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CONTENTS

The Selling of the 'Author's Edition': Whitman, O'Connor, and the West Jersey Press Affair. By Robert Scholnick.......................................................... 3

The Vernacular Hero in Whitman's 'Song of Myself.' By Donald D. Kummings.......................................................... 22

Whitman's Revision of 'By Blue Ontario's Shore.' By Gary A. Culbert.......................................................... 35

Walt Whitman's Influence on Hamlin Garland. By Nancy Bunge.......................................................... 45

The Atlantic Cable in Whitman's 'Passage to India.' By Martin K. Doudna.......................................................... 50

A New Whitman Letter to Talcott Williams. By Robert Del Greco.......................................................... 52

Whitman: A Current Bibliography. By William White.......................................................... 54

Title Page for With Walt Whitman in Camden, Vol. 1. By Artem Lozinsky [PLATE].......................................................... 56

WALT WHITMAN REVIEW
March 1977
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THE SELLING OF THE 'AUTHOR'S EDITION': WHITMAN, O'CONNOR, AND THE WEST JERSEY PRESS AFFAIR

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College of William and Mary

On 26 January 1876 a Camden newspaper, the West Jersey Press, published an editorial entitled 'Walt Whitman's Actual American Position.' Now recognized as having been written by Whitman himself, the essay charges in the most bitter terms that continued persecution by the American literary establishment has prevented the poet from properly publishing his work, isolated him from his audience, and made it impossible for him to earn even a small income. 'In a pecuniary and worldly sense,' this treatment has 'certainly wrecked the life of [the] author.' On the day the article appeared, Whitman sent a copy to his friend William Michael Rossetti in England with the request that he 'should have it put, if convenient, in the Academy, or any other literary gazette, your way, if thought proper.' Although the Academy rejected the article, Rossetti did have excerpts printed in the Athenæum for 11 March 1876, setting in motion a furious international controversy over the American treatment of Whitman. On 13 March, the Scottish poet Robert Buchanan attacked the American literary establishment in a long letter in the London Daily News. The very next day the New York Times reported Buchanan's protest of Whitman's 'impovertyment and sufferings,' and his call for English men to come to the poet's assistance by purchasing his new 'Centennial Edition.' The controversy swung into high gear when the London correspondent of the New York Tribune, George W. Smalley, reported Buchanan's charges in the course of his front-page 'Anglo-

1 The article has been reprinted in Walt Whitman's Workshop, edited by Hilton J. Furness (Cambridge, Mass., 1929), pp. 245-246.
2 Using his case on internal evidence, Furness convincingly demonstrated that Whitman wrote the article (pp. 247-248). For external evidence, see my Walt Whitman and the Magazines: Some Documentary Evidence, American Literature, 24 (May 1972), 222, n. 5.
American Topics’ column for 28 March. That same day, Bayard Taylor, then a Tribune editor, published ‘In Re Walt Whitman,’ an unsigned editorial ridiculing the ‘highfalutin’ of Buchanan’s ‘screech’ and calling the charges of ‘scurrilous, ‘official persecution,’ etc., ‘simply preposterous.’ This gave two of Whitman’s most articulate supporters, John Burroughs and William D. O’Connor, a chance to send long letters to the paper, again forcing editorial replies from Bayard Taylor. A discussion of the charges of persecution and the underlying value of Whitman’s poetry was undertaken in a variety of American newspapers and periodicals.

Although most of the comment in America on Buchanan’s ‘astounding letter, extravagant and generous, silly and noble’ was negative, the controversy had the effect of bringing Whitman’s name before the public in such a way that he could no longer be ignored. Successful sales campaigns for the ‘Centennial Edition,’ which he was selling from his Camden home, were undertaken in England and America. Four years later the recognition accorded Whitman’s genius by Edmund C. Stedman’s long essay on the poet in the popular and eminently respectable Scribner’s Monthly marked the ‘beginning of... public critical acceptance by others than the members of the Whitman circle.’

Whitman himself had conceived the campaign and fired the first shot, inaccurate as many of his charges proved to be. But the campaign could not have succeeded without the active support of friends in both England and America who, for a variety of reasons and in a variety of ways, were willing to come to his assistance. Of particular interest in this connection is the previously unpublished correspondence between Stedman and O’Connor in the Columbia University library. While Stedman disagreed with O’Connor on the question of persecution and on the most appropriate way to revitalize Whitman’s hardship, he assisted O’Connor by using his influence with the Tribune’s editor, Whitelaw Reid, to place O’Connor’s ‘Walt Whitman: Is He Persecuted?’ in these letters O’Connor denies the still-familiar charge of discipleship and gives a clear and reasonable statement of his purposes in defending Whitman. A close analysis of the entire West Jersey Press controversy provides new insights into Whitman’s purposes in publishing the explosive article and its immediate consequences. Further, as the willingness of certain of the nation’s leading newspapers and periodicals to engage in extensive discussion of ‘Whitman’s Actual American Position’ may indicate, the controversy raised basic questions regarding the American cultural identity.

1. Whitman’s Intentions in Publishing the Article

‘It is not easy to interpret Whitman’s conduct in this whole episode,’ Gay Wilson Allen observes in The Solitary Singer. ‘Had he simply in a period of emotional instability given way to his feelings, or had he deliberately planned the writing and use of the article to stir up sympathy for himself in Great Britain? Perhaps it is doubtful that he foresaw the repercussion in America.’ Unquestionably Whitman’s feelings, depression over his immediate circumstances as well as anger at ‘the determined denial, disgust and scorn’ with which, he charged, ‘orthodox American authors, publishers and editors’ had treated him were deeply involved. In an earlier essay, I wrote that it is likely that an offensive letter rejecting ‘Eiddons’ from Dr Josiah G. Holland, the editor of Scribner’s, ‘was the precipitating factor, the provocation, for the West Jersey Press article... Receiving the letter at a time of illness and concern over lagging creativity, Whitman may very well have been led to strike out against his “opponents.”’ But at the same time, it seems clear that he sought to ‘stir up sympathy’ for himself not only in Great Britain but also in America. He had an immediate and compelling reason: to promote sales of the ‘Centennial Edition’ of Leaves of Grass and Two Riddles. As Clifton Furness has suggested in this connection, Whitman’s was a ‘most “cute” intelligence which combined poetical imagination with practical acumen to a degree not usually realized.’

