THE CRITICAL HERITAGE SERIES

General Editor: B. C. Southam

The Critical Heritage series collects together a large body of criticism on major figures in literature. Each volume presents the contemporary responses to a particular writer, enabling the student to follow the formation of critical attitudes to the writer's work and its place within a literary tradition.

The carefully selected sources range from landmark essays in the history of criticism to fragments of contemporary opinion and little published documentary material, such as letters and diaries.

Significant pieces of criticism from later periods are also included in order to demonstrate fluctuations in reputation following the writer's death.
General Editor’s Preface

The reception given to a writer by his contemporaries and near-contemporaries is evidence of considerable value to the student of literature. On one side, we learn a great deal about the state of criticism at large and in particular about the development of critical attitudes towards a single writer; at the same time, through private comments in letters, journals or marginalia, we gain an insight upon the tastes and literary thought of individual readers of the period. Evidence of this kind helps us to understand the writer’s historical situation, the nature of his immediate reading-public, and his response to these pressures.

The separate volumes in The Critical Heritage Series present a record of this early criticism. Clearly, for many of the highly-productive and lengthily-reviewed nineteenth- and twentieth-century writers, there exists an enormous body of material; and in these cases the volume editors have made a selection of the most important views, significant for their intrinsic critical worth or for their representative quality.

For writers of the eighteenth century and earlier, the materials are much scarcer and the historical period has been extended, sometimes far beyond the writer’s lifetime, in order to show the inception and growth of critical views which were initially slow to appear.

In each volume the documents are headed by an Introduction, discussing the material assembled and relating the early stages of the author’s reception to what we have come to identify as the critical tradition. The volumes will make available much material which would otherwise be difficult of access and it is hoped that the modern reader will be thereby helped towards an informed understanding of the ways in which literature has been read and judged.

B.C.S.
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In assembling materials for this volume, I have drawn in part upon four earlier gatherings of writings about Whitman. These four works, which are now virtually unobtainable, are referred to in the headnotes by short titles, as follows:

Dowden  Edward Dowden, ed., 'English Critics on Walt Whitman', printed as Appendix to Bucke (above).

In Re  *In Re Walt Whitman*, edited by his literary executors, Horace L. Traubel, Richard Maurice Bucke and Thomas B. Harned (1893).

I should like to thank Professor Gay Wilson Allen for his kind permission to include Evie Allison Allen’s translation of Knut Hamsun’s criticism of Whitman, originally published in Professor Allen’s volume *Walt Whitman Abroad* (Syracuse, 1955).

I wish to acknowledge some useful bibliographical material placed at my disposal by Professor William White of Wayne State University, editor of the *Walt Whitman Review*, who is now compiling the bibliography of the new collected edition of Whitman’s writings which is in process of publication by the New York University Press.
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Introduction

THE BATTLE FOR RECOGNITION: 1855–60

Libraries of criticism have grown up around those literary works which humanity has found most challenging, but it seems safe to say that there has never been a book more intimately bound up with the history of its reception than *Leaves of Grass*. From the moment it made its appearance in the world early in July 1855, it was the destiny of this singular imaginative production which, the author later implied, was to be taken less as a work of art than as a piece out of a man’s life, to be ‘enveloped in the dust of controversy’.

In tracing the development of the conflict of opinion, there is a certain logic in grouping the responses around the dates of the nine successive American editions which appeared during Whitman’s lifetime (1855, 1856, 1860, 1867, 1871, 1876, 1881, 1888 and 1892). The decisive years were those in which the first three editions appeared. In later years, as Whitman’s fame grew without ever quite overcoming his notoriety, grave men of letters felt almost compelled to take sides either for or against his work, and they brought subtlety and erudition to the task. Yet the early reviews, though not as refined and analytical as some later criticism, retain a surprising amount of freshness and interest, if only because, as Anatole France suggests in *La Vie littéraire* with regard to the classics, the early readers of a work alone are free and spontaneous in their responses to it. Later readers are to some degree constrained by the consensus that time has brought about, even when they are moved to rebel against it.

The first sign that the new book, as unconventional in its appearance as it was in content, would not fail to find its mark was given by Ralph Waldo Emerson in his famous letter to Whitman (No. 1) written from his home in Concord, Massachusetts, on 21 July 1855, about seventeen days, according to the most reliable calculations, after its publication by the author in Brooklyn, New York. The last paragraph of the letter indicates that for a time at least Emerson suspected that the book might be a hoax of some kind. There was no name of an author on the title-page, only a picture of the supposed author in most informal attire and pose (open collar, no tie, hand nonchalantly
The name Walter Whitman was printed in tiny letters on the following page in the copyright notice, and the name Walt Whitman appeared unobtrusively in one of the odd verses of the book, like the careless signature of a painter stuck away in the corner of his canvas and barely noticeable at first glance.

Cicero observed caustically that even the most pessimistic philosophers took pains to identify the personal authorship of their dispiriting treatises, and Emerson's interest may have been aroused by the contrast between the near anonymity of this volume and the 'omnivorous' egotism which seemed to inform it. His letter, after more than a century, still preserves the sense of excitement with which he made his discovery. It may be comparable in a way to the experience recorded by Keats in his sonnet on Homer, and it was historically more important, not because Whitman is comparable to Homer but because Homer should have existed on the map of the world's literature whether or not Keats found him there in translation, while Emerson's recognition and encouragement were of incalculable importance in placing Whitman there. It is certainly fatuous to assert, as the Norwegian novelist Knut Hamsun once did in a lecture on Whitman at the Copenhagen Student Union in 1889 (No. 46), that 'if he had not received that letter from Emerson his book would have failed, as it deserved to fail', yet the letter no doubt served as a catalyst to hasten a process that might otherwise have been slower.

