WALT WHITMAN'S LITERARY REPUTATION FROM THE FIRST EDITION OF LEAVES OF GRASS IN 1855 to 1919

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

In American literature there is no more controversial book than Leaves of Grass. The literary reputation it has brought its author, Walt Whitman, beginning with the first edition of the slender volume in 1855, has never been one about which the critics have agreed. Some critics have abased and defamed Leaves of Grass, but others have formed Whitman cults and clubs to do him honor. It must be assumed that the truth lies somewhere between the two extremes, but the purpose of this paper is not that of saying which criticism is right and which is wrong about a poet whose poetic values have been a subject for debate more than three quarters of a century. The aim is to follow the American reputation of Whitman through the nineteenth century and to the centenary of his birth. Foreign criticism can not wholly be omitted, since English writers, especially, have had much to do with Whitman's reputation even in America.

Whitman's reputation will be discussed according to the three natural divisions in his life after 1855, in each of which his reputation has shown distinct changes and progress. Another period which logically belongs with the three already mentioned is the period from 1892, the year of his death, to 1919, the centennial of his birth.

The first period marks the beginning of Whitman's career.

In 1855, when he printed a queer, nondescript book announcing himself in one of the poems as Walt Whitman, an "Americano," he was known to only a small circle of friends. His second edition, which was published the next year, bore in gilt letters the words of praise the first edition had won from Emerson,"I greet you at the beginning of a great career." Whitman had caught the interest of a few men --Emerson, Thoreau, and Alcott --but almost everyone else who noticed Leaves of Grass called its "barbaric yawp" crude and indecent. Lowell turned his copy down without reading it, and Whittier threw his into the fire. A third edition in 1860 contained poems which dealt more frankly with sex than any other American book printed for general reading. If the Leaves of Grass had been unpopular before, it was doubly unpopular then.

The second period Whitman was in Washington. During the Civil War, while he was tirelessly nursing the sick and wounded soldiers, little was said of his book. Then in 1865 he was unceremoniously dismissed from his clerkship in the Department of the Interior on the charge of having in his desk a book of indecent poems of his own composition. William O'Connor and John Burroughs took up their pens to staunch the flood of adverse criticism Walt was receiving; but in spite of the "Good Gray Poet" pamphlet and Burroughs' magazine reviews, these men fought a losing battle until in 1868 William Rossetti published in England a carefully selected edition of Whitman's poems. In view of the enthusiastic praise given Whitman by

English men of letters, such as Rossetti, Swinburne, Dowden, and Tennyson, American hostility began to veer; and American periodicals made room for the poet they still did not understand.

From 1872 to 1892 Whitman lived in Camden. If the critics had ignored him with impunity through the sixties and seventies, they did not dare ignore him in the eighties. E. C. Stedman, a leading critic at the time, wrote in praise of Whitman an essay so carefully worded that offense could be taken by no one. The result of having this essay printed in the Century in 1880 was the offer of a Boston publishing house to bring out a new edition of Leaves of Grass, to which Whitman had added a few new poems from time to time. The result, however, was unfortunate and precipitated a storm of protest. Stevens, the district attorney of Boston, ordered the publishers to discontinue the printing; and for a while the poems were restricted from postal service as well as from many book stores. The approval of a popular critic like Stedman, however, and the unwavering support of numerous friends both in America and abroad had a good effect, and hostile groups in America had to modify their opinions.

The period after Whitman's death in 1892 to 1919 is the one in which Whitman's reputation as a great poet was really established.

Whitman and his Leaves of Grass will always remain inseparable. To some readers who have found the poems enigmatical,

a study of the poet's personality has made them comprehensible. If the man seemed a mystic, his poetry has amplified the belief. It seems impossible for most critics to deal impartially with him. Too many who are concerned at all adore him or curse him. It has been only a few decades since John Macy, disregarding all the prevailing precedents in literary criticism, re-evaluated American literature. He announced in his findings that Whitman was not only a poet of the first rank, but the greatest in America.

The common people, the "Americanos" for whom Walt Whitman professed to write, knew nothing of him; or if they knew, they passed him by and took to their bosoms a poet who had fled his native shores as often as possible to bring European culture to Americans. It seems ironical that the cultured and literary-minded people, the very ones whom Whitman was most against, were the first to recognize him.

Devotees have seen in Whitman the nineteenth-century divinity. Others have seen in him only a colloquial caricature of the lower clases, one who reveled in uncouthness and dissipation. Still others see in him the inspired poet, the Shakespeare of democracy.

The fact is Walt Whitman positively refuses to be pigeon-holed or card-indexed. On this subject Whitman himself wrote:

I charge you forever reject those who would expound me,
for I cannot expound myself,... [1]

Do I contradict myself?
Very well then, I contradict myself,
(I am large, I contain multitudes.) [2]

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[1] Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass, New York: Heritage Club edition, Doubleday Doran and Co., 1937, p. 219.

[2] Ibid., p. 81.

Chapter II

Leaves of Grass (1855-1863)

Walt Whitman had worked as a school-teacher, printer, editor, and carpenter before he printed Leaves of Grass and thus announced himself as a poet. For several years he had been writing and revising his poems as he rode on ferry boats or sat in theaters. In Specimen Days he confided, "I had great trouble in leaving out the stock poetical touches, but succeeded at last."[1]

It was on Independence Day, 1855, that the book made its first appearance. Fred Lewis Pattee said

> a nondescript thing it was, paradoxical from every standpoint. Quarto in size, tall and broad as a family Bible, it contained but ninety-five pages. With its soft, green cover over which rambled the title in gold letters made to resemble leaves and roots and tendrils, with its triple-lined border stamped in gold, and its marbled end pages, it had a Fanny Fern look. 2

The author's name was not given on the title page of the first edition but on page twenty-nine, where there was a reference to "Walt Whitman, an Americano." Opposite the title page, however, was a steel engraving of the author dressed in the familiar flannel shirt and slouch hat.

An edition of a thousand copies was planned. But when it

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[1] Walt Whitman, Specimen Days, as quoted in Bliss Perry, Walt Whitman 2nd ed.; New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1924, p.68.

[2] Fred Lewis Pattee, The Feminine Fifties, New York: D. Appleton Co., 1940, p. 37.

was placed on the bookstands alongside Hiawatha, which was also published that year, it was passed by unnoticed. Press copies were sent to important periodicals, and complimentary copies went to the most important literary men. The critical reception given by the various presses was not flattering. Frank Luther Mott in his study of American magazines gave an idea of the type of reviews which Leaves of Grass was given in 1855.

> Edward Everett Hale wrote a singularly understanding notice of it for the North American Review. The Criterion, on the other hand, which would not have reviewed it at all had not Emerson "unworthily recommended it," declared that "it is impossible to imagine how any man's fancy could have conceived such a mass of stupid filth unless he were possessed of the soul of a sentimental donkey that had died of disappointed love," and then decided to leave the matter to the officers of the law. A far better review appeared in Putnam's: faults are pointed out sharply, and the poem is called "a mixture of Yankee transcendentalism and New York rowdyism"; but the critic acknowledges "an original conception of nature, a manly brawn, and an epic directness" in the poem. The Southern Literary Messenger blames "the pantheism of Theodore Parker and Ralph Waldo Emerson," which, it says, "pervades and pollutes the entire literature of the North," for this "spasmodic idiocy of Walt Whitman." 3

Professor Perry mentioned, in addition, a notice that

> the London Critic declared that "Walt Whitman is as unacquainted with art as a hog is with mathematics," and that one page "deserves nothing so richly as the public executioner's whip." 4

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3 Frank Luther Mott, A History of American Magazines, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1938, Vol. II, p. 169.

4 Bliss Perry, Walt Whitman, 2nd ed., New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1924, pp. 100-103.

Whitman wrote anonymous accounts of the book in the hopes that sales would be accelerated. In mentioning these reviews, Frank Luther Mott pointed out that "the practice of anonymity made it possible for the Democratic Review to print Whitman's own able apologia as a review of the volume."[5] Referring to the success of the first edition of his poetry years later in a conversation with Horace Traubel, Whitman said:

> "It is tragic--the fate of those books. None of them were sold--practically none--perhaps one or two, perhaps not even that many. We had only one object--to get rid of the books--to get them out someway even if they had to be given away." 6

The "divine average," the "Americano" for whom Whitman professed to write, did not understand his book at all. John Burroughs told of the "staff of a leading newspaper of New York waiting to be paid off one Saturday afternoon in 1855, greeting the passages read to them from Leaves of Grass with peals upon peals of ironical laughter."[7]

Regarding his poetry, Walt's family was no different from the general public. His brother George saw the book, but did not read it--"didn't think it worth reading--fingered it a little. Mother thought as I did--did not know what to make of it....I remember mother comparing Hiawatha to Walt's and the one seemed to us pretty much the same muddle as the other.

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[5] Mott, op. cit., p. 168.

[6] Horace Traubel, With Walt Whitman in Camden, Boston: Small Maynard Co., 1906, Vol. I, p. 92.

[7] Pattee, op. cit., p. 41.

Mother said that if Hiawatha was poetry, perhaps Walt's was."[8] There is no record of what Whitman's father thought. He died July 11, 1855.

But what was the reception of Leaves of Grass and its author in New England, the recognized capital of the literary world in America? Whittier is said to have thrown his copy into the fire "when he came to what are called the indelicate passages."[9] Lowell could see only "brag, egotism, and sensuality in Leaves of Grass."[10] E. P. Whipple was said to have remarked that "the author of Leaves of Grass had every leaf but the fig leaf."[11]

Emerson was the first to raise his voice in praise of the strange new book. He sent its author a letter bearing such praise and congratulatory messages that Whitman must have forgotten all else for the time in his exultation that at last his dear master had recognized him and his worth. On July 21, 1855, Emerson had written from Concord, Massachusetts:

> Dear Sir,--I am not blind to the worth of the wonderful gift of Leaves of Grass. I find it the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed. I am very happy in reading it, as great power makes us happy. It meets the demand I am always making

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[8] Horace Traubel, In re Walt Whitman, Philadelphia: David McKay Company, 1893, p. 35, as quoted in Bliss Perry, Walt Whitman (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1924), p. 98.

[9] Traubel, op. cit., p. 127.

[10] Henry Seidel Canby, Thoreau, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1939, p. 42.

[11] Phillips Russell, Emerson: The Wisest American, New York: Brentano's Publishing Company, 1929, p. 261.

> of what seems the sterile and stingy Nature, as if too much handiwork or too much lymph in the temperament were making our Western wits fat and mean. I give you joy of your free and brave thought. I have great joy in it. I find incomparable things, said incomparably well, as they must be. I find the courage of treatment which so delights us, and which large perception only can inspire.
>
> I greet you at the beginning of a great career, which yet must have had a long foreground somewhere, for such a start. I rubbed my eyes a little to see if this sun-beam were no illusion; but the solid sense of the book is a sober certainty. It has the best merits, namely, of fortifying and encouraging.
>
> I did not know, until I last night saw the book advertised in a newspaper, that I could trust the name as real and available for a post-office.
>
> I wish to see my benefactor, and have felt much like striking my tasks, and visiting New York to pay you my respects.
>
> R. W. Emerson.[12]

Whitman spent the next year in writing new poems and revising the old ones. In June, 1856, he published the second edition of Leaves of Grass, a book containing three hundred and eighty-four pages. It contained the original twelve poems and new ones, such as "Song of the Broad-Axe," "By Blue Ontario's Shore," "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," and "Song of the Open Road." Fowler and Wells of Brooklyn were named as the publishers.

The appearance of this edition was much the same except for the excerpt from Emerson's letter, "I greet you at the beginning of a great career" being printed in gilt letters on the back. In an appendix called "Leaves-Droppings" Whitman added favorable notices from the press including those written by himself. Emerson's letter of July 21 was printed as well

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[12] Perry, op. cit., p. 99.

as Whitman's answer, which began:

> "Here are thirty-two poems, which I send you, dear Friend and Master, not having found how I could satisfy myself with sending any usual acknowledgment of your letter. The first edition, on which you mailed me that till now unanswered letter, was twelve poems--I printed a thousand copies, and they readily sold; these thirty-two Poems I sterotype, to print several thousand copies of. I much enjoy making poems. Other work I have set for myself to do, to meet people and The States face to face, to confront them with an American rude tongue; but the work of my life is making poems." 13

That Whitman used the extract without the permission of Emerson has furnished grounds for many literary speculations, but "there is no warrant for believing that Emerson regarded the incident as discreditable."[14] Whitman, probably supposing the Concordian wrote nothing that he would be unwilling to have the whole world read, had no qualms about using the letter. Besides, was it not exactly the kind of tribute Whitman felt his Leaves justified? Charles A. Dana had seen the letter and had even suggested to Whitman that he print it in the New York Tribune as well as in his book.

Emerson's reaction to the matter was written out for Bliss Perry by Josiah P. Quincey of Boston, who was present at the time Emerson received his copy of the second edition:

> "Mr. Emerson came into his study at Concord where I was sitting, bearing in his hand a book which he had just received. This was the edition of Whitman's book with the words 'I greet you at the beginning of a

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13 Perry, Ibid., pp. 115-116.

14 Russell, op. cit., p. 169.

15 Perry, op. cit., p. 114. (Emory Holloway in his Walt Whitman, pp. 142-143, said it was Richard Henry Dana, Jr., managing editor of Greeley's Tribune.)

