

LONGFELLOW'S ARTISTIC SELECTION  
OF  
AVAILABLE HISTORICAL MATERIAL  
FOR  
HIS POEM, "EVANGELINE"

AN ABSTRACT OF  
A THESIS  
PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY  
OF DANBURY STATE COLLEGE

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE  
MASTER OF SCIENCE

by  
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June 1965

Because of the many questions of junior high school students regarding the Acadians and Longfellow's writing of the poem "Evangeline," a research of the background information available to Longfellow, the true historical aspects of the British colonists' treatment of the Acadians, and the original story as told to Longfellow seemed worthwhile.

After preliminary research was completed, the topic was narrowed to exclude information not specifically dealing with Longfellow's artistic selection of available historical material.

It was surprising how much pertinent information Longfellow had at his disposal. He drew heavily on everything at hand, particularly T. C. Haliburton's An Historical and Statistical Account of Nova Scotia.

He chose a setting of peacefulness, calmness, and beauty, and he carried this mood from the beginning of the poem to the very end. In the several instances where he could have strengthened the plot, according to modern standards, by showing resentment, anger, and disloyalty, he chose to carry through with the theme of a peace loving, God-fearing, and loyal people.

His portrayal of the people of Grand Pre is accurate in detail. Their life of abundance by hard toil was one of tranquility, simplicity, and love.

"Evangeline" possesses clearness, simplicity, tunefulness, and regularity. Longfellow captured the tenderness of love, the mood of the Acadian people in their daily lives, their religion, and their loyalty to France in a masterful way.

He clouded much of the poem by leaving details to the imagination of the reader. Evangeline's wanderings from the time of her exile in Philadelphia, down the Mississippi River, through the desert, and until the final scene--all are vaguely written. Here and there is a detail to show her whereabouts. The absence of Gabriel makes him the object of loyalty and not really an active participant.

Longfellow made excellent use of the tale-within-a-tale technique which gave the story interest and color to an otherwise monotonous story.

A more comprehensive study of this topic would have been desirable; however, several pertinent references were unavailable. Haliburton was Longfellow's main source of accurate information, and he made extensive use of this source.

Much of the modern criticism of Longfellow's writing is unfavorable. He is accused of using pathetic instead of heroic themes and lacked originality and imagination. The writer of this thesis clearly focuses attention on the fact that the very qualities for which he is severely criticized today are the same qualities which made his work popular a century ago.

Although there is little dialog in the poem, the lovers' devotion to each other is constant as they quietly and gravely search for one another.

That Longfellow made an artistic selection of available material in order to create and carry to completion a mood of tenderness, love, and devotion, there can be no doubt. He dealt with the native theme of the Acadians effectively and memorably.