There is strong evidence that Whitman sought as wide a dissemination of the West Jersey Press charges as possible. We know that he sent copies to at least three friends in addition to William Michael Rossetti: Rudolf Schmidt, the Danish editor, critic, and translator; Edward Dowden, the Irish Shakespeare scholar and critic; and Stedman. He requested Rossetti and Dowden to place

4 Burroughs’s letter appeared on 13 April and is reprinted in Clara Barrus, Whitman and Burroughs: Comrades (Boston, 1931), pp. 116-117. O’Connor’s letter was published on 22 April.
6 Charles B. Willard, Whitman’s American Fane (Providence, 1936), pp. 21-22.
7 Edwin Haviland Miller observes that Whitman’s charges of abuse ‘were half-truths. His poems were not infrequently printed in magazines. Whitman received extensive publicity in newspapers through his own efforts and those of his friends, among whom there were always journalists.’ (The Correspondence, 2: 44.)
8 These letters are owned by Columbia University and are published with the permission of the University. With the exception of O’Connor’s letter to Stedman of 17 April, which is a typescript copy, all other letters are ALS.

11 Walt Whitman’s Workshop, p. 247.
12 He enclosed a slip copy of the article in a letter of 27 January 1876. (The Correspondence, 3: 21 and n. 11.)
13 The date of Whitman’s letter to Dowden has not been definitely established, but Mr Miller convincingly demonstrates that it must have been written about the same time as the one to Rossetti, 27 January 1876. (The Correspondence, 3: 22, n. 14.)
14 Stedman wrote Howells on 26 April 1880 that ‘a few years ago Mr Whitman sent me a “slip” copy of a leader in the West Jersey Press;’ and then he quotes directly from the article. (Whitman and the Magazines, p. 225.)
the article in appropriate journals and it is likely that he did the same with Stedman, who had extensive contacts with New York editors. But it is doubtful that Stedman tried to place it. He had a general policy of seeking to avoid public controversy within the American literary community, and we know that he came to view certain of the article's charges skeptically. No American magazine reprinted it. However, an excerpt did appear in the influential New York Tribune on 29 January 1876.

Whitman had established a good working relationship with the paper's editor, Whitelaw Reid, and he frequently supplied Reid with press clippings from Philadelphia and Camden newspapers for the 'Personal' section of the paper.25 It is probable, therefore, that the Tribune compiled the following paragraph directly from accounts which Whitman sent in (or that Whitman compiled the entire paragraph himself and the paper printed the story as received):

Walt Whitman is living quietly in Camden, working steadily and unobtrusively, and occasionally appearing in public for some charitable object. He gave a reading the other evening for the benefit of the poor of the town. In prefacing his entertainment he said: 'My dear friends, young and old, I propose to read to you the ballad of 'The Diver,' written by a great German poet, whom you all know. His name was Schiller, and he was one of the greatest geniuses that ever lived. To understand it, you must go far back into the feudal age — into the old times — into the open air, the fields and the streams, and see before yourselves knights and maids, barons and baronesses. That is what the poem does. It brings the past to life. It is full of color and movement. It is a picture of what life was like in the Middle Ages.'

The Camden Press [The West Jersey Press] speaks of Whitman's old age as black and desolate, since the magazines refuse his contributions, and Broadway books are his only friends. This is not true. The poem which the poet himself is more resolute and persevering than ever. "Old, poor, and paralyzed," he has for a twelvemonth past been occupying himself by preparing, largely with his own hand, a new edition of his complete works in two volumes, which he himself now sells, partly "to keep the wolf from the door" in old age, and partly to give before he dies as absolute an expression, as may be, of his ideas. "Leaves of Grass" is mainly the same volume previously issued, but has some new poems and a poem or two characteristic portraits. Of "Two Riviulets," he has printed the newer parts here in Camden.

Whitman did succeed, then, in having a significant portion of this important article published in a prestigious New York paper. However, the linking of the description of his old age as 'black and desolate' with reports of a characteristically inspiring performance at an entertainment held to raise money for the poor was hardly calculated to stimulate his friends to rush to his support. The picture we have of him in the opening part of the paragraph is not that of a helpless, crippled poet. Something more would be needed. Whitman continued this advertising campaign for himself and the new edition in the Tribune during February. On the 19th Reid allowed him to print long excerpts from Two Riviulets which the poet himself had prepared. These are prefaced by the following, characteristically Whitmanian note: 'Here we are presented, in advance of their publication, sufficiently copious extracts from Walt Whitman's new volume of poems, "Two Riviulets," to give the reader a fair and pretty full summary of it. The book is an interesting of the author's characteristic verse, alternated throughout with prose; and hence the name.' Less than a week later, on the 25th, the paper included in the 'Personal' column a paragraph drawn from a recent interview:

Walt Whitman, in an interview with a correspondent of The Philadelphia Times, gave the following information in regard to his forthcoming book and his writings: 'The book will be ready soon in about two weeks. I am having it printed on my own account. None of the publishers will take my writings. I was told the other day that I was becoming too old to have my writings sent back. My only way is to print the things myself or have them printed in newspapers. The short articles sometimes make good things for the last column of the editorial page, to be set in small type, but it depends about as much on the pressure of other matter as it does on the merit of the article whether it gets into a newspaper or not.'

On 10 February, the Tribune reported that 'a gentleman of Philadelphia has sent Walt Whitman a present of $100.00.' It would be hard to see that Whitman had any reason to complain of his treatment by the Tribune.

Nevertheless, for his immediate interests of selling the volumes, it appears that even this publicity was of limited value. Whitman had become his own publisher. (One purpose of the West Jersey Press article had been to justify the author's assumption of this role by arguing that the traditional methods of publishing had been closed to him.) He faced the difficult task of selling his books without all the supporting services — advertising, distribution, accounting, and the like — which publishing concerns at their best can provide. A check of the 'Books Received' lists of the New York Times, Nation, and Atlantic Monthly shows that Whitman did not distribute review copies. Beyond the job of informing potential readers of the edition and convincing them of its excellence was the task of motivating them to write directly to the author to obtain copies. After all, it was not for sale in the book stores. It was a special subscription edition, but one which did not have the supporting services of subscription salesman. At five dollars a volume, it was expensive. Only one of the two volumes, Two Riviulets, was actually new. As William White has written, technically, the 1876 Leaves was not a new edition at all, as the plates from which it was printed are those of the 1870 (1871) Leaves; but all of the annexes, plus some new poetry and prose, are collected in a companion volume entitled Two Riviulets.' Yet Whitman did label it as a new edition: 'The phrase "Author's Edition" appears on the title-page of both Leaves and Two Riviulets (as well as "Centennial Edition"

25 Edwin Haviland Miller, 'Walt Whitman's Correspondence with Whitelaw Reid, Editor of the New York Tribune,' Studies in Bibliography, 8 (1956), 269.
on the spines of both books).16 But in linking sales of the books to two related issues, persecution of the poet by the nation's literary establishment and his 'poverty,' the *West Jersey Press* article provided new incentives for potential purchasers. And if Whitman could also motivate his close supporters to act as subscription agents—to contact purchasers, collect money, and deliver books—so much the better.

