


1983

The Longfellow Letters: Review of *The Letters of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*, edited by Andrew Hilen, Volume V (1866-1874), Volume VI (1875-1882).

Edward L. Tucker

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/docedit>

 Part of the [Digital Humanities Commons](#), [Other Arts and Humanities Commons](#), [Reading and Language Commons](#), and the [Technical and Professional Writing Commons](#)

Tucker, Edward L., "The Longfellow Letters: Review of *The Letters of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*, edited by Andrew Hilen, Volume V (1866-1874), Volume VI (1875- 1882)." (1983). *Documentary Editing: Journal of the Association for Documentary Editing (1979-2011)*. 194.

<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/docedit/194>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Documentary Editing, Association for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Documentary Editing: Journal of the Association for Documentary Editing (1979-2011)* by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

The Longfellow Letters

EDWARD L. TUCKER

THE LETTERS OF HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW, edited by Andrew Hilen, Volume V (1866–1874), Volume VI (1875–1882). Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982. xiii, 825; ix, 912 pp. \$80.00 the set.

With the publication of these two volumes, Andrew Hilen brings to a conclusion his monumental work consisting of the extant letters of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807–1882). These last two volumes complete a project that began in 1966 and ended in 1982, one hundred years after the death of the poet.

During this period Longfellow's life was filled with correspondence. Hilen has managed to divide the two volumes equally, with titles for the different sections. For Volume V, the subtitles are: Part Seventeen, Three Score Years, 1866–1867; Part Eighteen, Europe, 1868–1869; Part Nineteen, The Virtuous Man, 1870–1871; Part Twenty, Embers

That Still Burn, 1872–1874. The subtitles of Volume VI are as follows: Part Twenty-One, Among the Breakers, 1875–1876; Part Twenty-Two, the Tumult of Life, 1877–1878; Part Twenty-Three, Lowered Sails, 1879–1880; and Part Twenty-Four, In the Harbor, 1881–1882. The number of letters recovered for Longfellow's last years are so evenly divided that each section, with one exception, contains only two years.

During the period 1866–1882 the Longfellow legend was created: that of the aristocratic white Mr. Longfellow, very kind, unemotional, seldom displaying impatience or anger. These letters, which reinforce the legend, become a means essentially of providing topical information, of encouraging others, or exchanging civilized courtesies.

The courtly, polite Longfellow, feeling it his duty not to destroy himself as a national institution, seldom wrote about his own problems. Instead he discussed his family and the people who visited him; he avoided controversy.

During these years Longfellow traveled to England, received honorary degrees from Cambridge and Oxford, responded to numerous invitations from aristocrats, poets, and novelists. He visited Tennyson and even called on the Queen and the Prince of Wales at Windsor. Back in America on his seventieth birthday he became so much an object of national adulation that he felt his study had become a "garden of flowers." School children in particular wrote to him of their affection.

And this comfortable man scarcely worried about money; he had wealth from the Appleton estate, the Craigie house, and some well-invested securities. Each of his children at twenty-one was to receive a handsome legacy. He donated a reasonable amount of money to friends, relatives, and worthy causes. His three girls, "grave Alice, and laughing Allegra, and Edith with golden hair"—now growing to womanhood—went to Europe with him, as well as his son Ernest (now newly married) and other family members. All in all, he was a prosperous, ideal family man. And to complete the image, Edith married and brought into the world two grandsons whom he could enjoy—Richard Henry Dana and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow Dana.

Essentially a scholar in his study, Longfellow during this time produced ten separate volumes of poetry. He finished his translation of Dante's *The Divine Comedy*; he supervised an expanded edition of *The Poets and Poetry of Europe*; he turned out his multi-volume collection of the *Poems of Places*. In 1872 he published *Christus*, which he hoped would be his *magnum opus*. He read widely and when amateurs sent their verses to him for criticism, he did not suggest improvements and sometimes even praised bad poetry, apparently because he could not bring himself to offend the authors.

Longfellow knew other literary figures. His good friend, Charles Dickens, was making a lecture tour of America and was in Boston for a week. The famous speech given by Mark Twain at a dinner honoring John Greenleaf Whittier did not upset him; he assured the young Westerner that he was not insulted, that it was "a pleasant dinner," and Whittier "enjoyed it very much." In 1881 when Walt Whitman wrote for an autograph to give to a Canadian friend, Longfellow complied with "great pleasure." And in January 1882 he received Oscar Wilde, the last of many Englishmen to come to his door, noting in a letter: "However fantastic he may be in public, in private he is a very agreeable and intelligent young man."

Anthony Trollope, who saw only this conventional image, stated that Longfellow was very pleasant, a "first-class gentleman." But, underneath the surface, asked Trollope, where and who was the "true" Longfellow?

The letters do go beyond this conventional image and suggest the "true" Longfellow, something more than the kindly, white gentleman.

