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The Grooming of a Harvard Hispanist: George Ticknor's Mentorship of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

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Abstract: This essay examines the role that George Ticknor (1791-1891), a pioneer in American Hispanism and author of the classic work *History of Spanish Literature* (1849), played as mentor and intellectual guide to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882), the person selected in 1836 to succeed him as Smith Professor of European Languages and Literatures at Harvard. Longfellow's greatest eminence ultimately came as a poet of international renown whose works would be widely translated and admired through most of the nineteenth century, but before achieving stature as the author of such classics as *Evangeline, a tale of Acadie* and *The Song of Hiawatha*, he devoted twenty-five years to teaching and translating European works into English, with Spanish—"the language of Cervantes," as he put it—being one of his specialties. The time Longfellow spent in Europe as a young scholar learning the subjects he was appointed to teach, including, in particular, an extended, transitional interlude in Spain, was key to the person he became, and the values he embraced.

Keywords: Longfellow, Ticknor, Smith Professor, Harvard, Bowdoin, Hispanism

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Image 1. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in formal robes as the newly installed professor of modern languages at Bowdoin College, by Thomas Badger, 1829. Courtesy of Maine Historical Society.

1. Introduction: Kindred Spirits¹

Had Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882) never written a single line of poetry—and he published something on the order of 420 poems during an eventful career that spanned more than 60 years—he would still be remembered today for his important work as linguist, translator of multiple European works into English—including the first complete translation by an American of *The Divine Comedy* (1867)—and, for twenty-five years, as a teacher of Romance languages and literatures. Seven of these were spent at Bowdoin College in Brunswick Maine, and eighteen at Harvard as the successor to the pioneering Hispanist George Ticknor (1791-1871), who hand-picked him for the position he left in 1836 to write his monumental work in three volumes, *History of Spanish Literature* (1849), which remains, after 174 years in print, a standard in its field.

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How this came to pass is a story involving two individuals who had several qualities in common. Foremost among these was the burning desire to achieve something beyond what was expected of young men coming of age in the early nineteenth century. Both were born to respectable New England families—Ticknor the son of Elisha Ticknor, a former headmaster of the Franklin Grammar School and a founder of the Massachusetts Mutual Fire Insurance Company and New England's first saving bank, Provident Institution for Savings. Longfellow's father, Stephen Longfellow, was a Portland, Maine, lawyer and one-term Member of Congress who expected his gifted son to follow him in the practice of law. On his mother's side, Henry's grandfather, General Peleg Wadsworth, had served with distinction during the American War of Independence, and was a leading proponent of statehood for the District of Maine, which was achieved in 1820 as part of the Missouri Compromise.

¹ Adapted from a presentation given on Oct. 21, 2022, in Hanover, New Hampshire at a conference organized by the Dartmouth College Department of Spanish and Portuguese to commemorate George Ticknor and the Foundation of Hispanism in the United States, with material drawn primarily from the author's book, *Cross of Snow A Life of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2020), and expanded with additional research for this essay.

2. A Thirst for Achievement

Home-schooled by his father and several private tutors, including the Hispanist Francis Sales, Ticknor entered Dartmouth College as a junior at the age of fourteen, graduating in 1807.² Over the next three years he studied Latin and Greek in Boston with the Rev. Dr. John Sylvester Gardiner, rector of Trinity Church and a brilliant classicist. In 1810, Ticknor began the study of law, was admitted to the Massachusetts bar in 1813, and opened an office in Court Square, Boston. “I tired of the life,” he admitted years later, “and my father understood it; for I was very frank with him, and told him—what he knew very well—that I was more occupied with Greek and Latin than with law-books” (Hillard, 1876, vol. 1, p. 11). So in 1815, and with the support of his family, Ticknor traveled to Europe for twenty months of intensive study at the University of Göttingen in Germany, home to a library of some 200,000 volumes. To prepare for the rigorous regimen, he taught himself German with borrowed grammars and dictionaries, one from the library of the brilliant statesman and future President of the United States, John Quincy Adams, which had been on temporary deposit at the Boston Athenæum. “There was no one in Boston who could teach me,” Ticknor would explain of his improvised mode of self-instruction (Hillard, 1876, vol. 1, p. 8).

Midway through his European studies word came from America that Abiel Smith, a magnanimous Boston businessman, had bequeathed twenty thousand dollars to establish a chair for the teaching of French and Spanish at Harvard, his alma mater, and it was Ticknor’s if he wanted it. Ticknor accepted the appointment, but with the understanding that he spend some productive time in France, Switzerland, and Italy, followed by five and a half months in Spain.³ His object in Spain, he would write years later in the preface to *History of Spanish Literature* was “to increase a very imperfect knowledge of the language and literatures of the country, and to purchase

² For Ticknor’s tutors and relationship with Francis Sales, see Doyle (1937, pp. 4-5).

³ Ticknor’s travels in Europe, 1815-1818: For a fuller account, see Adorno and Del Pino (2020, pp.6-12).

Spanish books, always so rare in the great book-marts of the rest of Europe” (Ticknor, 1849, vol. 1, p. v). He began his tenure as Smith Professor in 1819. Six years later, Bowdoin took steps to establish a similar program of its own, emboldened by a bequest from the widow of the college’s first great benefactor, James Bowdoin III, to create a chair for the teaching of Romance languages, “particularly French and Spanish.”



Image 2. Portrait of George Ticknor by Thomas Sully, 1831, during tenure as Smith Professor at Harvard. Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College/Wikimedia Commons.

There were by that time several other American institutions with similar programs, including the University of Virginia, founded in 1819 by Thomas Jefferson, who had offered a professorship in “Ideology, Ethics, Belles-Lettres and Fine Arts” to Ticknor at more than double his Harvard salary, but the native Bostonian chose to remain in Massachusetts (Hillard, 1876, vol. 1, p. 302). During Bowdoin’s commencement week, the college’s board of trustees voted to offer the newly established chair to eighteen-year-old Henry Longfellow, who was graduating fourth in a distinguished class of high-achievers that included the future novelist Nathaniel Hawthorne. Henry’s name had been formally proposed by an oral-examinations supervisor who recalled a Horatian ode the young scholar had translated and delivered with uncommon assurance during his sophomore year. There was a hitch, however; before Henry could assume the new position he would be obliged to spend an unspecified period in Europe learning the very languages he was being asked to teach. Bowdoin trustee Stephen Longfellow—who to that point had been pressing Henry to join him in the practice of law, but who can be assumed to have had a hand in advancing his son’s prospects for the newly created seat—agreed to underwrite what became a three-year excursion abroad.

Like Ticknor before him, Henry had expressed no interest whatsoever in becoming a lawyer, thirsting from childhood to be a writer, a dream he expressed during his junior year at Bowdoin, and repeated numerous times thereafter. “I most eagerly aspire after future eminence in literature, my whole soul burns most ardently for it and every earthly thought centers in it,” he confided to his father, who at the time was representing the state of Maine in Washington as a Member of Congress (Hilen, 1966-1982, vol. 1, p. 94). This was no idle wish, as Henry had already placed a number of his poems in several reputable publications, notably *The American Monthly Magazine* and *The United States Literary Gazette*. His first verse to appear in print—“The Battle of Lovell’s Pond”—was featured in the *Portland Gazette* when he was thirteen, making him a published poet by the time he arrived on the Bowdoin campus

in 1822. But Stephen Longfellow had not been moved to change his mind then, and with nothing between them resolved, Henry floated the idea of spending a year doing graduate study at Harvard. “I would attach myself to some literary periodical publication by which I could maintain myself and still enjoy the advantages of reading” (Hilen, 1966-1982, vol. 1, p.94).