The earliest printed notice of the book, written by Charles A. Dana and published in New York Daily Tribune on Monday, 23 July 1855 (No. 2) appeared before Emerson's letter could have reached Whitman, and its tone, while far from being as hostile and mocking as some later reactions were to be, was less encouraging and more equivocal than a sanguine author hopes for. The paper gave its notice of the new publication a leading place that day and it was both liberal in space and tasteful in its choice of excerpts from Whitman's Preface and his poems, but its very opening sentence expressed an attitude of critical scepticism concerning the worth of the author and, after saying some better things later about his work, it concluded on a rather pinched and grudging note.

The mixed feelings of Dana presaged, more accurately than the enthusiasm of Emerson, the conflict which for so long has swirled about the book. The ambivalence of Dana is echoed in a review by the New Englander Charles Eliot Norton, which appeared in Putnam's
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MONTHLY, published towards the end of the summer in which the book appeared, September 1855 (No. 3). We could hardly guess, judging from Norton’s flippant tone, that, behind the visible scene of public print, he was, very soon thereafter, participating in another drama with regard to Whitman’s book. On 23 September 1855, in a letter to his good friend James Russell Lowell (No. 5a), Norton called Leaves of Grass to his attention confidently with the assurance that the book must have something good in it to have recently ‘excited Emerson’s enthusiasm. He has written a letter to this “one of the roughs” which I have seen, expressing the warmest admiration and encouragement.’ The time was only a few weeks before Whitman permitted Dana to publish Emerson’s letter to him in the New York Tribune of 10 October (which Emerson complained to Samuel Longfellow was ‘a strange rude thing’ to do) and long before he caused a striking sentence from it (‘I greet you at the beginning of a great career’) to be embossed in gold on the spine of the second edition of the book in 1856. But if Norton had hoped to interest Lowell sufficiently to tempt him to undertake a review of the book, his hopes were dashed by the reply from Lowell (No. 5b) on 12 October: ‘No, no, this kind of thing you describe won’t do. When a man aims at originality he acknowledges himself consciously unoriginal, a want of self-respect which does not often go along with the capacity for great things.’

Another New Englander, however, was less reserved. Edward Everett Hale undertook to review the book in the North American Review for January 1856 (No. 8). Apart from Emerson’s letter, this was the most understanding appraisal that the book had received, and Whitman himself was so well pleased with it that he gave it the leading place in a pamphlet of advertisements for himself entitled Leaves of Grass Imprints, which was distributed with the third (Boston) edition of the book in 1860. But it is significant that, even then, the reviewer’s tone, while admiring, is also defensive and somewhat apologetic. He concludes with the observation that ‘there is not a word in it meant to attract readers by its grossness, as there is in half the literature of the last century, which holds its place unchallenged on the tables in our drawing-rooms’.

The polemical note sounds like an answer to the bombardment of abuse against the book’s indecency which must have begun in conversation before it reached the stage of print. Since many Americans at that time, though independent enough politically, were still colonial in their
cultural attitudes, the effect of the negative verdicts pronounced in the London periodicals is not difficult to imagine. The *Saturday Review* of 15 March, 1856 had concluded: 'If the *Leaves of Grass* should come into anybody's possession, our advice is to throw them instantly behind the fire.' More vehement and uncompromising still were the pronouncements of the (London) *Critic* (No. 10) of 1 April 1856:

Walt Whitman is as unacquainted with art, as a hog is with mathematics . . . Walt Whitman libels the highest type of humanity, and calls his free speech the true utterance of a *man*; we, who may have been misdirected by civilisation, call it the expression of a beast . . . If this work is really a work of genius—if the principles of those poems, their free language, their amazing and audacious egotism, their animal vigour, be real poetry and the divinest evidence of the true poet—then our studies have been in vain, and vainer still the homage which we have paid the monarchs of Saxon intellect, Shakspere, and Milton, and Byron . . .

The reviewer concluded with the statement that the most generous assumption he could possibly make was that the writer was mad!

The review in the *Boston Intelligencer* (No. 11) of 3 May 1856, which Whitman thought representative enough to bind into an Appendix entitled 'Opinions' printed in the second edition of the *Leaves* later that year, made a valiant attempt to surpass the billingsgate of these reactions overseas:

We were attracted by the very singular title of this work, to seek the work itself, and what we thought ridiculous in the title is eclipsed in the pages of this heterogeneous mass of bombast, egotism, vulgarity and nonsense. The beastliness of the author is set forth in his own description of himself, and we can conceive no better reward than the lash for such a violation of decency as we have before us. The *Criterion* says: 'It is impossible to imagine how any man's fancy could have conceived it, unless he were possessed of the soul of a sentimental donkey that had died of disappointed love.'

This book should find no place where humanity urges any claim to respect, and the author should be kicked from all decent society as below the level of a brute. There is neither wit nor method in his disjointed babbling, and it seems to us he must be some escaped lunatic, raving in pitiable delirium.

To compensate somewhat for these vilifications, those men who were most directly under the influence of Emerson—Moncure Conway, Thoreau and Bronson Alcott—confirmed the validity of their chief's appraisal of the new American literary phenomenon. As early as 17 September 1855, Moncure Conway, writing to Emerson from
Washington (No. 4) after visiting Whitman in his home, said: 'I came off delighted with him. His eye can kindle strangely; and his words are ruddy with health. He is clearly his Book—and I went off impressed with the sense of a new city on my map, viz., Brooklyn, just as if it had suddenly risen through the boiling sea.' Later, at the end of 1856, in a letter to Harrison Blake, Thoreau (No. 14) characterized *Leaves of Grass* in a sentence that has often been quoted: 'Though rude and sometimes ineffectual, it is a great primitive poem,—an alarum or trumpet-note ringing through the American camp.'