> great career. R. W. Emerson,' printed in gold letters upon the cover. Emerson looked troubled, and expressed annoyance that a sentence from a private letter should be wrenched from its context and so emblazoned. He afterwards gave me the book, saying that the inside was worthy attention even though it came from one capable of so misusing the cover. I noted the incident because at no other time had I seen a cloud of dissatisfaction darken that serene countenance." 16

Press notices of this second edition were more fulsome than ever. The two poems "Poem of Procreation" and"Now a Woman Waits for Me" were the frankest treatment of sex that had yet appeared in any book for general perusal. The storm of protest which broke caused Fowler and Wells to refuse to sell the book. But Whitman unperturbed was again busily writing favorable reviews, one of which began:

> "An American bard at last! One of the roughs, large, proud, affectionate, eating, drinking, and breeding, his costume manly and free, his face sunburnt and bearded, his posture strong and erect, his voice bringing hope and prophecy to the generous races of young and old. We shall cease shamming and be what we really are. We shall start an athletic and defiant literature." 17

Whitman's own reviews of his work indicated that he was not really discouraged because he had not been more popular. With supreme confidence he must have written the conclusion to that memorable preface in 1855, "The proof of a poet is that his country absorbs him as affectionately as he has absorbed it." [18] He could wait.

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16 Perry, op. cit., p. 115.

17 Emory Holloway, Whitman: An Interpretation in Narrative, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1926, p. 139.

18 Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass, "Preface to 1855 Edition" New York: Doubleday Doran and Company, 1937, p. xli.

A few well-known men had recognized him. In his letter of 1855, Emerson had said he felt like leaving his work and coming to New York to pay his respects. Before he himself came to New York, however, he had already recommended to Moncure Conway, a young Virginia divinity student, that he go see Whitman. "Americans abroad may come home," he wrote, "for unto us a man is born."[19] On the boat coming home, this young man read Leaves of Grass and was delighted.

Conway went to visit Whitman on one of the hottest days of September, 1855. He found Whitman not at home, but lying face down in a treeless meadow not far from the edge of town. Whitman returned home with his visitor but his room with its narrow cot and plain little washstand, over which hung a small mirror, was hardly the place to entertain company. So they went to Staten Island, where there was room to walk and talk in the shade.

They were such congenial companions that they agreed to meet a few days later for a stroll through New York City. Conway found him one morning setting type for a review. As they strolled along, so many people greeted Whitman warmly that Conway was curious to see how the poet was really regarded by the people for whom he wrote. "Everybody that knows Walt likes him" was the consensus of opinion of these people, but they knew nothing of his writing. As for Conway, he "came off delighted with him."[20] Whitman said that Conway had been

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19 Holloway, op. cit., p. 137.

20 Perry, Ibid., p. 119.

the first who paid him a visit because of his book.

Emerson also came to pay his respects to one who had apparently put his own philosophy into practice. There are records of several New York visits.

Another friend of Emerson's who had liked the Leaves of Grass at once was Bronson Alcott. His biographer says he was "one of the first and most discerning of Walt Whitman's admirers."[21] His admiration for the poet increased with the years. During the winter of 1855 Alcott had secured a copy of Leaves of Grass, which he read so much that for a time "his own prose style was affected."[22]

In September Alcott went to New York City, where he saw much of Whitman, Henry Ward Beecher, and Henry David Thoreau, who was likewise in New York to see the author of the new poems of democracy. Odell Shepard said:

> Walt Whitman was a study to Alcott. He was a revelation and a huge delight. Alcott saw at first glance that here was a man of a new sort--a sort quite unrepresented in Boston, but one which was somehow important, or was going to be; and he set himself to draw the man out, to sound his depths, and to test the range of his interests. He was amused by Whitman's egotism and by what he took to be his affectation of manners somewhat too free and easy, but he made no mistake about the power of the man, or even about his nature. 23

Thoreau, who had come to Brooklyn to see Whitman at the

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[21] Odell Shepard, Pedlar's Progress (The Life of Bronson Alcott) Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1937, p. 401.

[22] Ibid., p. 464.

[23] Ibid., p. 464.

suggestion of Emerson himself, went for the first time in company with Alcott. They found Whitman dressed in a red-flannel undershirt and overalls in his attic study. In spite of Alcott's effort to make an opening for conversation they were ill at ease. They were cool to each other "like two beasts, each wondering what the other would do, whether to snap or run; and it came to more than cold compliments between them."[24] Whitman promised to call at the hotel the next day, but he did not come. Then it was "Whitman who snapped and ran, not Thoreau."[25]

Thoreau, writing to Harrison Blake nine days later, said:

> "We visited Whitman the next morning (A. had already seen him) and were much interested and provoked. He is apparently the greatest democrat the world has seen. Kings and aristocracy go by the board at once, as they have long deserved to. A remarkably strong though coarse nature, of a sweet disposition, and much prized by his friends. Though peculiar and rough in his exterior, his skin (all over (?) red), he is essentially a gentleman. I am still somewhat in a quandary about him,--feel that he is essentially strange to me, at any rate; but I am still surprised by the sight of him. He is very broad, but, as I have said, not fine. He said that I misapprehended him. I am not quite sure that I do. He told us that he loved to ride up and down Broadway all the day on an omnibus, sitting beside the driver, listening to the roar of the cars, and sometimes gesticulating and declaiming Homer at the top of his voice. 26

A little later he wrote again:

"That Walt Whitman, of whom I wrote to you, is the most

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[24] A Bronson Alcott, Journal, p. 287, quoted in Henry Seidel Canby, Thoreau, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1939, p. 414.

[25] Ibid., p. 414.

[26] F. B. Sanborn, Familiar Letters of Henry David Thoreau, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1895, p. 340.

> interesting fact to me at present. I have just read his second edition (which he gave me), and it has done me more good than any reading for a long time. Perhaps I remember best the poem of Walt Whitman, an American, and the Sun-Down Poems. There are two or three pieces in the book which are disagreeable, to say the least; simply sensual. He does not celebrate love at all. It is as if the beasts spoke. I think that men have not been ashamed of themselves without reason. No doubt there have always been dens where such deeds were unblushingly recited, and it is no merit to compete with their inhabitants. But even on this side he has spoken more truth than any American or modern that I know. I have found his poem exhilarating, encouraging. As for its sensuality,-- and it may turn out to be less sensual than it appears, --I do not so much wish that those parts were not written, as that men and women were so pure that they could read them without harm, that is, without understanding them. ...Since I have seen him, I find that I am not disturbed by any brag or egotism in his book. He may turn out the least braggart of all, having a better right to be confident. He is a great fellow." 27

Many speculations have been made in literary circles as to the reason Emerson did not follow up his first endorsement of Walt Whitman. He wrote a number of letters to his friends, recommending that they read Leaves of Grass, but apparently he received little enthusiastic response. A letter to James Elliot Cabot began:

> "Have you seen Whitman's poems? Many weeks ago I thought to send them to you, but they seemed presently to become more known and you have probably found them. He seems a Mirabeau of a man, with such insight and equal expression, but hurt by hard life and too animal experience. But perhaps you have not read the American Poems?" 28

To Caroline Sturgis Tappan he wrote October 13, 1857, lamenting that we had no poets so exquisite as Tennyson or Browning

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27 Ibid., pp. 345-347.

28 Ralph L. Rusk, The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson, New York: Columbia University Press, 1939, Vol. II, p. 169.

and saying that "Our wild Whitman with real inspiration but choked by Titanic abdomen"[29] was one of the two producers that America had yielded in ten years.

Emerson's personal friends most certainly did not corroborate his judgment of Whitman. J. P. Leslie wrote in November, 1855, asking Emerson to confirm the clipping from the New York Tribune, which contained what purported to be a letter of respect and gratitude from that same author. Leslie called the Leaves of Grass "profane and obscene"[30] and thought the author utterly lacking in decency.

It was nearly a year before Emerson wrote of his discovery of the Leaves of Grass to Carlyle, and then he did so with apology because the book had fared badly with those to whom he had sent it. "After you have looked into it," he wrote, "if you think as you may that it is only an auctioneer's inventory of a warehouse, you can light your pipe with it."[31]

As has been said before, there have been many conjectures concerning Emerson's later reticence in speaking of Whitman, because his correspondence and journals fail to show many references to Whitman after 1857. Ralph Rusk, the editor of Emerson's letters, believed that this later silence was

> due in no small degree to the astonishment and dismay of a number of his personal friends. Thoreau was, as we know, an exception, but adverse opinion was strong.[32]

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[29] Ibid., V, 87.

[30] Ibid., IV, 521.

[31] Holloway, op. cit., p. 136.

[32] Rusk, op. cit., IV, 520.

William Cullen Bryant, who was still carrying on the editorship of the Evening Post in 1856, often came to take long walks with Whitman. These walks indicated that Bryant liked the younger man and endorsed his poems, yet years later when Justin McCarthy was in New York and asked him about Whitman, "Bryant shook his head, and professed himself no believer in Walt Whitman."[33] Whitman's talks with Horace Traubel cleared up the attitude of Bryant toward the poet and gave emphasis to McCarthy's statement:

> January 11, 1889.--In talking of W's early adherents, I mentioned Bryant. "Walt, you and Bryant were personal friends. Did he ever care for your work?" I can't say he did. Bryant was trained in the classics, made no departures. He was a healthy influence, was not a closet man, belonged out-of-doors; but he was afraid of my work. He was interested, but afraid. I remember that he always expressed wonder that with what he called my power and gifts and essential underlying respect for beauty, I refused to accept and use the only medium which would give me complete expression....Bryant said to me, 'I will admit that you have power!' But he would never admit that I had chosen the right vehicle of expression. We never quarreled over such things; I liked B--as a man as well as a poet. He, I think liked me as a man; at least I inferred so much from the way he treated me. 34

From 1856 to 1860 Whitman continued to write new poems, which were to be a continuation and an enlargement of the Leaves of Grass already published. He wrote more than a hundred new poems and revised some of the old ones. Two new sections for the proposed third edition were "Ensfans d' Adam"

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33 Justin McCarthy, Reminiscences, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1879, I, 171.

34 Traubel, op. cit., (Quoted in Century, Traubel, "Estimates of Well-Known Men," LXXXIII, 256.

(later renamed "Children of Adam") and "Calamus." These enlarged upon the frank treatment of sexual experience which had aroused considerable protest in 1860. When Thayer and Eldridge agreed to publish this third edition, Whitman made his first trip to Boston to be there while the book was printed. Perhaps he was curious, also, to see how he would be received by Boston Brahmins.

During this three months' stay in Boston, Whitman made several friends, one or two of whom were to be his most loyal defenders in the years to come. William D. O'Connor, who later wrote the pamphlet "The Good Gray Poet," was one. The two met at the publishing house of Thayer and Eldridge, where O'Connor, also, was having a book printed. Eldridge became a personal friend and admirer, and their friendship was carried over into the years while they were both in Washington.

Another friend and acquaintance at this time was John Townsend Trowbridge, who had first read about Leaves of Grass while he was in Paris in the fall of 1855. When he came to see the poems, he found in them much that impressed him as formless and needlessly offensive. Yet he confessed that the "tremendous original power of this new bard, and the freshness, as of nature itself, which breathed through the best of his songs or sayings,"[35] continued to hold a spell over him.

Mr. Trowbridge did not have the opportunity of meeting Whitman until he came to Boston in 1860. To him Whitman

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35 John Townsend Trowbridge, "Reminiscences of Walt Whitman," Atlantic Monthly, LXXXIX (January, 1902), 163.

confided that it was Emerson who helped him to "find himself." In reporting one of their conversations, Trowbridge wrote:

> I asked if he thought he would have come to himself without that help. He said, "Yes, but it would have taken longer....I was simmering, simmering, simmering: Emerson brought me to a boil." 36

Emerson came several times to see Whitman during his stay in Boston. Whitman recalled one of the talks they had as they walked on the Boston Common:

> Up and down this breadth by Beacon Street, between these same old elms, I walk'd for two hours, of a bright sharp February mid-day twenty-one years ago, with Emerson, then in his prime, keen, physically and morally magnetic, arm'd at every point, and when he chose, wielding the emotional just as well as the intellectual. During those two hours he was the talker and I the listener. It was argument-statement, reconnoitering, review, attack, and pressing home, (like an army corps in order, artillery, cavalry, infantry,) of all that could be said against that part (and a main part) in the construction of my poems, "Children of Adam." More precious than gold to me that dissertation--it afforded me, ever after, this strange and paradoxical lesson; each point of E.'s statement was unanswerable, no judge's charge ever more complete or convincing. I could never hear the points better put--and then I felt down in my soul the clear and unmistakable conviction to disobey all, and pursue my own way. "What have you to say then of such things?" said E., pausing in conclusion. "Only that while I can't answer them at all, I feel more settled than ever to adhere to my own theory, and exemplify it," was my candid response. Whereupon we went and had a good dinner at the American House. And thenceforward I never waver'd or was touch'd with qualms, (as I confess I had been two or three times before.) 37

Had Whitman been more acquiescent to public opinion, and had he conformed his poems to conventional standards in

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36 Ibid., p. 166.

37 Whitman, op. cit. (Quoted in Perry's Walt Whitman, p. 129.)

the matter of writing regular meter and omitted all direct references to sex, he might have been regarded as a first-rate poet at the time, but his imperviousness cost him his popularity.

One looking for favorable comment on Walt Whitman will not find it in the Atlantic Monthly. This magazine was conservative from the beginning and reluctant to accept any writer outside the select circle of its own New England coterie. The attitude of Lowell, who was the editor at this time, had always been one of aversion toward Whitman. Trowbridge remembered

> walking with him [Lowell] once in Cambridge, when he pointed out a doorway sign, "Groceries," with the letters set in zigzag, to produce a bizarre effect. "That," said he, "is Walt Whitman,--with very common goods inside." 38

"Bardic Symbols" appeared in the Atlantic for April, 1860,[39] probably because Thayer and Eldridge were Boston publishers; however, Lowell had taken the privilege of deleting two lines without Whitman's knowledge:

> See from my dead lips the ooze exuding at last!
> See the prismatic colors glistening and rolling![40]

The edition of 1860 had a fair sale at first, but the war came, bringing financial ruin to his publishers. Little is known of Whitman for the following year, except that he

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38 Trowbridge, op. cit., p. 172.

