

Poetic Crossings: Longfellow, Tennyson, and Transatlantic Women's Afterlives

This week we're looking at what Meredith McGill calls in her 2008 edited collection *The Traffic in Poems: Nineteenth-Century Poetry and Transatlantic Exchange* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2008). We are using the term "Poetic Crossings," however, not only to emphasize how the work of Longfellow and Tennyson, the most famous poets of their age, crossed and recrossed the Atlantic but also to signal a crossing of centuries in Margaret Atwood's cycle of poems responding to Susanna Moodie, *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (Oxford UP, 1970), and Heid E. Erdrich's response to Jane Schoolcraft (whom we last encountered in Anna Jameson's *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles*) in the brief poem "In Search of Jane's Grave" from *National Monuments* (Michigan State UP, 2008).

Below you'll find background and contexts on all these figures. First, though, to ensure that you don't overlook your report assignment for next week, we begin with your presentations, which we are scheduling at the beginning of the hour. (Be sure to read the background information below and the assigned poems of Longfellow and Tennyson before you begin working on your group reports. We also encourage you to communicate with your counterpart group doing either a US or British periodical article so that there won't be repeat materials.)

10-MINUTE GROUP REPORTS

- 1) Groups 1 and 3 will find an essay on Longfellow (an extended review, celebrity profile, or literary essay) in the British Periodicals 1 & 2 database; Groups 2 and 4 will find an essay on Tennyson (an extended review, celebrity profile, or literary essay) in the American Periodicals Series database. Please avoid selecting a mere reprint from across the Atlantic.
- 2) Select an essay that in some way indicates the transatlantic construction of your poet (you may have to sort through several before you find an appropriate one). The idea is to exercise an informed decision based on what the article can tell us about poetic crossings.
- 3) Within that essay, identify key passages, which you will present to the class (e.g., through highlighted passages in a pdf you upload, through a PowerPoint presentation, or through a Prezi; you can also prepare a handout).
- 4) Also present your interpretation of the transatlantic "crossing," construction, and/or significance of your poet based on the article you have selected.

Group 1: Longfellow in British periodicals
Amanda Barnett
Christopher Foree

Group 2: Tennyson in American periodicals
Heidi Hakimi-Hood
Meta Henty

Group 3: Longfellow in British periodicals
Samantha Moore
Adam Nemmers
Jay Jay Stroup

Group 4: Tennyson in American periodicals

Matt Tettleton

Ariel Weygandt

Kaleigh Wyrick

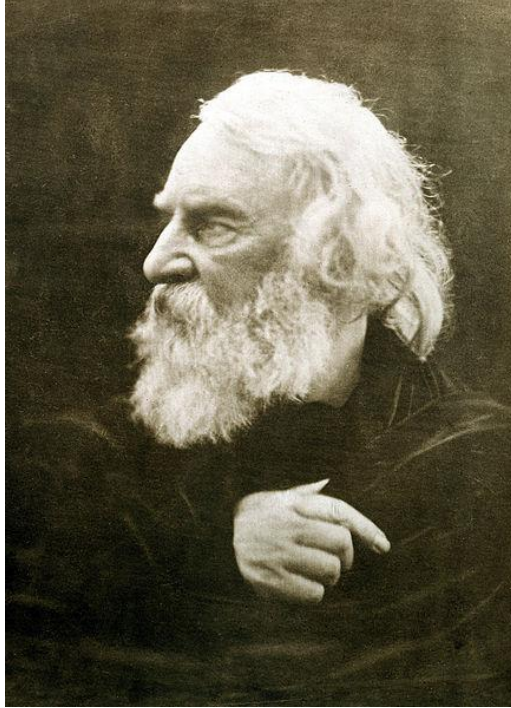
BACKGROUND ON LONGFELLOW (1807-1882) AND TENNYSON (1809-1892)