Emerson himself, however, had soon begun to waver, unfortunately. Whether this was due to annoyance at the use to which his private letter had been put for publicity by Whitman himself or to the unrelenting power of the reaction which Whitman had evoked in many reviewers or to genuine doubts as to the accuracy of his own judgment, it is now impossible to say. But as early as 6 May 1856, in a letter to Carlyle, Emerson is clearly beginning to be of two minds about his new protégé:

One book last summer came out in New York, a nondescript monster which yet had terrible eyes and buffalo strength, and was indisputably American,—which I thought to send you; but the book thrrove so badly with the few to whom I showed it, and wanted good morals so much that I never did. Yet I believe now again I shall. It is called *Leaves of Grass*,—was written and printed by a journeyman printer in Brooklyn, New York, named Walter Whitman; and after you have looked into it, if you think, as you may, that it is only an auctioneer's inventory of a warehouse, you can light your pipe with it.

What a distance separates these sentiments from the ones with which he had hailed Whitman ten months before ('the most extraordinary piece of wit & Wisdom that America has yet contributed. . . . incomparable things said incomparably well, as they must be. . . . the courage of treatment which so delights us, & which large perception only can inspire. . . . It has the best merits, namely, of fortifying & encouraging. . . .') The truth appears to be that Emerson, like others who have made important discoveries, did not succeed in holding on to his faith in what he had found. Despite all of his vaunted individualism (in theory he was as uncompromising as Ibsen when he said at the end of *Enemy of the People*: 'He is the strongest who stands most alone!'), Emerson was as inclined as other civilized men to yield and conform to social pressures in matters of literary evaluation.

In his later years, Emerson hurt Whitman's feelings by his failure to include a single selection from *Leaves* in his anthology *Parnassus*. 
Yet it was Whitman's feeling that, in the deepest sense, Emerson had not changed his mind about his worth since 1855, and in his talks with Horace Traubel in Camden, he added to the written record something that Emerson had said to him as they were conversing on the Boston Common in 1860. Sensing that Whitman, despite his brave demeanour, was feeling somewhat disheartened by all the clamour and controversy which surrounded his book, Emerson said, in an effort to buoy up his spirits: 'You have put the world in your debt, and such obligations are always acknowledged and met.'

After Emerson's death, Whitman's disciples (Traubel, Bucke, Harned, Burroughs, Kennedy, O'Connor) were often critical of Emerson's vacillations. It appeared to them that he had blown hot and cold. Some of his quoted sayings hurt, e.g. that he had expected from Whitman the songs of a nation and had got only its inventories. Yet Whitman himself never questioned Emerson's integrity or the indispensable service his spontaneous letter had performed in getting a sceptical public to grant him a hearing. In later years, he told Traubel mildly that even his own brother George had said to him on one occasion: 'Hasn't the world shown you that it doesn't want your work? Why don't you call the game off?' Walt said he had remained silent in answer to the questions. But, as Felix Adler once said consolingly to Whitman, 'readers must not only be counted; they must be weighed'. An Emerson, though he were alone in his appreciation (which, fortunately, he was far from being), would always carry weight in the world's estimation. And in conversation, Emerson may on occasion have been even more rapturous in his recommendation of Whitman's merits than he was on paper; he is reported, for example, to have said to a friend in the first phase of his enthusiasm over Walt: 'Americans abroad can now come home, for unto us a man is born!'

Among the many 'firsts' to be claimed for Emerson in Whitman criticism, the allusion in the concluding part of this sentence is the first known suggestion of a comparison, which appealed to William Douglas O'Connor (No. 30) and many other Whitman enthusiasts in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century between the American poet and Christ.

In retrospect, it appears that the most redoubtable warrior in Whitman's cause at the outset may have been none other than Whitman himself! Though it is doubtful that he ever heard of them, he acted in the spirit of the words attributed to Rabbi Hillel: 'If I am not for
myself, who will be for me? But if I am for myself alone, what am I?'
He may have hoped, like all authors, for a receptive audience when, in his thirty-seventh year, he finally published a book, but he was mentally prepared for the bitter polemic that ensued. And he was too intelligent not to have realized that, like Molière's character George Dandin, he himself 'had asked for it!' Without being bellicose, he could, when occasion demanded it, be stubborn indeed (as when he rejected Emerson's friendly advice on the Boston Common to meet his respectable enemies half-way by expurgating his own book). There was a marked vein in him of the phlegm and recalcitrance that Motley had noted in the Dutch character. In his seventieth year, he was to use a military image in describing the first publication of his book more than thirty years before. He described it as 'a sortie', the success or failure of which would not be evident for at least a hundred years more. Perhaps the figure that should be employed to describe his action is that of a gambit in chess. Literature was a superior and amusing game which Whitman enjoyed playing seriously against the world, and once his gambit was slashingly accepted and countered by his opponents and a fierce struggle began around his boldly exposed position, he proved willing to defend it as strenuously as was necessary.