Stephen Longfellow nonetheless remained unconvinced. “A literary life, to one who has the means of support, must be very pleasant,” he wrote back. “But there is not wealth enough in this country to afford encouragement and patronage to merely literary men. And as you have not had the fortune (I will not say whether good or ill) to be born rich you must adopt a profession which will afford you subsistence as well as reputation.”⁴ The stunning offer from the Bowdoin board of trustees changed all that, presenting father and son with a compromise that would enable Henry to indulge his love of literature and languages and become, in the process, a full professor at a prestigious college located twenty-five miles from the family home in Portland. Since there was no established protocol for this sort of overseas instruction in the early 1800s, strategies had to be cobbled together well in advance. Before setting sail for Europe, Henry wisely sought advice from the one person above all others who could counsel him knowledgeably. It happened that another member of the Bowdoin board of trustees, a Portland attorney and friend of Stephen Longfellow, Charles S. Davies, was also a confidant of George Ticknor, and wrote a letter of introduction on Henry’s behalf. The two arranged to meet on May, 2, 1826, just thirteen days before the young man from Maine was to set sail from New York for Havre de Grace in France.⁵

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⁴ Stephen Longfellow to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Dec. 26. 1824; Longfellow Papers, Houghton Library, Am 1340.2 (3516).

^{*} In subsequent notes, George Ticknor, Stephen Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Zilpah Longfellow, and Harvard’s Houghton Library will be referred to, respectively, with the abbreviations GT, SL, HWL, ZL, and HL.

⁵ For a precise chronology of HWL’s European travels, 1826-1829, see Hilen (1966-1982, vol. 1, pp. 149-151).

By the time Henry came knocking at his front door, Ticknor was a force with international clout, and a very wealthy one at that, having married especially well four years earlier, and living quite comfortably in a beautifully appointed house near Boston Common. Ticknor's wife, Anna Eliot Ticknor, was the daughter of Samuel Eliot, a prominent Beacon Hill banker and merchant. Of Ticknor's many attributes, one of the more celebrated was his having had the facility to become well connected with a stunning variety of important people, beginning in 1815, when he was twenty-three, with Thomas Jefferson at Monticello in Virginia before departing for Europe; that get-together was facilitated by a letter from John Adams. The friendship with Jefferson, according to Henry Grattan Doyle, was "the first noteworthy instance of an extraordinary ability to make and keep friends among the most notable people of the day, old and young, American and foreign, noblemen and commoners, statesmen, scholars, men of science, poets, novelists, and artists" (Doyle, 1937, p. 7).

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When George and Anna Ticknor took up residence at 9 Park Street at the top of Beacon Hill, they became legendary for their elegant soirees, their many houseguests over the years including Sir Walter Scott and the Marquis de Lafayette. An invitation to break bread with Ticknor was a statement of status, and his influence was far-reaching. He became, in the words of the Harvard historian John Stauffer, "the unofficial gatekeeper of Boston society,"⁶ a power broker whose approval or disapproval could open or close doors among the Boston elite. "To be admitted to such a house as Mr. Ticknor's was a test of culture and good breeding, to be shut out from it was an exclusion from what was most coveted in a social way by scholars and gentlemen who combined the fruits of study and travel," according to Edward L. Pierce, biographer of Charles Sumner (Pierce, vol. 3, 1893, p. 10). Sumner's pointedly sharp political attacks in the 1840s on Robert C. Winthrop, a Boston Brahmin stalwart with many like-minded friends, led to the fiery orator and soon-to-be "Radical Republican"

⁶ John Stauffer is a Harvard University professor of English and American Literature, American Studies, and African American Studies; personal interview with the author for *Cross of Snow*.

being declared “outside the pale of society” by Ticknor, a damning dismissal that amounted to social ostracism, and was likely the reason his dream of teaching law full-time at Harvard would never be realized, persuading him instead to run for the U.S. Senate in 1850. (Haynes, 1909, p. 108).



Image 3. George Ticknor’s Beacon Hill house seen from the Massachusetts State House, 1858. Southworth and Hawes. Boston Public Library/ Wikimedia Commons.

In the earlier instance of Henry Longfellow, my sense is that Ticknor took to the young man from Maine on the spot, impressed straightaway by his vibrant mind and infectious ambition. To that, he was handsome, nicely dressed, respectful of his elders, articulate, courteous to a fault, had a solid pedigree, carried excellent references, and, like himself, had not graduated from Harvard, but from a rural New England college far removed from the frenetic pace of Boston and Cambridge. Both men, too, were committed Unitarians—Henry’s father was a Harvard classmate of the Rev. William

Ellery Channing,⁷ a close Ticknor acquaintance—and both were ardent bibliophiles who would acquire books for themselves, and the programs they taught. Ticknor explained to Henry when they first met the kind of work he should pursue in Europe, and urged him, above all else, to spend quality time in Germany, then at the forefront of interdisciplinary theories of education, not just France, Spain, and Italy. Ticknor also stressed that he concentrate just as heavily on the literatures of the countries he would be visiting, a prescient strategy that would contribute mightily to the cosmopolitan vision Longfellow embraced in the years ahead, drawing generously from other national traditions and metrical models for his own work, which he hoped, in the process, would help shape a literary voice that was distinctively American⁸—and distinctively his own.

“I dined to-day with Mr. Ticknor,” Henry informed his mother with obvious jubilation immediately after leaving the professor’s house, judging his host to have been “exceedingly kind and affable” (Hilen, 1966-1982, vol 1, pp. 151–152). Ticknor provided introductory letters to the historian Johann Gottfried Eichhorn, who was teaching at Göttingen, the British poet Robert Southey, and Henry’s boyhood idol, the American author Washington Irving (1783-1859), who was living in Madrid while completing a biography of Christopher Columbus, along with other important people “useless” for him “to enumerate,” especially since he was in a rush to board a coach for Northampton in Western Massachusetts to meet with George Bancroft and Joseph Cogswell, founders of the Round Hill School, who also would urge study at Göttingen. Being allowed as a teenager to go off on his own to Europe required considerable trust, and while Henry had certainly earned the confidence of his parents, he was admonished by them to be cautious. “I will not say how much we miss your elastic step, your cheerful voice, your melodious flute, but will say farewell, my dear son, may God

⁷ Longfellow dedicated his 1842 collection, *Poems on Slavery*, to this charismatic minister in five stanzas of verse, the first concluding with the line “Servant of God! Well done!”

⁸ An honors oration Longfellow gave at his Bowdoin commencement in 1825 entitled “Our Native Writers” called for the development of a national literature that would be “peculiar to us, and to the land in which we live.” See Basbanes (2020, p. 26).

be with and prosper you,” Zilpah Longfellow wrote as her son was about to set sail for France. “May you be successful in your pursuit of knowledge; may you hold fast your integrity, and retain that purity of heart which is so endearing and interesting to friends. I feel as if you were going into a thousand perils. You must be very watchful and guard against every temptation.”⁹ Stephen Longfellow was more direct in his bon-voyage letter. “It is impossible, with all my solicitude, to give you all the instructions which your youth and inexperience require, but permit me to conjure you to remember the great objects of your pursuit. Keep them constantly in view, and let not the solicitations of pleasure, nor the allurements of vice lead you from the path of virtue. Your tour is one for improvement rather than pleasure and you must make every exertion to cultivate and improve your mind.”¹⁰

3. Longfellow’s Spanish Epiphany

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In country after country, Henry would be successful in these pursuits, but there was so much more. As I discuss in the chapter I call “Awakening” in *Cross of Snow* (2020), my biography of Longfellow, the three-year trip Henry made unaccompanied abroad as a teenager fresh out of college was fundamental to everything of consequence that followed. The people he met, the relationships he made, the remarkable landmarks brimming with historical and cultural resonances he so hungrily absorbed, enriched a keen and inquisitive mind. Henry’s plan of independent study had been loosely formulated with his father, with a focus, at first, on mastering French, Spanish, and Italian, as the Bowdoin commission had stipulated. But George Ticknor had stressed the importance of German, too, so priorities were modified on the fly, though as events developed, not without complications.

⁹ ZL to HWL, May 7, 1826; HL, bMS Am 1340.2 (3520).

¹⁰ SL to HWL, undated; HL, bMS Am 1340.2 (3516).