Besides being premier poets in their countries of origin, Longfellow and Tennyson were the most popular poets “across the pond.” As William St. Clair asserts in *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge UP, 2004), “Longfellow was the bestselling author of verse in the Victorian period in Britain” (p. 414). And as Hamilton W. Mabie argued upon Tennyson’s death in 1892,

Tennyson has been more widely read in [the US] than in England, and the knowledge of his work is more widely diffused. It has percolated through all classes of society, and much of it has been for many years a possession of the common memory.... He was earlier recognized here, as were Carlyle and Browning.... His lyrics and shorter idyls have been a part of our school literature for several decades, and ‘The May Queen’ and other pieces of its class have been heard in every schoolhouse on the continent. (“The Influence of Tennyson in America. Its Sources and Extent,” *Review of Reviews* 6 [Dec. 1892]: 556, qtd. in Kathryn Ledbetter, *Tennyson and Victorian Periodicals* [Ashgate, 2007], p. 169)

Their careers moved roughly in synchrony: they had their first important successes with shorter poems in 1842 (*Ballads and Other Poems* for Longfellow, *Poems* [2 vols., London & Boston] for Tennyson). But they achieved their greatest fame through long poems at mid-century: *Evangeline: A Tale of Acadie* (1847), *The Song of Hiawatha* (1855), and *The Courtship of Miles Standish* (1858) for Longfellow, and *The Princess* (1847), *In Memoriam* (1850), and *Maud* (1855) for Tennyson (followed by *Idylls of the King*, 1859-1885). Tennyson never traveled to the US, though he had arrangements with Ticknor and Fields as his American publisher from 1842 until that firm was bought out by Osgood in the 1870s.

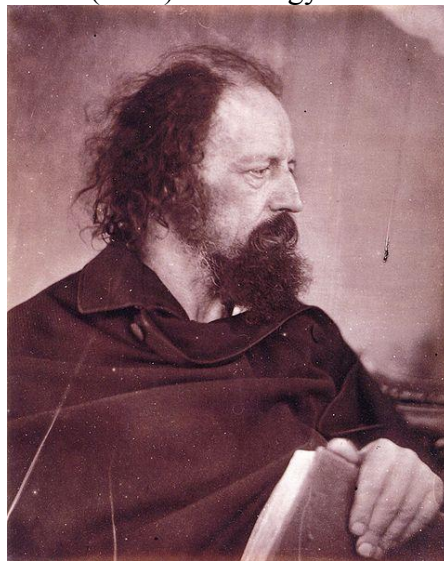
Longfellow, however, twice traveled to Europe to study languages and literature as part of his professorships at Bowdoin College and then Harvard; and as part of that travel he also met English literary figures. During his 1826-29 trip he met Washington Irving in Spain; during his trip in the early 1830s he formed a friendship with Carlyle and met William Cullen Bryant when both were residing in Heidelberg, Germany. On his third European trip he spent time with Dickens in London (after they had met in Boston during Dickens’s tour of the US). And his last European journey, in 1868-69, was a kind of triumphal tour: he was received by Queen Victoria at Windsor Castle; he was the personal guest of the Prince of Wales; he was awarded honorary degrees by Oxford and Cambridge Universities; and he also visited Tennyson on the Isle of Wight. During this last visit, Longfellow was photographed by Tennyson’s neighbor and dear friend, Julia Margaret Cameron (who happened also to be the aunt of Virginia Woolf), who had photographed Tennyson several times before. Below you can see both Longfellow’s 1868 portrait and Tennyson’s “Dirty Monk” photo (he gave it this name himself) from 1865. This visit helps to clarify why, following Longfellow’s death, a bust of him was placed in Poets’ Corner, Westminster Abbey—the only American poet so honored.



Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, photographed by Julia Margaret Cameron, 1868, while Longfellow visited Tennyson

RATIONALE FOR POEMS WE'RE READING

Probably we've all read or heard some of Longfellow's poems, such as "Paul Revere's Ride" from *Tales of a Wayside Inn* (1863, a narrative-framed series of tales modeled on Chaucer and Boccaccio). Or you may have read "The Village Blacksmith" (http://www.hwlongfellow.org/poems_poem.php?pid=38) or "The Children's Hour" (<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/173894>), two other popular favorites. In 2010, the transatlantic seminar read *Evangeline*, but we suspect you're happy to read the much shorter pieces we've assigned. "Hawthorne" (1867) is an elegy for the writer Longfellow had known



Alfred Tennyson ("The Dirty Monk"), photographed by Julia Margaret Cameron, 1865

since his college days, and is a fitting reference point for Longfellow's sonnets of tribute to the canonical British poets Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, and Keats (1875). The dedication poem of *Ultima Thule* (1880, the title of which signifies the outermost limits, especially northernmost limits as used by the ancient Greeks) is not only a kind of final retrospective statement from Longfellow but usefully intersects with some of the themes of Tennyson's "Ulysses" (as does Longfellow's immensely popular "A Psalm of Life" [<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/173910>] published in 1838).

Notes for the poems: "Musagète": French for chief of the Muses; Maeonides: Homer; ninth wave: according to tradition, each wave is increasingly larger, culminating in the ninth, largest wave before the cycle begins again (Tennyson himself used this tradition in "The Coming of Arthur," from *Idylls of the King*, 1869); "Endymion": shepherd beloved of the goddess of the moon, and subject of a Keats poem of 1818 (which begins, "A thing of beauty is a joy forever"); "nightingale": allusion to Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale," 1819; "Hesperides": nymphs who guard the golden apples stolen away by Hercules (and also the title of an 1832 poem by Tennyson); "Orcaes": Orkney Islands.

Questions to consider for the Longfellow poems include the following: are there ways in which his tribute to the American novelist and friend Hawthorne is specifically situated in an American voice or setting—or poetic technique—that contrasts with the sonnets on British poets? Or is "Hawthorne" as cosmopolitan as the sonnets? How does Longfellow seem to situate himself in relation to past British poets? Does he adopt "Britishisms" in the sonnets?

If you recognize any of these lines—"In spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love"; "Tis better to have loved and lost / Than never to have loved at all"; "Nature red in tooth and claw"—you know at least a little Tennyson. *In Memoriam* (from which the last two quotes come) is his most influential poem, though some of you may also know "Elaine," from *Idylls of the King*, through *Anne of Green Gables* (a Canadian connection).

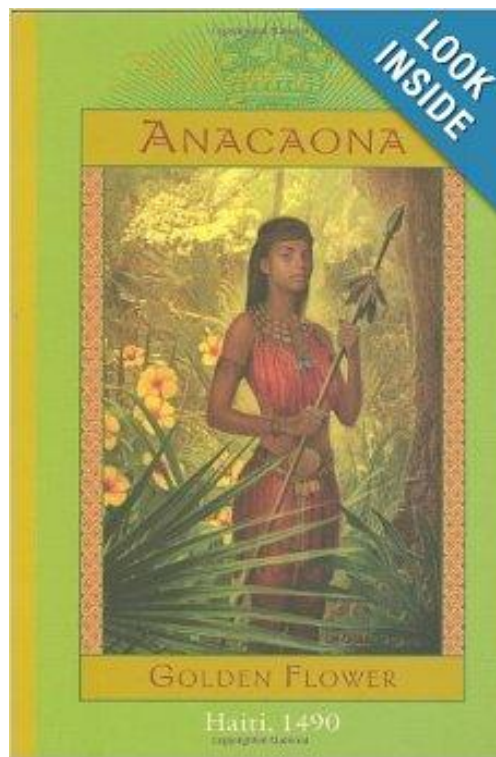
We've chosen the Tennyson poems that explicitly engage Caribbean topics, that are discussed by Daniel Hack in "Flat Burglary?" (which you read Oct. 30), and/or that intersect fruitfully with Longfellow. Daniel Hack, you'll recall, discusses "Charge of the Light Brigade," a response to a famous, disastrous charge in the Crimean War (1853-55) as reported in the *London Times*, which was reprinted in Frederick Douglass's paper. Hack mentions "Anacaona," based on historical incidents of First Contact in Haiti, in his essay for *Teaching Transatlanticism*, but discusses it in far more detail in his article "Wild Charges: The Afro-Haitian 'Charge of the Light Brigade,'" *Victorian Studies* 54.2 (Winter 2012): 199-225, for which he was awarded the Donald Gray prize for the best article of 2012 by the North American Victorian Studies Association. As he comments in that article,