Not only was he prepared for the extremely risky and unauthorized use of Emerson's letter (at a time when he could ill afford the loss of his one influential friend or the additional obloquy to which his tactics exposed him) but he went to the length of writing at least three separate reviews of his own book (No. 7) and published them anonymously in different places: the United States Review, the American Phrenological Journal and the Brooklyn Daily Times. Since he made no effort to disguise his characteristic style, the truth was suspected at once and used against him by shrewd contemporary readers (No. 15), and it was officially proclaimed by his literary executors in the volume In Re Walt Whitman (1893) after his death. He may have been inspired in this dubious practice, which raises some eyebrows among students still, from having heard of the tradition that the poets Spenser and Leigh Hunt (not to speak of the actor Garrick) had, at various times, all written laudatory accounts of their own performances.

He went still further by adopting (or, it may be, inventing) a technique that has become common in twentieth-century advertising when he made use of the hostile and negative opinions of his book as well as the positive ones (some of them composed by himself) in an effort to intrigue the reader's interest and to compel him to sit in judgment
for himself. He was determined, since he evidently would never be
an unqualified success, to be at least a controversial one, for he had
intuitively grasped the idea, put into words by Oscar Wilde, that the
only thing worse than being talked about was not being talked about.
In fact, it might have been Whitman whom Irving Babbitt was
writing about in *Rousseau and Romanticism*:

As for the lesser figures in the (Romantic) movement their ‘genius’ is often
chiefly displayed in their devices for calling attention to themselves as the
latest and most marvellous births of time; it is only one aspect in short of an art
in which the past century, whatever its achievement in the other arts, has really
surpassed all its predecessors—the art of advertising.

Whitman’s penchant for giving prominence to and reprinting
almost everything that was ever said about himself and his work, no
matter how trivial, obscure or worthless the source, annoyed even
some of his greatest admirers and friends. It was John Addington
Symonds (No. 48) who observed of Whitman: ‘Instead of leaving his
fame and influence to the operation of natural laws, he encouraged the
clague and reclame which I have pointed out as prejudicial. . . . Were
Buddha, Socrates, Christ, so interested in the dust stirred up around
them by second-rate persons, in third-rate cities, and in more than
fifth-rate literature?’

The answer may be that it was out of such unpromising materials
that Whitman managed in his lifetime to forge a reputation sufficient
to attract the attention of Symonds himself though he was separated
from him by thousands of miles of ocean and all the tiers of society.
But the real justification of Whitman’s unorthodox methods should
have been, for Symonds, not the simple pragmatic one that they
worked but rather the beneficence of the results they accomplished
for him and many others. For the healthy spirit and universal sympa­
thies of the American poet moved Symonds, according to his own
testimony, more than that of any other book except the Bible. He
was one of those readers for whom the *Leaves* seemed nothing less
than a religious revelation.

For my own part, [he wrote] I may confess that it shone upon me when my
life was broken, when I was weak, sickly, poor, and of no account, and that
I have ever lived thenceforward in the light and warmth of it . . . During
my darkest hours it comforted me with the conviction that I too played my
part in the illimitable symphony of cosmic life.

If, as Whitman suggests in *Democratic Vistas*, the true test of a book is
whether or not it is capable of helping a human soul, *Leaves of Grass* had obviously passed the test, and no persiflage or sophistication could erase that simple fact. That is the basic reason why it was able to survive the first five critical years of its existence.

**AFTER THE CIVIL WAR: 1865–92**

Whitman's record as a volunteer helper in the hospitals in Washington from 1862 on, recorded in part in *Specimen Days*, seemed to many to support the cause of his *Leaves* as well by demonstrating clearly that he was not a writer for whom words are cheap and that the doctrines of sympathy which he expounded so eloquently were of a piece with the conduct of his life. This may not have been a literary argument rigorously logical and pure enough to impress the young Henry James (No. 28) fresh out of Harvard who did not hesitate in dividing the man from the poet and condemning the latter roundly, but it did make Whitman some influential young new friends like William Douglas O'Connor (No. 29) and John Burroughs (No. 53). As a partisan polemicist O'Connor's rhetorical talents were formidable, and in his pamphlet *The Good Gray Poet* (No. 29) he portrayed Whitman as a martyr in the cause of literature because of his discharge from a department of the United States Government on the pretext that he was the author of an indecent book. The portrayal was so persuasive to some contemporaries that Whitman is sometimes described to this day in American newspapers under the sobriquet bestowed upon him by O'Connor.

Whitman was helped, too, by the popular appeal of two of his 'Memories of President Lincoln'. The very unrepresentative, loosely rhymed and metred Song 'O Captain! My Captain!' was soon anthologized and, despite its author's earlier unsavoury reputation, accepted into elementary schoolbooks. 'When Lilacs Last in the Door-yard Bloom'd', on the other hand, impressed the cognoscenti of literature not only in this country but in England. In his study of William Blake, Swinburne magniloquently proclaimed 'his dirge over President Lincoln—the most sweet and sonorous nocturne ever chanted in the church of the world'. It is interesting to trace the stages (No. 32 and 45) by which he passed from this hyperbole to his fulminations in later life against the dangers of 'Whitmania'.

Henry James, however, underwent a change of heart in an opposite direction. From the scathing sentiments of his review in 1865 (No. 28)
he proceeded to the relative benignity of his notice of Whitman’s letters to Pete Doyle in the volume *Calamus* thirty-three years later (No. 55). There is also the well-known report by Edith Wharton of the positive enthusiasm of James’s oral renditions of Whitman’s verses in her autobiography, for which she chose a title allusive to one of Whitman’s Prefaces, *A Backward Glance*.

