



## Survey Data for “What Price Poetry? Selling Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Longfellow in Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-century Britain”

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Unlike fiction, there was no set of standard prices at which poetry was sold in the U.K. in the nineteenth century. Similarly, unlike the three-decker novel or the railway novel, there was no standard length or format for published poetry. Add these details to the generally accepted truth that, as the nineteenth century wore on, poetry became progressively more difficult to publish profitably, and you have a situation in which publishers of poetry had constantly to experiment with format, title, and price in order to sell in large enough quantities to make a profit or, at least, not make a significant loss.

Pricing was a delicate and flexible matter for nineteenth-century publishers. As inflation was not a very significant factor in the British economy in the nineteenth century, and as the pound maintained its purchasing power, and actually increased it by around 25 percent between the 1860s and 1890s, very subtle differences in price might have quite a dramatic effect on the market. The difference between 3s6 and 5s was only 1s6d, or 5.25 pence in modern coinage, but for the publisher a decision between those two prices could mean the opening up or, if he didn't take the risk, the closing down of a new market for his book of poetry.

Another flexibility the publisher of poetry exercised was that of content. A novel usually has to be published in full but – unless the book contained an epic or claimed to be the collected works – books of poetry, mostly lyrical by the nineteenth century, could vary considerably in length according to the selection made.

A factor that might well play a significant part in determining the price of a book was copyright. Until relatively recently – unless the author were a Dickens and could extract a very generous deal from a publisher for each and every edition – paying the author either a lump sum, or entering into a half-profits deal, or even paying a royalty, did not usually significantly inflate the price of a book. The cost of paper, for instance was usually hugely more important in determining the cost of producing a book than whatever was paid to the author. But copyright brings with it a monopoly, and that is what tends to inflate the price of books. No legitimate competition from another publisher usually meant that the copyright-owner could ask as much as he thought he could get for a book – and hold back from issuing a cheaper edition until he felt that the market for expensive books had been fully saturated. In terms of the price of a book of poetry, it is therefore important to look also at the effect of copyright, at the effect of no copyright, and at what happened when a poet's work ceased to be in copyright.

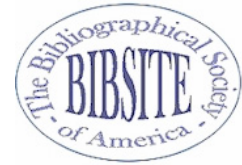


To summarize: poetry represented a curiously diverse, uncertain, tricky area for British publishing, one in which marketing experiments, particularly in pricing, were almost obligatory if a publisher were to have any chance of achieving a commercial success.

***Note on the Survey Data Table:***

The histograms included in my article are probably the best way of seeing, at a glance, the major trends in numbers of editions/impressions and in prices. However, given the scale and size of these histograms, it is not possible easily to see the absolute numbers. Even more of a problem is the fact that, due to lack of space, the histograms cannot clearly indicate the value of each and every price slot. For these two reasons a full set of tables is presented here.

There are 50 price slots from '1d' to 'above 42s' in this table, and all but three (8s, 9s6d, 13s) were occupied by at least one title at some time over the 105 year span of the study. This is some indication of the remarkable production and marketing flexibility of publishers, and a monument to perceived price elasticity in the nineteenth-century market for poetry.



The pricing of Wordsworth's, Tennyson's and Longfellow's poetry in the UK market in the nineteenth century: the frequency with which selections or collections of these poets' works occur at certain prices over the period 1801-1905.

Table 1: Listed prices for published poetry 1801-1862																																																								
	1d	2d	3d	4d	6d	8d	9d	1s	1s3d	1s6d	1s9d	2s	2s6d	3s	3s6d	4s	4s6d	5s	5s6d	6s	6s6d	7s	7s6d	8s	8s6d	9s	9s6d	10s	10s6d	11s	12s	12s6d	13s	14s	15s	16s	18s	20s	21s	24s	25s	28s	30s	31s6d	32s	35s	36s	38s6d	42s	>42s						
Wordsworth					1			1		1			1		4	1	1	7	2	5	2	1	2			1				3	1			1			1	1	4	1		1	1				1	1				1	1			
Tennyson								1		1		1						5		4		1	1			1		1	1		1								1	2		1				1						1				
Longfellow								9		2		12	8	6	5	4	2	7	2	2		1	3						3		1																									
Table 2: Listed prices for published poetry 1863-1897																																																								
	1d	2d	3d	4d	6d	8d	9d	1s	1s3d	1s6d	1s9d	2s	2s6d	3s	3s6d	4s	4s6d	5s	5s6d	6s	6s6d	7s	7s6d	8s	8s6d	9s	9s6d	10s	10s6d	11s	12s	12s6d	13s	14s	15s	16s	18s	20s	21s	24s	25s	28s	30s	31s6d	32s	35s	36s	38s6d	42s	>42s						
Wordsworth	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	10	1	7	2	5	17	3	10	1	1	20		2			4			1			1		2	3			14	1			3	1		11											1			
Tennyson							1	37		23		3	31	4	8	4	5	18	1	20		3	8		1	3			10		2	2			2	1	1		13		4			2		1	1		1	1		3	9			
Longfellow	2		3	1	7		1	60	1	21		9	13	2	40		4	10	1	5	1	1	7					1	5			1		1		1																	2	1		
Table 3: Listed prices for published poetry 1898-1900																																																								
	1d	2d	3d	4d	6d	8d	9d	1s	1s3d	1s6d	1s9d	2s	2s6d	3s	3s6d	4s	4s6d	5s	5s6d	6s	6s6d	7s	7s6d	8s	8s6d	9s	9s6d	10s	10s6d	11s	12s	12s6d	13s	14s	15s	16s	18s	20s	21s	24s	25s	28s	30s	31s6d	32s	35s	36s	38s6d	42s	>42s						
Wordsworth					1				1	1		1			2				1																																					
Tennyson				1	3			7	6	11		7	12		3		1	1		1			1					1	1			1			1																			1		
Longfellow								2		2		1	1		1																																									
Table 4: Listed prices for published poetry 1901-1905																																																								
	1d	2d	3d	4d	6d	8d	9d	1s	1s3d	1s6d	1s9d	2s	2s6d	3s	3s6d	4s	4s6d	5s	5s6d	6s	6s6d	7s	7s6d	8s	8s6d	9s	9s6d	10s	10s6d	11s	12s	12s6d	13s	14s	15s	16s	18s	20s	21s	24s	25s	28s	30s	31s6d	32s	35s	36s	38s6d	42s	>42s						
Wordsworth					3			4		8		3	7	1	3			1																																						
Tennyson			1		16			18		17		8	10	6	12	1	1	4		1			2						2																										1	
Longfellow				1	2		1	7		5	1	2	2		6																																									