From France, where he spent seven months, Henry proceeded to Spain, arriving in Madrid on March 10, 1827, his letters from George Ticknor and Charles Davies providing entrée to the diplomatic community, where he was welcomed warmly by a tight-knit group of Americans, who, to a person, grew very fond of him. The head of the American legation, Alexander Hill Everett (1792-1847), a Harvard graduate and member of a prominent Boston family, was a distinguished man of letters in his own right, appointed minister to Spain in 1825 by John Quincy Adams; he was also the older brother of Edward Everett (1794-1865), orator, educator, diplomat, governor, senator, secretary of state, and well known to Ticknor, having sailed to Europe with him in 1815 to study together at Göttingen. In the years that followed, as owner and editor of *The North American Review*, Alexander Everett became a champion of Henry's work. The very first letter Henry received from Minister Everett was delivered by courier within days of their introduction. It was brief and to the point: "I have a box at the opera for tonight," and Henry was welcome, if so "disposed," to come along.¹¹ Lucretia Orne Peabody Everett, Minister Everett's elegant wife, wrote Mrs. Davies in Maine to tell her "how much satisfaction we felt at the introduction of your young friend Mr. Longfellow." She noted approvingly how "his countenance is itself a letter of recommendation," and that "we are much pleased with this addition to our little American circle." She concluded with words that proved prophetic—that the polished young traveler "bids fair to be a great light in your State, if you can keep him there" (S. Longfellow, 1886, vol. 1, p. 117). Especially fortuitous was the opportunity Henry had to become closely acquainted with Washington Irving, who was doing double duty as a diplomatic attaché to Minister Everett while working on his Columbus biography. Henry would assert years later that Irving had written what, for him, was his "first" book, and by that he meant "the one book among all others which in early youth first fascinates the imagination, and at once excites and satisfies the desires of his mind." That first book was *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent* (1820) by Washington Irving; no surprise that

¹¹ Alexander Everett to HWL, undated ["1827" added in pencil]: HL, bMS Am 1340.2 (1879).

Henry's first major prose book, *Outre-Mer, a pilgrimage beyond the sea* (1835), which drew heavily on his experiences in Spain, was modeled on Irving's *Sketch Book* (H. Longfellow, 1859, p. 393).

Irving was living at that time in the home of yet another close friend and contact of George Ticknor, Obadiah Rich (1777-1850), an expatriate bookseller and foreign service officer from Massachusetts who would be credited by the bibliographer Nicholas Trübner with having single-handedly created the field of Spanish Americana in many stateside libraries. Rich's day job in Madrid was consul and archivist for Minister Everett, but he was also scouting and acquiring books on a massive scale for a number of affluent American collectors, most spectacularly the private libraries of James Lenox in New York, whose fabulous holdings became the core collection of the New York Public Library, and John Carter Brown in Providence, Rhode Island, whose treasures are now housed in a stand-alone rare-books library bearing his name at Brown University, and containing the world's largest collection of books printed in Spanish America prior to 1820, some seven thousand titles from presses in, principally, Mexico, Peru, Central America, Argentina, and Chile.

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Equally substantial were Rich's efforts to support ongoing scholarship, not just for his houseguest Washington Irving, but even more prolifically for the Boston historian and Beacon Hill neighbor of George Ticknor, William Hickling Prescott (1796-1859), "the foremost authority on the Spanish empire in nineteenth-century America and, arguably, the world" (Jaksić, 2016, p. 214). Denied functional use of his eyes in the aftermath of a freak accident, Prescott relied for source material on books provided to him by agents in Europe,¹² and read aloud to him by hired helpers; to write, he relied on dictation and a primitive writing machine known as a noctograph. His first book, *History of the Reign of Ferdinand and Isabella, the Catholic* (1836), was internationally acclaimed upon publication to be a masterpiece of historical interpretation. For

¹² For acquiring books for William Prescott, see Humphreys (1959, pp. 1-19).

providing him with the necessary research materials, he thanked “above all,” Obadiah Rich, “a gentleman whose extensive bibliographical knowledge and unwearied researches during a long residence in the Peninsula have been liberally employed for the benefit both of his own country and of England” (Prescott, 1838, vol. 1, pp. vi-vii). In personal letters itemizing his want lists, Prescott flattered Rich variously as being “a prince of Genii in the Bibliopolical way,” and “a sort of godfather” to his books (Wolcott, 1925, pp. 3, 8).

George Ticknor was a grateful beneficiary of Rich’s expertise as well, as he made clear in his preface to *History of Spanish Literature*, singling out for special mention the bookseller “to whose personal regard I owe hardly less than I do to his extraordinary knowledge of rare and curious books, and his extraordinary success in collecting them.” Working with Ticknor “for many years,” Rich had made “valuable contributions of books and manuscripts collected in Spain, England, and France for my library,” a library of 3,907 volumes of Spanish and Portuguese literature upon which the intellectual foundation of his monumental history had been built (Ticknor, 1849, vol. 1, pp. vii-ix). When bequeathed in 1871 to the Boston Public Library, the collection was recognized as unsurpassed in its field.

Like George Ticknor before him, Henry was on the constant lookout in Europe for books to acquire for his college. His agreement with Bowdoin for the newly established professorship was that, as a collateral duty, he would also serve as the college librarian, an assignment he handled brilliantly, transforming, according to one historical overview, “an unused repository of Scripture to a more functional one that reflected in its collection contemporary European culture and the trend in American education toward the study of modern languages and literatures” (Michener, 1973, p. 215). He would repeat Ticknor’s pattern of judicious book-hunting a decade later while preparing to take over the Smith professorship, and a good deal of the hands-on skills

he applied in the antiquarian field were passed on to him in Spain by Obadiah Rich. Writing to his father from Italy on January 13, 1828, with a breakdown of his total expenditures to date, Henry offered this:

With regard to the purchase of Spanish Books for the College Library—I report that I had not been authorized to purchase such as were wanted at Madrid. I could have purchased thousands of them very cheap—and under the direction of Mr. Rich our consul—who is very deeply read in Spanish Literature, could have made a very valuable selection. But at present I know of no one at Madrid who could attend to the purchase of books—and unless some one attends to it personally, the business will be badly done. Mr. Rich has left Madrid and established himself in London: but I presume he has agents in Madrid. As he is very extensively engaged in the sale of Spanish books, he would be the best person to apply to upon this subject. I know not the comparative value of Spanish books in Paris—but I should always prefer Spanish editions on account of the greater correctness of the text. I will take pains to inform myself upon the subject—and should any order be sent me, will attend to it with the greatest pleasure—as there is nothing I am so fond of in the way of business as buying books. (Hilen, 1966-1982, vol. 1, p. 229)¹³

Equally satisfying was the decidedly unconventional arrangement Henry had made at this time to learn and master the Spanish language, choosing, as his tutor, a beautiful young woman named Florencia González, the daughter of his landlord, and who, all evidence suggests, was the first great love of his life and the probable reason that he lingered, to his father's mounting frustration, in Spain for a full eight months before finally setting off for his next stop, Italy.