Whitman’s progress during this period was both a cause and a result of his being ‘taken in hand’ by reputable publishers and impresarios. In America, Whitman seemed to gain in respectability by being admitted to the list of Osgood (No. 42), though the publisher soon regretted his temerity and drew back before the threat of litigation on grounds of obscenity by the state’s attorney. But the greatest ‘coup’ for Whitman’s admission among the poets of the English language was undoubtedly created by the publication of Selections from the *Leaves* edited by William Rossetti in London in 1868 (No. 31). Whitman ‘wept and fasted’ before consenting to the expurgation that he had obstinately resisted in his own country. But Rossetti, in whom the friend and critic were almost indistinguishable from the impresario, finally prevailed with results so happy that Whitman and his disciples during his last years were inclined to romanticize the experience and to conclude from it that he was but one more illustration of the proposition that prophets are not without honour save in their own country.

The fact is that the most careful student of the growth of his reputation in England, Professor Harold Blodgett, has shown that the barriers to his recognition there were not substantially different from those which confronted him in the United States. But distance lent a certain enchantment on both sides, and the self-confidence of Whitman derived sustenance from the friendship of Rossetti, the politeness of Tennyson, the enthusiasm of Swinburne (before his radical recantation) and Stevenson, the visits and pilgrimages of Anne Gilchrist, Robert Buchanan, Edmund Gosse, Edward Carpenter and others. Signs of affection and esteem from the centre of the English-speaking cultural world certainly produced a stimulating effect upon Whitman’s American reputation, just as earlier signs of rejection and distaste there had created a correspondingly depressing effect in the most cultivated circles on this side of the Atlantic.

The final validity of Rossetti’s successful enterprise, however, must remain questionable. Of Whitman it may be affirmed by some who are what Scott Fitzgerald called ‘quick deciders’ that if you’ve read
one of his poems (especially if that one happens to be 'Song of Myself') you have read them all, but it may also be said perhaps with as much truth that unless you have read all of his poems you have not properly read any one of them. No man gains more than he from the mass of his accomplishment rather than by any detail or example of it, however well chosen. All of his words throw light upon the meaning of each, and all of his poems do likewise with regard to each of them separately. No poet, for better or worse, is less concentrated in any verse or set of his verses, and if poetry is, as Amy Lowell once said, concentration, then those people are right (including herself) who feel that he may be no poet at all. No poet is less safely, justly or even fairly selected, excerpted or anthologized. And yet this hurrying world requires excerpts, selections and anthologies because it does not have the time or leisure to devote to the elucidation of any writer the attention which he requires to be fully understood. It may have been some such qualms about compromising his integrity that troubled Whitman about Rossetti’s proposal of a volume of selections, and, despite the eventual happy outcome of the venture, he may well have been troubled, for, contrary to the dark suspicions and conjecture of Gerard Manley Hopkins (No. 44), Whitman was a man of honour and far from being 'a scoundrel'.

CANONIZATION, KINDNESS AND SOME BRICKBATS:
1892-1914

With Whitman’s death in 1892, a predictable process of beatification on the one hand and of demolition on the other began. Some critics, particularly academic ones, attempted to steer a more or less neutral course between these extremes, but this was not easy to do because the passions of the partisans ran even higher at times than when Whitman himself was alive. He remained a source of contention. Hagiography was the first order of the day. Literary remains of the master, tributes, memoirs, a uniform edition of his collected works, including variorum readings—all this was the work of years, of lifetimes actually for his literary executors: Richard Maurice Bucke, Thomas Harned and Horace Traubel. Traubel’s voluminous notes alone on the conversations, correspondence and day-to-day life of Whitman’s last years have produced five books of over five hundred pages each (the last published in 1964) and the end is apparently not in sight yet almost eighty years after Whitman’s death. Symonds’
valuable testimony (No. 48) was published the year after Whitman's death (1893) which was also the year of Symonds' own untimely death. The valuable and rare collection of tributes and reminiscences In Re Walt Whitman was published by the executors in the same year. Among the more interesting contributions to this volume was one from T. W. Rolleston (No. 49), an Irish admirer and correspondent of Whitman's who was instrumental in helping to translate the Leaves into German and thus contributing to the spread of Whitman's European fame.

The year 1896 saw two significant additions to the record by disciples of Whitman, John Burroughs (No. 53) and William Sloane Kennedy (No. 54). The initial posthumous period also saw a large number of cooler though still basically kindly estimates of his significance such as the one by William James (No. 50). Close to this category and yet more neutral in its assessment is that of James's Harvard colleague George Santayana (No. 58), who as early as 1890 when Whitman was still alive had indicated in a philosophical dialogue, which considerations of space forbade us to include here, that he was of two minds about his subject, since he found that Whitman was an author capable of inspiring delight at the very moment he was provoking critical scepticism, not merely in different people at the same time or in the same person at different times but simultaneously within a person. Finally, this period witnessed some ferocious onslaughts against the poet, degenerating at times into *ad hominem* and personal reflections upon him and his work rivalling the worst examples of what had been said about him in the 1850s. These expressions came from those who felt too strongly to heed the ordinary amenities and the cautious Latin admonition to say nothing if not good about the dead. Examples are Max Nordau (No. 51), John Jay Chapman (No. 56) and possibly T. W. Higginson (No. 57).