For one thing, he felt he should be paid well for his literary works; as a result, he drove hard bargains with editors

and publishers. In 1874 he charged a fee of \$3,000 from the publisher of the *New York Ledger* for "The Hanging of the Crane." And in 1875 he entered a ten-year contract with James R. Osgood & Company that paid him \$4,000 annually, exclusive of his ten percent royalty on new books and his fees from magazines. His average yearly income from his works over the last ten years of his life was \$16,000.

Early in his life, he loved travel, but during his last years, he became a homebody. When he was in Europe in 1868–1869, the memories of the past depressed him and, "heartily tired," he longed for Craigie House. Though he sometimes went to Boston to lectures or operas and enjoyed an occasional public dinner, he definitely did not want to speak at any celebration. In the summers he went to Nahant (though while there, he longed to return to Cambridge), and annually to Portland to visit his brother and sister. But "Castle Craigie," run with the help of servants and gardeners, which contained his daughters, their house guests, and his frequent dinner guests, was his place of security.

Fame produced headaches. Visitors, known and unknown, foreign and domestic, came to his home in a merciless procession: photographers, editors, unpublished authors, children, curiosity seekers. He listened patiently to an admirer who had committed the entire *Song of Hiawatha* to memory, and he recorded that on one afternoon in 1877, he had fourteen callers. When he became ill in 1881 and had to remain in his room and bed, he said it was pleasant "having the world shut out." It was "a great relief," this "freedom from callers."

Furthermore, he became a victim to his correspondence, which he considered a penance for his fame. Almost all the letters he received must be answered, not only those from friends but also from people he did not know—the "Entire Stranger": they wanted topical poems, they sent manuscripts for advice, they praised him. Whenever a letter arrived, he stacked it with others and answered it as soon as possible. The result was that he was anchored to his study for hours at a time. He reported that the incessant letter-writing embittered his existence. On one day in 1873 he recorded: "This morning I counted the unanswered letters on my table. There are fifty-two! Thus is my life riddled to pieces." During the last six months, Anne Allegra Longfellow acted as amanuensis, and finally Longfellow resorted to a printed form.

The burden of correspondence may have contributed to his poor health. Visitors to Craigie House, who saw him walking the grounds or standing at his study desk, assumed his tranquility of spirit; actually he suffered considerably. There were numerous ills: headaches, insomnia, colds, eye-strain, nervous prostration, difficulty with his hands which, during his last years, made writing very "painful, not to say, impossible," and especially the "two handmaidens, Influenza and Neuralgia." He experimented with various treatments that he saw advertised in newspapers or that he made

up: the patent medicines Vegetine and Nux Vomica; diets emphasizing onions or celery or fish; a medicated belt and breast-plate made of “wash-leather, lined with fine red flannel”; quinine pills; inhalations of ether. But nothing gave much comfort. He finally died of an infection, the result of peritonitis.

Some of his friends didn't help. For example, although Longfellow thought of George Washington Greene, his principal correspondent, as his “oldest friend” and “always a welcome guest,” the man had many unpleasant qualities. Greene, of a jealous nature, felt that the world was conspiring against him. He took advantage of Longfellow's good nature by using him as an intermediary with publishers, as a promoter of schemes to obtain employment, as a procurer of invitations to academic and social events. Longfellow supplied him constantly with encouragement and money, helped subsidize his biography of General Nathanael Greene, bought a house for him, and enlarged it. In 1874 he put Greene on a regular monthly allowance of \$50 and in his will left \$1,000 to each of Greene's children. Greene, not himself a beneficiary, sold his letters from Longfellow to the poet's children for an unspecified amount.

Two family members presented problems. Longfellow's son, Charles, who was very casual in his attitude toward money, seemed determined in dissipating his inheritance on the pleasures of Japan and other countries; because Longfellow himself was rather prudent, this attitude of his adventurous and spendthrift son annoyed him. But the really disturbing member of the household was the poet's nephew, Stephen Longfellow. He relieved his uncle of over \$3,000 over a six-year period. Having spent several years at sea, he persuaded the poet to invest in a mariner's compass, but nothing came of the venture. During succeeding years, Stephen became notorious: he made the headlines in the *Boston Transcript* when he forged Longfellow's name to a check, and, after being arrested, was put under bond of \$3,000; inebriated, he fell down the stairs of a Boston hotel and broke his leg, the result being amputation; when he married a sixteen-year-old girl, even though he had a wife and child elsewhere, the *Boston Globe* described him as the “bigamous Longfellow,” the “wild and wicked nephew of the poet”; he was put for a while in a home for alcoholics. Longfellow wrote about this relative: “How glad I am he is only my nephew. If he were any nearer I could not endure it.” In 1880, Stephen, in what Longfellow called a “wise decision,” sailed to Australia and passed out of the poet's life.

