

Literary Friendships and Transatlantic Celebrity: Harriet Beecher Stowe, George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans), and Literary Connection

Today we know Harriet Beecher Stowe mainly as the author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, but during her lifetime, she generated a large body of writing, including periodical stories and one book-length collection before her blockbuster, and many narratives in the years afterwards. Using serialization in periodicals as one income-producer (Stowe being the primary breadwinner for her large family), she would later bring out book versions of those same novels, and also served as a magazine editor. Thus, as Joan Hedrick's Pulitzer-prize winning biography demonstrated, Stowe was one early example of women's literary professionalism in action over many decades.

Even during her own time, however, the book for which Stowe garnered the most intense response was *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which actually sold many more copies in Britain than in the United States. Since its 1850s' publication pre-dated international copyright agreements, Stowe did not earn royalties for the pirated English editions, but she made a triumphant tour of Great Britain and used that experience as the basis for her enthusiastic travelogue, *Sunny Memories in Foreign Lands*, which will be our main reading for this week. During the tour itself, Stowe was greeted as a major celebrity and showered with gifts, as well as self-affirming attention from an array of cultural arbiters, including several members of the nobility. Stowe also met a number of literary luminaries. She maintained connections with some of her British "fans" and friends after returning to the US, and she wrote a vigorous "defense" of one, Lady Byron, whom she felt had been treated unfairly in a biography of Lord Byron which, published in 1835, had contributed to the mythology of the poet as a Romantic genius and his wife as a shrew. In an 1869 narrative in *Atlantic Monthly* in America in *Macmillan's Magazine* in England ("The True Story of Lady Byron's Life"), Stowe peeled back the curtain on the Byrons' relationship in ways that horrified many of her contemporaries, since she accused Lord Byron of committing incest with his half-sister, Augusta Leigh, both before and during his marriage and affirmed a long-time rumor that Byron had actually fathered a daughter by his sibling. As soon as the article appeared, a transatlantic firestorm exploded, with media on both sides of the ocean taking such a virulent stand against Stowe's breach of respectability that the never fully recovered her own reputation as a moral voice. The *Atlantic Monthly* alone lost 15,000 subscribers, almost one third of its readership. The gossip had been circulating for years, but for a woman to make such an accusation in such a public way was completely unacceptable.

As Jennifer Cognard-Black points out in her introduction to the cluster of letters between Stowe and Eliot that you'll be reading this week Stowe certainly didn't lose all her friends over this publication. But the negative reaction to the "True Story" may provide one reason why she never came out as a forceful supporter of women's suffrage, despite the repeated urgings of her half-sister, women's rights advocate Isabella Beecher Hooker. Still, Stowe could be persistent: like her *Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* collection of non-fiction accounts of "real-life" slavery and explanations of her writing process published in the aftermath of her major anti-slavery novel in an attempt to quiet its critics, a book-length extension of the Byronic periodical account appeared less than a year later, in 1870: *Lady Byron Vindicated* tried to marshal extensive presentation of factual details alongside insistent repetition of her initial charges against Lord Byron and praise for his long-suffering wife.

The *Sunny Memories* book preceded this period of intense conflict, however, and its tone reflects the triumphant period in the 1850s when Stowe had become an international celebrity and was trying to construct a literary persona consistent with being the author of the most widely read anti-slavery narrative of her day. To provide an introduction to the narrative, we'll invoke a few observations from Sarah's discussion of *Sunny Memories* in *The Cambridge Introduction to Harriet Beecher Stowe*:

- 1) Though the "Grand Tour" became a fairly common occurrence for well-to-do women later in the century, in the 1850s, Stowe's trip would have been far less common an activity for Americans of her social class.
- 2) Stowe's *Sunny Memories* publication actually contributed to the growing trend of Americans traveling to Europe to accrue cultural polish. The text also anticipates by at least a decade what Mary Suzanne Schriber, writing about the late 1860s and 1870s, dubs the feminization of

American travel writing. (That is, Stowe, Margaret Fuller, and Catharine Maria Sedgwick are helping to establish a trend.)

