Among the English Worthies: Longfellow and the Campaign for Poets' Corner

Berghahn Journals will not permit contributors to display copies of their work publicly, so in the interest of open access, I am posting -- not the final copy -- but an early draft. To quote from this material, please refer to the final published version in the special edition of *Critical Survey* "Celebrity Encounters: Famous Americans in Nineteenth-Century Europe," edited by Páraic Finnerty and Mark Frost. *Critical Survey 27* (2015), 82–104. David Haven Blake/The College of New Jersey

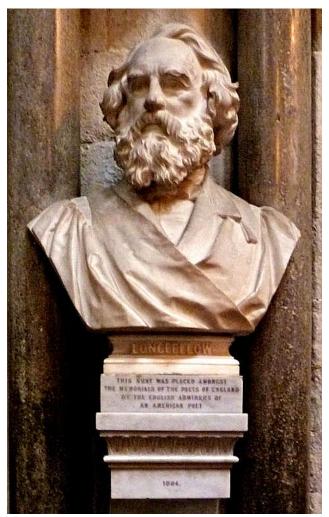
On Saturday, 1 March 1884, a distinguished group of men and women gathered in Westminster Abbey for the unveiling of a bust of the American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. The dignitaries included Earl Granville, the United Kingdom Foreign Secretary, Chancellor of the Exchequer Hugh Childers, and Sir Theodore Martin, a poet and parliamentary solicitor with valuable connections to the Royal Family. In addition to Longfellow's daughters and niece, the American guests ranged from the fellow poet and U.S. Ambassador James Russell Lowell to the Kentucky-raised actress Miss Mary Anderson, who was then starring in a Stratford-upon-Avon production of *Romeo and Juliet*. Accompanied by reporters from at least a half dozen newspapers, the group first met in the Jerusalem Chapel where the event's organizer, Dr William Cox Bennett, read letters from an impressive list of supporters, including the Prime Minister William Gladstone and the Prince of Wales, who had been unable to attend.

Longfellow was the first foreign author to be honoured with a bust in the South Transept of the Abbey, the area known since the eighteenth century as Poets' Corner, and the speakers emphasized the occasion's international significance. Citing recent developments in English and American literature, Granville praised the increasingly strong bonds 'between the intellectual and cultivated classes of both these great countries'. Lowell theorized that 'admission to Westminster Abbey forms a sort of posthumous test of literary eminence', one that compared to being elected to the French Academy. In all of his travels, Childers recalled, there was one place Americans

'regarded as being as much theirs as ours, and that place was the Abbey Church of Westminster'. He echoed Lowell in alluding to the Temple of Fame that the Bavarian king Ludwig I had built earlier in the century: Westminster Abbey, the two men agreed, was becoming 'the Valhalla of the English-speaking race'.¹

The crowd then filtered into the South Transept where the Abbey's Sub-Dean, Canon George Prothero, prepared to unveil the bust. Longfellow's daughter Alice disliked the Canon's 'hard, unattractive voice & manner', and compared to the personal reminiscence offered by the previous speakers, his solemn words seemed to bear the weight of generations: 'We are adding something to the rich heritage of national glory which we have received from our ancestors, and which we feel bound to hand down to our successors not only unimpaired but increased'. He spoke as if Time itself were scrutinizing the occasion:

Great poets are, in one sense, natives of every land – they speak the common language of humanity but never before have the great of other nations, however great, however, brilliant and world-wide their fame, been admitted to a place in Westminster Abbey. A century ago America had just entered upon her perilous path of independence and self-government. Who then would have ventured to predict that within the short space of a hundred year we in England should be so proud to honour an American with a monument in Westminster Abbey? We offer today to the world an emphatic proof of the oneness of the English-speaking race and the unity of our national glories. May I not say that we here give a solemn pledge to each other that nothing shall permanently sever those who are united by eternal ties of language, race, religion, and common feeling?²



With that, the Canon unveiled the white marble bust, Thomas Brock's dramatic representation of Longfellow with searching eyes, flowing hair and beard that looked, as one commentator put it, like the 'front of Jove himself'.³ 'It is in fine position', Alice recorded in her diary, '& the dear, beautiful head looked very grand against the great column'.⁴ Alice did not recount the specifics of the position, but the newspapers did.

Separated by only two feet on either side,
Longfellow's bust was placed midway between the monuments marking the graves of Chaucer and Dryden.⁵

The addition of Longfellow's bust to Westminster Abbey attracted significant attention on both sides of the Atlantic. In addition to the major New York and London papers, reports of the ceremony appeared in the *Manchester Guardian*, the *Atlanta Constitution*, the *Scotsman*, the *Birmingham Post*, and the *Montreal Gazette*. The coverage was uniformly positive and celebratory. No one would have predicted the warmth of this response after the press' negative reaction to Bennett's proposal only nineteen months before. During the summer and fall of 1882, dozens of editorial boards and letter writers engaged in a spirited debate about whether Longfellow belonged in Poets' Corner – firstly, because the Abbey was a traditionally English institution that had never memorialized a foreign author, and secondly, because critics

questioned whether the deep affection English and American readers held for the poet would translate into everlasting fame. Was the beloved Yankee destined for literary immortality or would his significance erode away like the barely legible inscriptions on the Abbey's ancient monuments and graves? From the genial openness of Lord Granville to the sombre gravitas of Canon Prothero, the unveiling of Longfellow's bust culminated in an urgent discussion about the meaning of transatlantic fame that had begun shortly after his death.