The result of the publication of all the available letters is to present a more fully developed man than seen previously: in addition to the conventional legendary figure, there is also a view of a human being with anxieties and sufferings.

Hilen's editorial principles are of special interest to the textual scholar, for he is handling a massive amount of material. This edition contains all the available letters of Longfellow, published and unpublished. Hilen ends up with

4,992 dated letters. A section entitled “Undated Letters and Fragments,” which arranges the manuscripts alphabetically by recipient or by the month in which they were written, brings the total to 5,055. The dated letters are arranged in chronological order, numbered consecutively, and placed under the full name of the recipient. When the exact date is not known, Hilen has provided a date within brackets, justifying it when necessary in a footnote. When only the year of a letter is known, the letter is put at the end of the year; when the month and year are known, it is placed at the end of the month.

The matter of copy text is not so crucial in this edition as it might be in editions of the works because a letter written and sent is seldom revised in future years. Whenever available, the manuscript text becomes the copy text. When the original letter is unrecovered, Hilen has depended—in order of priority—on photographic reproductions, printed versions, and typed or handwritten copies. When depending on a printed version, he has reproduced the text exactly as he has found it except for obvious typographical errors or errors in transcription, which he was silently corrected.

In the overall plan, Hilen has adhered strictly to a basic principle: absolute fidelity to the substantives. In the matter of accidentals, he has retained as closely as possible Longfellow's orthography, punctuation, paragraphing, grammar, and syntax. Longfellow wrote in a legible hand, and for the most part the actual readings of texts present few problems in interpretation. In some instances, though, Hilen has felt it necessary to emend the accidentals in the interests of clarity and readability. The following are some of his editorial rules:

1. Spelling has been retained as found in the manuscripts, although a few words that appear to be the result of mere slips of the pen (such as *vioelent* for *violent*) have been silently corrected. He has preserved such spellings as *recieved* and *schollars* when he has established the fact that Longfellow consistently spelled the words in that way.

2. Punctuation has not been changed, except in a few instances. For example, all sentences have been made to end with a period, which eliminates the terminal dash. In some cases he has supplied punctuation where it is clear that Longfellow inadvertently omitted it; he has closed his quotations and parenthetical remarks, ended his sentences, and provided question marks when necessary. Occasionally he has silently added punctuation, or deleted it, in order to clarify meaning, provided the correction, addition, or deletion in punctuation does not alter what Longfellow intended.

3. Capitalization is preserved as in the manuscripts, although for the sake of uniformity Hilen has started all sentences with a capital letter.

4. Grammar and syntax remain the same as in the manuscripts with a few exceptions, such as the occasional and inadvertent repetition of words and phrases (*the the*); and he has sometimes added a word or phrase to clarify meaning,

but always within square brackets.

5. Editorial insertions have been held to a minimum. On occasion he has used square brackets to enclose an explanatory word or phrase omitted by Longfellow or to expand initials or names.

Interested readers may wish to refer to Hilén's "Editorial Principles" for all six volumes, clearly stated in Volume I, pp. 12–15. In the matter of annotation, at the end of each letter is a series of necessary notes. These include identifications of names mentioned, textual clarifications, explanatory remarks, and translations of lengthy passages in foreign languages. Information concerning the location of a manuscript is given at the end of each letter, or if the manuscript is unrecovered, the source of the text. The great majority of the letters are the property of the Longfellow Trust, now on permanent deposit in the Houghton Library of Harvard University. Also included at the end of each letter are, if available, the address of the recipient, legible postmarks, annotations on the address leaf. If the letter has been previously printed in its complete form, this information is also included.

An Appendix contains Longfellow's Last Will and Testament. At the end of Volume VI is a section entitled "Additions and Corrections," containing a number of substantive and accidental errors in Volumes I–IV that have come to

light. Each volume has at the end an Index of Recipients, and at the end of Volume VI is the section that many Longfellow scholars have been waiting for: a Comprehensive Index containing personal names and titles mentioned in the letters.

The editor had planned a supplementary volume or article containing some letters that, as might have been expected, have surfaced since the beginning of the project. But he personally will not complete this addition.

Andrew Hilén, who devoted most of his scholarly life to Longfellow, who wrote *Longfellow and Scandinavia* and edited *The Diary of Clara Crowninshield*, died on 12 May 1982, one hundred years and less than two months after the poet. This edition of the letters, a model of impeccable scholarship, good taste, and sufficient humility in the presence of the poet, thus becomes a monument to our foremost Longfellow scholar.

Hilén, with the completion of this undertaking, almost demands a re-evaluation of the poet. What next? The Journals *must* be edited in their entirety by someone of Hilén's painstaking caliber. The Longfellow manuscripts of the literary works must be re-examined and some, certainly, must appear in modern editions. Hilén has pointed the way; other scholars must follow.