soft stream"
- **Line 10:** "set," "stone"
- **Line 11:** "memory may," "deed redeem"
- **Line 12:** "sires," "sons"
- **Line 13:** "Spirit," "dare"
- **Line 14:** "die"
- **Line 16:** "them," "thee"

APOSTROPHE

In the final stanza, the speaker shifts from addressing the crowd to addressing something more ethereal:

> Spirit, that made those heroes dare
> To die, and leave their children free,

The speaker uses apostrophe to call on that same "Spirit" of bravery that inspired the "embattled farmers" who fought against the British at the Battle of Concord. Doing so draws a connection between the past, the present, and the future: though those fighters may be dead, this brave spirit lives on as long as people value their heroic actions. The "Spirit" made them brave and ensured the freedom of "their children" and subsequent generations.

Addressing the "Spirit" in this way thus underlines the significance of the occasion, implying that any society that forgets the farmers' sacrifice is no longer worthy of their heroic "deed."

Apostrophe also provides the ending with a dramatic rhetorical flourish. It's easy to imagine the speaker—or singer—shifting their gaze from the crowd to the skies above, calling on something more enduring than individual human lives. Perhaps this apostrophe is also an acknowledgement that there is a bit of luck involved in anything standing the test of time—given that "Time and Nature" always wait in the wings to wreak destruction!

Where Apostrophe appears in the poem:

- **Lines 13-16:** "Spirit, that made those heroes dare / To die, and leave their children free, / Bid Time and Nature gently spare / The shaft we raise to them and thee."

CONSONANCE

The consonance in "Concord Hymn" intensifies the poem's language and brings its images to life.

For instance, listen to the dull /d/ sound that runs through the first stanza:

> By the rude bridge that arched the flood,
> Their flag to April's breeze unfurled,
> Here once the embattled farmers stood
> And fired the shot heard round the world.

One of the poem's major themes is time's way of destroying everything—ideas, people, incredible buildings, entire civilizations, and so on. All these muted /d/ sounds seem to embody this idea, making the opening feel worn down as an old stone. It's as though time's forces are already subtly at work! These sounds also create a quiet atmosphere in which the sudden word "shot," with its harsh /sh/ and spiky /t/, really sounds like a gun going off!

Another clear example of consonance is the spiky /t/ in line 10:

> We set today a votive stone;

This crisp, sharp /t/ sound helps to add force and emphasis to this important moment of dedication—and might even *visually* suggest the tall monument.

The poem also uses plentiful sibilance to create hushed, watery tones; see this guide's Sibilance entry for more on that.

Where Consonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "rude," "arched," "flood"
- **Line 2:** "flag," "unfurled"
- **Line 3:** "embattled," "stood"
- **Line 4:** "And fired," "heard round," "world"
- **Line 5:** "since in silence slept"
- **Line 6:** "silent sleeps"
- **Line 7:** "swept"
- **Line 8:** "Down," "dark," "stream"
- **Lines 8-8:** "seaward / creeps"
- **Line 9:** "green bank," "this soft stream"
- **Line 10:** "set today," "votive stone"
- **Line 11:** "memory may," "deed redeem"
- **Line 12:** "sires," "sons"
- **Line 13:** "made," "dare"
- **Line 14:** "die"
- **Line 16:** "them," "thee"

ENJAMBMENT

"Concord Hymn" uses enjambment to create drama.

For instance, consider the lines in which the speaker describes the Battle of Concord itself:

> Here once the embattled farmers stood

> And fired the shot heard round the world.

Notice how the enjambment following "stood" creates tension here. It's unclear what's coming next—just like it was unclear to the farmers themselves what exactly would happen if they stood their ground. The enjambment makes the fourth line a powerful event all of its own, speaking to the world-changing effects of that "shot heard round the world." It's as if line 3 and line 4 represent two distinct eras in history, divided by that all-important "shot."

Enjambment can also emphasize the first word of a line, again for dramatic effect:

> And Time the ruined bridge has swept
> Down the dark stream which seaward creeps.

The enjambment here, combined with the stressed syllable of "Down," makes time seem ruthless and powerful. The blank space at the end of the line following "swept" also speaks to a kind of oblivion—the way all things, ultimately, are doomed to destruction.

Lines 13 and 14, meanwhile, use enjambment for emotional effect:

> Spirit, that made those heroes dare
> To die, and leave their children free,

The enjambment here draws attention to the words "To die," emphasizing the farmers' brave sacrifice.

Where Enjambment appears in the poem:

- **Lines 3-4:** "stood / And"
- **Lines 7-8:** "swept / Down"
- **Lines 9-10:** "stream, / We"
- **Lines 13-14:** "dare / To"
- **Lines 15-16:** "spare / The"

HYPERBOLE

Line 4 is one of the most famous examples of hyperbole in poetry, and is certainly Emerson's best-known line! Here, the speaker describes how the "embattled farmers" at the Battle of Concord—a group of "minutemen," trained civilians ready to fight against the colonial British at a minute's notice—stood their ground:

> And fired the shot heard round the world.