Of course it was here that the actions of Rosetti and Buchanan served Whitman's cause so well. Not only did they begin the very successful English campaign,17 but the repercussions of their public statements and subscription activities were immediately felt in America. The day after Buchanan's letter appeared, the New York *Times*, in reporting the story, quoted Buchanan's suggestion that a committee be formed in England 'to collect subscriptions for the purchase of Whitman's complete works ... to begin with say five hundred copies and if the number could be extended to a thousand or more, so much the better for the poet; so much more honor for England, so much more shame to the literary coteries whichemasculate America.' Especially after these changes were featured prominently in G. W. Smalley's 'Anglo-American Topics' column in the *Tribune* for 28 March, the American literary establishment had been slapped in the face publicly. Some justification was called for.

### 2. The Tribune Debate

Early in March 1876 Bayard Taylor, poet, novelist, travel writer, translator of Goethe's *Faust* and prominent figure in the nation's literary establishment, joined the editorial staff of the *Tribune*, a paper in which he held stock and for which he had long been an important but intermittent contributor. Taylor disliked the necessity of giving 'his principal working hours to work upon the paper,' but he needed the money and 'the wear and tear' of a recently-completed lecture tour had forced him to seek some less-strenuous occupation.18 Since Taylor's editorial responsibilities included current European affairs as well as literary topics, he was in an ideal position to respond to Buchanan's attack on the American literary establishment. On 28 and 30 March and on 12 and 22 April 1876 he published four editorials critical of Whitman and his supporters, and the *Tribune* became the focus of the controversy in America. Ironically, this paper, which had been so friendly to Whitman, now became his chief American opponent.

'In Re Walt Whitman' appeared on 28 March, the same day as Smalley's front-page report. Largely a pastiche of familiar charges about the poet combined with long quotations drawn from an editorial in the London *Daily News*, the essay was obviously a hastily thrown together affair. At the outset, Taylor leveled a pointed *ad hominem* rejoinder to Buchanan: 'disappointed in one of his multifarious ambitions—that of becoming also a great American author through his "St Abe and his Seven Wives,"—[he] saw a chance of once more gratifying his restless passion for personal notoriety.' Taylor dealt similarly with Whitman himself. He accused him of betraying Emerson's confidence by using for advertising purposes the 'impulsive, extravagant private letter' of 1855, a letter Emerson wrote only 'after the perusal of a few pages.' Further, his book is 'something impossible to be read aloud under the evening lamp,' but 'must be hidden away in the dark corner allotted to the "Extra Volumes," or kept under lock and key from the eyes of women and youth.' After denying that Whitman has been the victim of persecution, he approvingly quoted from an editorial in the London *Daily News* which asserted that Whitman was not a poet at all. Taylor concluded by citing this editorial once again: 'If he is a martyr, ... he is probably the martyr of a theory. It is for those who upheld the theory to sustain its victim rather than to throw the blame of the martyrdom on the world at large, who from first to last never assented to the principle nor encouraged any one in trying the experiment.' Taylor was quite willing to see Whitman read out of the community of American writers. Since the editorials were unsigned, this became the position of the *Tribune*.

A further irony in this performance is that but a decade earlier Taylor himself had 'asserted' in the warmest terms not only 'to the principle,' but also the living reality of Whitman's verse, and 'encouraged [him] in trying the experiment.' In November 1866 he sent Whitman a copy of his *Picture of St John* and had written praising his 'remarkable powers of expression' and 'deep and tender reverence for Man.'19 Whitman wrote in turn to tell Taylor of the 'pleasure' his letter had given him and 'to proffer you my friendship in response.'20 This stimulated an even more enthusiastic letter in which Taylor told Whitman frankly, that there are two things in *Leaves of Grass* which I find nowhere else in literature, though I find them in my own nature. I mean the awe and wonder and reverence and beauty of Life, as expressed in the human body, with the physical and delight of mere contact which it inspires, and that tender and noble love of man for man which once certainly existed, but now almost seems to have gone out of the experience of the race.21

The contrast between this private letter and his public condemnation could not be more dramatic. Now Taylor, chafing under the reins of his editorial harness, may have resented particularly a plea

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17 See chapters 2 and 5 of *Walt Whitman in England*.
19 Taylor's letters to Whitman have been reprinted in Horace Traubel, *With Walt Whitman in Camden* (New York, 1915), 2: 148-149, 154.
20 The Correspondence, 1:295. The letter is dated 18 November 1866.
21 Traubel, 2: 133.
for charitable support for another writer. But there is evidence to support the logical inference: that Taylor was attempting to still, if not actually exercise, that portion of his nature which responded so enthusiastically to Whitman's celebration of the body. In a letter to Stedman dated 16 June 1865 (in the Huntington Library, HM 14649) Taylor described his own distressing intense reaction to that sensuous world and his firm decision to avoid the expression of physical, as opposed to spiritual, qualities in his work.

Understandably, this was not a subject which he could easily put behind him. Two days later, on 30 March, in reporting to Tribune readers on Buchanan's third letter to the London Daily News, he confidently observed, 'the bundle of frantic accusations which he first opened dwindles, at last, down to this sentence: "It is not America, but the literary class in America, which persecutes Walt Whitman"'. This was a charge he felt could be answered easily.

When Whitman lost his place in the Department of the Interior, he owed his new and better position in the Attorney-General's office to the combined influence of the authors at that time residing in Washington, Mr Edmund Clarence Stedman at the head of them. The 'establishment' must be judged blameless. At the beginning of the essay, Taylor had quoted Buchanan's eulogy call on "those who admire Walt Whitman, and on no others" to join him in the proposed contribution. Again, Taylor was only too pleased to see such polarization: If Whitman could so easily be separated from the community of American poets, Taylor might not have to resolve his ambivalent feelings toward the man. He was simply wrong in crediting his close friend Stedman with taking a leading role in obtaining a new position for Whitman. Stedman had not even been in Washington at the time.

In a letter published in the Tribune on 31 March, Stedman gave proper credit to William D. O'Connor. Diplomatically breaking with Taylor, he appealed to American authors to come to the assistance of their colleague:

Walt Whitman's Clerkship
A Card from Mr Stedman—the Government and Literature—Is Whitman In Any Special Distress?

To the Editor of the Tribune.

Sir,—Permit me to disclaim the undue credit given me in your paragraph referring to Walt Whitman's experience at Washington. It is true that the indignation of writing men was aroused by the Presidential action of the Secretary who removed Mr Whitman from the Interior Department; and it was owing to the simultaneous expression of this feeling, by authors and newspaper correspondents, that attention was called [to] the poet's case, and a comfortable desk procured for him in the Attorney-General's office. If anybody was especially prominent in behalf of 'the good, gray Poet,' it certainly was his brilliant and impetuous friend, Mr William D. O'Connor, the devoted adherent who at the time gave him that title—and the credit should be placed where it belongs.