This essay will explore the story of how Longfellow's bust came to Westminster Abbey and how the poet's popularity resulted in a campaign to turn the Abbey into a Temple of Fame for speakers of the English language. The campaign is especially interesting because Poets' Corner never became the monument to Anglophone writers that men such as Lowell and Childers envisioned, and Longfellow remains the only American writer (outside the naturalized British citizens Henry James and T. S. Eliot) to be represented in it. Longfellow's popularity across the English-speaking world can partially explain the singular nature of his case. As Christoph Irmscher has demonstrated, the poet inspired the most vibrant fan culture of any American writer of his time. Pictures of the Longfellow home were featured in books and calendars, and having seen *cartes de visites* of him and his children, visitors regularly came to the door to meet the poet or get a glimpse of the famous family. In what descends to us as a remarkable archive of nineteenth-century fandom, the poet received some 6200 letters from readers around the world, and in keeping with his reputation for graciousness, he made a habit of personally responding to each one.⁷

Longfellow's inclusion in Poets' Corner, however, did not come from the kind of democratic hero worship frequently associated with celebrity. Nineteenth-century celebrity culture conjures images of crowds pushing their way to see Jenny Lind when she visited the

United States or Harriet Beecher Stowe during her tour of England. Such moments gave rise to the desire for seemingly intimate connections with the famous such as the collecting of autographs or the soliciting of personal letters.⁸ By and large, the men and women who supported the monument were not the kind to follow a luminary through the public streets or keep his picture in their homes. They were almost exclusively public figures with strong, elite connections on both sides of the Atlantic. Some had a personal relationship with Longfellow and a deep appreciation of his poetry. Others joined the movement out of a desire to be publicized among the cultural worthies who had already subscribed to the campaign. But even as it was evolving into a rite of associative prestige, the question of how to honour Longfellow became part of a larger effort on the part of British elites to align the nation with its former colonies. Longfellow's death opened the door to competing definitions of his legacy. The same could be said, of course, about every celebrity who passes into the realm of posthumous fame, but in Longfellow's situation, the urgency of judgment was compounded by the special significance of place. The campaign for Poets' Corner became the setting for conflicting ideas about literature, cosmopolitanism, national memory, and Victorian theories about blood and race.

For at least twenty-five years, Longfellow had enjoyed a luminous reputation among nearly all strata of the British population. Priced to attract a broad readership, his books came in an enviable number of forms – 'in complete editions on the counters of the regular booksellers, in stacks of little shilling volumes on railway bookstalls, and in gorgeously-bound and profusely-illustrated volumes on drawing room tables'. Rural newspapers frequently published his lyric poems, while composers produced sheet music turning them into popular songs. Longfellow's style was easily recognizable, and as the *National Review* complained, his didactic sentiments often mirrored what his readers believed they ought to think and feel (Flint 72). In May 1855,

the poet's college friend Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote from Liverpool with news that the Harrow schoolboys had voted him the greatest poet of the age: 'You ought to be in England to gather your fame, which is greater, I think, than you are likely to estimate'; 'No other poet', he memorably added, 'has anything like your vogue'. The publication of *The Song of Hiawatha* later that year brought the excitement to a new level. Kate Flint has argued that the book-length poem fitted comfortably within a well-established subgenre of 'Dying Indian' poems and thus British readers were well-prepared for its melancholic portrait of Native American life (64-65). While the poem's metre inspired countless parodies (including one by Lewis Carroll), it led at least one critic to see Hiawatha as an American version of King Arthur (Flint 72).

Longfellow's 1868 tour of England gave readers an opportunity to express their affection first hand. 'England has not received so important a literary guest for many years', the *Essex Standard* trumpeted. 11 Although the purpose of the visit was to receive an honorary degree from Cambridge University, the poet's travels were regularly reported in the popular press. The *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, the *Glasgow Herald*, and the *York Herald* carefully followed his movements, informing readers who greeted him at train stations and in what homes he stayed. When emissaries from the 'committee of the Carlisle Literary, Scientific, and Mechanics' Institute' greeted Longfellow at a private home, the *Lancaster Gazette* was there and reported the details of the speech thanking him for 'the instruction, refinement, and elevation' he had given the 'English-speaking race'. 12 As one might expect, the poet's death on 24 March 1882 was marked by eulogies and tributes from newspapers across the country. *The Globe* pronounced his death 'a national loss to England'. 13 The *Observer* remarked, 'for forty years his works have had a place on our shelves, and it is scarcely too much to say that, since Byron died at Missolonghi, no English poet has enjoyed so wide a popularity'. 14 In an interview with the *Chicago Tribune*, a

representative from the publisher George Routledge & Sons estimated that there were about one million copies of Longfellow's books in the United Kingdom and that his works were perhaps in greater demand than Tennyson's. 15

Although Dr Bennett would not begin organizing the Memorial Committee until the summer of 1882, the movement to include Longfellow in Poets' Corner may have begun with a sermon that Canon Robert Fleming delivered in Westminster Abbey three days after the poet's death. Reflecting on the combination of power and diligence that made Longfellow a household name, Canon Fleming predicted that America and England enjoyed so many common bonds and possessed so much friendship and sympathy that 'the pure poet will be as sincerely mourned here as there':

We are sitting near to monumental stones that remind us no nation owes so much to her good and great men as ourselves. And in the death of Longfellow, just recorded across the Atlantic, we feel a touch of sorrow that bids us claim him, if not as one of our own to lie in our Abbey, yet as one of the men of this century who lived and talked and laboured for us all.¹⁶

By inviting his congregants to imagine Longfellow in Poets' Corner, the Canon underscored a central irony of its claims to immortality: while the monuments were meant to preserve the memory of England's greatest citizens, visitors frequently came away from Westminster Abbey with a sense of how transitory fame could be. Touring the Abbey over sixty years earlier, Washington Irving had been one of many visitors who were surprised by the number of plaques and gravesites that were dedicated to individuals whose significance had been lost over the

centuries. In a line that is perhaps especially meaningful to scholars who study the history of celebrity, he rather keenly observed that 'nothing impresses the mind with a deeper feeling of loneliness, than to tread the silent and deserted scene of former throng and pageant'. As Irving trod that scene within the Abbey's walls, he noted that the material monuments were as subject to decay as the bodies they commemorated. What 'is this vast assemblage of sepulchers but a treasuring of humiliation', he asked, 'a huge pile of reiterated homilies on the emptiness of renown and the certainty of oblivion?' (Irving 141) The Abbey was not the great preserver of reputation and deed as much as it was a testament to the historical contingency of fame.

Poets' Corner offered a special case, however, for initially by happenstance and then by tradition, it effectively differentiated the power of writers from that of statesmen, kings, and queens. The markers in Poets' Corner offered a Horatian lesson in the permanence of poems rather than marble or bronze; they reminded visitors less of oblivion than of the profoundly intimate relationship they had with literary texts. Irving observed that tourists seemed to linger about the tombs of writers as they would 'the tombs of friends and companions; for indeed there is something of companionship between the author and the reader'. While the achievements of other men become obscure, 'the intercourse between the author and his fellow-men is ever new, active, and immediate' (Irving 136). 'A poet's ghost is the only one that survives for his fellow mortals', Hawthorne wrote of his visits to Westminster Abbey in 1855, adding 'what other fame is worth aspiring for?' As Thomas Prendergast suggests, Poets' Corner emerged as a testament to the entwined histories of the corpse and the corpus.