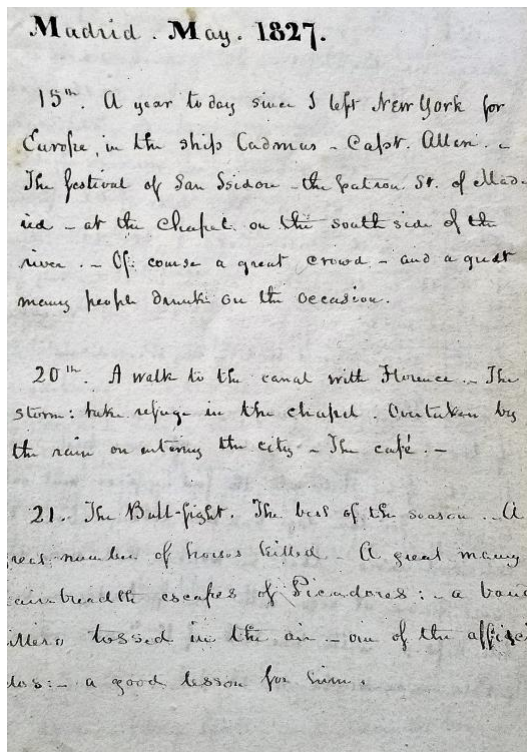
One of the first people Henry had met in Spain was Alexander Slidell, an American naval officer from New York then on leave in Madrid helping Washington Irving research his Columbus biography, and about to return to the United States. In the years ahead, he would be known as Alexander Slidell Mackenzie, his surname legally expanded to accommodate the wishes of a bachelor uncle on his mother's side eager to preserve the family patronymic in return for a handsome inheritance. Four years older than Henry, Lieutenant Slidell was staying in a private home in the heart of the capital, at the foot of the Calle de la Montera. Henry arranged to board in the same rooms himself; but since the flat would not be available for a fortnight, he joined Slidell

¹³ For more on Obadiah Rich as expatriate bookseller and the development of Spanish collections in the United States, see Knepper (1955). For more on Ticknor's bequest to the Boston Public Library, see Whitney (1879).

on a trip through the countryside, visiting Segovia, San Ildefonso, and the Escorial. The two Americans traveled through the mountains on horseback, by foot, in one instance aboard “a huge covered wagon drawn by six mules” (Hilen, 1966-1982, vol. 1, p. 224). Once back in Madrid, Slidell said his goodbyes, his time in Spain at an end; Irving’s book, *A history of the life and voyages of Christopher Columbus*, would appear the following year, and include a generous acknowledgment to Slidell. Henry, meanwhile, found the accommodations very much to his liking. “The family with whom I reside is a very kind and attentive one,” he wrote reassuringly to his mother. “It consists of an elderly gentleman and lady, with their daughter, a young lady about eighteen, who has already become quite a sister to me. Under her attentions I hope to find the acquisition of the Spanish a delightful task.” He described the young woman further as “one of the sweetest-tempered little girls that I have ever met with. The grace of the Spanish women and the beauty of their language makes her conversation quite fascinating. I could not receive greater kindness than I receive at the hands of this good family. I shall feel the most sincere regret in bidding them farewell” (Hilen, 1966-1982, vol. 1, p. 222). Writing a joint letter to his sisters Anne, Ellen, and Elizabeth, Henry identified the young woman as “Florence.”

Florencia González is mentioned cryptically several times in Henry’s Spanish diary, which is more fragmentary than his later European journals, this one serving basically as field notes for *Outre-Mer*. Part of his vagueness, it is safe to conclude, was a coy smokescreen for what was, as mentioned above, his first romantic relationship of any consequence. Henry himself never acknowledged this—one of the hallmarks of his life was the utter discretion he applied to all of his relationships, women in particular, who he held in the highest esteem—and it is only by examination of other surviving documents, combined with the steadfastness he exercised in extending, for as long as he possibly could, his stay in Spain, that there is any clarity on the matter. The ramifications of this going forward, and a comparable romantic scenario that followed in Italy, resulted in an abbreviated stay in Germany, which, in turn, became

an issue to be addressed a decade down the road when George Ticknor tapped him to be his successor at Harvard. Henry and his father exchanged a number of letters discussing the former's ever-changing plans. "Which is the most important for me as a scholar, the German language or the Italian," Henry had written from France. "All those who have spoken to me upon the subject in America told me by all means to become a German scholar—and that no student ever regretted a year's residence at Göttingen" (Hilen, 1966-1982, vol. 1, p. 187). But that was before he had set eyes on Spain—and Spain, it developed, quickly became a heaven on earth for the theretofore sheltered young man from Down East Maine.



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Image 4

From Longfellow's "Journal in Spain": at left, in Madrid, on the first anniversary of his departure from the United States; at right, a self-portrait on the road from Málaga to Granada, November 1827, with a quote from Lord Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* underneath. Houghton Library, Longfellow Papers, MS Am 1349 (172).

Image 5

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Henry's first journal entry in Spain, under the heading "Madrid," is dated May 15, 1827: "A year today since I left New York for Europe, in the ship *Cadmus*." He described attending a religious festival that night "at the chapel on the south side of the river." The next entry has him taking a "walk to the canal with Florence" during a storm and taking refuge with her in a chapel, only to be "overtaken by the rain" once again when "entering the city" before ending up finally in a café. On May 28 they were in the village of Villanueva del Pardillo, in the Guadarrama Mountains, and still there nine days later, preparing for their return to Madrid the following morning. "Thus I have seen a little of Spanish rural life and am much delighted with it," Henry summarized of the past week: "I like to see things in reality—not in paintings—to study men—not books."¹⁴

The arrival of funds from home occasioned a letter of gratitude to his father, "for although I live with all decent economy, yet I must confess that European economy would be extravagance in New England, and in residing in Madrid my expenses would have been greater than they would have been in a Provincial town. But unfortunately it is only in New and Old Castille, that the language is spoken with purity, and if I had gone to Barcelona or Valencia I should have learnt a jargon fit for the tower of Babel, and not the language of Cervantes" (Hilen, 1966-1982, vol. 1, p. 235). Glossed over in this letter to his father was the fact that the "language of Cervantes" was being taught to him by the lovely Florencia, a young woman we know something about, not through anything of substance Henry wrote, but from Alexander Slidell Mackenzie, who had introduced Longfellow to the González family, and who, it turned out, left Spain enchanted with the memory of Florencia, so much so that he rhapsodized about her at length in a memoir he wrote of the time he spent assisting Washington Irving in Madrid.

¹⁴ HWL Journal, June 6, 1827; HL, Longfellow Papers, MS Am 1340 (172).

Issued anonymously in 1831, *A year in Spain by a young American*, included a chapter devoted to traveling with a “young countryman, who had come to Spain in search of instruction”—not named, but indisputably Henry Wadsworth Longfellow—who had accompanied him on an overland trip through Old and New Castille. “He was just from college, full of all the ardent feeling excited by classical pursuits, with health unbroken, hope that was a stranger to disappointment, curiosity which had never yet been fed to satiety. When he had sunny locks, a fresh complexion, and a clear blue eye, all indications of a joyous temperament” (Mackenzie, vol. 1, 1831, p. 355). Elsewhere, Slidell Mackenzie recalled how he had come to live at 16 Calle de la Montera—and he gave the precise address—and how he was captured, instantly, by “Doña Florencia,” the landlord’s daughter, “a great beauty” who he described in glowing terms for a page and a half of text. “She had a mantilla of lace, pinned to her hair and falling gracefully about her shoulders, and a basquina of black silk, trimmed with cords and tassels, and loaded at the bottom with lead, to make it fit closely, and show a shape which was really a fine one.” To her arresting beauty was added a piercing intellect, a mellifluous voice, and an artistic temperament. When Slidell Mackenzie first laid eyes on her, she was “opening and shutting her fan with vivacity, and stopped short in the midst of a little song, a great favorite in Andalusia,” which he proceeded to quote, in Spanish (Mackenzie, 1831, vol. 1, p. 190-192).