The Administrations of Lincoln and Johnson were very friendly to the literary class. Many authors held office at Washington; others were

in the Customs or Revenue service, here and elsewhere; and some of the more eminent were high in rank upon the diplomatic list. It seems to me that our government has not been open to much censure for ignoring either the wants or the abilities of literary men. So far as I have any right to speak for American authors, I would say that even those of my acquaintance who do not justify the extreme claims set forth by the disciples of Whitman have a sincere regard for the man, and that they would like to prove it. No people are less the avaricious author, and artists, despite their frequently restricted means. If the poet really is in need, his fellow-craftsmen gladly would do what they can to relieve him. Nevertheless, both for his sake and their own, they would not wish to have their action made public, and they certainly do not need to receive any humane lessons from a transatlantic sentimentalista.

New York, March 30, 1876

Very truly yours,
E. C. Stedman.

At this time, O'Connor had been estranged from Whitman for some years following a bitter quarrel. A letter from O'Connor to Stedman dated 31 March indicates that a 'kind telegram' from Stedman, as well as his warm commendation of O'Connor's service to Whitman of a decade earlier, encouraged O'Connor to begin work on a letter to the Tribune responding to Taylor. Requesting Stedman to help place the article, he promised to send it directly to him 'tonight or tomorrow.' After waiting several days, Stedman wrote O'Connor that he would do his best to place the article:

49 East 9th St.
New York, Apr. 4th, 1876

Dear O'Connor:

I did not answer your letter yesterday, because I expected your Ms. to follow it immediately. The letter not having come, as yet, I write to say that of course the Tribune will & must give you a hearing—and I should say the paper would always be very lucky to have anything from your pen. Furthermore, that I will do anything for you that any half-crazy man can. From which you will deduce that the work & despair of starting in business, with my feeble strength, are making of me a semi-lunatic. I happened to meet one of the Tribune eds. to-day (not Mr Reid) & he said that I wd better ask you not to write at too great length: that being the only thing they fear, in any case, & being the one error that postpones & crowds out otherwise important matter.

I have urged John Swinton to quietly give a dozen of us a chance to chip in for old Hesiod. The fact is that Whitman's friends, except myself, have often acted on the offensive-defensive with respect to his brother authors, & have too hastily taken it for granted that they were not birds of the same blood and affection—whether their song be different or not. There have been mistakes, in my honest opinion, on both sides. But I am not well enough to express my thoughts fully & clearly. Understand one thing: I am not familiar, nowadays, with the trade of any newspaper office, but I will hand your Ms. to Taylor, or Reid, unless you are wise enough to compliment the Tribune by sending it 'direct.'

Faithfully yrs.,
E. C. Stedman

Mr W. D. O'Connor.

John Swinton, then a member of the editorial staff of Charles Dana's Sun, did become an agent for his old friend's 'Centennial Edition.' On 1 April 1876 he published an article in the New York Herald describing a recent visit to Whitman and asserting that 'Walt Whitman's long and grievous illness has placed him in such a position to justify the appeal of Mr Buchanan.' Making use of Buchanan's challenge to American national pride, he concluded by asserting that 'Walt Whitman's countrymen should not allow him to suffer from penury in his old age... his closing days should be cheered by those kindly memories, which, I hope, are not to reach him wholly from Great Britain.'

Sometime in March, Swinton suggested to Whitman that he contact the following individuals who desired to subscribe to the new edition: Swinton's brother William, the distinguished sculptor John Quincy Ward, Joaquin Miller, Stedman, and a Dr Ferdinand Seeger and a Mr Jardin. From Whitman's correspondence we know that Ward subscribed $50 as did John Swinton, Stedman $30, Miller, Jardin, and Seeger each purchased a set, and William Swinton must have purchased a set. The existence of a brief postcard from Whitman to Swinton, dated 31 May ('Letter & envelope rec'd - Thanks - will write more fully soon - muddling comfortable today -'), suggests, as Edwin Haviland Miller has pointed out, that Swinton obtained other orders. The indicated total from the first group alone approaches $200. While Whitman may not at this time have realized as much from domestic sales of his books as he did from the unusually successful English campaign, the Stedman-Swinton initiative was modestly successful in launching his sales campaign in this country.

John Burroughs sent his letter, 'Walt Whitman's Poetry,' to the Tribune on 30 March, but it did not appear until 15 April. One possible reason for the delay is that Bayard Taylor may well have wanted to reply to Burroughs in advance. Taylor's transparent 'American vs English Criticism' appeared on 14 April. The debate between them turned on radically differing perceptions not only of Whitman's poetry but also of the quality of American culture. One of Burroughs's arguments in defending the legitimacy of Whitman's poetry was that 'a majority of the rising men in the fields of English poetry and criticism' have become advocates of his work. He mentioned such names as Dowden, Tennyson, Symonds, Swinburne, and Professor Clifford. In America, however, the situation was different: 'the rising and risen literary lights are nearly all set against Whitman.' Burroughs, of course, had no doubt of his primacy and greatness: 'He seems to me about the only American poet that a man, apart from the versifier, the scholar, the professor, the gentleman of elegant leisure, etc., would want to read.' To appreciate Whitman as did John Burroughs, one must reject all conventional or traditional poets. He related this to a larger theory of the present state of American society: in these 'highly refined and cultivated times... the great mass of the poetry is written out of the atmosphere, out of the general store of distilled and accumulated literary skill and refinement, and while it has its value, for any high tonic and national purposes it is absolutely worthless.' Burroughs's defense, as did that of Buchanan, necessitated a wholesale condemnation of conventional poetry. It is no wonder that Taylor sought to counter this argument strongly and in advance.

The ostensible purpose of 'American vs English Criticism' was not to consider the merits of Whitman's poetry but to develop a broad comparative theory of American culture. Taylor charged that it is English society, not American, which suffers from the ills of over-refinement. Whitman was treated only as an example of the kind of crude American writer much in vogue with English readers anxious to escape the deadly inhibitions of a civilization 'where restraint is the severe and ever-watchful principle of Society.' Taylor took it for granted that Whitman's work is but 'a chaos,' which, although 'pierced here and there by splendiferous phrases,' is not the work of a 'developed poetic intelligence.' He casually explained away the popularity of such a writer in England by asserting that it is but to be expected that a 'barbaric yawp' would appeal to the tired 'English brain, blasted with respectable proprieties of utterance, surfeited with decorous elegance of style.' He went so far as to assert 'that nothing is too grotesque, nothing too lawless, nothing too coarse, for the overclothed palates of a large class of English authors and readers.' American civilization, on the other hand, is moving in the opposite direction, from raw energy to discipline, true culture, and controlled taste. The forcelessness of Whitman's art, Taylor asserted in a transparently biographical reference, reflects and is 'typical of a condition from which most men of earnest intelligence among us are trying to escape. We have enough, and more than enough, of unresolved elements in our American life; we crave the attainment of that harmony in literary achievement which will restore to us the lost blessing of repose.' American rejection of Whitman, then, is a sign of its coming of age and of its finally reaching 'a point of divergence' with the Mother Country. American writers may now properly 'claim, not equality, but superiority of intelligence' in their healthier, saner critical judgments.