39 Atlantic Monthly, V (April, 1860), 445-446.

40 Mott, op. cit., pp. 501-502.

returned to New York and again took up his old habits--riding with bus drivers and ferry boat operators, visiting hospitals, spending evenings at Pfaff's, drinking beer, and mingling with old friends of the Saturday Press, which had always been friendly to Whitman.[41]

In five years there had been three editions of Leaves of Grass. The first two editions were almost completely ignored by the public, and of those who read the poems, only Emerson, Thoreau, and Alcott were wise enough to grasp at once the message that these poems contained. Emerson recognized that in Whitman he had found someone who had put into practice his theories of freedom and self-reliance.

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[41] Ibid., p. 39.

Chapter III

Whitman in Washington (1863-1873)

Whitman said that without his experiences in the three or four years of war "Leaves of Grass would not now be existing."[1] It is true that some of his noblest poetry was the result of his experiences during the war years. "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed" is one poem which the critics agree deserves a place high on the list of noble poetry. Of Whitman's growth in poetical power De Wolfe Howe said:

> At first his cry was "I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world." Later it became, "Over the tree-tops I float thee a song." But it was in his threnody for Lincoln, and the events of which Lincoln was the center that were the chief influences which brought the man and the poet to completeness. 2

The fact that the tone of his poetry was deepened and strengthened by his war experiences should have been sufficient evidence that Whitman's part in the great conflict was not ignoble, yet he has been repeatedly charged by his adversaries of deliberately avoiding his duty as a soldier. It is true that he did not enlist as his brother George did, after the news reached New York that Fort Sumter had been fired on April 12, 1861.

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[1] Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass, (Abridged Edition with Prose Selections), Edited by Emory Holloway, New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1926, "November Boughs" Preface to "A Backward Glance O'er Traveled Roads," p. 410.

[2] DeWolfe Howe, "Walt Whitman," Bookman, VI (January, 1898) 434.

When news reached New York eighteen months later that George had been wounded in the Battle of Fredericksburg, Whitman started for Washington. Luckily he met William O'Connor, who gave him money to go on to Fredericksburg and on his return to Washington he lived with the O'Connors for nearly a year. Through O'Connor's influence Whitman received employment with Major Hapgood, an army paymaster. During this time he made his daily round to the army hospitals and offered his assistance wherever he was most needed. His letters to his mother and those to the New York papers are records of the immense amount of kindly visitations and ministrations he was making to the wounded. In one letter which is often quoted, he said:

> This afternoon, July 22d, I have spent a long time with Oscar F. Wilber, Company G, 154th New York, low with chronic diarrhoea, and a bad wound also. He asked me to read him a chapter in the New Testament. I complied, and ask'd him what I should read, He said, "Make your own choice." I open'd at the close of one of the first books of the evangelists, and read the chapters describing the latter hours of Christ, and the scenes at the crucifiction. The poor, wasted young man ask'd me to read the following chapter also, how Christ rose again. I read very slowly, for Oscar was feeble. It pleased him very much, yet the tears were in his eyes. He ask'd me if I enjoyed religion. I said, "Perhaps not, my dear, in the way you mean, and yet, may-be, it is the same thing." He said, "It is my chief reliance." He talk'd of death, and said he did not fear it. I said, "Why, Oscar, don't you think you will get well?" He said, "I may, but it is not probable." He spoke calmly of his condition. The wound was very bad, it discharg'd much. The the diarrhoea had prostrated him, and I felt that he was even then the same as dying. He behaved very manly and affectionate. The kiss I gave him as I was about leaving he return'd fourfold. He gave me his mother's address, Mrs. Sally D. Wilber, Alleghany post-office, Cattaraugus county, N. Y. I

had several such interviews with him. He died a few days after the one just described. 3

In the hospital against the advice of doctors Whitman stayed in such close attendance upon the worst cases that his health broke down, never to be completely recovered. His friends and admirers maintain that Whitman's part in the war was a noble record of sacrifice and self-abnegation, and that his care of wounded soldiers was a living demonstration of the doctrine of the "Calamus" poems.

In October, 1863, John Hay arranged for Whitman to visit his mother in Brooklyn. After a two months' stay he moved back to Washington. He took a shabby place on Sixth Street, where J. T. Trowbridge came to see him.[4] It was at this time that Trowbridge, learning Whitman had a letter of recommendation from Emerson to Seward and Chase to assist him in securing a better position, urged that he present the letter. Although Chase thought that he ought not to employ a man who had written a notorious book, he kept Emerson's letter for the autograph.[5]

In June, 1864, Whitman suffered his first serious illness. During his convalescence he was in Brooklyn writing and revising Drum-Taps, which he had long had in mind, according

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3 Walt Whitman, op. cit., pp. 328-329.

4 John Townsend Trowbridge, "Reminiscences of Walt Whitman," Atlantic Monthly, LXXXIX (February, 1902), 163-175.

5 Ibid., pp. 163-175.

to his correspondence with his mother.

Early in 1865 through the efforts of Hubley Ashton, Whitman was appointed to a clerkship in the Indian Bureau of the Department of the Interior. He was not in Washington, however, when the news came that the President, whom he had held in unusually high regard, had been shot. Although some copies of Drum-Taps were then off the press, Whitman hastily wrote the two poems "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloomed" and "O Captain! My Captain!" and used them as a supplement to Drum-Taps. Of these poems every critic may not have words of such high praise as those voiced by Bliss Perry, but most writers are agreed that the poems are probably his best. Perry said:

> Walt Whitman's Drum-Taps embody the very spirit of the civil conflict, picturing war with a poignant realism, a terrible and tender beauty, such as only the great masters of literature have been able to compass. 6

During the war and the years after it Whitman made or fostered some of his most valuable friendships. His visits to the O'Connors were continued. Mrs. Ellen M. Calder, who was formerly Mrs. O'Connor, in her Atlantic Monthly article recalled that the ones who knew Whitman in those days felt that "a great privilege was ours."[7] Charles Eldridge often visited Whitman, as well as two new friends who were to

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6 Bliss Perry, Walt Whitman, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1924, p. 155.

7 Ellen M. Calder, "Personal Recollections of Walt Whitman," Atlantic Monthly, XCIX (June, 1907), 834.

prove invaluable in establishing his reputation--Edmund Clarence Stedman and John Burroughs.

Another friendship beginning at this time which, however, was of no particular value to Whitman, but one which those unfriendly to the poet were likely to speak of derisively was with Peter Doyle, a young Confederate prisoner in Washington who was paroled and was working as a street-car conductor. Whitman felt that theirs were kindred spirits. All during the Camden years Whitman corresponded with this friend, addressing him affectionately as "dear boy."

On June 30, 1865, Whitman was abruptly dismissed from the Department of the Interior by Secretary Harlan, who, it seems, had been prying into Walt's personal papers in his desk, where he kept a manuscript of Leaves of Grass, which he was revising in his spare time. Harlan gave no reason for the dismissal, but his biographer, Johnson Brigham, in protest to the editor of the Nation, December 1927, wrote a vindication of Harlan. Brigham reminded his readers that there were many other supernumeraries besides Whitman who were dropped from the payroll. In this article Brigham quoted from his book, Life of James Harlan:

> Secretary Harlan removed Whitman on Commissioner Dole's report recommending that he, with others be dismissed....Harlan saw no reason why the author of Leaves of Grass should be longer pensioned in a department devoted solely to business for his hospital service and literary achievement. [8]

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[8] Johnson Brigham, "Why Harlan Dismissed Walt Whitman," Nation, CXXV (December 14, 1927), 685.

O'Connor, the fiery Irishman with his Celtic temperament and brilliant gift for vituperative speech, was thoroughly angry over the dismissal. He accused Harlan of reading Leaves of Grass and of discharging Whitman because he thought the poems were indecent. O'Connor felt that justice had not been done his friend. Two months later his passionate pamphlet "The Good Gray Poet" appeared as a valiant vindication. The title was a particularly "fit and enduring sobriquet."[9] O'Connor described Whitman's part in the war and likened his work to that of all the great writers of the world. In some respects O'Connor used the same argument as Milton did in Areopagitica. Few other literary pamphlets have aroused as much comment. Nor was O'Connor finished when he had issued this pamphlet. Two years later he wrote a story, "The Carpenter," in which "the Christlike carpenter bears an intentional resemblance to Whitman in person and character."[10]

Whitman had had many friends who had been almost as disturbed as O'Connor because of the distressful affair of the dismissal. Hubley Ashton found Whitman a better position that paid $1600 a year in the Attorney General's office, and John Burroughs began a number of negotiations with magazines in an effort to present Whitman in a favorable light to the

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[9] William Peterfield and others, A Short History of American Literature, (Based on Cambridge History of Literature), New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1923, p. 233.

[10] Clara Barrus, Whitman and Burroughs: Comrades, New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1931, p. 49.

public.

The friendship of John Burroughs and Walt Whitman began in 1863 and ended with Whitman's death in 1892. Burroughs had seen a few of Walt's poems in the New York Saturday Press in 1856, when he was teaching in New Jersey, and he had had a hint of him from Bayard Taylor, who had lectured during the time in Newark. When he inquired more about the poet after the lecture, Taylor answered half-heartedly, "Oh, yes, there is something in him, but he is a man of colossal egotism."[11]

Clara Barrus said that "never a shadow of misunderstanding or estrangement rested upon their comradeship."[12] In a letter to Myron Benton on December19, 1863, Burroughs wrote:

> I have been much with Walt....I love him very much. The more I see and talk with him the greater he becomes to me....I am convinced that Walt is as great as Emerson though after a different type. 13

It is also true that Burroughs' pen was kept busy till the end of his life writing the praises of Walt Whitman. Whitman himself wrote a considerable portion of Burroughs' earlier articles and books as he later wrote or dictated considerable portions about himself for other biographers.

Burroughs was the first to write an appreciative essay about Whitman, "Walt Whitman and His Drum-Taps," that was

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[11] John Burroughs, Whitman: A Study, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1896, p. 3.

[12] Clara Barrus, The Life and Letters of John Burroughs, New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1925, Vol.I, p. 113.

[13] Ibid., p. 109.

published in a recognized literary magazine; however, it was not published in the Atlantic Monthly as he had hoped. "Bardic Symbols," unsigned, had been published in that magazine in 1860, but there was no review of Drum-Taps. In a letter dated March 20, 1866, Burroughs wrote:

> Sometime ago a letter from the Atlantic, in answer to one of mine, in which they stated they were ready to see an article on Walt Whitman, though their editors were not prepared to champion him in so unqualified a manner as Mr. Emerson had, led me to prepare an article on "Drum-Taps." Hearing that Howells were going there on the editorial staff, I hurried it off, but not in time--'Willie, dear'--was there ahead of me, and of course it was not accepted. 14

This same article by Burroughs was published in another magazine, the Galaxy, December, 1866. Any magazine that dared to print Whitman's poems or articles in praise of Whitman had to be prepared to weather a gale of criticism.[16] But the New York Galaxy was a new magazine, which at first was less conservative and more "willing to admit the rebellious, or even the bizarre."[17]

The next year Burroughs wrote Notes on Walt Whitman as Poet and Person, following his review of Drum-Taps. Thereafter articles and books appeared continually from this prolific writer. "He [Burroughs] was never done with Whitman,

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14 Barrus, The Life and Letters of John Burroughs, Vol. I, p. 116.

15 Barrus, Whitman and Burroughs: Comrades, p. 43.

16 Frank Luther Mott, A History of American Magazines, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1938, Vol. III, p. 231.

17 Portia Baker, "Walt Whitman's Relations with Some New York Magazines," American Literature, VI (November, 1935), p. 278.

any more than with the birds. His last book contained a Whitman essay, 'The Poet of the Cosmos.'"[18]

In 1868 William Michael Rossetti arranged an edition of carefully selected poems from Leaves of Grass, leaving out the poems that caused consternation and disapproval in America. Because of Rossetti's good judgment in selecting only the best poems, the edition was very popular with English readers. The essays and reviews showed how deeply Leaves of Grass had impressed those who could recognize the essentials of good poetry and were not too prejudiced to accept an unconventional poet. Scholars, such as John Addington Symonds of Oxford and Edward Dowden of Dublin, and poets, especially of the Pre-Raphaelite group--Charles Algernon Swinburne and William Michael Rossetti, had been reading Whitman for several years. Alfred, Lord Tennyson and Edward Carpenter became interested about the time of the Rossetti edition. Swinburne's book on William Blake made some comparisons of the English mystic and of the American poet, and in 1868 his Songs Before Sunrise contained his tribute "To Walt Whitman in America." In 1871 Dowden's article on Whitman appeared in the Westminster Review.

The timid Americans were abashed to find they had lagged behind in their endorsement of Whitman only to find his popularity in England increasing with each new periodical from abroad.

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[18] Barrus, The Life and Letters of John Burroughs, Vol. I, p. 139.

It was the Rossetti edition of Leaves of Grass which Anne Gilchrist read with such deep appreciation that she asked Rossetti to let her have the unexpurgated copy so that she might read all of the wonderful poems. This unusual woman found nothing in the book that offended her. Her enthusiasm reached the point that she began a correspondence with Whitman. As their exchange of letters created in her a more intense desire to see and be near him, with her two children she moved to America in 1876, although Whitman advised her against coming.