That Slidell Mackenzie was seriously smitten by the woman became doubly evident in a series of letters he wrote to Henry, with whom he corresponded periodically over the next twenty years. Their friendship was not excessively close, but close enough that Longfellow would support him in 1842 when, as captain of the USS *Somers*, an armed brig used to train prospective naval officers, Commander Slidell Mackenzie ordered three midshipmen hanged at sea on charges of fomenting a mutiny while sailing off the coast of West Africa. Once returned to New York, a court martial on charges of murder, oppression, illegal punishment, and conduct unbecoming a naval officer was ordered, the situation made especially divisive since the alleged ringleader

was the son of U.S. Secretary of War John C. Spencer.¹⁵ Slidell Mackenzie was acquitted on all charges, though tensions remained high on both sides of the issue. But that was all in the future. In his early letters to Henry, Slidell Mackenzie exchanged the usual pleasantries, but there was always a subtext—he craved for details on Florencia. The first was written after Henry had left Spain and was getting settled in Italy. He began with a chatty synopsis reminding him of their trip together, recalling “the mules, and the mountains, the adventures of the snow-bank, the dread of robbers and the weary ride to Madrid, our room and balcony overlooking the Puerta del Sol”—but “above all” pleasures, he added, “the watchful eye of Florencia, best and greatest of her sex.”¹⁶ Eight months later, Slidell Mackenzie responded to news that Henry had been ill in Rome. “I hope you were not without some kind nurse of the more gentle sex, some Florencia to smooth your pillow or qualify the bitter doses of the doctor. Tell me if in all your wanderings you have anywhere met with a damsel whether of high or low degree so gentle, so kind, so affectionately amiable as that Florencia?” As for himself, Slidell Mackenzie added, “if chance should ever throw in my way one like her in character, and otherwise suitable in country and condition,” he would “buckle to” and “pop the question at her.”¹⁷ Getting no direct response to either of these comments, Slidell Mackenzie tried another tack, after having briefly met with Henry in New York, where the subject apparently did come up, but was devoid of the detail he would have liked.

“My Dear Don Enrique,” he began teasingly. “I like to call you by that old Madrid name of yours that used to sound so sweet from the lips of Florencia. How long is it since you have heard from our amiable Andalusian? I saw so little of you here in September that I had no time to hear at all about her.”¹⁸ In his reply, Henry shared a

¹⁵ Slidell Mackenzie was acquitted but there were reverberations, notably establishment in 1845 of the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, MD, to train midshipmen. The incident also gave Herman Melville, whose cousin was first officer on the *Somers*, the idea for the novella *Billy Budd*. See Basbanes (2020), pp. 246-252.

¹⁶ Alexander Slidell Mackenzie (ASM) to HWL, June 30, 1828; HL, bMS Am 1340.2 (3661).

¹⁷ ASM to HWL, Feb. 15, 1829 (Ibid).

¹⁸ ASM to HWL, Nov. 17, 1829 (Ibid).

few stories about several of the other people they both knew in Madrid, but still offered nothing about the young woman, which brought yet another prodding, this one written from the USS *Brandywine*, and again there was silence from Henry on the matter. “You say little of Florencia in your letters, and I did not have time to ask you much about her. You told me I believe that she had been near marrying a man going to Cuba. I am sorry she did not do so; for independent of the great chance I should then have had of seeing her again, I hold that an indifferent husband is better than no husband at all. If she does not marry she will run a great risk of becoming either a nun or a prostitute, two evils between which there is little choice.”¹⁹ That is the last we hear about Florencia in Slidell Mackenzie’s correspondence, the message apparently getting through that his queries were going nowhere—except that there was some contact between Henry and his Spanish tutor in the years ahead that he kept entirely to himself.

Among the thousands of letters Henry received and now in the Harvard collections, one, from Don Valentin González, responds cordially to an introduction Henry had sent his former landlord on behalf of a friend who was planning to travel through Madrid. In a brief addendum at the end is a warm note from Florencia, in Spanish, polite and discreet, but redolent with nuance nonetheless. The letter was translated from the Spanish for me by Iván Jakšić, who I contacted by email in Santiago, Chile, where he directs Stanford University’s Bing Overseas Studies Program. Professor Jakšić had quoted sparingly from the Florencia González addendum in *The Hispanic world and American intellectual life, 1820-1880* (2007), and offered to translate it in its entirety for me; happily, I had a photo of the original at hand to send him. He noted that Florencia also corresponded with Henry through a mutual friend in Spain, José Cortés y Sesti, who later—with Henry’s help—spent some time in the United States hoping to find a career in teaching, even staying with him for a period in Brunswick before returning to Spain.

¹⁹ ASM to HWL, Feb. 20, 1830 (Ibid).

“Florescia’s *modus operandi* was to piggy-back on the letters by others,” Professor Jakšić explained. “Cortés, in particular, would paraphrase what she said and, if I recall correctly, let her write PSs at the end. I looked for Cortés’s records all over Spain and never found out about his whereabouts. He must have kept some very important letters from Longfellow.” The Houghton Library has fifty letters Cortés y Sesti wrote to Longfellow, all of them in Spanish; there are none there that Henry sent to him. Professor Jakšić translated excerpts from several of Florescia’s postscripts to the Cortés y Sesti letters in his monograph, one of which begins “My dear Enrique,” then inquires with great concern about his health, concluding that “you must relieve me of this anxiety.” In another, Cortés passed on a comment Florescia made when asked directly why she had not yet married anyone. “I cannot love anyone as much as Enrique,” she replied (Jakšić, 2007, pp. 96-97). Little is known of her in the years that followed, or whether she ever did marry or move to Cuba. Florescia’s addendum to her father’s letter to Henry is gracious, written, she began, “with pleasure,” and to reaffirm “the true friendship I feel for you. I will never forget you no matter how many years pass. I will keep this friendship as strong as the first day, whether you reciprocate it or not, and with the same keenness as when I had the honor to meet you. I will always appreciate you.” She added how she had been working on improving her singing. “If we ever have the joy of meeting again you will enjoy my useless musical skills. But if this hope turns out to be in vain, we will have patience and accept the will of God regarding our fate.”²⁰

²⁰ Florescia González, addendum to letter from Valentin González to HWL, July 4, 1831; HL, bMS AM 1340.2 (2298). This passage has kindly been translated into English by Professor Jakšić for this study.

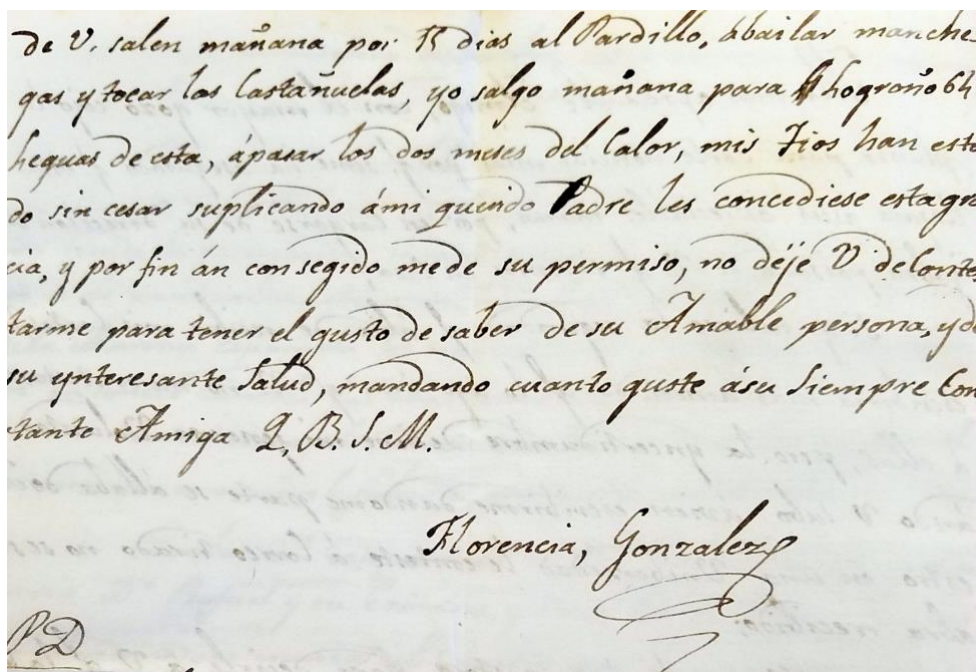


Image 6. Detail of July 4, 1831 letter to Longfellow with addendum by Florencia González. Houghton Library, Longfellow Papers, bMS Am 1340.2 (2298).