In conversation with Horace Traubel, Whitman spoke of the two Bayard Taylors, the one who had privately praised him and the one who publicly condemned: 'I prefer to believe in the Taylor of
my letters even if it does smack of egotism for me to do so.' 27 It was also charitable. In his first letter Taylor had condemned the cultural pretenses of the time:

I value, above all things, sincerity in literature; hence I am not one of those who overlook your remarkable powers of expression, your broad, vital reverence for humanity, because some things you have said repel them. The age is over-squeamish, and, for my part, I prefer the honest mode to the suggestive half-draped. I think the proper question to be asked is: does a certain thing need to be said? If so, let it be said! The worst form of immorality, I have found, veils itself in decent words.28

And in his second letter, Taylor had asserted that despite their differing theories of poetic form, 'there is not one word of your large and beautiful sympathy for men, which I cannot take into my own heart, nor one of those subtle and wonderful physical affinities you describe which I cannot comprehend.' 29 But now, in defining Whitman's actual position, he used 'decent words' to mask an old enthusiasm.

He was first known as 'Walter Whitman,' a writer of conventional stories and poems mostly in rhyme. Failing to achieve literary distinction, he made a bold and in one sense a successful experiment. He published a work in which we recognized three separate elements, curiously blended by his strong individuality. There was the old Greek reverence for the human body and delight in all its functions; there was a strong reflection of Emerson's democratic philosophy; and finally there was the slang, coarseness and aggressive insistence of the New York Bowery boy. It was a chaos, pieced here and there by splendid phrases. We acknowledged the rudimentary germs, but we could not find the developed poetic intelligence: it was perhaps genius, but about three generations in advance of birth. It aroused such the same interest in the molder as if he had lifted the lid of the author's brain, and were watching the latter's thoughts, impulses and appetites seething and breaking like bubbles in a cauldron. . . . Any man who fuses his nature from its last reserve and exhibits himself wholly to his fellow-men, will never lack a certain number of ardent admirers. He speaks for all impulses which have not learned the discipline of restraint, yet lack the courage to express themselves.

So great had been Taylor's interest in Whitman, that he had sought to arrange a meeting with him in Washington in December 1866 when Taylor visited the city for a lecture engagement. It seems likely that his 1875 misrepresentation of his earlier position was deliberate. If so, are we justified in thinking of this as an example of persecution?

In a letter of 16 April to Stedman, O'Connor reported that poor health and a heavy burden of work had forced him to give up responding to the Tribune. However, Taylor's latest editorial had 'revived my wish,' and he sent Stedman the completed "Walt Whitman: Is He Persecuted?" The next day he wrote Stedman again to discuss the continuing persecution which he found in the current debate:

Washington, D. C.
April 17, 1876

Dear Stedman:

I wrote you last evening in a hurried way, sending you my Ms., and I really hope it will not be a bother to you to use your good offices for me with the Tribune. You were kind enough to intimate in your letter that the paper would be glad to print anything from me, but I have less faith in that now, owing to Providence, and feel that I need an intercessor, though I should be sorry to plague you in the matter. Do what you can, but don't let me be a trouble to you.

In your letter, speaking of the friends and foes of W. W., you say you think there have been faults on both sides. I am sorry you think so, for in truth, we have done nothing but stand and take in meekness swelling blows, without rejoinder or the chance of rejoinder.

This is why I feel now the necessity of writing as I have done in the Ms. I send you, --all the more on account of the recent course of the press generally, which since the Tribune articles of March 28th and 31st, has been atrocious. Even the non-abusive notices have been supercilious and offensive in a high degree. I think it big time, after twenty years' endurance, to accept battle, since battle is insisted upon. And if our literary men want their record on this subject, unrolled, I can accommodate them, though I would like nothing better than to help them to bury the undeniable Past.

I deeply regret Bayard Taylor's attitude in the Tribune. His path of honor and glory for him, is in the defence and illustration of Walt Whitman, and he is choosing the other way.

A man of honor and generosity like you can have no prior conception, and no adequate realization, of the things that have been said and done against W. W. I have not even alluded to the more flagrant instances.

You were quite in error in your article in supposing there was any expression of indignation about Harlan's action. The fact is, I was the single solitary mover in the matter here, and, though I never want to say so, all that was done was of my doing. But I feel deeply obliged for the kindness of your article, and your friendly mention of me, calculated, I see, to do me good with the fair sex since I got a letter from a lady in which she says -- It was splendid (Oh, Edmund! that fatal adjective!) In Mr Stedman to speak of you as the Rupert of the Good Gray Poet's cause. He must be an ardent admirer of yours, etc. Good gracious! I hope this is not an omen of the last charge at Naseby, apropos of my Tribune onslaught!

I heard before your letter that you were starting in business. Good luck to you, and I hope by this time you are settled and running easily. With friendliest feeling for you and yours, believe me, always

Yours faithful
W. D. O'Connor.

Mr E. C. Stedman.

After telling O'Connor that he had sent the article directly to Reid, by-passing the hostile Taylor, Stedman described the other side of the coin, 'persecution' of 'the poor "conventional" singers' by the Whitmanites.

[14]
Office of E. C. Stedman,  
Stock Broker,  
No. 80, Broadway,  
New York April 18 1876

My dear O'Connor;

Your Ms., came yesterday, with no accompanying letter, so I sent it up with a note to Mr. Reid. To-day both of your letters were here, by the morning mail.

I am sorry you did not write immediately, a fortnight ago, as you threatened to. The iron was hot. Since then The Tribune has printed Mr. Burroughs' admirably-written letter, & may reasonably take the ground that enough has been said on the subject. However, Mr. Reid may send me word to-morrow that he will use your paper, also,— & in either event I will inform you immediately.