Irving visited the Abbey about one hundred years after the public began to realize its potential as a national institution. Philip Connell has shown that it was in the eighteenth century 'that the Abbey's poetical quarter began to achieve widespread recognition as a national literary

pantheon'.²⁰ As the Abbey became the subject of guidebooks, newspaper stories, and celebratory poems, tourists began to arrive and with them vendors offering miniature replicas of the busts and statues that could be purchased and displayed at home. The emergence of Poets' Corner as a symbol of cultural identity occurred alongside what Connell describes as 'other engines of canon formation such as editorial scholarship, the rise of the anthology, and the development of English pedagogy' (Connell 559-60). Rather than a space embroiled in theological controversies or melancholic reflections on mortality, Poets' Corner became a way of integrating the past and present into a coherent national tradition. As a result, between 1721 and 1740 monuments were erected to Samuel Butler (1721), John Dryden (1721), Ben Jonson (1728), John Gay (1736), John Milton (1737), and William Shakespeare (1740). A similar stretch occurred over seven years near the end of the century with Oliver Goldsmith (1777), Thomas Gray (1778), and Samuel Johnson (1784) (Connell 550).²¹ In looking 'to the losses of the past', Prendergast explains, Poets' Corner became a potential way of 'imagining the nation in the future' (Prendergast xiii).

Arthur Stanley's appointment as Dean of Westminster in 1864 brought new conviction to the importance of Poets' Corner. Stanley's book, *Historical Monuments of Westminster Abbey*, showcased the church as a national shrine, and his ecumenical vision welcomed preachers and congregants from many different Christian denominations (Jenkyns 152). More importantly, perhaps, he found ways to turn the Abbey into a site of civic ceremony, a place sanctioned by church and state in which the mourners of public figures could express their grief. Charles Dickens, for example, had forbidden any public ceremony or monument after his death, but when he died in 1870, Dean Stanley made sure that the novelist would be buried within the Abbey's walls. Although he respected Dickens' wishes in organizing a small and private burial,

Stanley eventually opened the doors to the thousands of mourners who wanted to pay their respects before the beloved novelist was interred in his unmarked grave. The burial, Samantha Matthews has concluded, 'helped re-engage popular feeling in support of giving prominent men of letters nationally significant graves'.²³

Stanley's death in July 1881 was the first in a series of high-profile losses that were felt across the Anglo-American world. Longfellow died the following March and was soon followed by Charles Darwin on 19 April and then Ralph Waldo Emerson on the 27th. Newspapers in Britain and the United States contemplated the loss of these three great men, and although he was an agnostic, Darwin's burial in the Abbey next to Sir Isaac Newton brought considerable attention to the Abbey's role in defining a pantheon of intellectual greats. Longfellow's passing seemed curiously entwined in the stories of his famous contemporaries and figured into the growing American presence in the Abbey. In 1875, an American businessman had paid for two stained-glass windows commemorating George Herbert and William Cowper (Jenkyns 159). In 1882, only days after Longfellow's death, Abbey authorities announced that a group of 300 Americans had followed suit in contributing £1064 toward a stained glass window in honour of Dean Stanley. The contributors included Oliver Wendell Holmes, Samuel Eliot, John Greenleaf Whittier, Phillips Brooks, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and, as if he were speaking from the grave, Longfellow himself.²⁴ Within five months, the movement to honour the poet with a bust in Poets' Corner was underway.

The primary force behind the Longfellow Memorial Committee was Dr W.C. Bennett, a poet and social reformer whose penchant for writing about infants earned him the title 'the Laureate of the Babies'. ²⁵ Though few elite writers took him seriously, he had become popular with newspapers in Britain and the United States and assumed the title of doctor in 1869 when a

college in Tennessee awarded him an honorary degree. Bennett had been involved in a number of public improvement projects in his home borough of Greenwich including the development of charity schools and the erection of public baths and wash houses. With a reformer's zeal, he invited an impressive group of men and women to join the Longfellow Committee, and his boldness met with immediate success. Almost three dozen prominent ladies and gentleman offered donations and agreed to lend their names to the subscription effort. The Poet Laureate Tennyson, the Archbishops of York and Dublin, the Duke of Westminster, and the presidents of the Board of Trade, the Royal Academy, and the Royal Society all agreed to join him. Bennett's connections to Greenwich, the borough Gladstone represented in Parliament for twelve years, may have played a role in attracting some leading members of the government – not just the Exchequer and Foreign Secretary (as we have seen) but also the Attorney General and the Secretary of State for War. Francis Bennoch, a businessman, poet, and good friend to the Hawthornes during their years in England, happily agreed to serve as Treasurer. The province of the government in the province of the government of the Hawthornes during their years in England, happily agreed to serve as Treasurer.

With this group of supporters behind him, Bennett sent a printed circular to hundreds of worthies, inviting them to subscribe to the effort and join what he called 'the First List'. Among the over 400 men and women who signed on to the committee were Rabbi Hermann Adler, Matthew Arnold, Edwin Booth, Baroness Burdett-Coutts, Sir Richard Francis Burton, Wilkie Collins, Henry James, Robert Louis Stevenson, Thomas Hardy, Eliza Lynn Linton, Leslie Stephen, August Webster, Tennyson's sons, Lionel and Hallam, and the Governor-General of India. The institutions the subscribers represented were as impressive as the individual names, and Bennett shrewdly included them in his publicity: the Royal Academy of Music, Trinity College, Oxford, the Royal Naval School, the Aborigines Protection Society, the Royal

Geographic Society, the Harrow and Rugby schools, and multiple Anglican dioceses. Parliament alone accounted for 38 members of the First List.