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When Henry finally left Spain after much delay, he did so with deep sadness. “I am traveling through Italy without any enthusiasm, and with just curiosity enough to keep me awake,” he wrote to his mother on January 23, 1828. “I feel no excitement—nothing of that romantic feeling which everybody else has, or pretends to have. The fact is, I am homesick for Spain. I want to go back there again. The recollection of it completely ruins Italy for me” (Hilen, 1966-1982, vol. 1, p. 253). Zilpah Longfellow had left the management of her son’s foreign adventure to her husband, but had some questions all the same about what had kept Henry in Spain far longer than originally intended. “I have felt some curiosity to know how you parted from your Spanish friends with whom you lived, the mother and the daughter, and her friend who resembled your sister Anne, you have not even told us whether you continued to be as much pleased with them, on a longer acquaintance,” she wrote after he had arrived in Italy.²¹ Henry, for his part, left that question unanswered, in his surviving correspondence, at least.

²¹ ZL to HWL, April 12, 1828; HL, bMS Am 1340.2 (3520).

Shortly after arriving in Rome, Longfellow found lodgings with another family, and wound up staying far longer there than originally planned as well, this time for a full year, the apparent reason once again a warm relationship that developed with another vivacious young woman, Giulia Persiani, who he would acknowledge years later to have been his *antiqua flamma*—his “old flame” (Hilen, 1966-1982, vol. 2, p. 452). Persuading him to leave Rome for Germany thus became yet another task for his father, one that took on particular urgency when Henry learned that his having a full professorship at Bowdoin was being imperiled by his apparent dalliance, a development he addressed forcefully with the administration—and won—but had jolted him nonetheless into moving along. Assisted yet again with letters of reference from Ticknor, Henry arrived, finally, in Göttingen in the spring of 1829, and took up formal studies at the university, though his stay was cut drastically short by the need to return home. He assumed his new position at Bowdoin as Professor Longfellow that September, and wasted no time establishing himself, engaging brilliantly with his students, earning the respect of his colleagues, all the while transforming the library into a modern, functional resource, and writing for publication on a wide variety of subjects. On the domestic front, he married, in 1831, the daughter of a Portland judge, Mary Storer Potter, described by acquaintances as “a gentle and affectionate” young woman with a “bright and attentive mind.” (S. Longfellow, 1886, vol. 1, pp. 187-188).

4. Hispanist and Cosmopolite

Between 1830 and 1835, Henry wrote numerous articles for the *North American Review* and *New-England Monthly*, and published ten books, nine of them intended for the study of the French, Italian, and Spanish languages. Of these, what qualifies as his first literary work to appear between hard covers was his translation of *Coplas por la muerte de su padre* by Jorge Manrique (c. 1440-1479), medieval Spain’s preeminent poet, earning in the process recognition as an American Hispanist of the first order—

and on this point we have no less an authority than George Ticknor to cite. Writing to Henry on Dec. 6, 1833, Ticknor acknowledged having received several months earlier the first part of *Outre-Mer*, which had appeared in print initially that summer as a pamphlet; the complete hardcover edition would be published in two volumes in 1835. Ticknor apologized for not extending his thanks earlier, having “hoped at different times to see you and make them in person,” but his principal reason for writing at this time, he continued, was to express special admiration for “your Translations from the Spanish”—the just-being-released *Coplas de Don Jorge Manrique* (1833)—which had arrived in his hands a few days earlier. Ticknor thereupon declared Henry’s version to be “more faithful and valuable than either [John] Boring, [John Gibson] Lockhart, or Lord Holland, to say nothing of [Thomas] Rodd and the earlier versifiers which do not deserve to be, in any way, compared with them.” He further praised it for being “full of moral tenderness,” and for opening “a fine and lovely vein of rich ore, little known to the world, but which runs deeply in the mysteries of human life,” and urged him to produce more translations, and more “beautiful sketches” along these lines.²²

This was heady praise, indeed, for a young scholar several months shy of his twenty-sixth birthday, and Ticknor’s opinion did not waver. Sixteen years later, in the acknowledgements of his magisterial *History of Spanish Literature*, he noted that he was “indebted to the beautiful version of Mr. Longfellow” for his extensive chapter on the Coplas of Manrique, and in a footnote to the chapter itself, stressed again that the quoted stanzas were from “Mr. H. W. Longfellow’s beautiful translation” (Ticknor, 1849, vol 1, pp. 18, 372). As for the poem itself, Ticknor declared this:

No earlier poem in the Spanish language, if we except, perhaps, some of the early ballads, is to be compared with the Coplas of Manrique for depth and truth of feeling; and few of any subsequent period have reached the beauty or power of its best portions. Its versification, too, is excellent; free and flowing, with occasionally an antique air and turn, that are true to the character of the age that produced it, and its picturesqueness and effect. But its great charm is to be sought in a beautiful simplicity, which, belonging to no age, is the seal of genius in all. (Ticknor, 1849, vol. 1, p. 373)

²² GT to HWL, Dec. 6, 1833; HL, bMS Am 1340.2 (5546).

While putatively a translation of a poignant fifteenth-century ode to a dead father, Longfellow's edition of *Coplas de Don Jorge Manrique* was, in fact, much more than that. The title poem occupied forty-six pages of the eighty-nine-page book, but there were examples from four other Spanish writers of the period translated there by him as well, each classified by Longfellow as representing the "moral and devotional poetry of Spain," a genre he discussed at length in a detailed introductory essay that had appeared first in the April 1832 issue of the *North American Review*. Included in the 1833 hardcover edition were two sonnets by Lope de Vega (1562-1635), "The Good Shepherd" and "Tomorrow"; two selections of Francisco de Aldana (1537-1578), "The Native Land on High" and "The Image of the Deity"; two by Francisco de Medrano (c. 1570-c. 1607), "Nature and Art" and "The Two Harvests"; and one anonymous poem, "To a Brook." The over-riding goal of "this little work," Longfellow wrote in the preface, was "to place in the hands of the lovers of Spanish literature the most beautiful moral poem of that language." That poem, he declared, "is a model of its kind. Its conception is solemn and beautiful; and in accordance with it, the style moves on—calm, dignified and majestic" (H. Longfellow, 1833, pp. v-vi).

Long before there were "multi-culturalists," there were "cosmopolites," people who considered themselves citizens of the world, a designation that came to characterize Henry's own world view. In one of his letters from Italy, he had asked his sisters if they were studying French or Spanish. "If not, you should lose no time in commencing, for I assure you that, by every language you learn, a new world is opened before you. It is like being born again; and new ideas break upon the mind with all the freshness and delight with which we may suppose the first dawn of intellect to be accompanied" (Hilen, 1966-1982, vol. 1, p. 280). Yet another of his writing projects in Brunswick was a memoir of his recent experiences abroad, tinkering at first with an experimental novel he called *The Schoolmaster*. Though never published in book form, portions made their way into *Outre-Mer*, while others appeared unsigned in *The New-*

England Journal, to which he was contributing regularly, including several of his translations from the Spanish.²³ In one of the magazine installments, the unnamed narrator described how his recent travels had helped shape his life:

A restless spirit prompted me to visit foreign countries. I said with the Cosmopolite, "The world is a kind of book, in which he, who has seen his own country only, has read but one page." Guided by this feeling I became a traveler. I have traversed France on foot; smoked my pipe in a Flemish inn; floated through Holland in a *Trekschuit*; trimmed the midnight lamp in a German University; wandered and mused amid the classic scenes of Italy; and danced to the gay guitar and merry Castanet on the borders of the blue Guadalquivir. (*The New-England Magazine*, July 1831)

Unstated in *The Schoolmaster*, or later even in *Outre-Mer*, was how deeply Henry yearned to get back into the mainstream, and while this longing in no way interfered with the quality of his work, he made numerous attempts to find an exit strategy, several proposing creative arrangements with other institutions, all of them coming up empty.²⁴ "I cannot believe that all my aspirations are to terminate in the drudgery of a situation which gives me no opportunity to distinguish myself," he complained to one of his sisters, "and in point of worldly gain, does not even pay me for my labor. Besides, one loses ground so fast in these out of the way places: the mind has no stimulus to exertion—grows sluggish in its movements and narrow in its sphere—and that's the end of a man" (Hilen, 1966-1982, vol. 1, p. 383). Once again, and in apparent desperation, he solicited help from George Ticknor, who supplied a letter of reference for a position he was seeking in New York. Here is the substance of what Ticknor wrote on his behalf:

Soon after he was graduated at Brunswick he became known to me by an interest, quite remarkable at that age, and still more so, perhaps, from the circumstances in which he was placed; an interest I mean, in the early Provençal literature and in the literature of Spain and Italy. This interest, in no length of time, led him to the continent of Europe. He passed time in France and still more in Italy and in Spain, and his knowledge of the language and literature of each of these countries, has, for several years past, seemed to me quite extraordinary. He writes and speaks Spanish with a degree of fluency and exactness, which I have known in no other American born of parents speaking English as their vernacular. His knowledge of Spanish

²³ The October 1832 issue of *The New-England Magazine* includes an English translation of a sonnet, "Art and Nature," identified as being "from the Spanish of Francisco de Medrano," the translator not credited there, but attributed to Longfellow "without question" in an appendix for previously "unacknowledged and uncollected translations" in Scudder (1896, p. 652). The same poem appears on p. 85 of the *Coplas de Manrique* (1833).