This period is so rich in examples of all these varying attitudes that we have been compelled, for reasons of space, to omit many items which are intrinsically interesting. We have included nothing, for example, from the disciple Traubel's five volumes of memoirs and reflections. We have likewise sacrificed enthusiastic selections from Edward Carpenter and James Thomson, the author of *The City of Dreadful Night*. Among academic appraisals of various degrees of admiration or hostility, we have not included anything by Bliss Perry, Barrett Wendell, William Peterfield Treat or Paul Elmer More. An *ad hominem* assessment that we regret not having the space for (one
of several examples of its kind in different languages) is a 1913 pamphlet by Dr. W. C. Rivers entitled *Walt Whitman's Anomaly*, published in London and, according to its cover, restricted to members of the medical profession. Rivers has little if anything to say about the literary quality of Whitman's work; he treats it solely for the light it is supposed to cast upon its author's putative latent or overt homosexuality. This question (in relation to the *Calamus* section of *Leaves of Grass*) had been raised directly during Whitman's lifetime by Symonds, and Whitman had indignantly denied what he regarded as a shocking imputation. Biographers like Professor Gay Wilson Allen have maintained an agnostic attitude on the point, but Rivers and those critics who have followed him insist on the decisiveness of the internal evidence of the poems themselves to establish the abnormality of Whitman's emotional life. From the point of view of pure literary criticism, of course, this approach, wherever it occurs, represents a bizarre digression. It is a historical curiosity, however, that there have always been those who would reduce Whitman from being primarily a writer to his interest as a 'case'. *Ad hominem* and reductive views of literature (including the Freudian and Marxist varieties) are effectively countered by Marcel Proust in *Contre Sainte-Beuve* with the challenging assertion that 'a book is the product of a different self from the self we manifest in our habits, in our social life, in our vices . . . .

An inference from such a view seems to be that the determination of aesthetic and intellectual worth must finally rest upon some impersonal or objective ground as independent of the judge as it is of the one he judges, and also that it may be asserted with confidence only when arrived at by a broad consensus of readers, as widely separated from each other as possible in space and time. For this reason it has seemed appropriate to conclude this collection with an excerpt from Basil de Selincourt's penetrating study of Whitman (No. 59), first published in 1914. This study has been widely recognized as outstanding, and many of its detailed observations still seem as sensitive, sharp and perceptive as anything written about Whitman before or since. Selincourt's speculative metrical analysis of the opening lines of 'When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd', for example, opened new vistas in the appreciation of Whitman's instinctive technical verbal virtuosity.

It is perhaps as fitting to close this survey of the first sixty years of Whitman criticism with the concrete, practical aesthetic approach of Selincourt as it was to begin it with the broad, sweeping moral generalizations about the effect of the book and its content made by
Emerson. Emerson's letter, Whitman later confided to a friend, presented him with something like 'the chart of an emperor'. How well he utilized the prerogatives granted him by the man whom, in the Preface to the 1856 edition, he saluted as his 'Master', is the subject of Selincourt's critical inquiry.

WHITMAN'S RECEPTION OVERSEAS

Professor Allen for his volume *Walt Whitman Abroad* in 1955 compiled a bibliography of Whitman criticism and translations listing a selection of two hundred and fourteen titles from Germany, France, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Russia, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Latvia, Poland, the Ukraine, Yugoslavia, Italy, Spain and South America, Israel, Japan and India. Extensive as this listing is, it is hardly exhaustive if only because it leaves out China, about which, especially since the mainland went Communist, information may not have been available to Professor Allen. In the year that his book appeared, however, press dispatches indicated that the centennial of *Leaves of Grass* was marked in China by the appearance of a postage stamp honouring him. One may surmise that Red China's interest in Whitman was of a kind similar to that which explained his vogue in Revolutionary Russia, about which I shall have something to say a little later.

His fortunes in France, which so often sets the style not only in women's dress but in the arts (and which, significantly, has accumulated more Nobel awards for literature than any other country in the twentieth century) are particularly interesting. Some of the most fashionable names in late nineteenth century and early twentieth century France have been among his translators and critics: Jules Laforgue, André Gide and Valéry Larbaud, the translator of James Joyce.

Laforgue's attention to Whitman had been called by one of the French Symbolist poets, Stuart Merrill, who had been born in America. Laforgue published his version in 1886 under the title *Translations of the astonishing American poet, Walt Whitman*. André Gide was impelled to undertake a new translation of Whitman because he was dissatisfied with the idealized versions by Léon Bazalgette, which had become popular in France. Apollinaire wrote a fantastic surrealistic account of Whitman's funeral, supposedly on the authority of someone who had been there. But the turning point came in 1918 when Laforgue's translations were republished together with some by Gide and some
THE CRITICAL HERITAGE

by Larbaud who also contributed an important and illuminating essay which fixed Whitman's place firmly on the map of modern avant-garde and experimental literature.

The first seeds of Whitman's German fame were sown in 1868 by Ferdinand Freiligarth, the revolutionary poet who was a friend of Karl Marx and was a political exile residing in London when the volume of Rossetti's Selections appeared. Freiligarth reviewed it with boundless enthusiasm for the Allgemeine Zeitung. More effective was a monograph in German in 1882 published in New York by a German-American Karl Knortz. Knortz also collaborated with T. W. Rolleston in translating a selection from Whitman's poems, published in Switzerland after the German police had forbidden its publication in Germany.

As had been the case in France, the most sensational advance in the value of Whitman's 'stock' in Germany came with the end of the First World War. Hans Reisiger published a new translation of Whitman in 1919 which, according to one reviewer, succeeded in making the American into a German poet. Thomas Mann described Reisiger's translation as a 'holy gift' to Germany. In the wake of the Second World War, another translation by Georg Goyert, the translator of Joyce, evoked the enthusiasm of critics.