- 3) You'll want to pay particular attention to Stowe's positioning of herself in the *SM* Preface in opposition to the British travelers who had denigrated America—e.g., Frances Trollope, Harriet Martineau, and Charles Dickens. That is, Stowe hopes that at least part of her audience will be the same British readers who had so eagerly embraced *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.
- 4) Americans became the largest readership for this text, however—unlike for *UTC*. Joan Hedrick, Stowe's biographer, describes how Americans purchased and carried the book with them to Europe like "a travel guide . . . carried under their arms as they would later carry Baedeker's and Fodor's" (*HBS* 266).
- 5) The popularity of the book with American readers is partly due to Stowe's cagey rhetoric: she makes Europe accessible to US readers via, on the one hand, celebrating its exotic features and, on the other hand, depicting sentimentalized connections between England and America (83-84).

We're asking that all of you read some sections of this memoir and its introductory materials. (See below.) As you read, watch for ways in which Stowe's book constructs characterizations of herself, her journey, and her impressions of Great Britain designed to confirm impressions of her position as a self-less anti-slavery advocate but also a literary star. Then, as noted in the table after that listing of chapters for whole-group analysis, we're also asking each of you to prepare a summary and commentary on one additional chapter.

Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Sunny Memories in Foreign Lands*

A) Assignment for all students: From Volume I (available via Project Gutenberg):

"Preface"

"Introductory"

"Public Meeting in Liverpool—April 13"

"Lord Mayor's Dinner—May 2"

"Stafford House—May 7"

"Antislavery Society--Exeter Hall—May 16"

Go here for these texts:

<http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/1/3/9/4/13945/13945-h/13945-h.htm>

B) From Vol I and Vol II—Each of you will also prepare an informal presentation on one short letter from Vol I or one from Vol II. Read, write out a précis, and select a representative passage or key sentence to share. In selecting your passage, choose one that, through your presentation, will allow you to make an argument about Stowe's self-presentation, transatlantic travel and connections, and/or cultural exchange as depicted in the travelogue.

Vol I: <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/1/3/9/4/13945/13945-h/13945-h.htm>

Vol II (a copy on googlebooks with original illustrations):

http://books.google.com/books?id=yOELAAAYAAJ&dq=sunny+memories+in+foreign+lands&printsec=frontcover&source=bn&hl=en&ei=ww4tTN-uHMHhnAeu5ti0Ag&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=4&ved=0CB8Q6AEwAw#v=onepage&q&f=false

See chart further down in this handout for individual assignments

Additional Primary Text

from Stowe's correspondence:

Jennifer Cognard-Black, ed., "Harriet Beecher Stowe," in *Kindred Hands: Letters on Writing by British and American Women Authors*, ed. Jennifer Cognard-Black and Elizabeth MacLeod Walls (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2006), 21-41. [This text is available on e-college]

Secondary Scholarship:

Sarah Robbins, "Harriet Beecher Stowe, Starring as Benevolent Celebrity Traveler." In *Transatlantic Women: Essays on Nineteenth-Century American Women Writers in Great Britain and Europe*. Edited by Beth Lueck, Lucinda Damon-Bach and Brigitte Bailey. Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire Press (UPNE): 2012, 71-88. [also available on e-College]

When reading Sarah's essay from *Transatlantic Women*, you'll want to watch for ways in which this piece re-positions Stowe from being an "American" author to becoming an international one. How does Stowe, for instance, accrue a transatlantic celebrity identity, even in the face of gender constraints? How did Stowe's performance of that role lay the groundwork for later women to embody aspects of that identity more recently? What inferences might we draw about interactions between individual agency and the power of media from these repeated performances of gendered celebrity?

Sandra Zagarell, "Americans, Abroad: Henry James's Portrait of a Lady." *Teaching Transatlanticism*.

James's novel, published in 1881, comes two decades later than *Sunny Memories*. Based on Zagarell's reading of this text, how have things changed during the time between, around such points as Americans' relationship to Europe, the role of European travel, and the social possibilities open to American women? At the same time, what connections would Zagarell's students likely see between James's narrative and Stowe's travelogue? Why?

Also, looking ahead to your own research and teaching projects for the course, what can you glean from the example of Zagarell's essay?

Recommended Additional Reading:

Cognard-Black, Jennifer. "The Wild and Distracted Call for Proof: Harriet Beecher Stowe's Lady Byron Vindicated and the Rise of Professional Realism." 36.2 (2004): 93-119.