²⁴ For more on the efforts HWL made to find a new teaching position, see Basbanes (2020, pp. 60-64).

literature is extensive and to be relied upon, and several publications he has made on the subject have been accomplished with poetical translations of much spirit and fidelity. Besides this, he is, for his years, an accomplished general scholar, particularly in modern literature; and full of activity and eagerness in the pursuit of knowledge. His general appearance, address and manners are very prepossessing; his temper amiable, and his character without blemish from his earliest years to the present time. (George Ticknor open letter dated June 18, 1834; HL bMS 1340.2 [1035]; see also Jaksic [2007, p.77])

A few months after Ticknor wrote that letter, everything changed, not just for Longfellow, but also for Ticknor, who was forty-three years old at the time, and presumably at the height of his career at Harvard. The wrenching death from a lingering illness on August 4, 1834, of his five-year-old son, George Haven Ticknor, had left him devastated, prompting him to take an early retirement. “While my little boy lived, I looked only to the future, and considered him only as a bright hope, that was growing brighter every day,” he explained to Charles Davies in Portland. “But now that he is gone I look at the past and the present, and, yielding all the future, in a spirit of resignation, to God, I feel the immediate loss, the pressing want of something that was so dear to me, and that was associated, without my knowing it, to everything around and within me” (Hillard, 1876, vol. 1, p. 398). Aside from the immense personal loss, clinching the decision was Ticknor’s continued exasperation with Harvard’s reluctance to fully embrace the European models he had been advancing, which were decades ahead of their time—problems Henry also would experience during his tenure at Harvard. But one man’s tragedy had become another’s deliverance, and Ticknor knew precisely the person to step in and replace him as Smith Professor. “I have substantially resigned my place at Cambridge, and Longfellow is substantially appointed to fill it,” he informed Davies. “I say *substantially*, because he is to pass a year or more in Germany and the North of Europe, and I am to continue in the place till he returns, which will be in a year from next Commencement or thereabouts” (Hillard, vol. 1, 1876, pp. 399-400). There was just one catch—essentially the same one that had been presented to Henry a decade earlier at Bowdoin—that he returned to Europe,

only this time to secure “a more perfect attainment of the German,” as spelled out by Harvard President Josiah Quincy in offering him the position (Hilen, 1966-1982, vol. 1, p. 459).

The terms were readily accepted, and plans were made for another arduous trip, this time to master German, Swedish, Danish, Finnish, Dutch, and Old Icelandic, adding to the French, Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese he had acquired earlier. Henry was also authorized by Harvard to purchase books for the courses he would be teaching, and given a stipend of two thousand dollars, which he quickly exhausted. At one point he expressed concern to Ticknor that he had heard nothing about a shipment he sent to Cambridge several months earlier, and was anxious for some validation of the judgment he was showing in his choice of titles. “I am sorry you feel disappointed at hearing nothing about your purchase of books for the college,” Ticknor replied, “but, if you were as much used to the management of things there as I am, you would not even be surprised. The truth is, the sum that was given to you was considered as given to your discretion entirely; and nobody will undertake to pronounce a judgement upon the result of your purchases. Indeed, who knows whether you have chosen well in Swedish, Danish, in Dutch, but yourself, or who else knows whether it be worthwhile to have Schiller or not? But of one thing, you may, I think, be sure;—I mean a kind reception when you get home and a confiding trust that what you shall do, will be right.”²⁵

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Six months into the trip, Mary Longfellow, Henry’s twenty-three-year-old wife, suffered a miscarriage and died eight weeks later in Rotterdam, leaving her husband bereft and uncertain as to whether he could carry on. George Ticknor learned the “dreadful news” while he was traveling in Germany. Henry informed Ticknor by letter a week after he arrived in Heidelberg that Mary “expired with perfect calmness and resignation,” adding that “the feebleness of my wife’s health” had precluded spending

²⁵ GT to HWL, March 29, 1836, quoted in full in Johnson (1944, pp. 19-20). Ticknor’s manuscript letters to HWL are in: HL BMS Am 1340.2 (5546).

the winter in Berlin as they had discussed (Hilen, 1966-1982, vol. 1, p. 530). Responding from Dresden on Christmas Day, Ticknor urged his colleague to “pray give yourself to constant and interesting intellectual labor,” a form of inner healing, he stressed, “that will go further than any other remedy, at least such is my experience.”²⁶ And so Henry did labor on, remaining in Heidelberg for close to six months, where he assuaged his grief, as he would recall in the autobiographical novel he wrote of this period in 1839, *Hyperion, a romance*, by having “buried himself in books, in old, dusty books” (H. Longfellow, 1839, vol. 2, p. 93). Of the twenty-four surviving letters Longfellow received from George Ticknor between 1830 and 1868 and now in Harvard’s Houghton Library, five were written when Henry was in Germany dealing with the loss of Mary, each of them newsy, informed, and laden with moral support. In the years ahead, when they were Boston-Cambridge neighbors who moved in the same social and professional circles, Ticknor’s letters were rarely more than thank-you notes or formal invitations to dinner. Longfellow’s personal journal, a multi-volume archive spanning five decades (1836-1875), which I examined and photographed in the Houghton Library, is replete with mentions of meetings with Ticknor for tea or dinner, or gatherings with him in the homes of such mutual friends as the Harvard theologian Andrews Norton, the industrialist Abbott Lawrence, and the renowned author and fellow Hispanist William Hickling Prescott. There was no longer any need for discursive letters.

²⁶ GT to HWL, Dec. 25, 1835; HL bMS Am 1340.2 (5546).



Image 7. Smith Professor Longfellow by Eastman Johnson, 1846.
Longfellow House—Washington's Headquarters Museum Collection (LONG 544).
Courtesy National Park Service.

Once established in Cambridge, Henry's first order of business had been to structure a curriculum for his classes. "I am now occupied in preparing a course of Lectures on German Literature, to be delivered next summer," he reported to George Washington Greene. "I do not write them out; but make notes and translations. I think this the best way—most decidedly. In this course something of the Danish and Swedish (the new feathers in my cap) is to be mingled" (Hilen, 1966-1982, vol. 2, p. 13). As the academic year drew to a close, he arranged to move into a gracious Georgian mansion on Brattle Street famous for having served as the command headquarters and residence of General George Washington in 1775-76 during the Siege of Boston. By the time Henry moved in it was known as Craigie House for a former owner, Andrew

Craigie, whose widow rented space to Harvard faculty members. “I have found two large and beautiful rooms in the Craigie house, and thither I go at the end of this term,” he informed his father. “I shall be entirely my own master, and have my meals by myself and at my own hours” (Hilen, 1966-1982, vol. 2, p. 30). Comfortably settled in, he advised George Ticknor that he was living “delightfully” in his new quarters, “somewhat aloof, as it were; and around me are faces and voices, which constantly remind me of you” (Hilen, 1966-1982, vol. 2, p. 42). An undergraduate already enrolled when Henry arrived in Cambridge was his younger brother, Samuel, whose closest friend at the time was Edward Everett Hale. “Samuel Longfellow and I walked together, studied together, recited together, wrote verses together, and thus, naturally, when his brother Henry came to be Professor, I came to know him,” Hale wrote. He credited Henry with invigorating the otherwise “older company” of Harvard faculty with a “sort of breezy” life. “This handsome young Smith Professor undeceived them. He was fresh from Europe. He could talk in French with Frenchmen, Italian with Italians, and German with Germans. The very clothes on his back had been made by Parisian tailors, the very tie of his neckcloth was a revelation to the sedateness of little Cambridge.” Despite his flashy appearance, the “friendly young professor” was “dead in earnest in his business,” and “pushed all traditions aside” in his approach, which Hale observed firsthand. “You could take your constitutional walk with Longfellow, you could play a game of whist in the evening with Longfellow, you could talk with him with perfect freedom on any subject, high or low, and he liked to have you. I think myself that with his arrival a new life began for the little college in that very important business of the freedom of association between the teachers and the undergraduates” (Hale, 1904, pp. 241-247).