The fifth edition of Leaves of Grass was brought out in 1871. And in June 1872, Whitman went to Hanover, New Hampshire, to read a poem, "As a Strong Bird on Pinions Free," for the Commencement at Dartmouth College, at the invitation of the students, who wanted to play a joke on the strict Congregationalist faculty to embarrass them. Contrary to the expectation of the students, Whitman was well received personally, although his poem, which probably could not be heard distinctly, made little impression. Nevertheless, Whitman, as was his custom, prepared elaborate press notices of the occasion.

On the evening of January 23, 1873, came the stroke of paralysis which left Whitman, the man who had enjoyed splendid health until his strenuous work in the war, a partial invalid. He was able to work again in a few months, but after the death of his mother in May, he went to live with his brother George in Camden. And thus another period in the poet's life was

closed. As a poet he was not popular, but he could not be completely ignored at home, with his English public growing all the time.

Chapter IV

The Camden Years (1872-1892)

The last twenty years of Whitman's life were spent in Camden. During the seventies and eighties he was recognized as a force in American literature that could not be ignored even though he could not be wholly accepted. His circle of personal friends continued to grow, as might be expected, and in addition to such avowed friends as O'Connor and John Burroughs there were the three new disciples--Horace Traubel, Thomas B. Harned, and Dr. Richard Maurice Bucke. Many friends from at home and abroad came to see the much discussed author of Leaves of Grass. In fact it became a vogue to make a literary pilgrimage to the house on Mickle Street, where he lived the last few years of his life.

In 1874 Whitman was invited to read a commencement poem at Tufts College in Massachusetts. For the occasion he wrote "Song of the Universal," but his ill health kept him from being present to read it. Soon afterwards he wrote his last significant poems--"Song of the Redwood" and "Prayer of Columbus," the latter of which appeared in Harper's for March, 1874.

In Philadelphia, 1876, the Centennial Exposition was held to celebrate the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Sidney Lanier was invited to write a cantata for the

opening, but Whitman celebrated the important occasion by bringing out a new edition in two volumes, the first of which was Leaves of Grass, and the second, Two Rivulets.

The books sold fairly well here, but better in England because of the efforts of William Rossetti and Mrs. Gilchrist in taking subscriptions for it. Subscribers were such people as Edward Dowden, Edward Carpenter, Alfred , Lord Tennyson, John Ruskin, Justin McCarthy, Moncure Conway, and E. J. A. Balfour.

In reply to a letter in the London News in which Robert Buchanan had accused Americans of negligence toward the poet in his illness and poverty,[1] George William Curtis contended through the "Easy Chair," which he as editor was writing for Harper's in 1876, that Whitman had had as fair a chance as any other American author. "There is no conspiracy against Mr. Whitman, nor any jealousy of him,"[2] he insisted. As a last word he wrote, "Mr. Buchanan should not be too hard upon America. With time and care it may become as wise as he."[3]

Burroughs' letter to Edward Dowden in 1876 furnishes more information regarding the Buchanan letter and the stir

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[1] Clara Barrus, The Life and Letters of John Burroughs, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1925, Vol. I, p. 182.

[2] George William Curtis, "From the Editor's Easy Chair," Harper's, LIII (June, 1876), 142.

[3] Ibid., p. 142.

it made in America:

> The papers have nearly all made his letter an excuse to attack Whitman, and it is pitiful and humiliating to see the littleness and cur-dog spite and bluster exhibited. ... The New York Tribune, of which we had some hope, has an editorial every day or two full of abuse of Whitman....
>
> You can hardly understand, from your distance, what a miserable puling set of editors and poets we have in this country. Such an utter absence of anything manly, broad, robust, is disheartening. They say that the reason Whitman is more popular in England than here is that the Englishman has grown blase, sated with order and conformity, and craves the wild and lawless. 4

In England the Buchanan letter made Whitman's public larger than it already was. So much sympathy for Whitman was aroused that a few years later Swinburne felt it was overdone, but Mrs. Gilchrist's interest in Whitman never lagged. Her letters to him would indicate that she had a deeper personal regard for the man than was in keeping with her admiration for the poet who had written the wonderful Leaves. She came to Philadelphia against the advice of Whitman, who evidently appreciated her interest, but did not want matters between them to become more personal. During the year she lived near Camden, she often entertained Whitman and his many friends at her house; and Whitman was content to have her make her sojourn in America appear to be a kind of literary pilgrimage.

Indeed Mrs. Gilchrist was the first one from her country to come to pay homage, but she certainly was not the last. Whitman was honored by visits from many distinguished men--Edward Carpenter, Edmund Yates, Lord Houghton, Sir Edwin Arnold,

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4 Barrus, op. cit., p. 182.

Henry Irving, Oscar Wilde, Bram Stoker, Ernest Rhys, and Edmund Gosse.

The tremendous vogue for Whitman in England seems to have been partly due to Rossetti's edition of Leaves of Grass, in which he was careful to omit every line or poem that might offend. Furthermore, it must not be forgotten that the general attitude abroad was that in America everything was rude and primitive; hence, Whitman was undoubtedly the most nearly representative poet of the United States. And it must be remembered that foreigners often tolerate literary innovations which are intolerable in the country of the innovator.

As has been said before, new friends were made who were found to be as faithful as Burroughs and O'Connor had proved. Dr. Richard Maurice Bucke, head of an Insane Asylum in London, came from Canada in the autumn, 1876, to pay his respects. Holloway said this visit "colored Bucke's whole life, and made him Whitman's friend, host, biographer and literary executor."[5]

Of all the men who were friendly and came under the spell of Whitman's poetry, only one--Swinburne--later recanted everything he had earlier said. Swinburne was really the first in England to become interested in Whitman's poems. He had been reading them before 1860. Then in 1868 in his book on Blake he paid Whitman the highest tribute he ever paid him. His Poems before Sunrise, published 1871, contained

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[5] Emory Holloway, Whitman, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1926, p. 296.

"To Walt Whitman in America," which indicated that he had great faith in Whitman as the preacher of democracy. A change in his attitude toward the American poet, however, was apparent in 1872, when he replied to Buchanan's Fleshly School of Literature with Under the Microscope, in which he tried to balance Whitman's virtues with his defects. Without further warning in 1887, the Fortnightly Review published his article "Whitmania." Whether he was under the influence of Watts Dunton when he changed his mind about Whitman is uncertain, but his charges are clear. He aimed to prove that Whitman was not a true poet and to make the "Whitmanites," those adherents who regarded Whitman as the American Shakespeare, appear ridiculous.

Swinburne was known for his colorful language; the following passage in his objuration has furnished phrases for those who wished to abuse Whitman, but who lacked Swinburne's power of words:

> Mr. Whitman's Eve is a drunken apple-woman, indecently sprawling in the slush and garbage of the gutter amid the rotten refuse of her overturned fruit stall; but Mr. Whitman's Venus is a Hottentot wench under the influence of canthrarides and adulterated rum. 6

Whitman's very tactful reply to all Swinburne's abuse is said to have been, "Ain't he the damnedest simulacrum?"

In April, 1879, Whitman was able to visit the Johnstons and Burroughs in New York. It was on this April that he began

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6 W. B. Cairns, "Swinburne's Opinion of Whitman," American Literature, III (May, 1931), 125.

the lectures on the anniversary of Lincoln's death. These became benefit lectures for the lecturer as they turned out. In 1887 Andrew Carnegie sent a check for $350 for a seat. Almost all well-known literary figures came sometime to hear him. On one occasion E. C. Stedman's little daughter appeared on the stage and presented Whitman with a bouquet of lilacs that had bloomed in their dooryard.

It was probably because of the favorable recognition which Whitman was receiving after a lecture trip to Boston and after Stedman's essay in Scribner's that James R. Osgood and Company in 1881 proposed a definitive edition of Leaves of Grass. True to his former policy of 1860, Whitman insisted that, if the book was published, nothing must be expurgated. After seeing the copy that Whitman had been preparing, Osgood agreed to take it. Of the transaction Whitman wrote to Burroughs:

> I have just concluded a contract with J. R. Osgood and Co. of Boston for the publishing of my poems complete in one volume, under the title of 'Walt Whitman's Poems' (the old name of 'Leaves of Grass' running through the same as ever)--to be either a $2. book or a $2.50 one--if the former, I to have 25 cts royalty, if the latter 30¢) The proposition for publication came from them. The bulk of the pieces will be the same as hitherto--only I shall secure now the consecutiveness and ensemble I am always thinking of--Book will probably be out before winter. 7

In August of this year Whitman went to Boston to see the book through the press. The following months must have been particularly happy ones, for opposition to his poems had at

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7 Clara Barrus, Whitman and Burroughs, Comrades, New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1931, p. 205.

last been overcome in the one place he most desired. Was not his book being published by the reputable Osgood house? Was he not invited to the Sanborn's for dinner, where he could sit once more in the presence of his beloved Emerson? Did not the Emersons entertain for him the next day?

His book enjoyed a brisk sale. Two thousand copies sold before the storm broke. The "Children of Adam" poems had come to the attention of the Society for the Suppression of Vice. They immediately complained to Stevens, the district attorney of Boston. When the case was presented to State Attorney Marston, he notified Osgood and Company that Leaves of Grass was subject to prosecution as falling "within the provisions of the Public Statutes respecting obscene literature." He suggested that the edition be suppressed.

James Osgood, thoroughly alarmed and fearing for the reputation of his firm, wrote Whitman that a minimum of eighty lines would have to be cancelled to satisfy Stevens. Whitman offered to cancel ten lines and half a dozen phrases, but no more than those. As a compromise it was suggested that if Whitman would consent to omit two of the most objectionable poems--"A Woman Waits for Me" and "To a Common Prostitute"--the book would be allowed to circulate as before. Whitman was in a worse dilemma than he had been in 1860, when Emerson advised that he omit the same poems, but his decision was the same.

To Burroughs he wrote, April 28, 1882:

> Osgood is frightened, asks me to change and expurgate--I refused peremptorily--he throws up the book and will not publish it any more--wants me to take the plates, wh. I shall try to do and publish it as before (in some respects shall like it just as well). Can you help me? Can you loan me $600? 8

William O'Connor, John Burroughs, and Dr. Bucke (sometimes spoken of as the "hot little prophets") immediately came to their friend's defense. O'Connor took up the cudgel for Whitman in Washington. To Dr. Bucke, O'Connor wrote, April 29:

> To think that after twenty years--after the continental fame, after the tributes from Emerson and Ruskin, from Concord and London--to think that this satyr of the law should dare to let the Brocken shadow of his buboed and chancred carnality project upon these same hallowed pages; that he should dare to protrude his dirty interpretation upon that book, and that he should dare to begin persecution! But he will rue the day. 9

Whitman no doubt counted on the support of O'Connor. Several years later he had remarked to Traubel that when O'Connor was angered, he

> was a human avalanche; nothing could defy him, stand up before him--nothing....William storms and blows and rains and snows and freezes and roasts you all at once; goes for you tooth and nail, hammer and tongs--leaves nothing for the dogs--not a bone. 10

Articles by O'Connor and Burroughs appeared in a number of periodicals. When O'Connor learned that Postmaster Tobey of Boston had excluded Leaves of Grass from the mail, he wrote an especially vituperative article in the New York Tribune with the heading "Tobey or Not Tobey--That Is the Question."

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8 Barrus, The Life and Letters of John Burroughs, p. 209.

9 Ibid., p. 218.

10 Ibid., p. 213.

But O'Connor and Burroughs protested loudly and long at the unjustness of the whole prosecution business, and most of the American newspapers were "outspoken in their condemnation of the ill-advised action of the Massachusetts authorities."[11]

With the plates turned over to him Whitman had not made more than fifty copies before Rees, Welch and Company of Philadelphia took over the publication and risked prosecution for the publicity it would bring them. They never had any difficulty. In fact sales were better, three thousand copies selling in one day. Before long Postmaster Tobey was ordered by Washington authorities to revoke his order.

Bucke's biography, copyrighted by O'Connor, came out the next year in the United States. From New Orleans, Lafcadio Hearn wrote O'Connor, August 9, 1883, to the effect that he had always secretly admired Whitman and would have like to express his opinion; but being in journalism, he did not dare to, lest his proprietors accuse him of loving obscene literature. He admitted the beauty of Whitman's poems, but for him "it must be sought for; it does not flash out from hastily turned Leaves; it only comes to one...after long study."[12] Admitting that he saw beauty and cosmical truths in Whitman, he nevertheless thought the singer barbaric. On the whole he considered him only the precursor of a greater poet yet to

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[11] Bliss Perry, Walt Whitman, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1924, p. 233.

[12] Ibid., p. 241.

come.

Bucke sang Whitman's praises in such exalted phrases that even Whitman himself thought they should be toned down. The book was authentic and valuable to students in that it reproduced many letters and critical reviews of Whitman. Its effect, however, was much the same as the eulogistic biography Queen Victoria had ordered prepared after Prince Albert's death.[13] The public is inclined to be a little dubious of any one whose virtues are extolled too loudly and too positively. No one outside of that close circle of Whitman's disciples was willing to admit such complete absorption in the poet's affairs.

Sidney Lanier certainly was not a man we should expect to endorse the poetry found in Leaves of Grass; but a study of his interest in Whitman leads us to see that while he did not praise unreservedly, he did recognize Whitman's original genius and his passionate love for American soil.

It was in New York toward the end of January, 1878, that Lanier called on Bayard Taylor, who gave him three books to read: Among My Books by Lowell, Atalanta in Calydon by Swinburne, and Leaves of Grass by Whitman, all of which presumably Lanier had not read before. As Taylor was not at home when Lanier called to return the books, he wrote him a letter a week later from Baltimore telling of his first impression of Whitman's poetry. He wrote:

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[13] Lytton Strachey, Queen Victoria, New York: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1925, pp. 317-318.