This shot, though probably pretty loud, wasn't literally heard around the world. But describing it as if it were portrays this as one of the most significant shots in history, setting in motion the events that created modern-day independent America. So though no gun shot can be heard all over the planet, some of them are *felt* by the entire world through their consequences.

This line has since been used to describe the shot that killed Archduke Franz Ferdinand and ignited the First World War, and the sniper bullets that killed President John F. Kennedy in 1963. It's worth noting, though, that it's not known for sure whether it was the "embattled farmers" or the British colonial army that *actually* fired the first shot at the Battle of Concord. But such is the power of Emerson's hyperbolic line that many people believe it was the minutemen who shot first.

Where Hyperbole appears in the poem:

- **Line 4:** "And fired the shot heard round the world."

METAPHOR

"Concord Hymn" uses metaphor to elevate the poem's language and to evoke the passage of time.

The poem was written in honor of a monument to a battle that was, at the time of the poem's composition, some 60 years in the past. To this end, the speaker notes how:

> The foe long since in silence slept;
> Alike the conqueror silent sleeps;

That is, those who actually fought in the conflict are no longer around: here, sleep is a metaphor for death. But notice how the "foe" has "slept" (past tense) for a *long* time, while the victorious American force "sleeps" in the present tense. This phrasing could suggest that the "conqueror" remains on hand, like a sleeping giant, ready to defend America and keep its "children free."

On the other hand, though, the dead seem pretty far away, lost in the darkness of "Time":

> And Time the ruined bridge has swept
> Down the dark stream which seaward creeps.

Here, "Time" itself behaves like a metaphorical river, carrying all traces of the battle away in its dark current.

Later, the poem personifies "Time"—and "Nature," too:

> Spirit, that made those heroes dare
> To die, and leave their children free,
> Bid Time and Nature gently spare
> The shaft we raise to them and thee.

Here, "Time and Nature" lurk like gods, waiting in the wings to destroy anything humankind creates. The speaker thus appeals to both—through the same "Spirit" that inspired the farmers—to let the monument stand. It's a humble moment that reminds the crowd (and the reader) of the fragility of life.

Where Metaphor appears in the poem:

- **Lines 5-6:** "The foe long since in silence slept; / Alike the conqueror silent sleeps;"
- **Lines 7-8:** "And Time the ruined bridge has swept / Down the dark stream which seaward creeps."
- **Lines 15-16:** "Bid Time and Nature gently spare / The shaft we raise to them and thee."

REPETITION

Repetitions—especially parallelism—give the poem some extra rhetorical punch.

For example, take a look at the parallelism and anaphora in stanza 3:

> On this green bank, by this soft stream,
> We set today a votive stone;
> That memory may their deed redeem,
> When, like our sires, our sons are gone.

The parallelism in line 9 helps to evoke a whole gentle scene; it's as if the speaker is looking from one side of the view to the other, noting that this former battlefield has become calm and peaceful now. This moment subtly points out that all traces of the battle are gone—and that it's thus up to the descendants of the revolutionaries to remember them and their heroism.

And that's exactly the point the speaker makes with the anaphora of "our sires, our sons," which draws a connecting line between generations. "Sires" are the crowd's literal and metaphorical forefathers, including actual family members and, perhaps, the "embattled farmers" and founders of modern, independent America. "Our sons" could be actual children, but also a reference to future generations to come.

The anaphora here speaks to intergenerational responsibility. The farmers fought so "their children [could be] free"—and in turn, these children owe them a debt of gratitude. The similarity of the sounds in these four monosyllabic words further strengthens this link, imagining a kind of extended American family across different eras.

The diacope of "our" also widens the speaker's speech to include everyone present at the dedication, making them aware of their own responsibility to honor the "heroes" of the Battle of Concord.

The polyptoton in lines 5-6 has a related effect:

> The foe long since in silence slept;
> Alike the conqueror silent sleeps;

These repetitions emphasize the idea that all the fighters of the Revolutionary War, British and American, are long gone now. It's up to those who still live to preserve their memories.

Where Repetition appears in the poem:

- **Line 5:** "silence slept"
- **Line 6:** "silent sleeps"
- **Line 9:** "On this green bank, by this soft stream,"
- **Line 12:** "our sires, our sons"

SIBILANCE

Sibilance is an important part of the poem's overall sound, and it first shows up in the second stanza:

> The foe long since in silence slept;
> Alike the conqueror silent sleeps;
> And Time the ruined bridge has swept
> Down the dark stream which seaward creeps.