I am in business again, but really have no right to be. My legs & feet are so weak (with nervous prostration,—stale, I think they feel it) that I have fairly to drag myself up & down stairs. Am unable to do any writing, even correspondence, expect business letters,—and am totally unfit for any excitement, or to take a part in any discussion. Were this not so, I should try to reply, giving you my personal views, to your remarks in your letter # 2. You know I am your warm friend, & respect your head and heart profoundly. But I do think you & six or seven other brilliant thinkers & writers have been to Whitman the most devoted champions & disciples that any poet, since Jesus Christ, ever has had. To have one such adherent is enough to secure fame & justice for a poet or prophet. Nearly all of you have, from the beginning, enlisted many other poets 'piano-jinglers' etc. etc., and have to a certain extent, & in a certain sense, 'persecuted' them. The poor 'conventional' singers have had to take it, over & over again. This is my private honest opinion, spoken to my dear personal friend. I do not speak it publically, because my sympathies are warmly enlisted for Whitman—old, sick, & poor. I have been in correspondence with him & tried to do my share. But you only hurt his cause, & hurt the movement in his behalf by reviving this question of persecution, my dear friend. I would give all my literary position for 1/10th the championship & advertising Whitman is having. But he is a poet, & his new edition is worth all its costs, to any one. I am too ill to write more—could talk to better advantage. Although I differ from you, I suppose you will give me credit for sincerity (& some courage) & believe me

Most sincerely yrs.,  
E. C. Stedman.

O'Connor ignored Stedman's warning to write briefly; his article is well over three thousand words. Nevertheless, Stedman sent it on to Reid, and it appeared in the Tribune on 22 April. Edwin Haviland Miller has described this essay as an 'extravagant, and garrulous, encomium.' Certainly the essay is far too long, and frequently the combative O'Connor is carried some distance from his immediate subject by the force of his argument and the momentum of his formidable rhetoric. Like Prince Rupert at Naseby, he did not succeed in keeping all his forces under firm discipline. But it is the only essay of the time which spoke directly, from Whitman's perspective, to the important issue of persecution; Burroughs's essay had focused on the poetry itself. If one overlooks its rhetorical

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69 The Correspondence, 3: 29, n. 86.

excesses, it becomes apparent that O'Connor's essay is reasonably controlled in the sense that its primary arguments are directed at refuting specific statements and charges made by Taylor in his editorials of 28 and 30 March. O'Connor pointed out at the beginning that he will not respond to the editorial of 12 April, 'American vs English Criticism,' because 'it is a legitimate attempt at a critical estimate.' But he was compelled to respond to the personal accusations of the first two essays because he found them 'springing up...[in] journals of every description.' These he treated as a kind of persecution because they had been used to stand between the writer and his audience.

O'Connor's approach to the complex, convoluted subject of American treatment of Whitman was not without humor. It was 'an affair of moral character, as well as a chronicle of small beer.' But since the various personal charges had been used in 'some vague and grotesque intention to make him at once criminal and ridiculous' and served as an obstacle to his poetry, O'Connor industriously set out to destroy these 'small and stale old slurs and figments invented twenty years ago, and kept in constant use by the enemies of the poet.'

The immediate purpose of Taylor's editorials had been to deny the propriety of subscribing to the 'Centennial Edition,' and this was the first substantive matter which O'Connor considered. The English campaign, he pointed out, is not charity, but 'an assistance and a homage which the case fully justifies...conceived in a spirit and form worthy of gentlemen, and as honorable in Mr. Whitman to accept as for them to bestow.'

O'Connor used his heavy guns on other, less strategic, subjects: In the famous picture in the 1855 edition, Whitman appeared not in inflammatory 'red flannel,' as has been variously charged, but in the linen of 'his typical mechanic's costume.' And Whitman's use for advertising purposes of Emerson's famous letter was in no sense a violation of a confidence; the letter was no more 'private' nor reserved from print than scores of similar letters we see constantly in the French and English journals from Victor Hugo, Thiers, Quinet, Carlyle, Garibaldi, Swinburne, and other celebrities. Further, the letter 'was originally published in The Tribune, and at the importantate and protracted solicitation of its editor.'

As he had done in The Good Gray Poet, O'Connor vigorously attacked censorship in literature, particularly the imposition of the 'evening-lamp' standard. Such works as Othello, Troilus and Cressida, the Inferno, Goethe's Faust (translated, of course, by his secret adversary, Taylor), to say nothing of Rabelais, could not pass such an inappropriate test.

And O'Connor corrected Taylor's and Stedman's rather charitable treatment of the behavior of the literary establishment at the time Whitman was removed from the Interior Department by Secretary Harlan. 'The fact was that American writers did not express 'gen-
eral indignation.' Whitman's new clerkship was obtained for him by Mr. J. Hubley Ashton. The only writers who supported O'Connor in his condemnation of Harlan in *The Good Gray Poet* were Henry Raymond, R. J. Hinton, and Frank Sanborn. He also hinted that Taylor's small-mindedness is that Whitman did not merit assistance now because he should have saved his government salary. The poet 'always lived frugally, and hoarded his narrow means in the service of the neglected and forgotten,' including especially wounded soldiers. After citing various examples of persecution and pointing out that recent press treatment of Whitman provided ample illustration and evidence of the abuse of which W. M. Rossetti complained, O'Connor reasonably asked that Whitman be judged not by the various personal accusations against him but by 'a fair interpretation of his writings, which his admitted genius deserves.... This he has never received.' Although O'Connor himself did not undertake that examination here, he recalled his first reading of *Leaves*: 'It was morning in the world with me when I first read those mighty pages, and felt to my inmost soul the vast charm of their sea-like lines and superb imagination; and today, after many years have passed, I never open the book without receiving again that supreme impression of its wild delicacy and splendor.'

In his rejoinder, 'Intellectual Convexity,' published in the *Tribune* that same day, Taylor made three points. The first is *ad hominem*. He accused both Burroughs and O'Connor of the convex vision of the true disciple. The disciple was really attempting to magnify his own importance through magnifying that of his 'accepted master,' who says, 'I celebrate myself.' The second point is more properly critical. Taylor scornfully rejected Burroughs's 'astonishing cry:' "Are we never to get beyond the point where the demand is for something elegant and scholarly and [to the point] where the analogue in art of the power and informality of Nature is more acceptable than any studied form and elaboration?" He called this an 'attempt to exalt Chaos into a literary ideal.' Of course Taylor had not been troubled by such an attempt when he had first written to Whitman.

Taylor's final point, regarding the skillful advertising of Whitman, which he ascribed entirely to the disciples, is not without merit:

"This, however, we must repeat—that the charge of a 'cabal' among any portion of the authors of America, to persecute and suppress Walt Whitman, or anybody else, is an absurdity and an impertinence. Other writers have had contributions returned by magazine editors, and do not whine about it. Hawthorne was ignored during his best years, Emerson abused and ridiculed, and their friends never dreamed of imagining a conspiracy against them. No man in this country has ever been so consistently and skillfully advertised by his disciples as Walt Whitman. They have not only been sleeplessly watchful for attack, but they have recent indifference. They deny, for his sake, the right of a critic to be honest, the right of an editor to select, and the right of a publisher to refuse. Not patient for the final and irreversible decision of time, they angrily claim the immediate acceptance of a theory of Formlessness in literature which would send the world's great authors to the shades. If their master's new venture should fail, they will be chiefly to blame. He has wisely held himself aloof from their aggresive championship; and we heartily commend the silence and apparent in difference of 'the good gray poet' to the imitation of his good green friends."

