

William Wetmore Story Biography

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Biography

William Wetmore Story (12 February 1819-7 October 1895), lawyer, sculptor, poet, essayist, and novelist, was the son of the eminent jurist Joseph Story. He was born in Salem, Massachusetts. After receiving his Bachelor of Laws degree from Harvard College in 1840, Story settled briefly into the practice of law and published several legal treatises. With the death of his father in 1845, Story was commissioned to design a statue for his tomb. This commission led Story to Italy in 1847. There he was received by a small community of American artists which included Margaret Fuller and Horatio Greenough, and by 1856 Story had abandoned the law and settled permanently in Rome. In 1862, with the acclaim given his statue of *Cleopatra* (which is described in detail by Story's friend Nathaniel Hawthorne in *The Marble Faun*), Story received the recognition as a sculptor he desired. But by this time he was already redirecting his energies into belletristic writing. Story had attempted poetry while still practicing law, but his *Poems* (Boston: Little & Brown, 1847) and *Poems* (Boston: Little & Brown, 1856) were common New England fare which brought him little acknowledgement. His later poems, especially those of *Graffiti d'Italia* (Edinburgh: Blackwood & Sons, 1868) are partially liberated from the restrictive atmosphere of New England, but are pervaded by a European flavor and the influence of Story's neighbor in Rome, Robert Browning. *Roba di Roma* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1862), the most popular of Story's collections of essays, is a rambling guide to contemporary Rome with Story's comments on Roman art, history, and culture. His one novel, *Fiametta; A Summer Idyl* (Edinburgh: Blackwood & Sons, 1885), is overly romantic and sentimental, and features the death of the heroine from unrequited love. Although his popularity and nearly all of his literary acquaintances were European by the 1860s, Story demonstrated his concern over the American Civil War with a series of letters to the London *Daily News* beginning in 1861.