In lines 5 and 6 (the first two quoted above), the /s/ creates a sleepy, whispery hush. This supports the metaphorical idea that both sides of the Battle of Concord are now "asleep"—that is, dead. These sounds make the past seem *more in the past*, which in turn supports the speaker's point that both memory and monuments require upkeep from generation after generation.

The speaker then describes time as a metaphorical river that sweeps all things into an ocean of oblivion. Sibilant alliteration supports this idea, too. "Swept [...] seaward [...] soft stream": these /s/ sounds conjure the atmosphere of the coast, the salty spray in the air as the waves go in and out.

Where Sibilance appears in the poem:

- **Line 5:** "since," "silence slept"
- **Line 6:** "silent sleeps"
- **Line 7:** "swept"
- **Line 8:** "stream," "seaward creeps"
- **Line 9:** "this," "this soft stream"
- **Line 10:** "set," "stone"
- **Line 12:** "sires," "sons"
- **Line 13:** "Spirit"

VOCABULARY

Rude (Line 1) - Crudely built.

Arched (Line 1) - Formed an arch over; crossed.

Unfurled (Line 2) - Unfolded, unrolled.

Embattled (Line 3) - Ready for war, under threat.

Foe (Line 5) - Enemy.

Seaward (Line 8) - Towards the sea.

Votive (Line 10) - An offering made in honor of a vow or promise (e.g. lighting a candle for a family member).

Deed (Line 11) - Heroic action.

Redeem (Line 11) - Justify.

Sires (Line 12) - Forefathers.

Bid (Line 15) - Ask, tell.

Shaft (Line 16) - A tall column.

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"Concord Hymn" is written in quatrains—four-line stanzas. And there are four of these, giving the poem a symmetry that fits its role in the dedication of a monument. The poem, like the obelisk, feels sturdy and well-made, speaking to its hopes of lasting a long, long time.

It's also worth noting that this is a *hymn*. It was intended, initially at least, to be sung, and was set to the tune of "Old Hundredth," composed by the 16th century French musician Louis Bourgeois. That musical form gives the poem its structure: hymns often have verses written in groups of four lines.

This is also an *occasional* poem—which doesn't mean that it only exists from time to time, but rather that it was written for one specific occasion! Occasional poetry, which can be written for any public event from weddings to inaugurations, is a tradition stretching all the way back to Ancient Greece—and so befits the poem's interest in history and inheritance.

METER

"Concord Hymn" uses a fairly loose iambic tetrameter—that is, lines of four iambs, metrical feet with a da-DUM rhythm. Here's line 10, which uses perfect iambic tetrameter:

> We set | today | a vot- | ive stone;

The steadiness of this iambic meter fits the seriousness of the occasion: regular iambs sound stately and grand.

But if steady iambs suggest sturdiness and permanence, the poem's metrical variations introduce a touch of fragility, reflecting one of the speaker's main points: the monument (and memory of the farmers) will only stand the test of time if people make an effort. The first line, for example, starts with two unstressed syllables followed by two stressed (that is, a pyrrhic foot followed by a spondee):

> By the | rude bridge | that arched | the flood,

The poem thus starts on uncertain terms, anticipating the speaker's point that "Time and Nature" can easily destroy humankind's strongest structures.

It's in the last stanza that the poem finds its most sturdy, regular iambic sound:

> Spirit, | that made | those her- | oes dare
> To die, | and leave | their child- | ren free,
> Bid Time| and Nat- | ure gent- | ly spare
> The shaft | we raise | to them | and thee.

The only variation here is the trochee (DUM-da) at the start of the stanza. This marks the speaker's switch of address towards the "Spirit," as opposed to the crowd. From then on, the poem uses iambs to build to a rhetorical, hopeful height.

RHYME SCHEME

"Concord Hymn" uses this steady, dependable rhyme scheme throughout:

ABAB

This pattern is known as *alternate rhyme*, and its singsong quality reflects the fact that this is a hymn, a reverent song.

Most of the rhyming pairs in the poem are pretty strong and clear: unfurled/world, stream/redeem. This creates a feeling of sturdiness and dependability, reflecting exactly what the speaker hopes for both the memory of the "embattled farmers" and the monument itself: that they will stand the test of time.

However, one slant rhyme, between "flood" and "stood" in the first stanza, hints that such stability isn't a given. The "flood" of time (and the literal river) might well sweep away whatever stands now if later generations don't make a conscious effort to remember and honor those who came before them.

SPEAKER

The speaker in "Concord Hymn" has no clear identity. Instead, they are a kind of voice for their community, which is why they use the first-person plural in line 10: they speak for a "we," on behalf of everyone gathered to see the dedication of the monument. While Emerson *could* be considered the speaker, since the poem was commissioned from him for the occasion, the poem really isn't about the speaker at all.