Bennett carefully saved every response to his request and then pasted the letters in a scrapbook that was presented to the United States' Longfellow Memorial Association in 1884. The scrapbook, which is now held at Longfellow's home in Cambridge, Massachusetts, offers remarkable insight into how fame operated among transatlantic elites at the end of the nineteenth century. Many subscribers responded with heartfelt appreciation for Longfellow both as a poet and human being. William Borlase and Stephen Coleridge fondly recalled Longfellow's warmth and hospitality when they visited the United States. Perhaps thinking of works such as 'Excelsior' and 'The Psalm of Life', the Head Master of Marlborough applauded the poet's influence on his generation. Head Master of Marlborough applauded the poet's influence on his generation. Edward Capern, known as the Postman-Poet of Devonshire, sent a mite along with an adaptation of Longfellow's poem 'The Day is Done'. Honoured by the invitation, the Irish poet Aubrey De Vere saw in Longfellow's work the moral lesson that "Genius is nothing so exalted as by that spirit of Purity & Virtue, as well as of Human Sympathy which characterizes all that he wrote'.

Other respondents joined the poet and journalist Edwin Arnold in focusing on the positive contribution a Westminster monument would make to Anglo-American relations. The Secretary of the North American Union, Hyde Clarke was 'fully aware' of the movement's value 'in becoming on our relations with our brethren in New England'. ³³ 'I by no means consider Longfellow a great poet', the socialist Lloyd Jones wrote, 'but he is good and sweet, and wholesome, and in addition I quite approve of such an act as may tend, as this I think will, to increase the honest brotherly feeling that ought to exist between them on both sides of the

Atlantic'. ³⁴ G. Barnett Smith acknowledged that he was 'opposed to foreigners being remembered in Westminster Abbey, but in the case of Longfellow this does not hold: he was so thoroughly English in his genius & spirit, that we are proud to feel he is one of us'. ³⁵

Perhaps the fullest, most measured letter of this kind came from Lyon Playfair, the Chairman of the House of Commons' Ways and Means Committee. Playfair was traveling in the United States and did not receive his invitation, so he wrote Lowell directly with the hopes that the ambassador would place his name on the list. Describing the 'great blankness' he had felt visiting Cambridge after Longfellow's death, he compared the memorials in Westminster Abbey to the statues recently erected in Manhattan's Central Park:

He belongs to England as truly as Sir Walter Scott & Byron belong to America. In the park at New York they have statues among four of his heroes & nothing could be more becoming than that the worthies of all English Speaking Nations should be appropriated by all. Longfellow is a Capital Example for England to begin with. Someday it may have so grasped the idea of this common light in our English great men that Washington may have a memorial tablet in Westminster.

In Playfair's vision, the distinctions of place, nation, and history would ultimately give way to the unifying bonds of eminence and language. ³⁶

Bennett was a notorious self-promoter, and the *Dictionary of National Biography* describes him as 'being addicted to sending eminent contemporaries – acquainted or unacquainted with him – copies of his verse'. Tennyson coolly thanked Bennett for the gift of his latest book when he agreed to be part of the Committee). Staying true to form, he sent

invitations to hundreds of illustrious Victorians and then cleverly publicized the names of key subscribers as their responses dribbled in. *The Times* carried at least five updates from the Longfellow Memorial Commission during the fall of 1882. These squibs were then picked up by exchange editors and republished in England and the United States.³⁹ (There is some evidence that Bennett even published the names of people who declined to participate).⁴⁰ Bennett's efforts brought the Committee so much attention (and some criticism as well) that *Punch* began publishing its own satiric updates mixing the names of real and fake contributors. On the 28 October 1882, for example, the magazine reported that Maid Marian, the Giantess of the Alhambra, Rosalind (the Poets' Corner) of the Pedlington News and Dullborough Advertiser, Signor Roman, and Misses Steel and Peach had all joined the Longfellow Memorial Committee.⁴¹

The press helped exert pressure on potential subscribers to align themselves with the movement, and stature certainly figured into a number of the responses. The phrenologist S. T. Hall said how proud he was to have his name included among so many distinguished and honoured men and women, while H. R. Reynolds added that he would be glad if his name induced his friends to subscribe. William Carpenter replied that he was going out of town but that he would give whatever amount his friend Professor John Tyndall did. (It turned out to be £5). Sir G. Thurston Baker was happy to have his name included but also gave precise instructions about how his name should look and what professional associations should be listed. An English physician who had relocated to San Antonio, Texas seemed delighted to be remembered in the wilderness of West Texas and admitted to feeling 'highly honoured in being esteemed worthy enough to be instrumental in however humble a degree, in manifesting the appreciation of his contemporaries of one whose monument lives in his works'.

The most outrageous and self-important series of letters came from the poet Martin

Tupper who mistakenly confused Dr Bennett with his brother, Sir John Bennett, the famously

eccentric London watchmaker. The author of the wildly popular *Proverbial Philosophies* (1838),

Tupper claimed a special relationship both to Longfellow and the American public:

As almost no English author in the poetical way (barring the noble Laureate) will be more looked for in America as a 'fautor et adjutor' in this matter than the humble undersigned, I am glad to offer to yourself and your committee the use of my name – albeit from circumstances little able to add any benefit more substantial. But, as for many years a personal as well as a book-friend of the admirable Longfellow (having been twice his guest at Cambridge, Mass, – as also having found myself bracketed with him on several occasions) it would ill become me to stand coldly aside, & not rather give his memory now whatever little honor I can add to it.⁴⁶

Tupper's addressing mistake resulted in his name being left off the 'List of Subscriptions', an oversight that led him to ask Bennett for an immediate correction since his friends had begun questioning his lack of involvement.⁴⁷

The emphasis on wealth and station troubled some contributors. The scientist Dr B. W. Richardson was one of several correspondents who urged Bennett to arrange the names alphabetically to avoid giving offence. Thinking about the roster of contributors, he saw the potential for irreconcilable conflict between the wealthy, the titled, and those who counted the poet as a personal friend. 'The alphabet is the simple and natural solution of all these difficulties', he urged in a long and passionate letter. As space ran out, he scribbled one final

thought on the paper's left hand fold: 'with Longfellow of all men there should be no distinction of person'. 48