In "Anacaona" as in Smith's ur-version of "The Light Brigade," then, the dark-skinned people of Haiti use song as they attempt to negotiate their relationship to Europeans. The earlier poem depicts natives as victims, rather than slaves of African descent as revolutionaries, yet even so we are not as far off from Smith's version as it might seem: as Marcus Wood points out, "Anacaona" not only draws from [Washington] Irving but also "develops out of the tropes of abolition poetry dealing with the natives of

Hispaniola” (313); Wood goes so far as to include the poem in an anthology titled *The Poetry of Slavery*. In Samuel Whitchurch’s 1804 poem *Hispaniola*, in particular, the voice of the murdered Anacaona (there spelled “Anacoana”) curses future generations of European conquerors and prophesies the Haitian Revolution itself:

“Then mourn not much-loved summer isle,
Again on thee shall freedom smile,
Though on thee prey the vultures of the north:
Brave sable nations shall arise,
And rout thy future enemies,
Though Europe send her hostile legions forth.” (175)
(Hack 215)

But there is another very relevant context for “Anacaona” for us in the Edwidge Danticat Young Adult story *Anacaona: Golden Flower, Haiti, 1490* (Scholastic press, 2005),



which you can access at http://www.amazon.com/Anacaona-Golden-Flower-Haiti-1490/dp/0439499062/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1383924128&sr=8-1&keywords=edwidge+danticat+anacaona#reader_0439499062. Many pages of this are accessible. The Taina people had no writing but did have petroglyphs, so Danticat is imagining what kind of diary Anacaona might have written had she been given these tools. The story traces her selection as the next ruler of Xaragua, her marriage, and her life thereafter. The diary ends just as the Spaniards—i.e., Columbus and his men—arrive. But an epilogue then tells how Anacaona, arriving to greet them clad only in flowers with 80 retainers, was met with destruction: the Xaraguans were slaughtered and Anacaona, as a higher-ranking personage,

hanged at age 29. The historical notes that follow remind readers that this was America's first genocide; and the text is accompanied by numerous images of the Spaniards and imagined portraits of Anacaona. Danticat's afterword explains that she had wanted to write about Anacaona, a "warrior, poet, storyteller, and ... diplomat" (p. 179), since girlhood. Danticat's mother, she adds, was born in the very area once thought to be ruled by Anacaona, hence another of Danticat's personal connections to this story.

Tennyson never published "Anacaona," written around 1830, on grounds that he couldn't be sure that the details of his tropical vegetation and fauna were accurate, nor was he satisfied with his rhymes. A shared Caribbean setting, focus on Spaniards' impact on the islands they "discovered," and Washington Irving source make "Columbus," written half a century later, a telling pairing with the unpublished lyric. With repeated apologies for all the scribbles on the text of "Columbus," we still wanted to share this copy from the 1969 Ricks edition of Tennyson because it will enable you to see how thoroughly Tennyson was drawing upon Irving as he wrote this poem in response to requests from Americans.

"Ulysses," one of Tennyson's best-known poems, is yet another westward voyage. It has had an interesting afterlife of its own. Its final line is the subtitle of the latest Tennyson biography by John Batchelor (*Tennyson: To Strive, To Seek, To Find* [Chatto & Windus, 2012]), and perhaps you too have seen this phrase on t-shirts in America. The full last line was also chosen as the quote on the Olympic wall at the Athletes' Village (a global gathering) in London in 2012.