Graham, Austin T. "The Slaveries of Sex, Race, and Mind: Harriet Beecher Stowe's Lady Byron Vindicated." *New Literary History* 41.1 (2010): 173-190.

Lueck, Beth L. "A little private conversation... in her boudoir": Harriet Beecher Stowe's Appearance at Stafford House in 1853: An Essay in Twelve Parts" in *Transatlantic Women: Nineteenth-Century American Women Writers and Great Britain*, eds. Beth Lueck, Brigitte Bailey, and Lucinda Damon-Bach.

Robbins, Sarah. *The Cambridge Introduction to Harriet Beecher Stowe*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Schreiber, Mary Suzanne. [*Writing Home: American Women Abroad, 1830-1920*](#). Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1997.

Sunny Memories of Foreign Lands—Individual Reading Assignments

In addition to the sections all are reading from Vol 1, please develop a brief overview of your assigned chapter from the list below. Read carefully, write out a précis (i.e., short abstract), and select a representative and/or striking passage (a few sentences or a paragraph, only) to share. In connection with the passage you choose to highlight, prepare ONE focused interpretive observation (i.e., an argument of several sentences in length) that thoughtfully connects your chapter's contents to transatlantic study.

From Volume 1

Letter	Synopsis/Analysis
Letter I: http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/1/3/9/4/13945/13945-h/13945-h.htm#toc_18	Meta
Letter II: http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/1/3/9/4/13945/13945-h/13945-h.htm#toc_19	Heidi
Letter III: http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/1/3/9/4/13945/13945-h/13945-h.htm#toc_20	Ariel
Letter IV: http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/1/3/9/4/13945/13945-h/13945-h.htm#toc_21	Chris
Letter V: http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/1/3/9/4/13945/13945-h/13945-h.htm#toc_22	Amanda
Letter VI: http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/1/3/9/4/13945/13945-h/13945-h.htm#toc_23	Jay Jay
Letter VII: http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/1/3/9/4/13945/13945-h/13945-h.htm#toc_24	Samantha

From Volume 2

[Note: For Vol 2, the URL takes you to the cover/title page. Scroll to the Table of Contents and select your chapter; then click.]

Letter XXI: http://books.google.com/books?id=yOELAAAAYAAJ&dq=sunny+memories+in+foreign+lands&printsec=frontcover&source=bn&hl=en&ei=ww4tTN-uHMHhnAeu5tj0Ag&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=4&ved=0CB8Q6AEwAw#v=onepage&q&f=false	Kaleigh
Letter XXV: http://books.google.com/books?id=yOELAAAAYAAJ&dq=sunny+memories+in+foreign+lands&printsec=frontcover&source=bn&hl=en&ei=ww4tTN-uHMHhnAeu5tj0Ag&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=4&ved=0CB8Q6AEwAw#v=onepage&q&f=false	Matt
Letter XXVI: http://books.google.com/books?id=yOELAAAAYAAJ&dq=sunny+memories+in+foreign+lands&printsec=frontcover&source=bn&hl=en&ei=ww4tTN-uHMHhnAeu5tj0Ag&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=4&ved=0CB8Q6AEwAw#v=onepage&q&f=false	Adam
Letter XXVII: http://books.google.com/books?id=yOELAAAAYAAJ&dq=sunny+memories+in+foreign+lands&printsec=frontcover&source=bn&hl=en&ei=ww4tTN-uHMHhnAeu5tj0Ag&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=4&ved=0CB8Q6AEwAw#v=onepage&q&f=false	Bonus anyone?
Letter XXVIII: http://books.google.com/books?id=yOELAAAAYAAJ&dq=sunny+memories+in+foreign+lands&printsec=frontcover&source=bn&hl=en&ei=ww4tTN-uHMHhnAeu5tj0Ag&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=4&ved=0CB8Q6AEwAw#v=onepage&q&f=false	Bonus anyone?
Letter XXX: http://books.google.com/books?id=yOELAAAAYAAJ&dq=sunny+memories+in+foreign+lands&printsec=frontcover&source=bn&hl=en&ei=ww4tTN-uHMHhnAeu5tj0Ag&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=4&ved=0CB8Q6AEwAw#v=onepage&q&f=false	Bonus anyone?