As we have seen, Whitman, far from being silent and indifferent in this affair, had set it all in motion with his *West Jersey Press* article. He had indiscriminately and falsely attacked prominent magazine editors and others for rejecting his work and otherwise wrecking his life. It was Whitman himself, not his 'disciples,' who was primarily responsible for the 'skillful advertising.' His exaggerated charges, reflected in the statements of certain of his supporters, did merit a firm denial. But certainly the case did not justify another round of personal insults from his critics. As Stedman observed to O'Connor, there were 'mistakes... on both sides.' However, partly as a result of Whitman's advertising efforts and the work of Burroughs, O'Connor, and various European critics, the poet was not, nor would he become, a forgotten American writer.

Although Whitman had succeeded in keeping his name before the public, his work had yet to receive in America, an objective critical evaluation. The kind of derogatory comments typified by Taylor's first two editorials do represent, as O'Connor charged, a kind of persecution in the sense that they interpose irrelevant judgments of the author's personality in the way of the direct experience of his work. Taylor's statements did have a strong influence elsewhere. Following the lead of the *Tribune*, the *Boston Evening Transcript* made the following comments in a 1 April editorial on 'Walt Whitman':

"That strange being is neither pecked at nor pursued, nor even combined against by the literary class, nor by any class in this country. He is simply not mentioned, as many things are not mentioned in the intercourse of people who respect the decencies and common proprieties of civilized society. Whitman has forced his fellow-citizens, even many of those who half believe that he is possessed of poetic insight and power, to take this course with regard to him. Like a maniac or a beast, he has proved himself incapable of observing the commonest respect to the modesty of human nature, to say nothing about conventional manner, and it has been simply impossible to have him about. He has brought his own penalty upon himself by willfully flying in the face of the inherited sensibilities of centuries of civilization.... So far from the literary class in America persecuting him, when Whitman lost his place in the Department of the Interior, he owed his rise and better position in the attorney general's office (as is authoritatively stated in the *Tribune*) to the combined influence of the authors at that time residing in Washington, Mr. Edmund Clarence Stedman at the head of them. It is added that the salary of Whitman's clerkship supported a family of four persons, before he received it; he held the place several years, and if he failed to accumulate any surplus during that time, the cause thereof was certainly not 'persecution.'"
O'Connor referred to the Transcript editorial in the course of a long letter to Stedman in which he replied to 'Intellectual Convexity,' denying that he could properly be called a 'disciple.'

Washington, D.C.
April 25, 1876

My dear Stedman:

Of course, I got your kind missives of the 18th & 21st, and only delayed answering till my letter came out, which it did in yesterday's Tribune, to my great satisfaction, and I at once wrote Mr Reid, expressing, what I sincerely felt my grateful thanks. Neither man nor editor can do more for another than give him a fair hearing, and this has been my lot,—my corner lot!

But to you I owe especial and cordial thanks for your warm and living interest in the matter, and your assistance to me—all the more marked and generous because of your difference, which I deeply appreciate and respect. The sense of obligation cannot properly exist between friends, but action like yours deepens attachment, which is a nobler form of gratitude...

I felt very much pleased with the things you said in your letter about Walt, and his new edition, and all the rest. I deeply appreciate, and give you every credit for sincerity and courage and faithful wounds of friendship. Heaven forbid that I should ever blame anyone for merely differing, or for expressing difference, publicly or privately, in the stouthearted possible manner! Go in, I say, to everybody, stand up for what you think, and strike out till fire flies,—only no stabbing in the back or hitting below the belt! Which I know you never did and never will. But can you fairly say, dear Stedman, that others have not? Notice how the Tribune, pretending to reply to me, avoids the sample instances of wrong doing I offer which no honest or honorable man can parry or defend. (Denies 'cabal,' besides! This is rich to me, who have a lively knowledge of what I am talking about. Walt till Edgar Poe's life, literary and personal, is written! What another unfolding of that would be.)

I don't want to be a controversial wratch, however, and won't annoy you by obtruding my convictions on these matters. But let me frankly say, what I haven't the further privilege of telling the Tribune, that I frankly deny the discipleship. 'Champion,' yes—with all my might, to my utmost ability; but 'disciple,' no. Nor can I see that Walt has any 'disciples,' among the group that defends him and his work. John Burroughs is nearer to me than any of you, but he didn't admit it, even of me. Indeed, my dear, you can't fail to notice that Walt has founded no school as, for example, Victor Hugo has; nor can you fail to see that all our writing for him is in a strictly defensive tone. If, therefore, we women defend him, solely, against attacks we think not only unjust but outrageous; almost always doing it, with expressed reservations or qualifications as to his art or doctrines (sometimes injurious, as admissions, witness Dowden's, Buchanan's, Sanborn's, etc.); and never, in any case, imitating his methods of expression, or adopting more than is reasonable, his views; you can't justly call us 'disciples,' anymore than you could Rushkin for his perfectly 'judicial,' unbiased, and confirmed defence of Turner; or Boccaccio for his passionate dedication of Dante; or the poet of the Shakespeare Sonnets for his lavish praise of Spenser. We simply recognize in Walt a poet of vast genius; different, obviously, in kind and degree from other respected poets of our time; and with an aim and scheme, avowedly lofty. After all, is it possible, in ten years of the most determined and terrific abuse and ill treatment, culminating in his ignominious dismissal from a public office, and has been, for all that decade, as you ought to recollect, almost wholly without defense, we begin a movement

[20]

commencing with my pamphlet, strenuously resisting the attempt to crowd him down. We are, therefore, simply his champions, and no more. For my own part, I am far more a 'disciple' of Lord Bacon's (you know I think he is Shakespeare) and my sense of his supremacy is just tremendous; and Victor Hugo, though I don't admire him greater than Walt, is certainly far nearer to my sympathies, individually, as a poet; so that I could far more justly be called a 'disciple' of either than of W. W.