Questions to consider as you read Tennyson: how do "Anacaona" and "Columbus" mutually illuminate each other, and how does the summary of Danticat's retelling of the story of Anacaona affect your sense of the Tennyson poems and their interrelations? What kind of poem did the Americans who requested "Columbus" get, and what transatlantic response do you imagine in turn? Is the latter a pro- or anti-imperialist poem, and on what grounds do you base your answer? And how would you answer the same question regarding "Charge of the Light Brigade" and "Ulysses"? Daniel Hack has shown one way that Tennyson could be repurposed for African American readers. In what ways might these other poems have been appreciated/adapted/repurposed/critiqued by American readers? And, finally, how might both UK and US readers have read Longfellow and Tennyson interactively, as contemporaries and colleagues rather than as representatives of separate national traditions?

MARGARET ATWOOD AND HEID E. ERDRICH

Atwood's and Erdrich's poems are afterlives of Susanna Moodie and Jane Schoolcraft. What is each poet saying on her own terms, about her own time and sensibility as well as about Moodie and Schoolcraft? How does reading some of Atwood's cycle of poems and Erdrich's enable a reinterpretation, a re-visioning, of the Moodie and Schoolcraft materials we've read earlier? Do the Atwood poems function in any of the same ways that we agreed the Moodie poems did in the context of *Roughing It in the Bush*? N.B.: the last lines of "Alternate Thoughts from Underground" are as follows:

they drew by their closed senses
of what was right

felt when scuttled
across, nested in by the velvet immoral
uncalloused and armourless mammals.

Secondary Scholarship:

Alison Chapman, "Transatlantic Mediations: Teaching Victorian Poetry in the New Print Media," from Hughes and Robbins, *TT*

In what ways might Chapman's approach to transatlantic poetry inform our reading of Longfellow and Tennyson, and how could you adapt her comments on pedagogy to the "crossings" you are exploring in your own teaching materials?

Further Reading:

Blair, Kirstie. "'Thousands of throbbing hearts.' Sentimentality and Community in Popular Victorian poetry: Longfellow's *Evangeline* and Tennyson's *Enoch Arden*." *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* 4 (2007):

www.19.bbk.ac.uk

---. "Transatlantic Tractarians: Victorian Poetry and the Church of England in America." *Victorian Studies*. 55.2 (2013): 286-98.

"Charlie Pachter and Margaret Atwood." McMichael Canadian Art Collection Exhibit. [Discussion on You Tube Discussion of their Collaboration on Poetry and Art Inspired by Susanna Moodie's Stories.] <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sHAqknm2qOg>.

Flint, Kate. "Is the Native an American?: National Identity and the British Reception of Hiawatha." In McGill: 63-80.

Hack, Daniel. Wild Charges: The Afro-Haitian 'Charge of the Light Brigade,'" *Victorian Studies* 54.2 (Winter 2012): 199-225

Imscher, Christoph. *Longfellow Redux*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2006.

Ledbetter, Kathryn. Chapter 5: "Transatlantic Connections." *Tennyson and Victorian Periodicals: Commodities in Context*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007.

McGill, Meredith. "Introduction: The Traffic in Poems." *The Traffic in Poems: Nineteenth-Century Poetry and Transatlantic Exchanges*. Ed. Meredith McGill. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2008. 1-12.

Murray, Patrick. "'These Vistas of Desolation': Image and Poetry in Margaret Atwood and Charles Pachter's *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*." *British Journal of Canadian Studies* 24.1 (2011): 69-84. (to be posted on ecollege above reading guide for Nov 13)

Parker, Robert Dale, ed. *The Sound the Stars Make Rushing through the Sky: The Writings of Jane Johnston Schoolcraft*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania Press, 2007.

Schwarcz, Caroline. "Approaches to Teaching Heid Erdrich's National Monuments." Approach from a Native American perspective by a M.A. candidate, UCLA, May 23, 2012.

Available at

<http://media.collegeboard.com/digitalServices/pdf/diversity/2013/Approaches-to-Teaching-Heid-Erdrichs-National-Monuments.pdf>