> ...upon a sober comparison I think Walt Whitman's 'Leaves of Grass' worth at least a million of 'Among My Books' and 'Atlanta [sic] in Calydon.' In the two latter I could not find anything which has not been much better said before; but 'Leaves of Grass' was a real refreshment to me--like rude salt spray in your face--in spite of its enormous fundamental error that a thing is good because it is natural, and in spite of the world-wide difference between my own conceptions of art and its authors. 14

It is true that this generous praise followed that of first discovery, but it is significant that Lanier, finding so much with which he could not agree, was yet able to recognize the genius of a fellow poet.

Three months later Lanier was writing to Whitman for a copy of the Centennial edition:

> A short time ago while on a visit to New York I happened one evening to find your Leaves of Grass in Mr. Bayard Taylor's library; and taking it with me to my room at the hotel I spent a night of glory and delight upon it. How it happened that I had never read this book before...is a story not worth the telling; but, in sending the enclosed bill to purchase a copy...I cannot resist the temptation to tender you also my grateful thanks for such large and substantial thoughts uttered in a time when they are, as you say in another connection, so many 'little plentiful mannikins skipping about in collars and tailed coats!' Although I entirely disagree with you in all points connected with artistic form, and in so much of the outcome of your doctrine as is involved in those poetic exposures of the person which your pages so unreservedly make, yet I feel sure that I understand you therein, and my dissent in these particulars becomes a very insignificant consideration in the presence of that unbounded delight which I take in the bigness and bravery of all your ways and thoughts....I beg you to count me amoung your most earnest lovers, and to believe that it would make me very happy to be

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14 Aubrey Harrison Starke, Sidney Lanier, A Biographical and Critical Study, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1933, p. 305.

of the least humble service to you at any time.[15]

Lanier's interest was no passing fancy or Whitman would not have been praised in his English novel lectures, which in 1881 Lanier was delivering at Johns Hopkins University, and which were published two years later under the title, The English Novel. Professor William Hand Brown of Johns Hopkins prepared the lectures for publication shortly after Lanier's death. He took the liberty of making clear that if Lanier had lived, he would probably have revised the lectures in certain instances, but that

> the present editor has not felt free to make any change from the original manuscript, beyond the omission of a few local and occasional allusions, and the curtailment of several long extracts from well known writers. 16

The omitted passages were Lanier's references to Whitman, which Brown suppressed because he thought to spare Lanier the shame of having defended the author of Leaves of Grass. Brown simply could not imagine the pure and saintly Lanier seriously meaning to praise the poet whose reputation was still at that time a matter of controversy. Had there not been a recent scandal in Boston of the notorious poems? Lanier might have given his opinion of Whitman in his lectures, but as editor, Brown could make certain Lanier did not have his critical study discredited by such passages as

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[15] Ibid., p. 306.

[16] Sidney Lanier, The English Novel (Prefactory Note to the First Edition--W.H. Brown) New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1887.

> Here let me first carefully disdain and condemn all that flippant and sneering tone which dominates so many discussions of Whitman. While I differ from him utterly as to every principle of artistic procedure; while he seems to me the most stupendously mistaken man in all history as to what constitutes true democracy, and the true advance of art and man; while I am immeasurably shocked at the sweeping invasions of those reserves which depend on the very personality I have so much insisted upon, and which the whole consensus of the ages has considered more and more sacred with every year of growth in delicacy; yet, after all these prodigious allowances, I owe some keen delights to a certain combination of bigness and naivety which make some of Whitman's passages so strong and taking, and indeed, on the one occasion when Whitman has abandoned his theory of formlessness and written in form he has made "My Captain, O My Captain" [sic] surely one of the tender and beautiful poems in any language. 17

Brown might have remembered that, although Lanier did not agree with Whitman in the matter of what constituted democracy, and in the matter of artistic form, he was perfectly sincere about liking the "bigness and bravery" of Whitman's ways. If Brown had, he might have been saved the embarrassment that came with the second edition. That Mrs. Lanier saw fit to restore the expurgated passages of her husband's book in the 1897 edition shows much in Whitman's favor, and according to Stark "should call for a re-evaluation of the importance of Lanier as a critic."[18]

There is evidence, however, that Lanier was not always willing to forgive Whitman's lack of form. William Hayes Ward, who wrote a memorial preface for Lanier's collected poetry, quoted from Lanier's notes:

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17 Ibid., p. 45.

18 Starke, op. cit., p. 421.

> 'Whitman is poetry's butcher. Huge raw collops slashed from the rump of poetry and never mind gristle--is what Whitman feeds our souls with. As near as I can make out, Whitman's argument seems to be, that, because a prairie is wide, therefore debauchery is admirable, and because the Mississippi is long, therefore every American is God.'[19]

There is no doubt that Whitman understood Lanier. On the evening when he showed Traubel the Lanier letter quoted above he chuckled:

> Lanier was a beautiful spirit: he had his work to do: did his work: I can see how the Leaves may at first blush have carried him by storm--then how, analysing his feeling, he became less sure of his enthusiasm. It was after all rather a rough dish for so delicate a palate.[20]

In 1876 Harper's published an article, "The First Century of the Republic," by E. P. Whipple, who, although he was conventional, was, nevertheless, on the side of the liberals. DeMille said with E. P. Whipple criticism in America became self-conscious.[21] In his day he was regarded as a radical.

Of Whitman he wrote in that article:

> Very different from all these is Walt Whitman, who originally burst upon the literary world as "one of the roughs," and whose "barbaric yawp" was considered by a class of English critics as the first original note which had been struck in American poetry, and as good as an Indian war-whoop. Wordsworth speaks of Chatterton as "the marvellous boy"; Walt Whitman, in his first "Leaves of Grass," might have been styled the marvellous "b'hoy." Walt protested against all convention, even all forms of conventional verse; he seemed to start up

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[19] Sidney Lanier, Poems (Edited by Mrs. Sidney Lanier with a "Memorial" by William Hayes Ward), New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929, p. xxxviii.

[20] Horace Traubel, With Walt Whitman in Camden, Boston: Maynard, Small and Co., 1906, Vol. I, p. 209.

[21] George E. DeMille, Literary Criticism in America, New York: The Dial Press, 1931, p. 38.

> from the ground, an earth-born son of the soil, and put to all cultivated people the startling question, "What do you think of Me?" They generally thought highly of him as an original. Nothing is more acceptable to minds jaded with reading works of culture than the sudden appearance of a strong, rough book, expressing the habits, ideas, and ideals of the uncultivated; but unfortunately, Whitman declined to listen to the suggestion that his daring disregard of convention should have one exception, and that he must modify his frank expression of the relation of the sexes. The author refused, and the completed edition of the "Leaves of Grass" fell dead from the press. Since that period he has undergone new experiences; his latest books are not open to objections urged against the earliest; but still the "Leaves of Grass," if thoroughly cleansed, would even now be considered his ablest and most original work. But when the first astonishment subsides of such an innovation as Walt Whitman's, the innovator pays the penalty of undue admiration by unjust neglect. 22

Whipple, lecturing and writing on literature for forty years, had won the esteem of the best writers of his time. His importance as a critic for the North American Review while the transcendentalist movement was in full force was tremendous, but his survey of American literature was bad. Whipple was out of practice by that time.[23]

"Roughly speaking, the year 1880 marks the shifting of the literary capital of the United States to New York from Boston."[24] The leaders of the older generation that had swayed criticism and set the standards for literary excellency were either dead or had ceased to take an active part.

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[22] E. P. Whipple, "The First Century of the Republic," Harper's, LII (March, 1876), p. 526.

[23] DeMille, op. cit., p. 48.

[24] Ibid., p. 133.

DeMille said:

> In 1889, Lowell was abroad; Henry James was still of minor importance; Howells had not yet struck a critical pitch of his own. And so the editors of the Century Magazine, which was rapidly assuming the place of the Atlantic Monthly as the leading literary organ of the day, cast about for a new leader of criticism. They found him in the New York Stock Exchange. 25

"At no other period," continued DeMille, "could Edmund Clarence Stedman have been accepted as the leading literary critic in America."[26] In order to understand his fame as a critic, one must realize that he was one of those persons whose reputations are excellent, "not because they are great, but because they are representative."[27] In the four volumes upon which his fame as a critic rests, he is the mildest and least obtrusive of revolutionaries. One must read closely to discern that he classed Longfellow as a second-rate poet and hailed Whitman as "the best augury for the future."[28]

Stedman was the first genuinely accepted critic who wrote in defense of Whitman. Personally he had been his friend since the days when he used to meet him at O'Connor's house in Washington.

In the essay on Whitman Stedman was most careful to keep to the letter of the law regarding conventions. DeMille

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25 Ibid., p. 134.

26 Ibid., p. 134.

27 Ibid., p. 136.

28 Ibid., p. 147.

declared that Stedman's paying tribute to an unconventional poet such as Whitman was the "most daring act of his life."[29] Before this essay, which was first published in the Century for November, 1880, and included in the Poets of America in 1885, only a few men besides O'Connor and John Burroughs had defended Whitman to the American public. That two of those few men who had thought Whitman had great ability and originality were none other than Thoreau and Emerson, some more discerning readers at that time might have remembered. Stedman's essay, however, probably did more to further Whitman's acceptance than all the fiery eloquence of O'Connor, the many eulogies by Burroughs, or even the approval of Thoreau and Emerson. Bliss Perry classed Stedman as "one of Whitman's most sane and illuminating critics.[30]

A few extracts from the essay will illustrate the subtlety of Stedman's approach:

> Others are more widely read, but who else has been so widely talked of, and who has held even a few readers with so absolute sway? Whatever we may think of his chantings, the time has gone by when it is possible to ignore him; whatever his ground may be, he has set his feet squarely and audaciously upon it, and is no light weight.
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> . . .
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> It may well be that our poet at first had more claim to a wide reading in England than here, since his English editor, without asking consent omitted entirely every poem "which could with tolerable fairness be deemed offensive." Without going so far, and with no falseness

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29 Ibid., p. 148.

30 Perry, op. cit., p. 160.

> to himself, Whitman might re-edit his editions in such wise that they would be counted wholly among those books which are meant for strong men, but would have a chance among those greater books that are the treasures of the simple and the learned, the young and the old.
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> . . .
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> His warmest admirers are of several classes: those who have carried the art of verse to super-refined limits and seeing nothing farther in that direction, break up the mould for a change; those radical enthusiasts, who, radically incline, do not think closely, and make no distinction between his strength and weakness. Thus he is, in a sense, the poet of the over-refined and the doctrinaires. 31.

As Stedman wisely pointed out, by 1880 Whitman had become a force which no critic dared ignore. Charles F. Richardson, a Harvard professor, was evidently disturbed about what position to give Whitman in his history of American literature, which he wrote in 1886, and published in 1892. His avowed purpose in the history was that of "estimating the rank and analyzing the achievements of American culture."[32] Bayard Taylor he placed at the head of the list of living poets, and Whitman he classed as about the equal of Stoddard, Stedman, or Aldrich. He attributed the attention which Whitman was receiving in America, England, and the Continental nations, "greater for the moment, than that bestowed upon any contemporary singer of his nation," to Whitman's "magnifying the physical

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[31] Edmund Clarence Stedman, Poets of America, New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1885, pp. 349-386.

[32] Charles F. Richardson, "Introduction" to American Literature, New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, Vol. II, p. v.

and crudely spontaneous."[33] Richardson pointed out that the masses for whom Whitman claimed to sing did not know him, and that he "who has failed to satisfy his own time that he has portrayed its full life as it knows life, can never be the "poet of the future," and quoted Stedman's "Music at Home" to illustrate his meaning. About Whitman's verse forms Richardson was open-minded, but he asserted, "The sexuality of Whitman's poems forms their most obvious characteristic."[34]

In the "Introduction" to his history we see how grudgingly Richardson included Whitman for all his attempting to be fair. He wrote that Whitman's place in literature had not been fixed and that

> we may claim that the criticism of Whitman by the best American minds is likely to be approved by the literary historians of the future, in comparison with that expressed by not a few foreigners of high intelligence. In regard to the perspective of American literature, it must never be forgotten that deck-hands, 'longshoresmen, and stage-drivers, California miners, Chinese, highway robbers, buffaloes, and Indians are but a part of our civilization, and that literature may concern itself with such themes as God, duty, culture, and Eastern lakes or rivers, and still be distinctly American. 35

The New England group of critics had very little criticism of Whitman that was commendatory. When Edward Carpenter was in Boston, 1872, he wrote that Holmes "whinnied" at the mention

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33 Ibid., Vol. II, p. 269.

34 Ibid., Vol. II, p. 279.

35 Ibid.,"Introduction," Vol. I, p. xv.

of Whitman's name and ranted as usual about his sexuality.[36] But certainly Holmes was never rated as a very prudent critic by any one who had read his Breakfast Table series and Over the Teacups. One can understand Longfellow's comment on Whitman, "Poor fellow, something might have been made of him if he had been trained,"[37] but not Lowell's unrelenting hostility, for Lowell was the best critic of the Brahmins.

Bernard Smith said these New England critics were doomed to neglect and eventually oblivion:

> They helped to develop a serious audience for serious literature in the United States, but they did not add to esthetic thought, offered no new insight to the reading public, and gave nothing to the artist struggling with unprecedented problems. 38

In fairness to this group we should note, however, that in later years they were liberal subscribers to all funds intended to give pecuniary aid to the Camden bard, who was frequently described as being poor and neglected in his house on Mickle Street. In response to a subscription to raise money for buying Whitman a horse and buggy, Whittier replied with ten dollars and a clever quip about hoping it would be more serviceable to him than the "untamed, rough, jolting Pegasus he has been accustomed to ride--without check or snaffle."[39]

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36 Barrus, op. cit., p. 141.