As a voice for the community, the speaker clearly feels proud of the "embattled farmers" who "fired the shot heard round the world" and ultimately set in motion the events that led to American independence. But the speaker also acknowledges that "Time and Nature" have a habit of destroying even the tallest towers (and the strongest memories). The speaker, then, is both a patriotic idealist *and* a realist.

SETTING

"Concord Hymn" was an occasional poem, written to be "Sung

at the Completion of the Battle Monument, July 4, 1837." It thus has a very specific setting: Concord, Massachusetts, on the specific day of the monument's dedication. The location is the same site as the battle which both poem and monument commemorate. For the reader, then, it's a kind of glimpse at one exact moment in history.

But as much as the poem focuses on its own present, the speaker urges readers to look both backwards and forwards in time. Observing that there would be little left to show that this is the site of the battle if the monument weren't there, the poem acknowledges how things that seem important can fade into insignificance. "Time" and "Nature" have a habit of destroying everything—nothing, and no one, lasts forever.

The speaker thus implores both crowd and reader not to let the heroic "deed" of the "embattled farmers" fade away. The poem's setting thus intersects different times, reminding readers that memories only stay alive if people make the effort to *keep* them alive.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) was one of the most influential writers in American literature. He was a key figure in the Transcendentalist movement, which attempted to redefine humankind's relationship with nature, and argued that the divine was readily accessible through the natural world. As one of the founders of the Transcendental Club (alongside Henry David Thoreau), he sought to give America a literature that was specifically its *own* (as opposed to being inherited from Britain).

"Concord Hymn" is one of Emerson's earliest poems. It was written in 1837 for the completion of a monument built to commemorate the Battle of Concord, and it later appeared in his collection *Poems* (1848). Emerson and his wife moved to Concord, Massachusetts in 1835, quickly becoming key figures in the community. Emerson composed "Concord Hymn" at the request of the Battle Monument Committee; as the subtitle suggests, the poem was set to music and sung at the monument's dedication ceremony. The monument—an obelisk—pays tribute to a group of farmers who took arms against the British colonial troops and set in motion the events that led to American independence.

Among many memorable lines, the "shot heard round the world" is perhaps the most famous phrase in all of Emerson's writing. It is, however, an example of poetic license: the Battle of Concord was in fact the *second* skirmish to break out on April 19th, 1775, following the Battle of Lexington. The phrase has since been used to describe another famous "shot:" the one that killed Archduke Franz Ferdinand and sparked the First World War.

Emerson was a huge influence on later poets; Robert Frost, for instance, considered him one of the four most important Americans, along with George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Thomas Jefferson.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

"Concord Hymn" was written with history in mind. The poem was commissioned from Emerson to mark the dedication of the Concord monument, roughly sixty years after the Battle of Concord, and was originally set to the music of "Old Hundredth," a tune written by the 16th-century French composer Louis Bourgeois. Both poem and obelisk honor the armed civilians ("embattled farmers") who fought in one of the earliest skirmishes of the American Revolutionary War. These fighters were known as *minutemen* because they were ready and willing to fight at extremely short notice.

The background of the war is complex and has roots stretching all the way back to the first generation of European settlers in America. Put simply, though, some of the North American colonies grew disenchanted with being ruled by the British. Massachusetts, where the Battles of Concord and Lexington took place, was seen by the British authorities as one of the most troublesome colonies, and British General Thomas Gage mobilized his men for military action to suppress rebellious activity there.

On April 16, 1775, Paul Revere, a Bostonian in favor of American independence, rode ahead of the British to warn local militiamen of Gage's advance. Despite the suggestion in this poem that it was the Battle of Concord that kicked off the war, it was in fact the slightly earlier (and nearby) Battle of Lexington that marked the beginning of armed conflict. These skirmishes set in motion the chain of events that dragged France and Spain into the war (also against the British) and culminated in modern, independent America.

The American Revolution captured the imaginations of many poets on both sides of The Atlantic. Interested readers might want to check out Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's "The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere," Phillis Wheatley's "To the Right Honorable William, Earl of Dartmouth," and William Blake's "America, a Prophecy."

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- Emerson's Essays — Read a collection of Emerson's writing which lays out some of his key Transcendentalist ideas. (https://www.gutenberg.org/files/16643/16643-h/16643-h.htm)
- The Poem Aloud — Listen to the poem set to music, as it might have been sung on the day of the monument's dedication. (https://www.youtube.com/

watch?v=W1ApkEnMCwc)

- The Monument Today — Take a virtual tour of the site of the battle—and the monument, which still stands! (https://goo.gl/maps/sWdAjPuxYg7bKodG9)
- The American Revolution — Learn more about the background to the Battle of Concord and the American Revolutionary War. (https://www.britannica.com/event/American-Revolution/Prelude-to-war)
- Emerson's Life and Work — Learn more about Emerson's poetry and biography at the Poetry Foundation. (https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/ralph-waldo-emerson)

HOW TO CITE

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