And yet distinction and rank obviously mattered to the Committee as it challenged ideas about the Abbey that had been in place since the eighteenth century. Bennett knew the value of prestige, and rather than organize a popular movement among Longfellow's more humble fans, he sought to gain the attention not just of the press but of the most powerful figures in the country. From August through November, Sir Theodore Martin functioned as a broker between Bennett and the Royal Family. The author of a well-known biography of the Prince Consort, Martin worked to protect the monarchy while also helping Bennett refine his request for royal aid. Reporting that the Queen 'admires Longfellow's works greatly' and would probably be inclined to 'go with the movement', Martin nonetheless warned Bennett not to seek her support, as her practice was not to join any 'movements to erect statures of eminent people'. 49 While he ruled Victoria out, Martin believed that the Prince of Wales would join the Committee when he returned from Germany later that fall, especially if Bennett could 'lay before HRH a large list of influential names favourable to the proposal'. A few days after the Committee held its first public meeting in the Marlborough Rooms at Regent Street, Bennett received word that the Prince would serve as the titular Chairman of the Committee. His participation came with a set of strict expectations – he would not attend meetings, would not weigh in on any controversy, and not be asked to deliver long speeches.⁵⁰ It was the name that mattered, however, and Bennett proudly published the news in the *The Times*. 51

Bennett did receive some negative responses (for reasons she did not specify, Christina Rossetti contributed a donation and yet twice declined to have her name included on the First List), but in the end, his subscription campaign exceeded all expectations.⁵² Initial press reports

emphasized that the proposal had met unanimous support at the Committee's 1 November 1882 meeting, but seemingly overnight, a series of editorials appeared questioning Longfellow's suitability for Poets' Corner. Bennett had regularly enlisted *The Times* in his cause, but on 2 November, the paper published a long piece against the proposal that sparked minor controversy in England and the United States. Praising Longfellow for his stance against slavery and refusal to cultivate a hyper-nationalist identity, *The Times* nonetheless contended that the Abbey was 'pre-eminently an English institution, a place for the memorials of England's greatest worthies'. Longfellow would need to have won his fame on English soil, it argued, to be properly considered for the honour, especially when other – and better – foreign poets had never been considered. The editors pressed the Dean of Westminster to exercise great caution in making his decision, keeping in mind the precedent it would establish.⁵³

Parts of *The Times* editorial were reprinted in the *Washington Post*, the *Baltimore Sun*, the *New York Times*, and the *New York Tribune*, while synopses of the meeting made it into such tiny outlets as the *Aurora* (Ohio) *Daily News* and the *Cornell Daily Sun*, a student newspaper in Ithaca, New York. A number of American newspapers were sympathetic to *The Times* objections. The *Washington Post* quoted the editorial and then cautioned American readers from taking offense: we cannot find anything in that protest which ought to excite ill feeling in the United States'. The editors advised Longfellow's friends to 'insist on putting the memorial in some other place than Westminster Abbey, 'a place sacred by tradition and usage to distinctively English worthies'. As if they sensed something undemocratic taking place, the editors urged that 'the national sentiment of England in this matter should be sacredly respected'. 55

Amid the criticism, many American newspapers graciously acknowledged the honour.

The proposal 'will be received with unusual satisfaction', the *Chicago Tribune* predicted, for 'the

For decades Americans had been debating whether to build a monument to George Washington in the nation's capitol, and the dispute inevitably spilled over into the Poets' Corner question. The *Chronicle* used the proposed Longfellow memorial to attack the nation's 'shameful' neglect of its own great men. In a sharply worded rebuttal, the editors of the *Detroit Free Press* dismissed such 'sentimental nonsense'. 'Monument Mania' had got out of hand, the *Free Press* argued. From obelisks to pyramids, monuments were once 'the archives of the nations, the record of the reigns', but the printing press had rendered such memorials meaningless. Monuments are no longer required to remind us of our history, the editors concluded. The proper way for both nations to honour their most eminent citizens was through books.⁵⁹

From the beginning, Bennett was dogged by concerns that the Committee was being too hasty in granting Longfellow immortality. In late August, William Rossetti had written a long letter explaining his many reservations about the project. Longfellow was a genuine poet and a

good man, but to Rossetti's mind, he was not 'a supereminently great poet': 'it seems to me hardly reasonable that he should be recorded in Westminster Abbey while Shelley, Byron, and Keats are left without any such memorial'. Feeling pulled by the proposal's international spirit, however, he not only contributed a guinea, but he seemed to raise no objections at the November meeting where members of the press were clearly sympathetic to his concerns. A few weeks later, the historian J. A. Froude wrote Bennett contending that 'Poets corner belongs to genius which has been ascertained to be permanent – we cannot tell which among our notabilities will command the interests of posterity, and if we may judge by the past will *not* be those who have been most popular in their own generation'. He thought Emerson deserved the honour more than Longfellow, but like Rossetti, he both contributed to the fund and did not raise objections during the November meeting. A

While multiple people wrote the newspapers saying Longfellow was no Milton or Shakespeare, the *Daily News* offered a more acerbic estimation of his talent: 'Longfellow was a poet widely read, especially by people who did not care for poetry'. 62 *The Pall Mall Gazette* had kinder words for the poet but feared that including him in the Abbey would incur 'the displeasure of posterity'. 'We should greatly prefer the erection of a public statue to the unveiling of a bust of Longfellow in the Abbey', the *Gazette* proclaimed; 'to the latter course there are, as we have seen, grave objections: to the former, none'. 63 The Committee's refusal to heed such objections bothered writers at the *Gazette* and the *New York Tribune*, and writing from London, the *Tribune* correspondent described the refusal to negotiate as 'just a little bit ridiculous'. 64 But Bennett and Granville pushed ahead, and three weeks later, the committee received the approval of the Dean of Westminster who, unknown to the press, had months before privately assured Bennett that he fully supported the project. 65

To many of its participants, the debate over whether Longfellow belonged in Poets' Corner came down to a looming conflict between patriotism and cosmopolitanism. The committee promoted an international vision of the Abbey that matched the experience and aspirations of an Anglo-American elite. In his much-publicized remarks at the Regent Street meeting, Lord Granville derived a lesson for diplomats from the opening of *Hiawatha* when looking from above, the Great Spirit brings calm among the warring tribes on earth. The same peace, he said, had become more and more prevalent between Britain and the United States. Longfellow represented the great potential of that international friendship, for 'no man ever more perfectly blended genuine patriotism with cosmopolitan feeling'. A 'great linguist and traveler', he had a mind that was 'impregnated with the legends of old Europe', and yet he vividly recreated 'the legends of the native tribes of his own country'. In Granville's opinion, the poet practised in his daily life what he believed about poetry: it 'ought to have its roots in native soil with its branches spread in unpatriotic air'. 66 As Playfair had suggested, in the transnational republic of letters, the distinctions between statues in Central Park and memorials in Westminster Abbey seemed to melt away.