37 Ibid., p. 141.

38 Bernard Smith, Forces in American Criticism, New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1939, p. 259.

39 Barrus, op. cit., p. 255.

In a study of Whitman's literary reputation it seems necessary to follow his reception by some of the leading periodicals more closely than has been possible with the occasional references given heretofore. The policy of the publication, the character of the editors, and the audience for whom the magazines were intended--all are important considerations to keep in mind.

The Atlantic Monthly, it may be said, ignored Whitman from 1860 to 1877. Portia Baker pointed out that Thomas Wentworth Higginson in an article for January, 1870, on Americanism in literature did not mention Whitman, "though the gist of his complaint of the native literature was its mildness, a fault which Whitman would seem to have overcome."[40] The fact that Whitman won some favor with this periodical by the late seventies probably came as a result of the attention he was receiving from the British scholars and poets. And, it must be remembered, the Atlantic was inaccessible to almost everyone living outside of New England with the possible exception of Bret Harte. In 1878 Whitman was mentioned several times in the "Contributor's Club," and in January, 1882, there was a review of the Leaves of Grass in the light of Stedman's essay and the Osgood edition. This review began:

> It would be a waste of time to discuss the question whether or not Mr. Whitman is a poet: Abundant authority both creative and critical has recorded itself on the affirmative side. Nor is it worthwhile to debate upon

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[40] Portia Baker, "Walt Whitman and the Atlantic Monthly," American Literature, VI (November, 1934), 285.

> the form he has adopted, and which--as Mr. Stedman has shown--is not the startling novelty which many, including the poet himself, have assumed it to be. 41

In the September, 1890, number of the Atlantic Monthly Holmes' Over the Teacups began. As a critic Oliver Wendell Holmes had never been considered in the same light with Lowell, but his essays were filled with literary comments and must have considerably influenced the reading public. Of Whitman, Dr. Holmes wrote:

> He takes into his hospitable vocabulary words which no English dictionary recognizes as belonging to the language, --words which will be looked for in vain outside of his own pages. He accepts as poetical subjects all things alike, common and unclean, without discrimination, miscellaneous as the contents of the great sheet which Peter saw let down from heaven. He carries the principle of republicanism through the whole world of created objects. He will "thread a thread through (his) poems," he tells us, "that no one thing in the universe is inferior to another thing." No man has ever asserted the surpassing dignity and importance of the American citizen so boldly and freely as Mr. Whitman. He calls himself "teacher of the unquenchable creed, namely, egotism." He begins one of his chants "I celebrate myself," but he takes us all in as partners in his self-glorification. He believes in America as the new Eden....I shrink from a lawless independence to which all the virile and trampling audacity of Mr. Whitman fail to reconcile me. But there is room for everybody and everything in our huge hemisphere. Young America is like a three-year colt with his saddle and bridle just taken off. The first thing he wants to do is roll. He is a droll object, sprawling in the grass with his four hoofs in the air; but he likes it, and it won't harm us. So let him roll,--let him roll. 42

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41 "New Poetry of the Rossetti's and Others," Atlantic Monthly, XLIX (January, 1882), 124.

42 Oliver Wendell Holmes, "Over the Teacups," Representative Selections (Edited by S. I. Hayakawa) New York: American Book Co., 1939, pp. 423-424.

Since the editor of a periodical very largely determines its policy, it is well to consider some of the men who were editors of the Atlantic Monthly while Whitman was writing. James Russell Lowell was the first editor from 1859 to 1861, James T. Fields from 1861 to 1871, William Dean Howells from 1871 to 1881, Thomas Bailey Aldrich from 1881 to 1890, and Horace E. Scudder from 1890 to 1898.

Lowell, the greatest critic of the last half of the nineteenth century, always disliked Whitman. The first edition of Leaves of Grass, which Charles Eliot Norton sent abroad to him, is said to have disgusted him. On December 7, 1863, Lowell received a letter from the Reverend W. L. Gage who protested the propriety of having Leaves of Grass in the Harvard Library. In reply Lowell wrote:

> It [Leaves of Grass] is a book I never looked into farther than to satisfy myself that it was a solemn humbug....I am obliged to you, however, for calling my attention to a part of this book of which I knew nothing, and I will take care to keep it out of the way of students. 43

In 1888 Whitman in one of the interminable conversations, which Traubel recorded as faithfully if not as skillfully as Boswell, told how he thought the "New England crowd" had always regarded him:

> "You remember our talk about Lowell yesterday? Yes? Well--I have thought a lot of it since. The New England crowd had always seemed to be divided about me with Emerson, Alcott, Longfellow on the one side--Lowell, Whittier and Holmes on the other. Sometimes I seem to be divided myself--don't quite get myself of one mind

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43 Baker, op. cit., p. 288.

> about myself. I understand that Lowell is in the habit of saying sore things about me--yes, very severe things--Holmes passes me off in a joke: but Whittier took me in dead earnest at the very start--my book was an evil book --he would shake his head--a sort of ah me!" 44

As we have seen, Lowell would not be likely to encourage either Whitman's verse or the reviews about him, and his war poetry received little or no attention from this periodical; we, therefore, turn to a consideration of William Dean Howells, the next editor. During his connection with the Atlantic Howells was not for Whitman, although he had been friendly with him years before when they had occasion to meet at Pfaff's and when both had connections with the Saturday Press. While Howells was assistant editor in 1866, he wrote to E. C. Stedman:

> The small but enthusiastic admirers of Walt Whitman could not make him a poet, if they wrote all the newspapers and magazines in the world full about him. He is poetical as the other elements are, and just as satisfactory to read as earth, water, air and fire. I am tired, I confess of the whole Whitman business. 45

Howells probably meant exactly what he said. By that time he had become too absorbed in realistic fiction to devote much time to evaluating poetry.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich was particularly cold to all writers who had not already established an impeccable reputation with the Atlantic. He had met Whitman several times, but those

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44 Horace Traubel, With Walt Whitman in Camden, Boston: Small, Maynard and Co., 1906, Vol. I, p. 454.

45 Mildred Howells, Life in Letters of William Dean Howells, New York: Doubleday Doran Co., 1931, Vol. I, p. 116.

meetings were not of "the most sympathetic nature."[46] By 1880 he had become "a fastidious, querulous figure whose sensitive spirit was vexed at anything that might disturb the gentility of his established Boston."[47] That he thought Whitman little better than a charlatan we see from his letter to Stedman dated November 20, 1880.

> My dear Edmund,--...you seemed to think that I was going to take exception to your letter on Walt Whitman....If Whitman had been able (he was not able, for he tried it and failed) to put his thought into artistic verse, he would have attracted little or no attention, perhaps. Where he is fine, he is fine in precisely the way of conventional poets. The greater bulk of his writing is neither prose nor verse, and certainly it is not an improvement on either. A glorious line now and then and a striking bit of color here and there, do not constitute a poet--especially a poet for the People. There never was a poet so calculated to please a very few. As you say, he will probably be hereafter exhumed and anatomized by learned surgeons--who prefer a subject with thin shoulderblades or some abnormal organ to a well-regulated corpse....Whitman's manner is a hollow affection, and represents neither the man nor the time. As the voice of the 19th century, he will have little significance in the 21st. That he will outlast the majority of his contemporaries, I haven't the faintest doubt--but it will be in a glass case or a quart of spirits in an anatomical museum. 48

According to Horace Traubel, the following is Whitman's impression he had received from the Atlantic:

> Someone asked W. why he was not received in The Atlantic? "How should I know? They will have none of me. I have met Aldrich--used to in New York, at the beershop--indeed, have met Howells often enough. They are friendly in all personal ways, of course. But when I was in Boston,

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[46] Ferris Greenslet, The Life of Thomas Bailey Aldrich, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1908, p. 38.

[47] Frances Otto Matthiessan, Sarah Orne Jewett, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1929, p. 138.

[48] Greenslet, op. cit., pp. 138-140.

> although Aldrich called on me--and O'Reilly, who is my ardent friend (noble O'Reilly!), went several times to see him and induce him to invite me to contribute to the magazine--he made no tenders of literary hospitality; he was dead still and let me go." Had he ever tried them with verses? "Yes, years ago, with Elemental Drifts, for instance, which they published--and some others, I believe. Don't think I blame 'em--feel hard about this: it all belongs to the story--I always take what comes: kicks, blessings, anything. No man of that stripe could accept me on the whole--could say 'yes' without a touch of 'no.'" 49

As far as New York periodicals were concerned, Whitman received little enough commendation while he lived. He won some friends among the critics in the seventies, but the occasional friendliness was often overshadowed by attacks on his work. The surprising thing is that we find as much in his favor as we do.

This attitude of the periodicals is comprehensible, however, since literary critics were eager that the United States should be recognized for its polish and literary excellence. Whitman's lack of form in his poems and his frank treatment of sex were enough things against him to make him unpopular with magazine critics aiming to promote American culture. Moreover, he lacked the support that comes from having a regular publisher to advertise his work.

Portia Baker pointed out other reasons for the hostility toward Whitman:

> Suspicion of his vulgarity was increased by the over zealous promotion of his cause by his disciples, and by his picturesque appearance and conduct, which many had no hesitation in calling a pose; and the puffs which he

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49 Traubel, op. cit., pp. 169-170.

wrote for his own work were deemed inexcusable. The fact fact that his name came to be linked with those of Swinburne , Wilde, Zola, and other men whose moral principles were suspected strengthened the cause against him. 50

The Galaxy, which had started in 1866, was more favorable to Whitman the first half dozen years of its existence than it was afterwards, probably because in those years Burroughs was a frequent contributor. When the Galaxy became better known as a reliable literary organ, it was more reluctant to accept any poems or reviews from a doubtful writer like Whitman.

The reception of Whitman by Harper's, which had a very large circulation,was very influential in molding public opinion, although generally its tone was less strictly literary than that of the Atlantic Monthly. Six poems by Whitman appeared in Harper's between 1881 and 1892, the publication of which indicates that he fared better with it than with the Atlantic; however, there were fewer critical reviews given in Harper's.

References to Whitman in this magazine are found chiefly in the "Easy Chair" and the "Editor's Study," which were conducted at different times by George William Curtis, Henry Mills Alden, William Dean Howells, and Charles Dudley Warner. Curtis was not fond of Whitman, but he did speak of him in an unprejudiced tone.[51] Personally he preferred Tennyson. In the "Editor's Literary Record" for January, 1882, Henry

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[50] Baker, "Walt Whitman's Relations with Some New York York Magazines," American Literature, VII (November, 1935), 300.

[51] Perry, op. cit., p. 158.

Mills Alden in commenting on the Osgood edition of Leaves of Grass said that it is "a congeries of bizarre rhapsodies, that are neither sane verse nor intelligible prose."[52] William Dean Howells wrote the "Editor's Study" from 1888 to 1891.[53] For one who had shown no liking for Whitman as editor or assistant editor of the Atlantic in the seventies, his attitude is remarkably favorable. In reviewing November Boughs, in February, 1889, he said:

> For the poet the long fight is over; he rests his cause with what he has done; and we think no one now would like to consider the result without respect, without deference even if one cannot approach it with entire submission....He dealt literary conventionality one of those blows which eventually... made it possible hereafter to be more direct and natural than hitherto. 54

In November, 1891, however, he was writing sarcastically explaining to the British why we did not have a national literature. He apparently was disgruntled because someone had implied that Walt Whitman could write that national literature. He wrote:

> We understand better than they how and why Walt Whitman is; we perceive that he is now and again on the way to the way we should all like to find; but we know his way is not the way. 55

Scribner's Monthly, which became the Century in 1881,

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[52] Henry Mills Alden, "Editor's Literary Record," Harper's, LXIV (January, 1882), 313.

[53] Baker, op. cit., p. 281.

[54] William Dean Howells, "Editor's Study," Harper's LXXVIII (February, 1889, 488.

[55] Ibid., LXXXIII (November, 1891), 964.

was generally more friendly to Whitman than the other leading periodicals, with the exception of the seventies, when Dr. Holland was editor. His distaste for Whitman is evident from the "Topics of Time" mostly written by him. In October, 1878, he thought:

> When the genuine geniuses of this period shall be appreciated at their full value...their countrymen will have ceased discussing Poe, Thoreau, and Walt Whitman....How an age that possessed a Longfellow and an appreciative ear for his melody can tolerate in the slightest degree the abominable dissonances of which Walt Whitman is the author, is one of the unsolved mysteries. 56

Disliking Whitman as he did, it was with difficulty that he was persuaded to print Stedman's moderately commendatory article on Whitman, though it belonged to a series which Scribner's was publishing.[57] The essay was printed in November, 1880.[58]

However, the situation changed when Richard Watson Gilder, who mildly admired Whitman, became editor. Between 1888 and 1890 Whitman had as many as nine or ten contributions in the magazine, and it was always open to John Burroughs who was continually writing about Walt. On the whole it appears that Scribner's was willing to recommend Whitman to its 125,000 subscribers.

The Critic, begun in 1881 by Jean and Joe Gilder, was

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[56] Josiah Gilbert Holland, "Topics of Time," Scribner's, XVI (October, 1878), 896.

[57] Mott, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 473.

[58] Edmund Clarence Stedman, "Walt Whitman," Scribner's, XXI (November, 1880), 47-64.

particularly favorable to Whitman. He soon became a leading contributor, writing "How I Get Around at Sixty and Take Notes" for the first volume.[59] Some of his poems were published, but mostly his contributions were prose articles. The results of the plebiscite which was conducted in 1884 among the Critic's readers to find who were esteemed the greatest living American authors must have been disappointing. Holmes, Lowell, and Whittier were ranked first. Whitman was in twentieth place.[60] Neverthless, the Critic was consistently kind to him during the eighties.[61] It is doubtful if any American writer received more attention from any other periodical in the same length of time.