Image 8. Professor Emeritus Longfellow, c. 1858, Black and Batchelder.
Longfellow Family Photograph Collection (LONG 27886). Courtesy National Park Service.

Before returning to the United States in 1836, Henry had gone on a tour of the Rhineland that proved both therapeutic and eventful. In Switzerland, he met Frances (Fanny) Elizabeth Appleton (1817-1861), a brilliant young woman from Beacon Hill traveling through Europe with her family; seven years later she would become his second wife. As a wedding present, Fanny's father, the textile manufacturer Nathan Appleton, bought them Craigie House, which Fanny would come to call "Craigie Castle." One of the more compelling questions I addressed in *Cross of Snow* was to consider the extent of Fanny Longfellow's impact on Henry's creative process: if there were instances, even, where she collaborated with him, if not in the composition of his verse,

but whether she influenced his choice and handling of content. For Henry, the union with Fanny represented a “Vita Nuova of happiness”²⁷ that had, at its core, a symbiotic, intellectual partnership of eighteen prolific years highlighted by the book-length narrative poems *Evangeline, a tale of Acadie* (1847), *The Song of Hiawatha* (1855), and *The Courtship of Miles Standish* (1858), and numerous stand-alone classics, notably “The Building of the Ship” (1849), “The Children’s Hour” (1860), and “Paul Revere’s Ride” (1861). With Fanny’s encouragement, Henry resigned his professorship at Harvard in 1854 to become a full-time writer, his works by then already published in more than thirty languages worldwide, Sanskrit, Hebrew, and Mandarin Chinese among them. “So many have already blessed him for the light and strength his words have given them, that I long to have him always inspired by the responsibility of his holy mission—of poet,”²⁸ Fanny wrote to Zilpah Longfellow not long after their marriage.

5. Conclusion: The Later Years

While the writing of poetry had always been Henry’s ultimate aspiration, there was a period of about ten years, beginning around the time he arrived in Europe in 1826 and continuing into his first years at Harvard, when his creative energies were focused on preparing scholarly essays, textbooks, translations, and lectures, with the composition of his own verse remaining entirely on the sidelines. Not long after *Coplas de Don Jorge Manrique* appeared in print in 1833, however, certain stirrings began to take place, creative impulses that finally surfaced in the summer of 1838 as he was putting the final touches on his autobiographical novel, *Hyperion*. He explained what happened many years later when asked by John Owen, a friend and neighbor who had published

²⁷ HWL Journal, May 10, 1844; HL, MS Am 1340 (199).

²⁸ Fanny Appleton Longfellow letter to ZL, April 3, 1844; Frances Elizabeth Appleton Longfellow Correspondence, Longfellow House—Washington’s Headquarters National Historic Site, B2-P14-111 FEAL to ZWL 1844-04-03.

his first collection of original verse, *Voices of the Night*, in 1839, and worked closely with him on the 31-volume anthology *Poems of Places* (1876-1879), to reflect on the arc of his career.²⁹ Here is the thrust of what he had to say:

I had translated *Coplas de Manrique*, my mind was haunted for a long time with gloomy thoughts. I seemed to have a perfect fear of death. With the lesson of later years came also a reaction. Came suddenly the feelings which I tried to express in the "Psalm of Life." It was written in my chamber, as I sat looking out at the morning sun, admiring the beauty of God's creations and the excellence of his plan. The poem was not printed until some months later, and even then with reluctance. (Austin, 1888, p. 354)

"A Psalm of Life" was transformative for Henry, a "breakthrough" work in today's parlance that caused a sensation from the time of its first appearance in the October 1838 issue of *The Knickerbocker* magazine. Identified there only by the initial "L," the author's full name became widely known as newspapers throughout the country began reprinting the poem. Resonating with still-familiar lines like "Life is but an empty dream," "things are not what they seem," "Footprints on the sands of time," and "Learn to labor and to wait," it was translated throughout the world and memorized by millions. Similarly motivated two months later, Henry began thinking about other poems, and found he could write both prose and poetry without sacrificing one muse for the other. A few months after *Hyperion* was published, *Voices of the Night* (1839), his first collection of poetry, was issued, with "A Psalm of Life" as the featured selection; twenty-three of his translations, including the full text of his *Coplas de Jorge Manrique*, occupied a second section of the volume. His next collection, *Ballads and Other Poems*, was issued in 1842, a year before he and Fanny were married. Henry's pen now flowed freely, though it would be another eleven years before he became a full-time man-of-letters; his successor as Smith Professor would be James Russell Lowell (1819-1891), who had been one of his students at Harvard, and was destined to become a prominent Hispanist in his own right.

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²⁹ *Poems of Places*, 31 vols (1876-1879), Boston: James R. Osgood & Co. The 4,242 selections, "mapped to every corner of the globe," according to the publisher's description, were selected and edited by Longfellow, many of them his own translations, and provided an agreeable diversion for him in his later years.

In his preface to *Jorge Coplas de Don Manrique*, Longfellow wrote that the “great art of translating well lies in the power of rendering literally the words of a foreign author, while at the same time we preserve the spirit of the original,” a refrain he would repeat periodically in the years ahead. After the devastating death of his wife Fanny in a horrific domestic accident in 1861, and finding himself for an extended period unable to write anything original, he returned to a project he had begun twenty years earlier and worked on intermittently over the years, a full translation from the Italian of the *Divine Comedy*. “In translating Dante something must be relinquished,” he wrote in his journal on May 7, 1864, as he neared the end of his epic undertaking. “Shall it be the beautiful rhyme that blossoms all along the lines, like a honeysuckle in a hedge? I fear it must be, in order to retain something more precious than rhyme, namely fidelity—truth—the life of the hedge itself.”³⁰ In his masterful handling of these two timeless classics, one, the *Coplas* from the Spanish, undertaken at the beginning of his career, the other, the *Commedia* from the Italian, completed in triumph toward the end, the twin virtues of translation, as he articulated them—fidelity to the original, and beauty of expression—are manifestly apparent.

In the sunset years of his life, Henry wrote a poem that reflected on youthful joys and aspirations, choosing as his central image a place where he had once dared dream of a bright future. Here is how it begins:

How much of my young heart, O Spain,
Went out to thee in days of yore!
What dreams romantic filled my brain,
And summoned back to life again
The Paladins of Charlemagne,
The Cid Campeador!

³⁰ HWL Journal, May 7, 1864; HL, MS Am 1340 (210).

And here, fourteen searching stanzas later, is how it concludes:

How like a ruin overgrown
With flowers that hide the rents of time,
Stands now the Past that I have known;
Castles in Spain, not built of stone
But of white summer clouds, and blown
Into this little mist of rhyme!

Published first in the May 1876 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*, the title, of course, was
“Castles in Spain.”³¹

³¹ For a fuller discussion of how the phrase resonated not only for Henry, but for Fanny Longfellow, see Basbanes (2020, pp. 187-209).

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