The growth of Whitman's reputation in Russia was given its greatest impetus by the Revolution of 1917, but it had begun a long time before that. Before 1900, Czarist censorship forbade virtually any mention of him or the fame he was achieving in western Europe. Nevertheless, the novelist Turgenev, who was an Anglophile, a traveller, and followed literary developments in the English-speaking literary world with close attention, was impressed enough with Whitman's work to translate some of his poems and offer them to an editor. Turgenev also appears to have spoken to an American writer in 1874 (quite possibly his friend Henry James) and to have told him that while there was undoubtedly a great deal of chaff in Whitman's work there was some good grain there as well. Tolstoy, too, though seemingly even more ambivalent on the subject than Turgenev, suggested the rendition of Whitman into Russian.

Nothing much came of these efforts, however, until 1907 when Kornei Chukovsky took advantage of a relaxation in Czarist censorship after the abortive revolution of 1905 to publish his translations from Leaves of Grass, which, by the year 1944, had gone into ten editions. Writing in 1955, Stephen Stepanchev said: 'It would be
WALT WHITMAN

difficult to overestimate the importance of Walt Whitman in the history of Russian letters of the past fifty years. Whitman’s emphasis on pioneering, on building a new, democratic future, on brotherhood and equality elicited a warm response both from youthful Marxists and from partisans of a gentler, more middle-class orientation. After the Bolshevik Revolution, Whitman’s poems appeared with an introduction by the Soviet commissar of culture, Lunacharsky, and his work became the major influence upon the futurist poet Vladimir Mayakovsky. By 1935, according to Stepanchev, ‘it is not an exaggeration to say that Whitman is now a Russian as well as an American author.’ Whitman’s successes in other Slavic countries may perhaps be attributed to Russian influence, but some of them appear to have been achieved independently of it. In Czechoslovakia, for example, Whitman’s poems were translated years before Chukovsky’s epoch-making version was published in Russia.

Whitman was known early in the Scandinavian countries largely through the efforts of the Danish journalist Rudolf Schmidt. The Norwegian novelist Knut Hamsun, who was very critical of America, reacted against Schmidt’s publicity for Whitman by writing one of the most satirical and amusing pieces ever penned against Whitman (No. 46), but another famous Norwegian author, Björnson, was an admirer of his work, and the novelist Johannes Jensen, not only translated Whitman’s work into Danish but made the protagonist of his allegorical novel *Hjulet* (The Wheel) a character modelled upon Whitman, according to Professor Allen. In 1935, K. A. Svensson brought out a volume of Whitman’s poems in Swedish translation.

French critics are credited with first bringing Whitman to the attention of Italian writers. His first influential enthusiast in Italy was Enrico Nencioni, who succeeded in arousing the interest of Carducci and D’Annunzio. Luigi Gambarale published a slim volume of translations from his work in 1887; this was enlarged in 1890 and finally a complete translation appeared in 1907. After the First World War, Giovanni Papini produced an effective proselytizing essay on Whitman’s behalf, and after the Second World War the brilliant and ill-fated Cesare Pavese published an essay that is accepted as the most perceptive criticism of Whitman by an Italian. This renewed interest resulted in a complete new translation by Enzo Giachino.

The Cuban journalist José Martí, who had heard Whitman lecture on Lincoln in New York, is credited with introducing him to Latin America in 1887 with an essay that was published in *La Nación* in
Argentina and received wide circulation in South America. After the turn of the century, a Whitman cult came into existence in Spain, and a Catalan critic published a study of him and his message in 1913. Miguel de Unamuno published a sensitive and illuminating essay on Whitman entitled ‘El canto adánice’ (‘Adam’s Song’), and the famous Spanish poet García Lorca wrote a poem about him.

Whitman’s manifest indebtedness to the Hebrew Bible for both his verse-form and his vision made his appreciation in that language natural. Decades before the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, the poet Uri Zvi Greenberg was writing about him. In 1950, S. Shalom, a poet and journalist of Tel Aviv, explained why he had undertaken to translate Whitman: ‘Whitman’s pioneering is very close to us, and so are his Biblical rhythms. To translate him into Hebrew is like translating a writer back into his own language.’ The best known and most ambitious translation of Whitman into Hebrew has been made by Simon Halkin, a poet, novelist and critic, who is a retired professor at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Professor Sholom J. Kahn of the Hebrew University, an American who has settled in Israel, has written perceptively about Whitman.

Whitman’s work has exerted an influence, too, upon Yiddish poetry, and Louis Miller has translated and published selections from *Leaves of Grass* in that language.

Appreciation of Whitman in the Far East may be explained at least in part, as the United States Ambassador to Japan, John M. Allison, once did in opening an exhibit of Whitman materials accumulated by collectors in Tokyo after the Second World War, as a simple human response to the outgoing affection so warmly expressed by the poet who wrote *Salut au monde*:

> Health to you! good will to you all, from me and America sent!
> Each of us inevitable,
> Each of us limitless—each of us with his or her right upon the earth.