The Nation was contemptuous throughout Whitman's career.[62] There is in this magazine hardly a favorable article about him. Thomas Wentworth Higginson, one of the contributors for a good many years, would see to that. His attitude during the whole time he was associated with the Nation was summed up in the article which was published in April after Whitman's death.[63] The Osgood edition had received a scathing review.

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59 Mott, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 549.

60 Ibid., p. 238.

61 Baker, op. cit., p. 274.

62 Mott, op. cit., p. 344.

63 Baker, op. cit., p. 291.

In fact, Mrs. Lanier sent her letter which was printed August 30, 1883, because she felt it would help Whitman's reputation with the periodical. She thought the public should know Dr. Brown had omitted passages from her husband's book which in justice to Whitman should stand.[64]

A closer study of the Nation's policy with regard to other literary writers shows, however, according to Frank Luther Mott, that this magazine's

> comments on current literature were, on the whole rigorous. Occasionally all the leading reviews would be condemnatory and the praise seldom balanced the censure. Yet the Nation was not merely captious; it was acute, definite, and convincing. Moreover, its reviews were, more often than not good reading. 65

The circulation was large, and Godkin's paper was respected for its reputation of being liberal and fearless.[66] From this fact it can be seen that the Nation's influence on Whitman's reputation was considerable.

The poet's death came in March, 1892, and his part in the struggle for recognition was ended. But he had lived to see many of his battles won. By his personal magnetism he had made a most loyal group of friends--William O'Connor, John Burroughs, Dr. Bucke, Thomas B. Harned, and Horace Traubel. Many great men had made visits to Camden to pay their respects to Whitman, and invariably they came away inspired.

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64 Baker, Ibid., p. 291.

65 Mott, op. cit., p. 343.

66 Ibid., pp. 331-348.

His popularity in England had caused not a little consternation in Literary America, which was striving to develop native culture equal to that on the other side of the Atlantic. Gradually the stiff opposition he had met with in New England abated. Writers such as Whipple and Richardson conceded him an important place in American literature because they did not dare ignore him. Emerson and Thoreau had recognized him as a great original genius from the first.

The shift of the literary capital to New York and the Century's gaining a place among periodicals rivaling that of the Atlantic Monthly were all points in Whitman's favor. In fact, we can say that from the time of Stedman's essay in 1880, Whitman's reputation as a poet gradually improved.

Chapter V

Whitman's Posthumous Reputation (1892-1919)

We have traced Whitman's literary reputation through the years from 1855 to his death in 1892. We have seen how closely his own fortunes were linked with his Leaves of Grass, into which he had attempted to put a whole person--a complete personality.[1] Although many of his battles with adverse critics had been won while he yet lived, he was by no means accepted without reservations, as less worthy poets were.

By 1892, most of the New England literary men were no longer living. Only Holmes was left. Whitman had outlived Emerson, Whittier, Longfellow, and Lowell. But what of the future? Will we find his fame brightening with the years, or was his dynamic personality all that sustained interest in him?

Through the remaining years of the nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth, many periodicals devoted considerable space to Whitman. An examination of a representative number of these magazine articles shows that opinions were still divided, but that more comments were in his favor.

The Arena was a Boston periodical which had begun in 1889, under the editorship of B. O. Flower. Its liberal attitude toward literature was a bold contrast to that of the

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[1] Walt Whitman, Leaves of Grass, Heritage Club edition, New York: Doubleday Doran and Co., 1937, p. 444.

conservative North American Review and the Atlantic Monthly. The number for September, 1893, contained an article on moral and immoral literature by Howard Macqueary, who wrote:

> And what shall we say of our own Whitman? Those who love the chaff of commonplace and the dry straw of conventionality, find no pleasure, no glimmer of poetic fire in "Leaves of Grass." It is all "wood, hay, and stubble" to them. They would not accept it as many do, as "a marvellous, almost miraculous message to the world, full of thought, philosophy, poetry and music." 2

The North American Review and the Atlantic Monthly seem to have had a policy of balancing their reviews. Some were favorable; some were unfavorable. In March, 1904, a most derogatory review of Whitman was printed in the former.[3] Churton Collins reviewed Swinburne's criticism in "Whitmania" with a good deal of relish, and then accused Whitman of writing "The Children of Adam" poems merely to attract attention and gain a unique place as a poet. He said Whitman's pages of jabber, of twaddle fascinated by their sheer audacity. On the other hand, Louise Collier Willcox in her article printed two years later in the same magazine spoke of Whitman's "profound mind."[4]

Gerald Stanley Lee made an interesting statement a few years later in Putnam's: "A man who reads Walt Whitman for two hours feels like a poet. If he reads Tennyson for two

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[2] Howard MacQueary, "Moral and Immoral Literature," Arena, VIII (September, 1893), 450.

[3] Churton Collins, "The Poetry and Poets of America," North American Review, CLXXVII (March, 1904), 446-449.

[4] Louise Collier Willcox, "Walt Whitman," North American Review, CLXXXIII (August, 1906), 281-295.

hours, he feels that Tennyson is a poet."[5]

The attention given Whitman through periodicals was supplemented by many books. Whitman publications continued steadily. The literary executors collected Whitman's letters, notebooks, and unpublished manuscripts, and they edited many of them in a book entitled In re Walt Whitman. Horace Traubel in three separate volumes published Boswell-fashion the conversations he had had with Whitman from 1888 to 1892. John Burroughs brought out another book, Whitman: A Study in 1896.

With Whitman's death, literary pilgrimages to the Camden house at 328 Mickle Street did not cease. In 1895 Theodore Wolfe reported Whitman was much liked by the people in Camden. His own opinion was that from

> the wide-spread sorrow over his death, in the changed attitudes of critics and reviewers, as well as in the largely increased demand for his books, were evidences of general acceptance. His day is coming--is come. He died with its dawn shining full upon him. 6

Elbert Hubbard, who came to Whitman's house in 1896, expressed his enthusiasm for the poet in these words:

> Milton knew all about Heaven, and Dante conducts us through Hell, but it was left for Walt Whitman to show us Earth. 7

The extravagant praise of men such as Wolfe and Hubbard counts

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[5] Gerald Stanley Lee, "An Order for the Next Poet," Putnam's, I (March, 1907), 699.

[6] Theodore Wolfe, Literary Shrines, Philadelphia: J. P. Lippincott and Co., 1895, p. 217.

[7] Elbert Hubbard, Little Journeys to the Homes of American Authors, New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1896, p. 192.

for little except to indicate the homage he has always had from his close followers.

"What is in Walt Whitman, the writer and the man, which will not permit people to stop writing books about him?" one might well ask. In 1906, there were four new biographies: With Walt Whitman in Camden by Horace Traubel, Days With Walt Whitman by Edward Carpenter, A Life of Walt Whitman by H. B. Binns, and Walt Whitman: His Life and Work by Bliss Perry.

Of these four books, Bliss Perry's is unquestionably the greatest.[8] Because of his high standing as a professor at Harvard and as a critic of literature whose judgments are respected, his opinion of Whitman is to be given more credence than that of Traubel or Edward Carpenter since they were personal friends. De Wolfe Howe said:

> Mr. Perry has done more for Whitman than his most vociferous followers have accomplished. He acknowledges, even repeats, the worst that may be said of Whitman, writer and man, and then shows how triumphantly the best of him shines out above it all. 9

Professor Perry told us he had been reading Whitman for twenty-five years before he wrote his book. He said that Whitman was "upon the whole, the most original and suggestive figure since Wordsworth."[10] His final comment was:

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[8] M. A. De Wolfe Howe, "The Spell of Whitman," Atlantic Monthly, XCVIII (December, 1906), 849.

[9] Ibid., 854.

[10] Bliss Perry, Walt Whitman, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1924, p. 307.

> Numbers count for nothing, when one is reckoning the audience of a poet, and Whitman's audience will, for natural reasons, be limited to those who have the intellectural and moral generosity to understand him, and will take the pains to do so. But no American poet now seems more sure to be read, by the fit persons, after one hundred or five hundred years. 11

The place Bliss Perry gave Whitman in 1906, when other professor historians thought they dared not risk giving more than faint praise, showed how far Perry surpassed them by his independent thinking. The timid, conventional writer of American literary history before 1915 or thereabouts was afraid to voice any new opinion of Whitman. Alphonso Newcomer's estimate of Whitman, 1911, was a typical one:

> It is too early to calculate the orbit of an eccentric luminary like Whitman. But one thing we are certain of, that he fills a large place in the hearts of many lovers of English poetry, and that he cannot be omitted from any final summary of American literature. 12

With the exception of a very few, according to Will S. Monroe in the American Mercury, professors did not mention Whitman in their class-room lectures. Before 1910 the author of Leaves of Grass was tabooed in classes. Professors George Rice Carpenter of Columbia, Stuart P. Sherman of Illinois, and Bliss Perry of Harvard are the notable exceptions.[13]

American literary history had generally been written by college professors, who were too slow to make changes in

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11 Ibid., p. 308.

12 Alphonso G. Newcomer, American Literature, Chicago: Scott Foresman and Co., 1911, p. 257.

13 Fred Lewis Pattee, "A Call for a Literary Historian," American Mercury, II (June, 1924), 134.

their critical analyses to keep them abreast with the times. Once a general pattern of criticism was established, it was continued indefinitely. In 1900 Barrett Wendell published his Literary History of America, which showed no improvement in critical judgment over Richardson's history of the decade before. Pattee said this history "should have been entitled A Literary History of Harvard University, with Incidental Glimpses of the Minor Writers of America."[14] Wendell's emphasis was placed more on the genealogy and social status of the authors he deigned worthy of praise rather than on their merits as creative artists.

Even Charles William Eliot thought Wendell placed too much emphasis on birth and social position rather than on the meaning and value of the literature itself. He made this criticism of Wendell's history in a letter to Dean L. B. R. Briggs, March 13, 1901:

> The way he dwells on the birth or family of literary people is also, I think, a subject for regret, because it shows that he has not observed how quickly American men and women acquire not only the manners and customs but the modes of thought and sentiments which prevail among "ladies and gentlemen."...Wendell's frequent discourse on the subject of birth and descent seems snobbish in an American, and will cause many people to underestimate his judgment and good sense. 15

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[14] Fred Lewis Pattee, "A Call for a Literary Historian," American Mercury, II (June, 1924), 134.

[15] Henry James, Charles W. Eliot, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1930, Vol. II, pp. 134-135.

With Wendell's biases and prejudices in mind, let us see what he said of Walt Whitman. He railed against the "decadent eccentricity of Whitman's style."[16] Then admitting that occasionally unorthodox books such as Huckleberry Finn or The Biglow Papers were masterpieces of American thought, he still insisted that "the vagaries of Walt Whitman...are as far from literary conscience as the animals which he somewhere celebrates are from unhappiness or respectability."[17] He ignored "The Children of Adam" poems altogether as beneath his notice.

"Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," he decided, seemed the most nearly beautiful poem, but following the quotation he used for illustration, he wrote:

> The eight preceding stanzas are very like this,--confused, inarticulate, and surging in a mad kind of rhythm which sounds as if hexameters were trying to bubble through sewage. 18

He called Whitman "uncouth" and "inarticulate,"[19] but he gave him a kind of back-handed compliment by adding a word about his own repugnance of New York rivers and admitted that

> after all he can make you feel for the moment how even the ferry-boats plying from New York to Brooklyn are fragments of God's eternities. Those of us who love the past are far from sharing his confidence in the

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16 Barrett Wendell, A Literary History of America, London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1901, p. 477.

17 Ibid., p. 477.

18 Ibid., p. 473.

19 Ibid., p. 477.

> future. Surely, however, there is no reason for denying the miracle that he has wrought by idealizing the East River. 20

A somewhat fairer estimate of Whitman was given by Professor Trent of Columbia University, but he is unprepared to break the mold of tradition by making any bold original statements:

> What Whitman's ultimate rank among writers will be is a matter upon which no living man is warranted to speak with confidence....In a word, Whitman seems not only a far better man and truer poet than his censors are willing to admit, but too large a man and poet for adequate comprehension at present. He may turn out to be a mouse in the telescope rather than an elephant in the moon, but who shall take to pieces the instrument through which we view the literary heavens, when that instrument is nothing more nor less than--Time? 21

Paul Elmer More belonged to the New-Humanist group of writers. He was a conservative who judged the present in the light of the past. After devoting a long chapter of his Shelburne Essays to a discussion of Whitman's life, he concluded:

> I do not see why Americans should hesitate to accept him, with all his imperfections and incompleteness, and with all his vaunted pedantry of the pavement, as one of the most original and characteristic of their poets. 22

W. C. Brownell in his essay on Poe grudgingly gave this bit of praise by reminding us that

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20 Ibid., p. 479.

21 William P. Trent, American Literature, New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1903, p. 491.

22 Paul Elmer More, Shelburne Essays (Fourth Series), New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1906, p. 211.

> readers more sensitive to art than to poetry are deceived by the poetic disguise of that arrant artist, Walt Whitman, who achieved a fairly radiant degree of perfection in never yawping his commonplaces off the key, in spite of the variety of their modulations. 23

It is important to know that Whitman was included in both the English and American Men of Letters series. Joseph Addington Symonds of Oxford, writing of Whitman for the English series, said, "Leaves of Grass, which I first read at the age of twenty-five, influenced me more, perhaps, than any other book has done, except the Bible, more than Plato, more than Goethe."[24] Professor George Rice Carpenter of Columbia, writing for the American series, said Whitman "must be considered primarily as a great religious seer and only secondarily as a man of letters."[25]

No other significant changes in literary criticism were noted until 1913, when the critical revolt came with full force. DeMille said:

> And then in 1913 something happened--the publication of John Macy's Spirit of American Literature which marks the outbreak of the last great revolution in American literary thought. In this daring volume Macy setting aside the generally accepted verdicts on the classical American writers went back to the originals, and examined the whole afresh. His conclusions were startling. Echoing Emerson's judgment of seventy years before, he decided

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23 W. C. Brownell, American Prose Masters, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909, p. 211.