This cosmopolitan vision, however, created intense anxiety among editors in both England and the United States. Although it later warmed to the idea, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* initially accused Bennett of being patronizing when he suggested that Americans and Britons were 'bound together by blood and language' and might share 'in common the glory of our achievements'. British newspapers had an equally difficult time incorporating Granville's sentiments into their view of the world. 'Westminster Abbey should remain a place of national memorial, and not assume a cosmopolitan character', *The Times* declared, and over the next weeks, a flurry of newspapers agreed. A Pantheon should be local rather than cosmopolitan',

the *Tamworth Herald* affirmed. 'Let the Abbey be confined to essentially British fame', it urged, while suggesting that the committee erect a statue in Cambridge where the poet had received his honorary degree. 'Then will our national identity be kept distinct and the glory of our heroes be more prominently kept in mind'. ⁶⁹ The editors of *Punch* believed that Longfellow deserved to be honoured but maintained that 'admitting an American Singer to a place so specially set apart for English celebrities as Westminster Abbey' was inappropriate. ⁷⁰ Taken together, the editorials conveyed a deep desire to protect the Abbey as a coherent national text and a pervasive anxiety that remembering Longfellow would disrupt a tradition that stretched from Chaucer to Dickens. If Longfellow made it into Poets' Corner, the *Pall Mall Gazette* wondered, would he soon be followed by Goethe and Schiller? ⁷¹

Such concerns were ultimately misplaced, however, for despite their cosmopolitan rhetoric, men such as Granville, Childers, and Playfair primarily focused on Longfellow as a representative of the United States. Their vision of the Abbey as a temple of English-speaking fame was enabled and governed by new thinking about Anglo-American relations since the disasters of the Civil War. Reflecting major changes in transatlantic diplomacy, Longfellow's supporters consistently connected the nations' cultural and literary ties with racialist theories about Anglo-Saxon supremacy. These associations took on a variety of inflections and forms. They appeared in the president of the Royal Academy's remark that 'more than all else, it is the literature of our race that most makes all of our blood one and indivisible'. They could be found in Prothero's reference to 'the oneness of the English speaking race' and in Granville's comment that while the French and Germans were definitely foreigners, he thought the English and the Americans were brothers in language, religion, law, and blood. They even appear in *The Belfast Newsletter*'s contention that the bust should not be regarded as 'the effigy of an alien',

for 'Longfellow was more of an English poet than any of his contemporaries in England. He is essentially the poet of the English home'. 73

The discourse of bloodlines and racial solidarity was part of what H. A. Tulloch described as a 'generalized sentiment of Anglo-Saxon fraternity' that gained wide acceptance in the 1880s. ⁷⁴ Gladstone's 1878 article 'Kin Beyond Sea' heralded an era in which British intellectuals and politicians would seek to align themselves with the former colonies. Writing in the North American Review, Gladstone argued that the United States and the United Kingdom were 'the two greater branches of a race born to command' and that one day the daughter would replace her mother 'as the head servant in the great household of the world, the employer of all employed'. 75 In subsequent years racist historians such as E. A. Freeman and James Bryce developed theories about the western frontier and claim that American society reflected the heritage and fulfilment of the Anglo-Saxon race (Tulloch 829). After decades of charging it with recklessness and immaturity, British conservatives began to praise the United States as a 'conservative democracy' and approvingly recommended its constitutional protection of contracts and property. Writing in *The Nation*, the Oxford legal theorist A. V. Dicey drily labelled the growing conservative fascination with the U.S. political system 'Americomania in English Politics'. 76

The Longfellow memorial became an early testing ground for these new ideas and theories, a means to honour a virtuous and beloved poet and at the same time promote a notion of Anglo-American harmony that would extend for decades. To a different generation, the presence of the Unitarian Longfellow next to Chaucer and Dryden would have been deeply offensive if not outright unthinkable. To some of his Victorian contemporaries, the memorial was regrettable for no matter how admired, the poet who had glorified the ride of Paul Revere was arguably

disqualified for honours in the place that crowns kings and queens. But even when it makes claims on immortality, celebrity is a collaborative form of identity, one that reflects not just an individual's work but the history and ideologies of the people who receive him or her.

The archives of the Memorial Committee suggest the ways in which Longfellow's admirers used his fame as a carrier of cultural meaning that circulated through different segments of English and American society and brought them into closer contact with each other. Whatever his own predilections, Longfellow proved to be a wonderfully flexible figure for the Gladstonian elite, a respected and well-known poet who comfortably shouldered their vision of transatlantic diplomacy and ethnocentric fraternity. Like the Victorians who debated it, the throngs of tourists who crowd into the Corner each year understand the poet's memorial as a sign of his individual corpus and the sanction of immortality. What they do not see is that the apparent timelessness of those honours was firmly grounded in the politics of the 1880s.

Notes

The author would like to thank Christine Wirth and Kathryn Hanson Plass of the Longfellow House-Washington's Headquarters National Historic Site, Cambridge, Massachusetts for their help on this project.

¹All quotations about the unveiling are from 'The Longfellow Memorial in Westminster Abbey', *The Times*, 3 March 1884, 8. Online Gale. Accessed May 17, 2014. Slightly different reports appear in the *Daily Telegraph*, *London Daily News*, the *Observer*, and the *New York Tribune*. Edward Connery Lathem's indispensable book *England's Homage to Longfellow: The Westminster Abbey Bust of Henry Wadsworth* Longfellow, 1884 (Maine Historical Society: Portland, 2007) provides a compilation of the multiple sources.

² 'The Longfellow Memorial in Westminster Abbey', *The Times*, 3 March 1884, 8. [I am offering an expanded version of the abbreviated entry I have above to clarify -- that ok? IS THIS THE FULL REFERENCE?]