In a country like India, however, another factor may enter in that Whitman’s mysticism has been thought by some readers to resemble that of the Upanishads, the Bhagavad-Gita and other sacred books. This had already been noticed by a reader like Thoreau who asked Whitman if he had ever read these Indian texts which were just becoming familiar to the West in translation during the nineteenth century. ‘No,’ Whitman is said to have replied to Thoreau’s query, ‘Tell me about them.’
In an article published in 1928 entitled ‘The Critic and American Life’, Irving Babbitt recorded his own ‘protest against the present preposterous overestimate of Walt Whitman’. In the same year, writing an Introduction to the Selected Poems of Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot assured readers, who may have entertained doubts upon the point, that ‘I did not read Whitman until much later in life, and had to conquer an aversion to his form, as well as much of his matter, in order to do so.’ He added: ‘I am equally certain—indeed it is obvious—that Pound owes nothing to Whitman. This is an elementary observation.’ In the light of some scholarly and critical investigations since then, the truth of this observation has turned out to be neither obvious nor elementary. And Eliot himself may have recognized this when he came to write of Pound again in the 1940s. Amy Lowell, too, had felt compelled to deny the influence of Whitman on the Imagist movement in which she was prominent: ‘Often and often I read in the daily, weekly and monthly press, that modern vers libre writers derive their form from Walt Whitman. As a matter of fact, most of them got it from French Symbolist poets . . .’

The prevailing liberal and literary view of the period, though, increasingly approximated the one which Ludwig Lewisohn formulated with characteristic rhetoric and eloquence in his Expression in America (1932) where he had called Whitman ‘the most strange and difficult figure in all our letters and perhaps the greatest, certainly the most far-reaching, far-echoing poetic voice’.

In the wake of the Great War (1914–18) many factors had converged to give Whitman pre-eminent stature, at home no less than abroad. The rise of America to world power heightened the interest in the work of a man who had self-consciously proclaimed himself her representative poet and had been accepted at his own estimate by a band of energetic and capable disciples. In the paradoxical post-war world of Prohibition and affluence, those intellectuals leading the struggle for liberation from the repressiveness and inhibitions of Puritan legalism found his frankness and openness, particularly with regard to sexual matters, much to their taste and honoured him as a precursor for the courage and obstinacy of the challenge which he had issued against respectable convention, Victorianism, the genteel tradition and censorship in his time. And many of his fellow-citizens, particularly those of recent immigrant origin, overlooking the nativist
and nationalist strains in his work, responded to his internationalism and to his capacious conception of America as 'a nation of nations' (as he had called it in the Preface of 1855) in which none of them need feel alien any more or be compelled to sacrifice any of their distinctive cultural characteristics and background. Amy Lowell made a dour observation that 'it is perhaps sadly significant that the three modern poets who most loudly acknowledge his leadership are all of recent foreign extraction'.

While expatriate Americans (like Eliot and Pound) and some of the 'internal emigrés' in the States who sympathized with them regarded him with distaste and suspicion for those very reasons, other American writers who felt more at home in the melting-pot and were not altogether lacking in talent and prestige continued to testify to the pertinence both of his vision and his style. The most obvious example of Whitman's influence (and it may be one of those whom Amy Lowell had in mind) was no doubt Carl Sandburg, who claimed the whole Whitmanian inheritance—aesthetic, social and political—as his own. This claim can be granted only in part, however, because the extraordinary vivacity of Whitman's imagination and his verbal inventiveness and mimetic precision (e.g. 'The carpenter dresses his plank, the tongue of his foreplane whistles its wild ascending lisp') are never more impressive or clear than when they are contrasted with the laborious effects achieved by even a gifted member of his 'school' such as Sandburg. The sweep of Whitman's majestic vision of America ('The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem,' he had written in the Preface of 1855) also came into possession of the imagination of a novelist like Thomas Wolfe, as his friend Scott Fitzgerald clearly recognized. Wolfe's dithyrambs to America and the American Dream (when they are separated from their context and grouped together as they are in the volume edited by John Hall Wheelock, The Face of a Nation) are quite evidently Whitmanian in quality though they are even wordier than Whitman and though Wolfe's lyricism is more prosaic and drags its plumes along the ground instead of soaring up into the empyrean of song. Yet the reader of Wolfe has the feeling that Whitman himself might have been pleased that his own national ('Unionist') vision had at last found a sympathetic echo in the heart of a Southern writer from the Carolinas.

One of the most impressive of the poetic proselytes that Whitman made in the post First World War period was Hart Crane, who addresses him directly as an inspirer in one of the sections of his epic
The Bridge. Unfortunately, since Crane’s ambitious effort was regarded by many academicians at the time as a dismal failure, his intended tribute to Whitman turned into something of a reproach to his master, as is clear from the comment of Yvor Winters in his review in Poetry (Chicago) in 1930. According to this reviewer, The Bridge merely succeeded in proving ‘the impossibility of getting anywhere with the Whitmanian inspiration. No writer of comparable ability has struggled with it before, and with Mr. Crane’s wreckage in view it seems highly unlikely that any writer of comparable genius will struggle with it again.’

This forecast did not prove fortunate, and Whitman continued to exercise his fascination upon leading poets of the twentieth century long after 1930, as is evident from a response of William Carlos Williams to this editor’s invitation to contribute to a celebration of the centenary of the publication of Leaves of Grass in 1955. In the letter accompanying his essay (printed in Leaves of Grass: One Hundred Years After), Williams called the Leaves ‘a book as important as we are likely to see in the next thousand years, especially a book written by an American’.

Succeeding generations of poets and prose writers of varying degrees of talent and prominence from D. H. Lawrence and Henry Miller to Allen Ginsberg, Lawrence Ferlinghetti and David Ignatow have all supplied vivid confirmations of the continuing viability and potency of the Whitmanian muse. The sixties, in America, with their turbulence and social upheaval, have been as hospitable to Whitman, and for many of the same reasons, as the 1930s were. And whatever the future may bring, it seems safe to predict that one facet or another of his many-sided and even contradictory appeal will continue to interest at least some readers and writers. It is not too soon to affirm that the evidence in this book tends to support the conclusion that he belongs not only to history but to living literature as well.
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