24 DeWolfe Howe, "Walt Whitman," Bookman, VI (January, 1898), 434.

25 Clayton Hamilton, "Walt Whitman as a Religious Seer," Forum, XLII (July, 1909), 83.

> that the vast mass of American writing, especially of American poetry was feeble, second-rate, derivative. From his re-examination, the figures of Poe, Thoreau, Whitman emerged as really great among American writers.[26]

With no preconceived ideas on the outcome of his findings, Macy launched boldly into his subject. American literature he found to be idealistic and genteel. With the exception of a few of the greatest most American literature might have been written for the Youth's Companion. He also said:

> The present generation of young readers of poetry contains men who no more doubt that Whitman is the greatest poetic voice of nature and liberty since Wordsworth and Shelley than they doubt that Lincoln was the greatest statesman. But...the indifference of democracy to its greatest poet seems a paradox, but the indifference does not exist. America is not a democracy; it is a vast bourgeoisie; the democracy which Whitman celebrates has not arrived on the earth. 27

The spirit of revolt was in Macy's whole attitude. He thought we had too often paralyzed our intelligence and spoiled our eyes and ears by holding a text book between ourselves and art.

Macy's opinions were new and fresh. No one had written a history of literature in the unrestrained manner he used. That he was writing to please no clique is evident. This passage will give an idea of his style and attitude:

> Rightly comprehended, Whitman's central theme is a cosmic declaration of sympathy, a reverberant announcement of the love and imagination which enable the great

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[26] George B. DeMille, Literary Criticism in America, New York: The Dial Press, 1931, pp. 245-246.

[27] John Macy, The Spirit of American Literature, New York: Doubleday Page and Co., 1913, pp. 211-212.

> artist to identify himself with all the joys and sorrows of man. The idea has never been more mightily, more embracingly expressed, and its seemingly haphazard details are intended, calculated by a poet in confident command of his thought and his symbols, to suggest inclusion, a human-godlike numbering of the falling sparrow and measurement of the wide circuit of the star. Whitman breaks through all artificial boundaries erected by the blind hostilities of men, all castes, philosophies and schools that keep neighbors upon a common globe sundered from each other and from their common work. He strikes the mind from a hundred sides, to reach it somehow, if not with one detail then with another, to shock us out of our false conceits, deliver us from the prison of unsympathetic isolation. It is not he who is fragmentary and disparate, but thoughts and interests. Great-hearted people love him and understand him. He is unintelligible or offensive to persons who have been deflected from him by some single verses and so have never entered him, and to persons whose education has cramped their humanity or who had little humanity to begin with. 28

Following Macy's The Spirit of American Literature, Fred Lewis Pattee brought out in 1915 a book, A History of American Literature Since 1870, which gave a new insight into literature and a re-evaluation of American writers. His aim was not to write the stereotyped history of literature such as were the hundred volumes in his library. Of the usual type he said:

> I have nearly a hundred histories of American literature on my shelves, and I am still adding more--a hundred volumes to tell the story of our literary century, and all of them alike, all built upon the same model! I think I could dictate one to a stenographer in three days, with no reference to authorities save for dates: Colonial Period, Revolutionary Period, Knickerbocker Period, New England Period, and so on....
>
> But the really stereotyped thing about these histories is their critical method: always the same list of biographical facts with emphasis upon the picturesque,

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28 Ibid., pp. 219-220.

> always the repetition of a standard series of well-worn myths....Special purpose and provincial prejudice wave over every one like red flags. 29

As a professional critic, Pattee was the first to evaluate Whitman with a conscious effort to shake off the shackles of the past and rely on his own judgment. Appreciation of Pattee's study prompted Bernard Smith to remark, "The treatment accorded Walt Whitman by professional critics, before 1915, is one of the major scandals in the history of American criticism."[30] Pattee's treatment of Whitman seems wise and judicious. As a final estimate of the poet's rank he said, "He is the central figure of the later period, the voice in the wilderness that hailed its dim morning and the strong singer of its high noon."[31]

In the following decade literary criticism exceeded all other types of writing. After the war the pendulum swung from the conservative, gentle, drawing room criticism like Lowell's to the other extreme. James Gibbon Huneker was the perfect representative of the radical class that dominated American thinking after 1918. Others who helped to further the critical revolt and form the impressionistic school were George Jean Nathan, Carl Van Doren, Van Wyck Brooks, Ludwig Lewisohn, and H. L. Mencken. DeMille said:

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[29] Pattee, op. cit., p. 134.

[30] Bernard Smith, Forces in American Criticism, New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1939, p. 263.

[31] Fred Lewis Pattee, A History of American Literature Since 1870, New York: The Century Co., 1915, pp. 184-185.

> But the full flowering of radicalism was reached in the work of H. L. Mencken, who developed from a purely literary critic into a sort of universal iconoclast, attacking current orthodoxies in religion, in politics, in morals, as well as in literature. 32

This group of radicals or liberals was opposed by the New-Humanists--Paul Elmer More, Irving Babbitt, W. C. Brownell, Norman Foerster, and Stuart P. Sherman. These critics followed the method that had been used by Lowell. Stuart P. Sherman, having acquired a technique from Matthew Arnold of calmly putting himself above his contemporaries, could most successfully refute the radical criticisms of his opponents.

But the question with which we are most concerned is: How did Whitman's reputation fare between the liberals on the one side and the conservatives on the other?

Huneker told us that he had become a Whitmaniac about the time John Addington Symonds sang the praises of the Camden bard, but that he realized after reading Walden that "in David Thoreau a true American is incarnated and not in Whitman."[33]

Van Wyck Brooks said during a lecture:

> Whitman precipitated the American character. All those things that had been separate, self-sufficient, inordinate--action, theory, idealism, business--he cast into a crucible; and they emerged harmonious and molten, in a fresh democratic ideal, based upon the whole personality.[34]

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32 DeMille, op. cit., p. 246.

33 James G. Huneker, Steeplejack, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1918, p. 197.

34 Van Wyck Brooks, Three Essays on America, New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1934, p. 82.

No remarks could be more typical of Mencken than those he made in praise of Whitman:

> In the year 1865 Harlan resigned from the United States Senate to enter the cabinet of Abraham Lincoln as Secretary of the Interior....One day discovering Whitman was the author of a book called "Leaves of Grass." Harlan ordered him incontinently kicked out, and it was done forthwith. Let us remember this event and this man; he is too precious to let die. Let us repair, once a year, to our accustomed houses of worship and there give thanks to God that one day in 1865 brought together the greatest poet that America has ever produced and the damndest ass. 35

A more iconoclastic "prejudice" which indirectly shows sympathy with Whitman is his observation of the Whitman centennial celebrations:

> What could have been more ironical than the solemn celebrations of Whitman's centenary that were carried off in various American universities in 1919? One can picture the old boy rolling with homeric mirth in hell. Imagine the fate of a university don of 1860, or 1870, or 1880, or even 1890 who had ventured to commend "Leaves of Grass" to the young gentlemen of his seminary! He would have come to grief as swiftly as that Detroit pedagogue of day before yesterday who brought down the Mothers' Legion upon him by commending "Jurgen." 36

Since the radicals repudiated everything that had been held sacred in American politics, religion, and literature, since to destroy conventions was their aim, we should expect that they would approve of Whitman, who had been an anomoly that Puritan New England had found particularly vexing. But Whitman's reputation with the liberals will have to be

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35 H. L. Mencken, Prejudices, (Second Series), New York Alfred A. Knopf, 1920, pp. 249-250.

36 Ibid., p. 64.

contrasted with that given by the conservatives, the New Humanists, in order to obtain a fairer evaluation and to arrive somewhere nearer the truth as to what his real position in America was prior to 1920.

After Sherman had written his Whitman essay in 1920, he wrote to Carl Van Doren:

> I keep reading and re-reading these pieces and the more I read them, the more I feel the real heaven-descended greatness of the man's passion, and the moving and novel grandeur of his poetic style. It is no longer with me an enthusiasm of first contact. He [Whitman] grows on me. like the Bible and Shakespeare. 37

A word must be said to recall Sherman's change in philosophy after he left Northwestern University, however, and went to New York to edit the Herald-Tribune's "Books." Whereas he had been an extreme New-Humanist writing critically very much in the style of Arnold, he became after the World War a kind of liberal himself, a change which accounts for his breadth of sympathy with Whitman in Americans.

Finding that critics like Stuart P. Sherman praised Whitman's poetry and his philosophy of democracy, we come to the conclusion that Whitman was rated as the most original poet America had produced.

Along with the critical revolt in America came the revolt in poetry. The new free verse movement began about 1912, and with the "advent of the free verse movement, the spirit of

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37 Jacob Zeitlin and Homer Woodbridge, Life and Letters of Stuart P. Sherman, New York: Farrar and Rinehart Inc., 1929,

Whitman was reborn."[38] Harriet Monroe's Poetry: A Magazine of Verse, started in 1911, became the official organ of the poetical renascence. Contributors to this magazine--Amy Lowell, Edgar Lee Masters, Carl Sandburg--all owed something to Whitman. They could not successfully imitate his verse forms, but they were encouraged to try. Whitman's freedom in choice of subject matter was copied by the new school of free verse writers. Boynton said that Louis Untermeyer's New Era in American Poetry "could almost be described as a series of essays on Whitman in relation to his literary progeny."[39] Untermeyer himself expressed the indebtedness of the new school of poets to Whitman in the introduction to American Poetry Since 1900:

> It was Whitman's use of the rich verbal material that flowered in libraries that gave him such potency.... with his elemental dynamism, his desire to strike off chains rather than put up bars, he might be called--if rhetoric were permitted--the Lincoln of our literature. 40

Witter Bynner's poem expressed his indebtedness:

> Somebody called Walt Whitman
> Dead! He is alive instead,
> Alive as I am. When I lift my head,
> His head is lifted. When his brave mouth speaks,
> My lips contain his word. And when his rocker creaks
> Ghostly in Camden, there I sit in it and watch my hand grow old
> And take upon my constant lips the kiss of younger truth.
> . . .

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[38] Alfred Kreymborg, A History of American Poetry, New York: Tudor Publishing Co., 1934, p. 207.

[39] Percy H. Boynton, "Walt Whitman--A Centenary View," Nation, CVIII (May, 1919), 867.

[40] Louis Untermeyer, American Poetry Since 1900, New York: H. Holt and Co., 1923.

It is my joy to tell and be told
That he is all the world and me,
Cannot be dead,
That I, in all the world and him, youth after youth
Shall lift my head. 41

The rise of Whitman as a poet from gross neglect, misunderstandings, and bitter denunciations by the critics to recognition as one of the great literary figures of modern times is strikingly emphasized by the celebrations in Brooklyn and elsewhere and by the mass of articles in American periodicals in connection with the centenary of his birth in 1919. A glance at some of these articles will give a cross current of public opinion:

> New Republic: Yet the world is coming round to the spot where Whitman stood with his soul much faster than he could have foreseen. Every great step in progress is a step in that direction.--Percy H. Boynton. 42

> Bookman: Whitman is still the poet of the thinker and the literary man rather than a popular poet, but he is making headway.--"Gossip Shop." 43

> Dial: For the teacher humble enough to feel that he himself needs instruction before he shall presume to teach Americanization, there is no nobler text book than the poems of Walt Whitman.--Winifred Kirkland. 44

> Literary Digest: My verdict upon Whitman is this--that he has more nearly justified the ways of God to man than any writer that we have produced, and perhaps more so than any poet who has lived.--Edgar Lee Masters. 45

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41 Boynton, op. cit., p. 867.

42 Percy H. Boynton, "I, Walt Whitman," New Republic, XIX (May, 1919), 143.

43 "The Gossip Shop," Bookman, XLIX (July, 1919), 633.

44 Winifred Kirkland, "Americanization and Walt Whitman," Dial, (May, 1919(, 539.

45 "Walt for Our Day," Literary Digest, LXI (July, 1919), 29.

> Current Opinion: At the centenary of the births of Lowell and Whitman, it is natural to compare the two men as they stand today. Lowell was preeminently a singer for his own generation....But he was not a trail-maker. Whitman was very much of a trail-maker, one of the pioneers of whom he sang....The spirit of American life is closer to him today than it was when he died, while it is farther from Lowell than it was at his death.--Unsigned. 46

> Yale Review: So Whitman has come after a hundred years to have two groups of admirers--those who read him as a prophet and the only poet,...and those who read him as one of the high fellowship of poets, and who look to see what of lasting value he may have contributed to the great tradition of poetry.--William B. Cairns. 47

In May, 1919, the centennial of Whitman's birth was celebrated by special ceremonies and a voluminous number of pictures, poems, reviews, and comments in practically all literary periodicals. After one hundred years of Whitman and sixty-four years of Leaves of Grass comes the logical time to estimate the progress of the man who has received the most extravagant praise and the most damning criticism ever given to a writer in this country. That neither extreme is true is certain; the truth lies somewhere between. Of the future one can make only a conjecture as Perry did in saying he seemed "the poet most sure to be read after one hundred or five hundred years."[48] At the year of the centenary Whitman was still a subject for debate, but the "world is coming round

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[46] "Voices of Living Poets," Current Opinion, LXVII (July, 1919), 54.

[47] William B. Cairns, "Walt Whitman," Yale Review, VIII (July, 1919), 754.

[48] Perry, op. cit., p. 308.

to the spot where Whitman stood with his soul much faster than he could ever have foreseen."[49]

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[49] Percy H. Boynton, "I, Walt Whitman," New Republic, XIX (May, 1919(, 143.

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