- ⁸ On Stowe's trip to England, see Michael Newbury, "Eaten Alive: Slavery and Antebellum America," *ELH* (61:1) (1994), 169-76.
- ⁹ Theophilus Davis in the *National Review* as cited in Kate Flint, 'Is the Native an American? National Identity and the British Reception of *Hiawatha*', in *The Traffic in Poems: Nineteenth-Century Poetry and Transatlantic Exchange*, ed. Meredith L. McGill, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 71.
- ¹⁰ Nathaniel Hawthorne to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 11 May 1855, in *Life of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*, Volume II, ed. Samuel Longfellow (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 2003), 287. Google Books. Accessed May 29, 2014.
- ¹¹ 'Longfellow in England', The Essex Standard and General Advertiser for the Eastern Counties, 12 June 1868. 19th Century British Newspapers Part II Database. Gale. Accessed May 13, 2014.
- ¹² 'Mr. Longfellow in England', *The Lancaster Gazette, and General Advertiser for Lancashire, Westmoreland, Yorkshire, &c, 20 June 1868.* 19th Century British Newspapers Part II Database. Gale. Accessed May 13, 2014.

³ 'Longfellow in Poet's Corner', *New York Times*, 16 March 1884, 4. Pro Quest Historical Newspapers. Accessed 13 May 2014. Reprinted from the *London Daily Telegraph*.

⁴ Alice Longfellow, Journal Entry, 1 March 1884, as cited in Lathem, *England's Homage to Longfellow*, 37-38.

⁵ 'Longfellow in Poet's Corner', New York Times, 16 March 1884, 4.

⁶ See *Montreal Gazette*, 18 March 1884. Google Newspapers. Accessed 29 May 2014.

⁷On Longfellow's fame, see Christoph Irmscher, *Longfellow Redux*, (Champagne-Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 24.

¹³ As cited in Lathem, England's Homage to Longfellow, 3.

¹⁴ Lathem, England's Homage to Longfellow, 3.

¹⁵ 'Longfellow in England: His Great Popularity Shown by the Immense Sale of His Works', *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 8 November 1882, 4. Pro Quest Historical Newspapers. Accessed May 13, 2014.

¹⁶ 'Longfellow', *The Times*, 27 March 1882, 9, Gale, Accessed May 13, 2014.

¹⁷ Washington Irving, *The Sketchbook of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* (New York: Penguin, 1988), 139.

¹⁸ Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Our Old Home, The Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, vol. 7, eds. Nathaniel Hawthorne, George Lathrop, Julian Hawthorne, (Houghton-Mifflin: Cambridge, MA, 1891), 315. Google Books. Accessed June 12, 2014.

¹⁹ See Thomas Prendergast, *Poetical Dust: Poets' Corner and the Making of Britain*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

²⁰ Philip Connell, 'Death and The Author: Westminster Abbey and the Meanings of the Literary Movement', Eighteenth-Century Studies 38, 4 (2005), 559.

²³ Samantha Matthews, *Poetical Remains: Poets' Graves, Bodies, and Books in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 227.

²⁵ 'William Cox Bennett', *Dickens Journal Online*, reprinted from *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. http://www.djo.org.uk/indexes/authors/william-cox-bennett.html Website. Accessed June 12, 2014.

²⁷ See 'Longfellow Memorial Committee. First List'. Proof Copy. 'England – Longfellow Bust in Westminster Abbey, 1882-1957', Box 12, Folder 4, HWLD. Longfellow National Historic Site, Cambridge, MA.

²⁸ William C. Borlase to W.C. Bennett, 23 September 1882 and Stephen Coleridge to W.C. Bennett, 19 October 1882. *Letters Given by the English Longfellow Memorial Committee to 'The Longfellow Memorial Association' of Cambridge*. Longfellow National Historic Site, Cambridge, MA.

²¹ For a comprehensive list of Abbey burials, busts, and memorials, see Prendergast, *Poetical Dust.*.

²² Richard Jenkyns, Westminster Abbey (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 150.

²⁴ 'Dean Stanley Memorial Fund', 10 April 1882, *The Times* (London), 5. Gale. Accessed June 12, 2014.

²⁶ 'William Cox Bennett', *Dickens Journal Online*.

²⁹ G. C. Bell to W.C. Bennett, 3 October 1882. Letters Given.

³⁰ Mr. Charles G. Burnard to W.C. Bennett, 23 September 1882. *Letters Given*.

³¹ Edward Capern to W.C. Bennett, 11 September 1882. Capern's lines were: 'By all means add the name of 'A humble poet,/ Whose songs gush fresh from his heart/ As showers from the clouds of summer,/ Or tears from the eyelids start'. On Capern's history, see Ilfra Goldberg, *Edward Capern: The Postman-Poet*, (n.p. Vanguard Press, 2009).

³² Aubrey De Vere to W.C. Bennett, 10 November 1882. *Letters Given*.

³³ Hyde Clarke to W.C. Bennett, 10 November 1882, *Letters Given*.

³⁴ Lloyd Jones to W.C. Bennett, 11 November 1882, *Letters Given*.

³⁵ G. Barnett Smith to W.C. Bennett, as cited in Thomas Wentworth Higginson, 'Longfellow's Welcome to Westminster Abbey' *Sunday Magazine*, 17 April 1904, 7-8. 'England – Longfellow Bust in Westminster Abbey, 1882-1957', Box 12, Folder 4, HWLD. Longfellow National Historic Site, Cambridge, MA.

³⁶ Lyon Playfair to James Russell Lowell, 24 September 1882, 'Letters from Lyon Playfair to James Russell Lowell, September, October 1882', Box 5, Folder 60. The statues in Central Park were erected in 1880.

³⁷ See 'Bennett', *Dickens Online Journal*.

³⁸ A. Tennyson to W.C. Bennett, 25 August 1882, *Letters Given*.

³⁹ See *The Times* (London), 30 August, 4 September, 7 September, 13 November, and 1 December 1882. Gale. Accessed May 13, 2014.

The correspondent for the *New York Tribune* was particularly hostile to the Longfellow Memorial and repeatedly mocked the methods of its organizers, including the publication of the names of people who declined: "The excellent persons who have it in charge publish from time to time lists of celebrities who have 'joined the committee.' The process of joining the committee consists apparently in sending one's name in, and some of those sent in are more likely to receive distinction than to confer it And why should the managers of the committee publish the rebuffs they have received? Mr. Coventry Patmore was within his right in refusing to join the committee." See "Notes from London," the *New York Tribune*, November 2 1882. Pro Quest Historical Newspapers. Accessed May 13, 2014.