Allowing—though I should deny it till I saw the proof—I didn't do it, anyhow—allowing that we have called other poets 'piano-jingleers,' that doesn't justify them in calling us sodomites, swans of the sewer, etc., or stopping our foreign visitors, or saying we can't pay our debts of honor, etc. To call the 'idle singers of an empty day' piano-jingleers, might be soothing even if unjust it is legitimate because impersonal and a form of criticism, and therefore allowable, like the Tribune, calling my letter a 'screech' and me a convex lens, which is worse than O'Connell calling the fish-women a 'paralipomenon.' But the things the other side said and did in the first decennium of our existence, and a number since, were not criticism in any form, nor at all allowable. I am not afraid of hurting W. W., as you fear, by raising the question of persecution, which the fortnight's journals before I wrote prove and illustrate—the Transcript for example; of or ruining him, as the Tribune brilliantly says, by 'skillful advertising.' I like a 'good green friend'! Allah preserve us! I always did like logic!... Good bye, dear Stedman. Don't be vexed or aggravated by aught I say. It's all meant kindly and well.

Your very faithful,
W. D. O'Connor.

Forgive a too-long letter. Don't feel called on to reply if you are too driven, though I am always glad to hear from you.

3. 'Quite a Run on the Home Edition'

As it began to revolve around charges of 'persecution,' 'whining disciples,' and skillful advertising, the Whitman debate in the Tribune touched on tiresome and petty matters, affairs of rather small

[21]

In a letter of 25 April, which ends this phase of their correspondence, Stedman attempts to prodd O'Connor into resuming his own literary career: 'I say to you, as I said years ago, in the words of the Plymouth maid to John Alden: "Speak for yourself, John!" You are wasting your life, hiding your talent in a napkin, & I have no patience with you.' Since 1861 O'Connor had served continuously in various government jobs in Washington and had produced very little original work. His daily occupation prevented him from continuing his career as a writer, but because of various family obligations and complications, he found it impossible to leave. Before writing as he did, Stedman may well have recalled O'Connor's pathetic description of this predicament in a letter of 20 April 1866:

'As for me I am like a caged tiger walking around and around endlessly—mad as can be that I am wasting my life in this infamous office. I long to write. My brain teems with poems, stories, sketches, commentaries, criticism, political diversities, lectures, God knows what else; all in conception, nothing in accomplishment. I cannot write, or read, or study, or do anything—My office work is laborious and constant; and leaves me so tired each day that I can do nothing for myself. But I long to bitterly, and some day I shall break loose and astonish the natives.'

Meanwhile I am fearfully enraged. Sadly, tragically, he never was able to 'break out.'
beer.' What was needed instead was exactly what O'Connor had called for, a fair examination of Whitman's work. Fortunately, the West Jersey Press controversy did succeed in prompting responsible critics to ask the question, 'What is the actual value of Walt Whitman's poetry, leaving out all thoughts of his hospital work, his generosity, his poverty, or his uncouth attire?' as Charles F. Richardson formulated it in a modest essay on Whitman for The Independent published on 29 June 1876. In his analysis, which is not at all original, Richardson concluded that Whitman was only a 'poet of the second rank among American bard, if we make the first rank to include Longfellow, Lowell, Whittier, Bryant, and Holmes only,' but he had succeeded in asking the relevant question. Similarly, in December 1877, the 'Contributor's Club' of the Atlantic Monthly carried a more sympathetic article which took advantage of the 'lull in the Walt Whitman controversy' to take 'a dispassionate view of his work.'

The most important of these articles was Stedman's 'Walt Whitman,' which appeared in the respectable and popular Scribner's Monthly. At last the broad audience of reading middle class Americans were presented with a sympathetic but judicial estimate of the poet, one which explained the genesis of his novel verse technique and defended its legitimacy, one which even included an approving explanation of the cataloguing technique. The effect of Stedman's essay was to stimulate a new group of readers to come directly and without prejudice to Whitman.

But first they would have to obtain copies of Whitman's work. Stedman put in a special 'plug' for

the unique centennial or 'author's' edition of his collected poems. Never was a collection more aptly named. The volumes bear the material as well as the spiritual impress of the author. Of the many portraits for which he sat, they give, besides the earliest, a bold photograph of his present self, and the striking woodcut by his friend Linton—that master of the engraver's craft. Here and there are interpolated recent poems, printed on slips, and pasted in by the poet's own hand. The edition has an inescapable air; one who owns it feels that he has a portion of the author's self. It is Whitman. His Book, and should he present nothing more, his work is well rounded.

Then, in a footnote, which he did not include when the essay was republished in Poems of America (1885), Stedman, in explaining to his readers how to obtain copies of this edition, provided them with an excellent 'tip': 'Mr. Whitman's address is Camden, New Jersey. The two volumes are sold by him for ten dollars. If book-collectors understood the quality of this limited edition, and how valuable it must become, the poet's heart would be cheered with so many orders that not a copy would be left on his shelves.' This is precisely what happened. William Sloane Kennedy wrote Stedman on 25 December 1880 that 'Whitman told me with glee that your great kindness (he dwelt on this) in giving his address in yr. article, has been the cause of quite a run on his home edition. He says this is all he has to get his bread & butter with.'

In the long run, then, the West Jersey Press controversy brought Whitman dividends both of increased critical understanding and financial returns for what, in a letter to John Swinton, he termed 'my book business.' And most important, his work was now being read in his own country.

THE VERNACULAR HERO IN WHITMAN'S 'SONG OF MYSELF'

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Many critics find Whitman the pre-eminent example of the truly artist in anti-poetic society. They attribute to him adolescent innocence and compulsive egocentrism, often contending that his poetry projects the image of a primitive Adamic man. R. W. B. Lewis and Roy Harvey Pearce are among the chief proponents of this view. Both of these men argue that Whitman was more intent upon creating and ordering a world than he was with revealing and discovering one. They imply in their more extreme moments that Whitman's poetry is hazardous personal, possibly even solipsistic (Mr Pearce uses the term antimonic). The upshot of the Lewis-Pearce view—and, at the same time, its principal shortcoming—is that Whitman's poems finally have to be regarded as soliloquies, as poems of the introspective self.

68 This letter is owned by Columbia University and is quoted with the permission of the University.
67 The Correspondence, 3:45.
66 Lewis maintains that 'Whitman began in an Adamic condition which was only too effectively realized: the isolated individual, standing flush with the empty universe, a primitive moral and intellectual entity' (The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955], pp. 49-50). Harmonizing with Mr Lewis's view, Mr Pearce describes Whitman as the prototype of the Adamic impulse, a poet 'sufficiently conscious of his own commitment to isolated, egocentric creativity to manifest it even as he tries to transcend it. Lacking a hard-headed respect for the "other," [Whitman] is more Emersonian than Emerson' (The Continuity of American Poetry [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961], p. 169). In fairness to Mr Pearce, I should note that in his lengthy chapter on 'Song of Myself' (see pp. 69-83) he is not as insistent upon Whitman's 'Adamism' as he is in the chapter in which he discusses the poet in broad, general terms (see pp. 164-174).
65 In a study of Whitman published a decade after the appearance of The