⁴¹ 'The Longfellow Memorial', *Punch, or the London Charivari*, October 21, 1882, v. 83, 185. Hathi Trust Digital Library. Google Books. Original from University of Michigan.

⁴² S.T. Hall to W.C. Bennett, 2 September 1882 and H.R. Reynolds to W.C. Bennett, 7 October 1882. Letters Given.

⁴³ William Carpenter to W.C. Bennett, 23 September 1882. *Letters Given*. On the donation sums, see 'The Longfellow Memorial', List of Subscriptions', Henry Wadsworth Longfellow Daughters Papers, Box 128, Folder 4. Longfellow National Historic Site, Cambridge, MA.

⁴⁴ Sir G. Thurston Baker to W.C. Bennett, 23 October 1882. *Letters Given*.

⁴⁵ George Cupples, MD, To W.C. Bennett, 30 September 1882, Letters Given.

⁴⁶ Martin F. Tupper to Sir John Bennett, 28 August 1882. *Letters Given*.

⁴⁷ Martin F. Tupper to W.C. Bennett, 7 September 1882. 'English Longfellow Memorial Committee, 1882-1884', Box 128, Folder 3. Longfellow National Historic Site, Cambridge, MA.

- ⁴⁹ Theodore Martin to W.C. Bennett, 31 August 1882. 'English Longfellow Memorial Committee, 1882-1884', Box 128, Folder 3. Longfellow National Historic Site, Cambridge, MA.
- ⁵⁰ Theodore Martin to W.C. Bennett, Private and Confidential, 20 November 1882. English Longfellow Memorial Committee, 1882-1884', Box 128, Folder 3. Longfellow National Historic Site, Cambridge, MA.
- ⁵¹ 'The Longfellow Memorial', Letters to the Editor, *The Times* (London), 7 November 1882, 8. Gale. Accessed May 13, 2014.
- ⁵² Christina G. Rossetti to W.C. Bennett, 19 September 1882. *Letters Given*.
- 53 'The Longfellow Memorial', The Times (London), 2 November 1882. Gale. Accessed May 13, 2014.
- ⁵⁴ *The Cornell Daily Sun*, Volume III, Number 30, 2 November 1882. Cornell Daily Sun. Keith R. Johnson Digital Archive. http://cdsun.library.cornell.edu/cgi-bin/cornell?a=d&d=CDS18821102.2.9#
- ⁵⁵ 'Longfellow and Westminster', *Washington Post*, November 3, 1882. Pro Quest Historical Newspapers, 4. Accessed May 13, 2014.
- ⁵⁶ The Longfellow Monument', *Chicago Tribune*, 12 September 1882, 4. Pro Quest Historical Newspapers. Accessed May 13, 2014
- ⁵⁷ 'Honoring a Poet', *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 2 November 1882, 4. Pro Quest Historical Newspapers, 4. Accessed May 13, 2014; 'Rejected Taffy', *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 29 August 1882, 4. Pro Quest Historical Newspapers. Accessed May 13, 2014.
- ⁵⁸ 'Honors to Longfellow', *San Francisco Chronicle*, 12 September 1882, 2. Pro Quest Historical Newspapers. Accessed May 13, 2014.
- ⁵⁹ 'The Monument Mania', *Detroit Free Press*, 23 November 1882, 4. Pro Quest Historical Newspapers. Accessed May 13, 2014. *The Chronicle* passage is contained within the *Free Press* editorial.
- ⁶⁰ W. M. Rossetti to W.C. Bennett, 28 August 1882. Letters Given
- ⁶¹ J.A. Froud to W.C. Bennett. 11 September 1882. *Letters Given*.
- ⁶² Daily News as quoted in 'Notes from London', New York Tribune, 17 December 1882, 3. Pro Quest Historical Newspapers. Accessed May 13, 2014.

⁴⁸ Dr. R.W. Richardson to W.C. Bennett, 9 September 1882. *Letters Given*.

⁶³ 'The Longfellow Memorial', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 3 November 1882 n.p., 19th Century British Newspapers Database. British Library. Gale. Accessed May 13, 2014.

⁶⁴ 'Notes from London', New York Tribune, 17 December 1882.

⁶⁵ George Granville Bradley, Dean of Westminster to W.C. Bennett, 23 September 1882. Letters Given

⁶⁶ 'The Longfellow Memorial', *The Times* (London), 2 November 1882, 6. Gale. Accessed May 13, 2014.

⁶⁷ 'Rejected Taffy', *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, 19 August 1882, 4. Pro Quest Historical Newspapers. Accessed May 13, 2014.

⁶⁸ 'The Longfellow Memorial', *The Times* (London), 2 November 1882, 6.

⁶⁹ 'The Proposed Longfellow Memorial', 18 November 1882, 8. *British Newspapers*, *Part II: 1780-1950*, British Library. Gale. Accessed May 13, 2014.

Out of Place', Punch, or the London Charivari, 11 November 1882, vol. 83, 222. Hathi Trust Digital Library.
Google Books. Original from University of Michigan. Accessed May 30, 2014.

^{71 &#}x27;The Longfellow Memorial', Pall Mall Gazette, 3 November 1882 n.p.

⁷² Sir Frederick Leighton quoted in the *New York Times*, 11 September 1882, 4. Pro Quest Historical Newspapers. Accessed May 13, 2014.

⁷³ Belfast News-Letter, 3 March 1884. 19th Century British Newspapers Database. British Library. Gale. Accessed May 13, 2014.

 ⁷⁴ H.A. Tulloch, 'Changing British Attitudes Towards the United States in the 1880s', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 20, 4 (1977), 826. JSTOR. Accessed May 28, 2014.

⁷⁵ William Gladstone, 'Kin Beyond Sea', *North American Review*, 127 (1878), 180, 182. Google Books. Accessed June 25, 2014.

⁷⁶ A.V. Dicey, 'Americomania in English Politics', *The Nation*, 21 January 1886, vol 42, nos. 1073, 52-3. Google Books. Accessed June 25, 2014.